



8 JULY 2009

**LEGAL SERVICES COMPLAINTS COMMISSIONER  
2008/09 ANNUAL REPORT WELCOMES IMPROVEMENTS IN COMPLAINT HANDLING**

The Legal Services Complaints Commissioner, Zahida Manzoor CBE, today (8 July 2009) released her fifth Annual Report, 'Opportunity for Excellence', covering the period 1 April 2008 to 31 March 2009.

In the Report the Commissioner looks forward to the new independent complaints body to be established next year (the Office for Legal Complaints (OLC)) and welcomes the Law Society's Legal Complaints Service (LCS) and Solicitors Regulation Authority (SRA) improvements in their performance.

The Commissioner said:

"I am pleased to report, five years after my appointment as Commissioner, improvements in complaints handling about the solicitors profession. The results speak for themselves. In every area where I set targets, there has been a demonstrable improvement in LCS and SRA performance. We are now a world away from the problems in complaints handling that led to my appointment."

In the year 2008/09, the LCS and SRA together met 12 of the 14 targets set for them by the Commissioner. She reports that by actively targeting the performance of LCS and SRA in key areas, the consumer and profession are receiving a faster, more consistent service.

Speaking about the LCS and SRA performance in complaints handling, the Commissioner said:

"Overall this is a picture of improvement. I am particularly pleased to see that complaints dealt with by LCS and SRA were in the main concluded within 12 months, with only exceptional cases taking longer. The LCS performance against its quality target has shown what I have always believed, that with focus it can deliver consistency as well as maintaining timeliness."

The Commissioner added:

“This is a sound platform from which the new complaints body (the OLC) can build. It will want to aim for excellence and I believe that is justifiable and realistic now.”

However, as there will be no independent direct oversight of the investigation of conduct complaints, the Commissioner sounded a note of warning:

“The importance of the link between complaints and misconduct must not be allowed to drop off the radar. And I would look to the Legal Services Board and OLC to ensure this does not happen.”

Commenting on the 7% rise in complaint numbers received by LCS and SRA in 2008/09, Ms Manzoor added:

“The trend of year on year increases in complaints about solicitors must be a warning sign for the OLC. It should not have to gear up to handle cases that are preventable. I believe that more can be done by the profession to deliver better client care and handle more complaints in-house without the need for complaints to be escalated. The Legal Services Act places an onus on firms to get it right first time.”

Speaking of her March 2009 announcement with the Law Society of a range of dedicated client care support for the profession, the Commissioner concluded:

“I am delighted that the Law Society has pledged its commitment to this initiative and I urge it to continue to build on this for future years and deliver long term benefits to standards within the profession.”

(Ends)

## NOTES TO EDITORS:

1. The Commissioner's 2008/09 Annual Report "Opportunity for Excellence" can be downloaded on the OLSCC website [www.olscc.gov.uk](http://www.olscc.gov.uk)
2. Ms Manzoor CBE was appointed Legal Services Complaints Commissioner in February 2004 in addition to her role as Legal Services Ombudsman (LSO). The Commissioner only has powers in relation to the Law Society of England and Wales. Ms Manzoor was reappointed as both Commissioner and LSO in February 2009.
3. The Commissioner is also the Legal Services Ombudsman (LSO) for England and Wales. The Annual Report for that Office was published on 7th July 2009. It can be downloaded from the Ombudsman's website [www.olso.org/](http://www.olso.org/) The roles of the LSO and the Commissioner are distinct. The LSO examines the handling of individual complaints by the professional bodies on behalf of members of the public. The Commissioner examines the Law Society's capability to handle complaints made about its members efficiently and effectively.
4. The Commissioner set a total of 14 targets for the Law Society's Legal Complaints Service and Solicitors Regulation Authority for 2008/09 under section 52 of the Access to Justice Act 1999. On 11 June 2008, the Commissioner set LCS an additional target relating to the handling of Coal Health Compensation cases. This target assessed the quality of LCS caseworker investigation in miners' complaints and came into effect from 1 July 2008.
5. For enquiries please contact Lorraine Jackson, 0113 2615429.