

Meeting	OLC Board	Agenda Item No.	9
		Paper No.	135.7
Date of meeting	24 October 2024	Time required	30 minutes
Title	Service Complaint adjudicator's interim report		
Sponsor	Steve Pearson – Deputy Chief Ombudsman		
Status	OFFICIAL		
Executive summary			
<p>Board will find attached the Service Complaint Adjudicator's (SCA) interim report which provides a summary of the complaints which have been escalated to Stage 3 of LeO's service complaints process.</p> <p>The SCA report acknowledges that LeO's service complaints team has been making significant inroads into an historic backlog of service complaints and provides assurance that the reviews the team are carrying out remain of a high standard.</p> <p>The report provides further assurance that the standard of complaints handling at the earlier stages of our service complaints process remains consistently high and that LeO takes a proactive approach to addressing areas of concern or risk as soon as they are identified.</p> <p>Board will also note the slides attached to the pack. These form the basis of a presentation which the Senior Ombudsman, who specialises in handling our Service Complaints, will be delivering under this item to provide Board with a deeper dive into two of the cases reviewed by the Service Complaints Adjudicator.</p>			
Recommendation / action required			
Board is asked to note the content of the SCA report			
Equality Diversity and Inclusion			
EDI implications	Yes		
The findings of the SCA report do reflect on the way that LeO's service impacts individual customers and talks to the impact of reasonable adjustments for protected characteristics			
Freedom of Information Act 2000 (Fol)			
Paragraph reference	Fol exemption and summary		
<i>Annex 1</i>	<i>For redaction under s.22 FOIA. The information in Annex 1 contains information which will be published at the end of the year as part of the annual report and accounts</i>		
<i>Annex 2</i>	<i>For redaction in accordance with S.40 FOIA in annex 2 contains personal information, provided in confidence, which if published externally could result in an individual customer being identified in breach of DPA and GDPR.</i>		

<i>Slide deck</i>	<i>For redaction in accordance with S.40 FOIA information in the slide deck could be cross referenced to identify customer's details and therefore should not be published.</i>
-------------------	---

Service Complaints Adjudicator's Mid-Year Report 2024/2025

Introduction

1. This report sets out a summary of matters arising from the cases I have dealt with at stage 3 of the service complaints process since April 2024, and an overview of service complaints more generally during this period.
2. I have issued reports in 13 cases, a notable increase when compared to this time last year, due to the team making good progress in clearing the backlog of cases at stages 1 and 2. I provide a brief summary of the workload of the service complaints team at Annex 1. I set out the issues arising in complaints escalated to me in Annex 2.
3. Of the complaints escalated to me, all were made by consumers of legal services. The main matters complained of relate to delays (both in the lawyer complaint and service complaint), perceived failures to make reasonable adjustments and the level of compensation offered at earlier stages in the service complaints process. Delays were often upheld, and had been at previous stages. In terms of reasonable adjustments, I have found that the LeO has effective processes in place to identify customers who need additional support, and this is generally provided and meets need. I have not upheld the majority of complaints around this issue. I have found that customers either have not understood what is meant by the term 'reasonable adjustment' or they did not in fact communicate their needs as they subsequently assert they did. On occasion, an agreed adjustment was overlooked, and in consequence the related complaint was upheld. With regard to compensation, I have generally agreed with offers previously made, or that no compensation is indicated, as the case may be.
4. Again the driver in a number of complaints has been disagreement with the outcome in the lawyer complaint, and some customers request escalation to me in the hope that I will be able to review that, notwithstanding clear and repeated information as to the service complaint remit. One complaint was withdrawn when I explained to the customer that I could not achieve what she was seeking. However, a recommendation from one of these matters, which has now been implemented, is that my terms of reference are sent to customers who request escalation. I hope that going forward this will encourage customers to reflect on whether escalation to me can achieve their aim.
5. As before, I have found that the quality of responses at both stages 1 and 2 has been high. I have generally agreed with those and this is reflected in the

recommendations I have made. Often, I have made no recommendations, or recommended that the same compensation is re-offered.

6. I have also found the LeO to have been proactive. In the case I most recently reviewed the recommendations I would have made had been superseded by action already taken by the LeO based on feedback from a range of sources around the issue that arose in that case.

Susan Bradford
Service Complaints Adjudicator
October 2024