

Legal Ombudsman – 3 year strategy consultation

1. Do you agree with the analysis of the strategic drivers (pages 3-6)?

We agree with the majority of the strategic drivers noted in the document, with regulatory and market developments being important factors in how the Legal Ombudsman progresses its plans to move forward over the next 3 years.

The impact of technology features heavily throughout the strategy document. The pace of progression in this area means that organisations have to move quickly and invest to ensure they provide modern, relevant and accessible solutions for consumers and other service users.

It is noted that there is an efficient target of 15% which has to be achieved by 2019-2020. This is bound to be a significant driver for the business plan. Presumably technology will play its part in achieving efficiencies.

The analysis of on page 5 does in the main reflect our experiences with the Legal Ombudsman. Generally, there is a positive relationship on complaints related matters and we tend to experience a good level of service. Minster Law can also testify to the improved level of engagement, working with the Legal Ombudsman to develop the relationship and methods of communication.

There is on occasion a lack of consistency between case investigators, although we would say this tends to be the exception rather than the rule.

We acknowledge some of the IT infrastructure challenges faced by the Legal Ombudsman although would say this doesn't necessarily have a direct impact upon the end user and so isn't always apparent.

Overall, the strategic drivers are appropriate and the Legal Ombudsman appears to have an accurate self-perception around this analysis.

2. Are the vision, mission and strategic objectives the right ones (pages 7-10)?

These do appear to all be relevant. This is set out in a clear manner so that third parties can understand the high level mission and vision and each strategic aim. Presumably, the influence of CMC environments will be limited given the subsequent transition of jurisdiction to the Financial Ombudsman Service.

Our view is that performance management will have to be managed carefully to achieve the right balance. There is an understandable reference to managing cost and efficiency alongside the customer experience. The Legal Ombudsman will have to be mindful of encouraging the right behaviours and not encouraging quick resolution of complaints for efficiency purposes when this might not necessarily be in the interests of the consumer or the law firm.

Having the right IT systems is present throughout the strategy and it is agreed this could play a pivotal role across a number of the planned business objectives. Whilst the IT infrastructure is more internal-facing, this could have a positive impact upon consumers and other service users, improving the overall experience with the Legal Ombudsman.

Minster Law continues to have the appetite to engage with the Legal Ombudsman and believe we can add value by having a mutually beneficial relationship. We would be interested to learn more what the strategy and structure of stakeholder engagement looks like over the next 3 year period.

3. Are our planned activities the right ones to deliver our four proposed objectives? Have we missed any, or are there any we should de-prioritise? (pages 12-16)

The planned activities do appear to cover off all the key areas in respect of the strategy. There appears to be a significant amount of work involved in deploying the strategy, so if any need de-prioritising, we would suggest engaging and influencing the CMC environments, given that at some stage there will be a hand-off to the Financial Ombudsman Service.

The scheme rules also work effectively for the most part, so this is something else that could be de-prioritised if needed.

4. Does the strategy strike the right balance between realism and ambition in maximising the impact of our scheme, modernising the organisation and the changing legal services landscape?

The strategic plans do seem ambitious given the breadth of change and scale of improvement being proposed. The strategy stretches across operational effectiveness, IT infrastructure, employee engagement and leadership, stakeholder engagement and scheme rules. This is a vast array of strategic initiatives to address and if the Legal Ombudsman completes all these objectives, then it should have a significant positive impact upon their role in the legal services industry.

5. Do you have any specific comments on our budget for 2017-18 (pages 17-19) and our business plan (pages 11-22)?

We have noted that the legal expenditure remains the same as the previous year and work volumes are anticipated to be at similar levels. However, to achieve some of the strategic plans, it would appear that significant investment is required in both IT infrastructure, training and engagement. Whilst we do not have an insight into the specific plans and investments to be made, the capital budget of £0.49M does appear to be a tight budget to work within. It will be interesting to establish if this budget constraint allows all the desired improvements to be made.

In terms of the business plan, there are a number of comments and observations we would make in this regard:

We would be interested to learn how the Legal Ombudsman is going to promote E&D in your delivery? What considerations are you giving to this? Also, what are your plans to improve the position for vulnerable customers?

Feedback from stakeholders is a good area to focus on and should be a factor in improving engagement. It should be noted that the current automated feedback process on each resolved complaint case is time consuming and there is little incentive to complete this on each case. It is unclear how these surveys are used and what value the Legal Ombudsman gains from these.

We would be interested in learning more about any focus groups we could become involved in and professional learning courses which may strengthen our approach to complaints handling.

In terms of a proposed self-service function for consumers and other service users, Minster Law were selected as a partner to assist with this some time ago, but we understand the proposed changes at the time were postponed indefinitely. We would welcome the opportunity to become involved in this initiative going forward.

Overall, the business plan is extensive and gives an effective insight into the areas that the Legal Ombudsman intends to address as part of its overall strategy.

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