

Monday 7 November 2011

Naming lawyers – Protecting consumers

Embargoed until 00.01am Monday 7 November 2011

It is right to publish the names of lawyers in specific circumstances. That's the decision of the Office for Legal Complaints which oversees the Legal Ombudsman. The Ombudsman has dealt with some seventy-thousand calls about the legal profession in the last year. From 2012, information about complaints resolved by an Ombudsman decision will be available to the public.

Firms and individual lawyers will be named where there is a pattern of complaints or when it is in the public interest to do so. The move is in response to issues raised by lawyers, consumers, Ministers and others who took part in the year-long consultation on the subject.

Elizabeth France Chair of the Office for Legal Complaints says:

“We consider we have struck a balance between protecting consumers and encouraging an independent and strong legal profession. Every day we know most lawyers do a good job for their clients – but there are some who simply don't. That's why it's in the profession's interest to make sure all who provide services to consumers are doing so effectively.”

Every three months the Legal Ombudsman will also publish lawyers' names and firms involved in all complaints that have been resolved by a formal Ombudsman decision. This means that examples of good practice as well as bad will be there for all to see.

Ed Davey MP, Consumer Minister says;

“I am pleased that the Legal Ombudsman has decided to publish this data. This will make the legal profession stronger, improve service standards and consumers will be better protected as a result. As the Government set out in our consumer empowerment strategy 'Better Choices, Better Deals', we are keen to see more information such as this being made available by ombudsmen and regulators. This will enable consumers to be armed with the best possible information before purchasing goods or services.”

The decision has also been welcomed by consumer groups including the Legal Services Consumer Panel. The Panel's Chair, Elisabeth Davies says;


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“This is great news for consumers who tell us they feel in the dark when trying to find a good lawyer. Today’s announcement means there will no longer be a hiding place for the minority in the profession who provide a poor service and fail to put things right. People use legal services at critical moments in their lives and it is entirely appropriate that those who provide these services are held accountable if they get things wrong.”

Ends.

Notes for Editors

- (1) The new publication practice will begin in July 2012
- (2) The Legal Ombudsman currently publishes anonymised versions of real cases on its website www.legalombudsman.org.uk . A consultation about moving to a system of naming firms and lawyers began in October 2010. Evidence was received from other ombudsman Schemes, the Department of Business, Innovation and Skills, Lawyers, consumer groups and other stakeholders.
- (3) It’s free for consumers who wish to use the services of the Legal Ombudsman. They can contact the service on 0300 555 0333 or email enquiries@legalombudsman.org.uk
- (4) The Legal Ombudsman for England and Wales was set up by the Office for Legal Complaints (our Board) under the Legal Services Act 2007. We are independent and impartial. This means that when we receive complaints, we will look at the facts in each case and weigh both sides of the story. We are not consumer champions or part of the legal profession, and we are also independent of Government.

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