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Press release

OLC appoints Service Complaint Adjudicator

Walter Merricks CBE, the former Chief Financial Ombudsman, has been appointed as the person who will consider unresolved complaints about the level of service provided by the Legal Ombudsman.

His takes up his position as Service Complaint Adjudicator with immediate effect.

Announcing the appointment Liz France, Chair of the Office for Legal Complaints, said: "This is a key appointment which requires a thorough understanding of the Ombudsman approach to dispute resolution. Walter has long been a respected member of the Ombudsman community. His commitment to fairness, combined with his firm knowledge of the legal sector, leaves me in no doubt that we have recruited the very best person for the job. I look forward to working with him to further improve the quality of the work of the Legal Ombudsman."

Walter Merricks is a qualified solicitor and has had a distinguished and varied career. For a decade he was responsible for policy and communications at the Law Society. He was then appointed the Insurance Ombudsman and, when the office merged into the Financial Ombudsman Service, he became Chief Financial Ombudsman.

He said: "It is already clear to me that a great deal of care and thought has gone into setting up the Legal Ombudsman, and that a very enthusiastic team are keen to do a serious job well.

"I will very much be the last resort in resolving complaints. I won't be second guessing Ombudsman decisions, but looking at whether process was followed and service standards adhered to.

"I can receive complaints either from a consumer or business, or from a lawyer, and I will make recommendations on what I think should happen next. This might, for example, mean offering further explanation to the complainant or an apology. And if I reach a view that a complainant has

been seriously prejudiced or inconvenienced, I can require compensation to be paid.”

He continued: “I’ve had a number of roles which have involved trying to improve how the legal system works - particularly, and importantly, for ordinary people. I’ve been watching the progress of the establishment of the Legal Ombudsman and think it finally does what’s needed, taking complaints handling completely outside of the legal profession.”

Ends

Notes to Editors:

The Legal Ombudsman can look into complaints about lawyers in England and Wales. The Ombudsman is a vital part of the Legal Services Act 2007 (see link below), which is transforming the regulatory framework of legal services in England and Wales.

<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2007/29/contents>

By law, the Legal Ombudsman is a free service for consumers. It is funded by a levy on the legal profession, but with Government controls in place to ensure it is independent and free from influence when it comes to resolving complaints. There is no cost to the taxpayer.

A range of publications to help consumers and lawyers can be found here: <http://www.legalombudsman.org.uk/publications>

The Ombudsman provides a more effective service, using technology to ensure that it resolves complaints quickly and at less cost than the previous arrangements. It operates within a budget of £19.9m. The old system cost £32.5m, according to independent analysis commissioned by the Ministry of Justice.

The Legal Ombudsman deals with complaints about a broad cross-section of legal professionals, including barristers, law costs draftsmen, legal executives, licensed conveyancers, notaries, patent attorneys, probate practitioners, registered European lawyers, solicitors and trademark attorneys.

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