

Final consultation

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Strategy 2013-2016

Business Plan 2013-2014

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LEGAL  
OMBUDSMAN



## Foreword to the consultation edition from our Chair, Elizabeth France

The business cycle has yet to complete its turn for 2012-13 but we must start to formulate our plans for the years ahead. Indeed, like many other organisations we began reviewing our strategy and thinking about the 2013-14 business plan in September.

From those early sessions with Board colleagues, through feedback from executive workshops, to our presentation to the Legal Services Board, we have worked to ensure that we have a common understanding of our environment, what we are seeking to do, and how we might deliver. Now we invite your input. It is important to us that lawyers, those who use their services, regulators, professional bodies and consumer groups, have a real opportunity to tell us whether they share our view of the strategic direction and whether we have properly identified the things we need to do now.

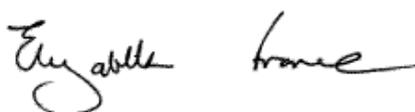
We are proposing no change in direction; no sudden change in pace. Our aim over the period covered by the strategy is to use fully and effectively the provisions of the Legal Services Act 2007 to deliver high quality, timely and proportionate redress. We aim to ensure that the Ombudsman service can play its part in helping to improve levels of service and can contribute to the achievement of the regulatory objectives in so doing.

We consulted during the year on possible changes to our Scheme Rules and last month we shared with you the package of changes which, as a result of the discussions we had, we have put forward for approval. The draft business plan for the year assumes these changes will be made early in 2013. By the time we are ready to decide on the final version of this document we shall know whether our planning assumption is right.

While we also know that Ministers have agreed that the powers in the Legal Services Act 2007 which would allow the Ombudsman to consider complaints against claims management companies should be switched on. However, there is less certainty at this stage about the timing or the likely volume of work. We have therefore decided that for this year, at least, planning assumptions and targets for this work should be produced and then measured separately. There must be no confusion. The Legal Ombudsman's delivery of current work must not be, or perceived to be, adversely affected by the extension of the remit of the service; in the medium term we would expect it to be enhanced.

We want to use this draft not just to seek your written comments but to engage as many of you as possible in debate. We therefore plan to hold an open meeting of the Board (the OLC) at which you will be welcome to raise questions about the strategy and business plan and to ask more general questions about our governance of the service.

We look forward to your comments.



Elizabeth France, CBE

**Chair**



## Overview from our Chief Ombudsman, Adam Sampson

When we consulted on and then published our last Strategy and Business Plan, we said that our objective over the three-year time frame it covered was to finish establishing the organisation and then seek fully to explore the potential powers given to my office under the 2007 Legal Services Act.

During the months that have followed, we have seen no reason to question that broad statement of intent and are continuing to pursue the same agenda. So, for example, we have now largely completed the process of setting up the organisation and are well on the way towards securing the turning on of the first of the additional powers available to us under the Act: the power to be able to consider complaints about claims management companies. There have also been a few developments over that time that have caused us substantially to revise our broad assumptions about the future.

This Strategy and Plan therefore continues on the path set out a year ago and there will be little within it which will be a surprise to those who have been following our work. Indeed, given the fact that this document builds directly on its predecessor, there is little value in repeating the analysis that publication contains. Those who are unfamiliar with my office's work may wish to read this in conjunction with the preceding Strategy.

However, in saying that our approach is very much as previously described, that does not mean that we do not recognise that we face considerable challenges. As a relatively new organisation, although we have made a good start to our work, we can still improve on the speed,

cost and quality of our handling of complaints. If we are to extend our powers, we also have to learn how to make use of them more effectively. Finally, working as we do in a fast-changing legal environment, we need to work closely with Government, the regulator, and other key stakeholders to ensure that what we do is adapted to the new circumstances in which we find ourselves.

It is not enough simply to say that our only intent is to deliver the objectives of the Legal Services Act. By the time this Strategy expires, the Act will have been in place for nearly a decade. It is therefore incumbent on us to start to consider whether there is any way in which the settlement that the Act sets out, particularly in relation to the protection of consumers and the provision of consumer redress, may be improved. Clearly, the essential decisions are for Parliament to make. However, as an organisation which has considerable contact with users and providers of legal services, and as one of the country's larger Ombudsman schemes, we believe that the evidence we have accrued about how legal services are operating in practice enables us to contribute to the debate about the way that redress for consumers of legal services – and consumers more generally – might be better provided.



Adam Sampson

***Chief Ombudsman***



## Who we are and what we do

We run an independent, free and accessible ombudsman service for consumers of legal services who have complaints about their legal services provider. As an Ombudsman service it is, in its decision making, independent of government and the legal profession.

Like our previous two Business Plans, this Plan has been informed by knowledge of real cases and stories gained from complaints we have handled over our period of operation. This experience has given us practical insights, not only into how the market works, but also into how to shape our service for the future. As we continue with our work, we will be an Ombudsman scheme that not only resolves individual complaints but also shares our learning to help improve the consumer experience of legal services.

These improvements might be in the standard of legal services being offered, helping consumers become more confident in using legal services or by contributing to the broader debates that increasingly influence how professional services generally are being offered and the role of redress schemes in the wider arena of consumer protection.

### **The Legal Services Act 2007**

The basis for our service stems from the Legal Services Act 2007. The Office for Legal Complaints (OLC) is the creation of the Act. The scheme itself, named the Legal Ombudsman, takes its powers from sections 125–129 of the Act. The Act defines the terms of the scheme and these in turn are embodied in the Scheme Rules. The scheme deals only with consumer complaints about the service received; it does not deal with disciplinary matters, other than to ensure an information flow to those

Approved Regulators who exercise such functions. Its role is two-fold: to provide consumer protection and redress when things go wrong and to feed the lessons we learn from complaints back to the profession, regulators and policy makers to allow the market to develop and improve. As such, the Legal Ombudsman occupies an important and vital place within both the broader justice and consumer landscapes.

### **The Office for Legal Complaints**

The OLC itself has specific statutory duties, including a formal relationship with other bodies as set out in the Act, as well as its role as the non-executive Board for the Legal Ombudsman. While acknowledging the specific role of the OLC, we refer to the OLC in this document in its role as the Board for the Legal Ombudsman. The use of the term 'Legal Ombudsman' (rather than the OLC) refers to the complaints handling body and to the operational and administrative employees who work within the Ombudsman scheme.



## **The regulatory objectives**

The Legal Services Act 2007 sets out eight regulatory objectives as a framework to regulation and redress. Under the Act, the OLC is required to act, so far as is reasonably practicable, in a way that is both compatible with the eight regulatory objectives and pays specific reference to them in our reporting and planning. The eight regulatory objectives are set out in Annex A. While it may be argued that some of the objectives are not as relevant to an independent ombudsman as perhaps they are to our colleagues in the regulatory bodies, the OLC has taken the view that it is right to refer to the objectives as a whole. This provides some useful limits as well as some assistance in assessing risk. They will require a balancing of the different objectives as circumstance

requires. It is unlikely that a specific issue or activity will allow us to deliver each separate objective.

With that said, the OLC seeks to act in a way that is consistent with the regulatory objectives. When it does so, it also bears in mind the additional obligations on it: to have regard to good practice in ombudsman schemes as well as to the principles of good complaints handling and good governance set out by the Ombudsman Association; and to manage our affairs in accordance with good corporate governance.



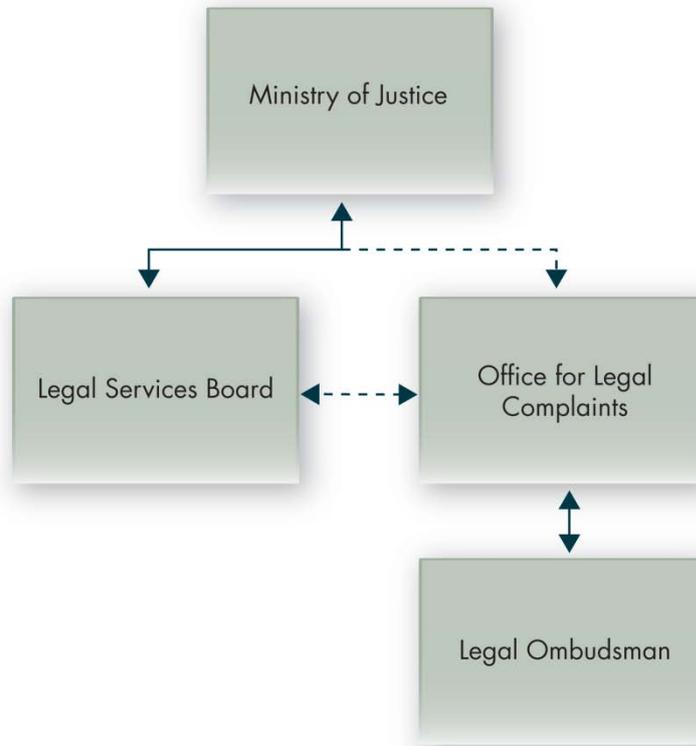
## Governance

The Ministry of Justice (MoJ) sponsors the Legal Ombudsman in line with the framework agreement. This framework is used by the OLC, the Legal Services Board (LSB) and MoJ and provides information on how we are performing against our strategic aims and objectives and whether we are delivering value for money. The budget for our second full year of operation was £16.9 million, £2.8 million below our year one budget and within the initial cost envelope of £19.9 million estimated as part of the Parliamentary process in 2006. This reduced figure reflects the volumes of activity we are experiencing but also results from the efforts we have made to reduce costs. While the commitments that capped our initial operating budget are no longer in place, we intend to continue to challenge ourselves to deliver cost savings on our core service in 2013-14. This is in line with our commitment to providing value for money according to principles of good governance. It also seems right for the financial climate in which we operate. However, the intrinsic unpredictability of complaint volumes means that one can never guarantee a budget, which is why we also use a unit cost measure to track performance.

In 2013-14 we will be dealing with complaints about claims management companies for the first time. In addition to providing an independent complaint scheme for this industry we will also achieve economies of scale which we believe will benefit all our stakeholders. While this work will be financed as part of the existing levy process which underpins the financial arrangements set out in the Act, we intend to ensure that its costs can be tracked and reported separately in order to ensure that they are apportioned correctly between professional communities.

The sponsor team will continue to work closely with the Legal Ombudsman and OLC to advise on the appropriateness and coherence of our aims and objectives to ensure they contribute to the MoJ's overall aims and objectives. The team will also continue to provide assurances to Ministers that we are appropriately assessing and managing risks.

Although the funding for the Legal Ombudsman comes ultimately from the legal profession, it is routed through government and is therefore classified as public spending. As a result, the OLC is accountable directly to the MoJ for its financial performance. However, along with our relationship with the MoJ, the OLC also has a responsibility to report our performance to the LSB, which also agrees our budget and performance targets.



Our governance arrangements are set out in the Act and enshrined in primary legislation. They were also examined during the recent triennial review, which reported positively on the Legal Ombudsman. The detail of these arrangements will clearly need to be kept under review during the next three years and refined in response to experience and changing circumstances.



## Vision, mission and values

The Legal Ombudsman decided to enshrine the expression of its role in a statement of vision, mission and values. Having reviewed these as part of our planning process, we have decided that they remain relevant as a guide to the organisation and as a touchstone against which to consider any changes to the structure or approach of the Ombudsman scheme.

The vision is simple but ambitious: that everyone can access legal services in which they have confidence.

The Legal Ombudsman remains part of a wider process of legal services and justice reform and our vision therefore recognises the role we play beyond the resolution of individual complaints. This wider role is reflected, too, in the statement of our mission:

Our mission statement:

Our task is to run an independent Ombudsman scheme that resolves complaints about lawyers in a fair and effective way, where we are shrewd and decisive when tackling complex issues, and that is open so we can give focused feedback to help drive improvements to legal services.

Our corporate values are embedded within our mission statement:

- Independent
- Fair
- Open
- Effective
- Shrewd

These corporate values were originally used as a basis for the organisational design and have been enshrined in the behavioural competencies required of employees.



## Context for the Strategy

The Legal Ombudsman was set up to provide access to redress for the users of legal services. But the legal services market is subject to

constant change. In developing our strategic plans for 2013-2016 we consider the following elements of change of significance.

### **Alternative business structures**

We expect to see an increase in the number of licences being granted to new Alternative Business Structures (ABSs), together with an increase in the number of regulators authorised to licence such structures. This will continue to bring legal services out of the niche in which they have been confined by the requirement that reserved legal services were provided only by lawyer-owned organisations.

### **Government policy**

Other changes arise directly out of government policy. Changes to the legal aid system; the implications of the Jackson Review of civil litigation, funding and costs; Ministerial decisions about the banning of referral fees – all of these will help to shape the market in different ways and will impact on the work the Legal Ombudsman undertakes. As funding patterns shift with these changes, so the market will continue to shift with them. The Legal Ombudsman will be alert to how this will affect consumers and providers alike: monitoring changes, anticipating problems and planning for the new types of service issues that will inevitably arise.

In addition to government, there are four other sources of pressure on the legal services market.

### **Gaps in regulation**

There continues to be a growing number of individuals and organisations who are exploiting gaps in the regulation of legal services that have resulted from the piecemeal history of legal policy-making. Examples of this include will writing, probate, employment and immigration services.

While the LSB is actively examining the issues this causes, in practice it may take some time before measures can be brought in to respond to them.

### **Blurring boundaries**

The growth in interest in the legal services market on the part of separate commercial providers continues to flourish, particularly on the part of financial institutions, which see the advantages of packaging their traditional offers alongside legal services. For example, we now have more and more high street banks offering legal and financial services together. Probate and estate handling are both now regularly provided by banks. As these offers grow, the distinction between services that fall into the territory of financial regulation and redress and those which are seen as legal begins to erode, with the consequent risk of overlap and confusion.

### **New technology**

The challenges which arise out of the increasing use by legal service providers of new technology and remote marketing and fulfilment techniques remain. An increasing proportion of our complainants have accessed legal services through the web. This has been matched by an increasing number of organisations that seek to make use of the efficiencies offered by new technology to streamline their services. This makes it difficult to apply simple tests of jurisdiction to organisations whose presence is more 'virtual' than 'geographic'. It also erodes the distinction between legal services and legal products: if a will generated by online will writing software proves defective, does that constitute a service failure or is it merely a defective product?

## **The economy**

The current economic climate continues to drive some of the changes identified above and to provide the impetus for some businesses to innovate to meet the challenges of straitened economic activity. As people seek to protect their incomes and standards of living we have seen an increased demand for certain legal services, for example in relation to employment and housing disputes. Conversely, the demand for residential conveyancing services remains depressed as fewer people are choosing to move house; though those who do may be more conscious of the service they receive which may increase propensity to complain. We will continue to monitor our complaints data and share intelligence about consumer behaviour with other Ombudsmen and regulators.

Predicting the impact of the economy remains an art rather than a science. What we do know is that the economic climate will be reflected in changes to the nature of complaints received by the Legal Ombudsman and will have some impact on volumes.

## **Crossing borders**

It is because of the increasingly international nature of these trends that legislators and regulators across different sectors and nations are beginning to respond to the issues they create.

The European Parliament has also taken a keen interest, particularly in the form of the EU Directive on Alternative Dispute Resolution. If there are moves to remodel the existing patterns of regulation and redress, it will be important that the Legal Ombudsman continues to play its full part in these discussions at home and abroad.

### **Informing the debate**

Much of policy making takes place in the abstract, with changes driven as much by theory as by experience. Ombudsman schemes deal in the real life experience of those who provide and receive services. The Legal Ombudsman is expecting to have contact with well over a quarter of a million users of legal services over the lifetime of this Strategy.

Necessarily, this is a partial group of customers: people do not usually come to an ombudsman if they are entirely happy with the service they receive. Nevertheless, this provides a solid bedrock of real evidence about what is happening – and particularly about what is going wrong – in our sector. Colleagues in other schemes have a similar evidence base.

Our stakeholders agree that it is important that we mine this evidence base for information and use that to help shape broader debates. So, for example, we have researched the consumer experience of first tier complaints handling and used the results to produce guides for consumers and lawyers about how to approach complaints. However, initiatives like this have a cost. We have weighed these costs against the benefits and agree that this is an area that adds sufficient value and that reasonable costs are worth bearing in light of stakeholder feedback. It is important, too, that regulators value this evidence and make sure their regulatory response prioritises changes to address the consumer issues we highlight.

### **Signposting**

The increasing conflation of legal and other services risks increasing confusion on the part of consumers about how to obtain redress. There are already indications that this is happening. If consumers become confused about which Ombudsman scheme deals with the service they wish to complain about, Ombudsmen should be working more closely together to signpost consumers to the right place or to pass cases

between scheme. We have raised these issues with the regulators and worked with other Ombudsman schemes to discuss solutions and we will continue these efforts in the coming year.

### **The strategic challenge**

The factors outlined above create challenges both to the Legal Ombudsman and the regulators. But they are challenges which go beyond those who are responsible for overseeing the legal services market. Moves towards the bundling of professional services, the increasingly opaque and complex structures of delivery, the use of new technology to market and commodify services – all of these are common across consumer services and, increasingly, are changes which transcend national as well as professional boundaries.

The Legal Ombudsman will explore the implications of these wider challenges during the lifetime of this Strategy and consider the option of seeking to extend our jurisdiction to take account of a new and rapidly changing legal and professional services environment.



## **Assumptions**

This Strategy has been built, like its predecessors, on a set of assumptions about the next three years. As before, the key assumption is about the level of demand: the number and nature of complaints that will be raised over the next few years. Experience both at the Legal Ombudsman and at other schemes has shown that demand is rarely predictable. Given the number of variables involved – the number of transactions, the quality of the services offered, the consumers' attitude to complaining, the complaints handling practices of the providers, and

the awareness of the existence of our scheme – forecasting demand is by no means an exact science.

In some respects, we are now in a better position to forecast demand than we were in the past. Having been dealing with complaints for two years, we now have some data on which to plan. However, although the level of demand on our scheme has settled into an established pattern, there are significant changes which will take effect in the next 18 months radically affecting the number and nature of the complaints raised with us.

The changes in the legal market, with the entry of large high street brands, consolidation and the formation of ABSs along with imminent changes to legal aid will have an impact on the nature and quality of legal services which no one can predict. Closer to home, we are making changes to our Scheme Rules, particularly in relation to the time limits governing complaints, which are likely to increase the number of eligible complaints we receive. Finally, and most significant, is the extension of our jurisdiction to cover complaints about claims management companies (CMCs). This last departure may have a major impact on the level of demand: there has not previously been any formal consumer redress mechanic for CMC customers and given the level of work generated, for example, by Payment Protection Insurance claims (the Financial Ombudsman Service currently receives 1,500 such claims a day from customers, 50% of whom are represented by CMCs), it is possible that the Legal Ombudsman may receive a very significant level of demand when we begin accepting CMC complaints in 2013. It is not only the raw number of complaints which is an issue. It is also how those complaints interact with our business process. So, for example, we do not anticipate that the changes to our Scheme Rules will substantially add to the 75,000 to 80,000 contacts we receive every year; however, we do expect that they will increase the proportion of those contacts which fall within

our eligibility criteria by approximately 10% and will therefore increase the number of full investigations which we carry out. It is simply impossible to predict what proportion of CMC complaints will turn into cases we accept for resolution and what proportion of those will be informally resolved rather than requiring formal Ombudsman's decisions. These variables have only just begun to settle into a pattern in our current jurisdiction, where providers are used to dealing with a formal complaints handling mechanism. It may take quite some time for them to become predictable in a jurisdiction where independent complaints handling is entirely new.

There is a potential risk to the existing jurisdiction from the advent of CMC complaints. So, it is important that we take steps to ensure that any significant variations in demand in CMC work do not affect our ability to maintain and improve the current level of service to our existing stakeholders. We will therefore ensure that the new jurisdiction is functionally separate from our existing work, so that any impact can be isolated and contained without affecting the handling of legal complaints. We have also expressed our planning assumptions for CMC work separately from our existing jurisdiction.

So what is the information about demand on which we can build our plans? Given the inherent unpredictability of demand for claims management, we will not attempt here to give suggested contact volume figures for that aspect of our work. We will continue to work with the Claims Management Regulator and other stakeholders to model possible scenarios and will be in a position to publish our assumptions in our final version of this document. The following analysis should therefore be taken only to apply to demand for our existing jurisdiction.

We expect to receive around 75,000 contacts in 2012-13 regarding legal complaints. Around 7,500 of these contacts will result in cases which we

accept into the scheme as requiring resolution. Our experience over the last six months is one of steady contact volumes. Our expectation for 2012-13 had been that contact and case volumes would grow through the year and fall within a range of between 80,000 and 85,000 contacts, with 8,500 cases accepted into the scheme. This increase has not materialised to date and we expect our contact volumes for 2013-14 in our core jurisdiction (that is, excluding claims management) to be broadly the same as the 2012-13 estimate.

This expectation is based to a degree on external factors. We remain in a depressed market and we have not seen the expected increase in the number of legal transactions. While the housing market remains depressed, we will see no upturn in the number of complaints about conveyancing, which historically was the main generator of work for our predecessor bodies. We believe that any continued downwards pressure in demand arising out of legal aid changes and better complaints handling by the profession is likely to be offset by a gradual increase in people's awareness of our scheme and an increasing propensity of financially driven consumers to complain.

We therefore see no reason to plan for any significant increase in the level of contacts we receive in our existing jurisdiction. Over the past two years, the proportion of those contacts being assessed as eligible for investigation and therefore becoming cases has also remained relatively stable at 10-11%. However, we believe that the changes to our Scheme Rules, particularly the extension of our time limits for complainants to bring complaints to us from one year to six years, will reduce the number of cases which fall outside our jurisdiction. We have also experienced an increase in premature complaints returning to us. Our modelling has indicated these factors will add approximately 14% to the number of cases we will investigate.

Accordingly, we have planned for a small increase in the actual number of cases we investigate. The graph below illustrates our predictions for work through our existing jurisdiction. This is lower than the original prediction and reflects our desire to only record cases that ultimately fall within jurisdiction. We therefore exclude around 800 to 900 cases each year which we accept in good faith but upon further investigation fall outside our powers to deal with. Because of this adjustment, and because the current year's figures include a small residue of cases which remained unresolved from the previous year, the year-on-year figures are not directly comparable. The final figures are also likely to change from those in this consultation draft as further data emerges.

We planned and designed our business process to minimise the formality of the complaint resolution process wherever possible. In our experience, this approach can, in the right circumstances, deliver effective and quick complaint resolution. However, legal services are often delivered in very stressful or contested circumstances, where customers have much at stake and where a negative outcome can leave both parties deeply disappointed. Given the emotions involved, it is difficult to predict in individual cases whether informal resolution is possible.

Currently, between 30% and 35% of cases go to formal ombudsman decision. This is higher than we would wish and over the next 12 months we will undertake a range of activities with the aim of reducing this proportion to 30% and, we hope, below. However, we must bear in mind that complainants and lawyers are entitled to an Ombudsman decision should they wish and statistics from other Ombudsman schemes indicate that there is an increasing propensity for those involved to insist on one.

Along with assumptions about demand and the way that complaints are resolved, we have made some assumptions about organisational efficiency. Over the lifetime of the scheme, we have been increasingly

effective in resolving complaints speedily and efficiently. We are currently on course comfortably to exceed our aim of resolving at least 50% of our cases within three months. In addition, the figures on staff productivity are showing a pleasing and sustained improvement over the past two years. However, we are not standing still: for example, we have taken steps to streamline the Ombudsman decision process and put into place additional Ombudsman resources in order to address the high number of formal decisions.

Our plans are therefore built on an assumption of continued improvements in timeliness and efficiency. These in turn should directly affect our budget. The addition of claims management will increase overall spend during the period covered by this Strategy. However, we recognise that we have a responsibility to demonstrate that we are not placing a disproportionate financial burden on a profession which itself will be grappling with difficult economic issues and will therefore be setting ourselves challenging financial targets.

We have already demonstrated our commitment to value for money by ensuring that both our set-up and steady state budgets were substantially under spent. Our plans have always remained within the estimates created in 2005, before the Legal Services Act was passed. Not only have we managed within those budgets, we have done so despite inflationary pressures. We have sought to increase staffing to our agreed capacity only when there is a proven case that it is necessary, and have managed the resources to meet the levels of demand that we have experienced. This has produced consistent underspends.

Overall, therefore, we believe that the relatively slow growth in case numbers we have assumed for our core jurisdiction will, to a significant degree, continue to be managed by improvements in our efficiency. However, having been in operation for over two years, not only will the

pace of organisational improvement begin to slow over the lifetime of this strategy, but we will also be faced with the need to begin refreshing our infrastructure which, by the start of 2013-14, will be more than three years old. It will be important that we manage our finances effectively to ensure that the efficiency gains which we created through our use of modern technology are not lost by an inability to refresh our infrastructure in a timely fashion.



## Approach to risk management

The success of the Legal Ombudsman has been built on a rigorous approach to managing risk. Over the past year, we have worked to continue to refine our risk management processes, both at a strategic and an operational level. In line with good practice, we regularly take time to identify and review risks, and then allocate and rank them to plan our mitigations.

The major risks identified for the coming period are:

- anticipating and responding to broader market and environmental changes;
- matching financial and organisational capacity with fluctuations in demand, particularly given the changes to the Scheme Rules;
- managing the extension of our jurisdiction to CMCs, particularly considering the relative lack of information about the level and nature of demand, and dealing with the resultant financial and operational consequences;
- ending the first phase of the IT contract and ensuring that our IT infrastructure meets developing organisational needs;

- the need to ensure internal ombudsman, managerial and operational structures support the business as it evolves.
- providing an accessible and adaptable service for all consumers;
- maintaining our reputation if we do not live up to our values or objectives;
- ensuring our systems are robust and that data and information management processes are sustainable, ensuring no data security breaches or lack of ability to mine data to feed back from complaints.



## Measuring our performance

One of our responses to the requirement set out in the Legal Services Act that we should exemplify best practice in ombudsman schemes has been to establish clear and robust performance targets aligned to the critical objectives of the organisation. These will necessarily need to be long-term targets, to allow stakeholders to track our performance over time.

In 2011, we agreed with the LSB that the five areas we would be measured on would be our timeliness, quality, cost, reputation and impact. These enable us to focus on what we have to do to provide a high quality service to both complainants and lawyers, and help meet the requirements of the Legal Services Act. We began reporting our progress against the majority of the targets on our website in April 2012.

Again, we will need to refine our Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) over time so they remain relevant and we will need to account for the new CMC jurisdiction. However, the following represent the KPIs and linked

strategic objectives which we agreed with the LSB for the 2012-13 year in relation to our core work:

### **Timeliness**

**Strategic objective:** Resolve complaints quickly and with minimum formality

We want to resolve cases as quickly and fairly as possible. We measure the time taken to resolve cases from the point at which consumers contact us with a complaint which we can look into to the point at which we resolve the case. The time it takes to resolve a complaint is also determined to a large extent by the parties to the dispute themselves. If a case can be resolved informally, it tends to take less time than if a lengthier investigation or an Ombudsman's decision is needed.

Our KPI includes three target dates for the resolution of complaints: 90, 180 and 365 days.

We propose that our timeliness KPI targets for 2013-14 are to:

- Resolve 55% of cases within 90 days
- Resolve 85% of cases within 180 days
- Resolve 100% of cases within 365 days

Our performance in relation to this KPI has proved consistently above the previous target of 50% within 90 days during 2012-13, and although the 55% target will undoubtedly prove challenging, we consider that it is consistent with the philosophy of the organisation to constantly stretch our targets.

### **Quality**

**Strategic objective:** Offer a professional, high quality service that responds to the needs of individual customers, leading to fair and proportionate outcomes

We are committed to improving the quality and consistency of our work. We track against a range of quality indicators that focus on the accuracy of our work and the quality of customer service provided, including responsiveness and communication. We have put in place a quality assurance framework that specifies and reinforces the quality standards we have set ourselves. It helps us monitor and evaluate our performance, identifying issues where we can improve what we do and how we do it.

Our quality team is working with assessors, investigators and Ombudsmen to ensure quality of communication, adherence to process and thoroughness in our investigations. During the course of 2013-14, we will continue to refine and improve our quality systems, in particular by building a better knowledge management approach to capture and disseminate the expertise and learning from our collective experience.

Our independent quality team has developed numerical performance indicators for quality: this information is available on our website. The KPI takes an average of scores for responsiveness, accuracy and communication to produce a percentage quality score. Our aim is to score in excess of 80%. In 2013-14 we will be focusing on developing our quality systems to deliver quality improvement not just quality assurance. Part of this work will involve examining the effectiveness of the current quality scoring metrics, which may result in them being refined further.

## **Cost**

**Strategic objective:** Provide a value for money service that uses best practice from other ombudsman schemes

We track the unit cost of our work by reporting the annual cost of the organisation averaged out over the number of cases resolved. To ensure we are delivering a value for money service, we will use robust internal

processes backed up by effective, progressive technology. We also challenge ourselves to work increasingly shrewdly and continuously drive improvement.

This KPI includes two aspects: keeping within our agreed annual budget and the unit cost per case.

Both these measures are critically dependent on the levels of demand experienced. Higher than expected demand will tend to threaten the overall annual budget but depress the unit cost figure. Conversely, lower than expected demand will tend to increase the unit cost but make it easier to come in under budget. We have been able to respond to the lower than expected demand during the first period of 2012-13 to achieve what looks likely to be an underspend in the current financial year: however, like any organisation in a similar position, it is difficult quickly to scale down our fixed costs; this means that the reduced demand is likely to make the £1,999 unit cost measure for this current year unachievable.

The financial assumptions for the 2013-14 year and beyond are clearly crucially dependent upon the timing of the CMC work and the level of demand for which we plan. At this stage, therefore, we cannot make any reliable assumptions to inform this consultation draft. However, in relation to our core jurisdiction, at this stage we are proposing a budget of £16.9 m and a unit cost target of £1988.

## **Reputation**

**Strategic objective:** Build credibility and openly share best practice with stakeholders

During 2012-13, we began receiving and publishing the results of external, independent measurement of satisfaction levels among our

customers (consumers and lawyers); this happens on a quarterly basis. These surveys also include an indicator for how many of those who have had contact with us would recommend us to others. We consider this to be a significant measure of reputation.

We also commissioned a stakeholder perception survey and now have the results of these to inform this KPI.

Having considered these activities we intend to provide two measures of our reputation in 2013/14:

Advocacy: % respondents who would speak highly of the Legal Ombudsman without being asked / if asked.
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Stakeholder satisfaction:% of stakeholders satisfied with overall level of engagement
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## Impact

**Strategic objective:** Seek to promote the regulatory objectives of the Act in such a way as is compatible with our primary role

This area links closely to reputation, looking at the effectiveness of our efforts to feedback knowledge and learning to the profession and consumers. It measures the effectiveness of the effort we put into a range of initiatives including providing feedback and evidence from our complaint handling to publishing decisions and statistics, informing wider policy debates and raising awareness and building confidence among the general public to contribute to the regulatory objectives in the Act.

This is a complex KPI that we will derive from stakeholder feedback based on their view of our achievement against our stated mission and the wider awareness of the Legal Ombudsman amongst users of legal

services. It will be produced annually and we will start tracking performance against two measures from April 2013. They are:

Percentage of stakeholders who have confidence in our delivery against our mission.
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Percentage of users of legal services in the last two years that had heard of the Legal Ombudsman
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## Approach

Since we agreed the five areas above, we have structured our internal plans to ensure that activity is focussed on meeting these objectives. We have set in place measures to ensure that there is a ‘golden thread’ running through everything we do – not just our casework – so that, as an organisation, we remain focused on our statutory function and the outcomes we want to achieve.

We have worked extensively with colleagues at the LSB to develop a suite of measures that will help us deliver these aims. We do not wish to meet targets for their own sake, but for these KPIs to help us focus on what we need to do to be successful. These KPIs have been trialled during 2012-13 and, while we have made refinements for 2013-14, we believe in the main they are proving to be effective.



## What we are planning to do

Our first two years of operation have been characterised by a great deal of learning: we knew we wouldn't get everything right from the start. We conducted our own reviews and sought feedback from our stakeholders, such as Approved Regulators and the Stakeholder Advisory Panel, who provided us with valuable insights and suggestions. We have also liaised regularly with other Ombudsman schemes in order to refine our practices, not least because it is a statutory obligation for us to exemplify best practice in Ombudsmanary. More than anything else, we want to demonstrate that we are open to improving our standards and learning from the feedback we received; just as we hope the profession will be when we regularly share evidence from complaints.

The work we do to improve will be guided by the feedback both from our own reviews and monitoring processes and from that which we continue to request and receive from our stakeholders. The next year necessitates a continued focus on efficiency and simplicity to drive up our levels of performance, and work to absorb the challenge represented by CMC complaints. This is in the context of a longer term need to develop what we do in harmony with other Ombudsman schemes and to respond to a changing context. The Act calls on us to look to good practice in other schemes. In light of the changing marketplace and regulatory environment this can only be prudent. As we look to secure our jurisdictional boundaries, so we will continue to deliver, over the lifetime of this Strategy, against our core objective – providing access to independent redress for consumers in an increasingly complex professional services market.

In our previous Strategy, we set out key areas of focus which would guide our work over the following three years. While the following

formulation slightly differs, we see no need to change those substantially in this update. We take them in turn here, setting out the specific deliverables we wish to consult on for our 2013-14 Business Plan, along with those longer term activities and outputs that form part of our 2013-2016 Strategy.

### **1. Operational effectiveness**

We will continue to try to improve our efficiency over the coming year as we have over the previous one. While we continue to drive an improvement in timeliness in our complaint handling, we are now equally focussed on improvements in the quality and consistency of our work. As we have said previously, our challenge is not to be 'quick at all costs', but to balance speed with delivering consistency and quality. We will continue to refine our approach from feedback (once we have implemented tools to gauge our reputation among users and stakeholders).

We remain committed to providing fair, accessible and responsive services to all and ensuring that our services are non-discriminatory. In order to achieve our equality and diversity objectives<sup>1</sup> we rely on robust equality data collection and monitoring for our customers. This data informs our strategies, initiatives and decision making. We made significant progress in 2012 in developing our systems and processes to achieve relatively high data collection rates. Together with our regular customer satisfaction surveys and targeted community engagement activity, this will enable us to consider the needs of diverse groups of customers and improve our service.

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<sup>1</sup> See Annex B for our equality priorities and objectives

We believe that this approach provides a framework for making a positive difference to the experiences of our customers, and ensures that we fulfil our duties under the Equality Act 2010.

Allied to the focus on quality, accessibility and consistency in our existing jurisdiction, we have to respond to the challenge of our new CMC work. As indicated above, we have not yet worked out what level of demand we can expect. It will be vital not just that we learn to manage these cases effectively but that we test and refine our plans for responding to sudden and unexpected rises and falls in demand. As we have said, it is essential that we manage this new work, which will be challenging, in a manner which does detract from our existing responsibilities.

We have also completed a review of our organisational structure during the latter stages of 2012. Following this review, we will be implementing changes during 2013-14 and monitoring the results.

## **Activities and deliverables**

### **Business Plan 2013-14**

- Use the established mechanisms to drive a programme of continuous improvement through a rolling cycle of business effectiveness reviews. Implement changes based on learning from judicial reviews and community/equality audits. Build on and enhance our expertise in the skills required to reach informal resolution.
- Implement a new operational structure and continue to embed a high performance culture and effective management

- Enhance quality measures, continue to embed processes and build a 'right first time' culture moving from quality assurance to quality improvement
- Improve equality data collection rates and enhance accessibility of services in line with equality priorities
- Refine customer contact methods and information through a review of the website
- Pursue external customer service accreditation and ensure that a clear customer service framework is published
- Take on workload associated with new CMC jurisdiction while minimising impact on current jurisdiction, and collect information on equality learning on CMC work.

#### **Strategy 2014-16**

- Continue to review operational effectiveness, taking into account new jurisdictions
- Keep IT progressive
- Continue to focus on consumer needs
- Constantly review and learn from Ombudsman best practice

## **2. Refine and refresh our infrastructure**

The Legal Ombudsman has been operational for over two years at the time of this consultation draft and the outstanding elements of set-up have largely been completed. We are, in many ways now, a steady-state organisation. However, that does not mean that we can stand still. For example, our IT infrastructure needs further development. Our aspiration is for integrated IT that supports effective, modern complaints resolution, including dynamic tools around which we can grow as a learning organisation. This was always going to take time, and the advantage of having further operational experience means we are able to refine requirements as we put in place further aspects of our technological platform. We also have to consider the future of our IT contract, which is due for review during the period covered by this Strategy. We are required to plan now to ensure due diligence in the procurement of systems and avoid gaps in delivery of our front line service.

This is coupled with our ongoing review of other internal processes, for instance in relation to quality and knowledge management. We must continue to capture our growing expertise and augment it from external sources so we are confident we stay up to date and expert in the areas that are needed to support effective resolution of legal complaints.

### **Activities and deliverables**

#### **Business Plan 2013-14**

- Support integrated, up-to-date and responsive knowledge management and quality systems that support a culture of learning
- Enhance IT to ensure an increasingly robust platform and

infrastructure to support the business process and ensure accessibility through online technology.

- Strengthen service level agreements with external service providers

### **Strategy 2014-16**

- Undertake rigorous benchmarking and research to ensure the organisation infrastructure remains 'cutting edge' with regard to best practice

## **3. People**

As we strive to become an 'employer of choice' our focus continues to be on the performance of our people to deliver fair outcomes for customers through a strong performance management culture.

We continue to provide a positive environment in which to work by offering a flexible environment to meet the needs of our employees while delivering a reliable service.

We recognise that recruitment will be crucial as we continue to expand the service that we offer. It is essential that our recruitment, retention and reward policies ensure that we can deploy the right person in the right job at the right time.

As we do this, we will continue to work with key recruitment and other stakeholders to ensure we recruit from the various communities around us. The Legal Ombudsman recognises the importance of its role as employer in promoting equality, diversity and fairness, and to dealing effectively with all forms of

discrimination.

In addition to offering job secondment opportunities for our employees, we use the appraisal process to look at possible options around promotion, training and succession plans for the organisation. We continue to increase our employees' skills by offering a range of interactive learning and development opportunities, based on their feedback and the organisation's own requirements.

In this way we hope to be able to ensure that we have the knowledge and skills within the teams to be confident in developing and keeping this talent for the future.

### **Activities and deliverables**

#### **Business Plan 2013-14**

- Increase staff knowledge and skills with improved and focussed training support; including, leadership and management development programmes.
- Review approach to attracting, recruiting, retaining and training staff in light of changing organisational needs and equality priorities
- Monitor and report on the equality data on our recruitment, retention, promotion, attendance, learning and development and other aspects of employment, and actively address shortfalls
- Refine and implement resource strategies for responding to peaks and troughs in demand

### **Strategy 2014-16**

- Review staffing levels and skills necessary to deliver CMC and core work in the light of experience
- Review and refine remunerations and reward structure in the light of prevailing economic and employment conditions
- Review training and development requirements
- Review HR equality priorities

## **4. Finance**

Having been fully operational for over two years, we are in a better position to be able to review whether our structures and finances are as efficient as they can be. Once we have implemented the changes to our jurisdiction with CMCs, we will be in a position to undertake a thorough review of our finances, with a view to understanding the opportunities further to drive down cost.

However, in undertaking that task we will need to be conscious of the increasing risk of bad debt which comes from changes to our case fee structure and the risk of unexpected in-year fluctuations of demand, particularly from CMC work. We have also to ensure that our costs remain transparent, particularly with the assignation of substantial costs to the new CMC jurisdiction.

### **Activities and deliverables**

**Business Plan 2013-14**

- Undertake a thorough costs review once the CMC jurisdiction is established
- Model funding mechanisms for voluntary jurisdiction
- Support infrastructure review by ensuring procurement opportunities are open to a broad and diverse supplier base

**Strategy 2014-16**

- Reduce unit costs and ensure cost efficient procurement services are in place
- Benchmark results against other services and against year-on-year statistics
- Manage essential infrastructure contract breaks

**5. Raising awareness and sharing evidence from complaints**

Along with our role resolving individual complaints, the Legal Ombudsman has a duty to feed back learning to Government, regulators, the profession, consumers and the wider public. Therefore, in addition to our formal governance relationships, the Legal Ombudsman has a broad range of external stakeholders with whom it is vital that we communicate effectively. All of these are key relationships for us to manage, especially given the complexity and level of change in our external environment.

As we move forward, our work will focus on ensuring that consumers (including in harder to reach communities) are aware of and correctly signposted to our service, that the profession has access to useful research and data about our work that they can, and that we are able to respond to changes in the legal services market. This task is made more

difficult by the increasing levels of demand and shrinking resources of the advice sector, a key partner in our attempts to reach consumers, and the changes going on in the legal profession. These will require us to redouble our efforts in this area.

We depend upon the Approved Regulators for information about individuals and firms within their ambit. In turn, the regulators depend on us to provide them with information about allegations of misconduct. We have negotiated memoranda of understanding (MoUs) with many of the key stakeholders and continue to work closely with these key partners. We are committed to making sure these vital flows of information, including about conduct referrals, work as smoothly as possible. We remain keen to receive feedback here and find out how well the system is working. However, it is vital that we are also able to receive accurate information about, for example, regulated individuals and firms since this is essential to our effectiveness.

As part of our process of feeding back information, during 2012-13 we began publishing statistics on our complaints data on our website. We also began publishing data about complaints decided by an Ombudsman, including the name of the firm or lawyer. While this has been controversial, it represents the implementation of a policy that was the subject of extensive discussion and consultation. While it is not proposed to refine the policy during the first year covered by this Strategy, like all our policies it will be kept under review and any feedback about its operation fed into any process of refinement.

We will also continue to widen and deepen our relationships with consumer bodies and the advice sector. We depend on them to inform potential complainants of our existence and they in turn depend on us, as do other stakeholders, for feedback about our findings. Since our launch we have made considerable efforts to ensure that people know that our

service exists, what it offers, who can use it and when. Those efforts will continue.

In order to fulfil our role in helping to drive up standards and spread best practice, we will continue to mine our data and develop a new programme of research to share lessons from complaints that will help improve standards across the profession. We will continue to produce thematic reports and measure our own impact on good practice. This is an area that adds value to the work of the Ombudsman, consumer groups, regulators and the profession.

Where we can, we will continue to collaborate with key stakeholders so that the research is broad-based, relevant and focused on practical ways to improve public confidence in the profession, such as the recent first tier research commissioned with the Legal Services Consumer Panel. Our stakeholders welcomed and recognised the need for the research, not simply for the reasons given above, but also because it allowed Approved Regulators to meet their regulatory objectives, now that they are no longer directly involved in handling service complaints.

Our communications work for this year will include extending our reach into under-represented areas. Changes to Scheme Rules and extending our jurisdiction to include CMCs will also mean engaging with more disparate communities.

One way we will do this will be to review and enhance our website on a rolling basis to make it a more useful tool for our users (both consumers and lawyers), to help them understand our approach and processes. We want to use this technology to encourage interactivity, as well as to provide feedback to the profession and individual consumers to help prevent complaints arising in the first place.

We will also continue to respond to changes in the media environment, including social media, to share lessons from complaints and the evidence and trends we find. This will allow policy makers and others to draw on our expertise and raise awareness of our key findings.

## **Activities and deliverables**

### **Business Plan 2013-14**

- Continue to publish data on our website, including on equalities aspects of our work, to allow both consumers and the profession to monitor the trends in what we do
- Implement our ongoing stakeholder engagement plan, which includes ensuring we build strong relationships with the regulators, the profession and consumer/advice sector and ensuring that consumers know about our service at the point they need it
- Provide feedback to profession to improve standards, including on equality issues arising from complaints
- Build and promote interactive engagement with our website to allow us to share information with consumers and stakeholders more effectively
- Monitor information exchange through MoUs and respond to issues if they arise
- Commission research to inform development of a strategy for extended jurisdiction

### **Strategy 2014-2016**

- Develop a targeted external communications and public affairs strategy to support the long term intentions of the OLC
- Maximise our stakeholder and communications strategy to support the objectives of the Ombudsman

### **6. Jurisdictional boundaries**

In relation to the core work of the Ombudsman, our Scheme Rules have been consulted on and amended during 2012. This follows our commitment to review this framework within two years of our launch. Subject to successfully clearing the necessary Parliamentary and regulatory hurdles, our revised Scheme Rules will be operational shortly before the commencement of this business planning cycle. It is important that we inform the profession of these changes and embed the new rules effectively.

A review of the jurisdictional boundaries of our scheme in light of evidence of consumer detriment is also of central importance. The decision to use the powers under Section 161 of the Legal Services Act to bring CMCs within our jurisdiction is such a response. We hope to implement this change as early as possible in 2013.

Following the above, we will look to explore the potential of establishing a voluntary scheme (as allowed for in Section 164 of the Act) to make sure what we have in place will serve to support the longer term regulatory objectives of the Act. The ultimate aim is to provide consumers with redress wherever or however they access a legal service.

The LSB has examined areas of unregulated practice, such as will writing, and has identified potential detriment there too. One possible response would be to use the powers under Section 164 for the Legal Ombudsman to operate a voluntary scheme to run alongside our statutory one to respond to such areas of detriment. We will actively consider the option of establishing a voluntary scheme, having received encouraging responses to the suggestion. For example, a voluntary jurisdiction over will writers, either on a permanent basis or as a stop-gap until regulation is introduced, would provide access to redress for consumers as well as benefiting the profession.

As the shape of legal services continues to change, it is vital that we keep the boundaries of our scheme under review. Key to this process will be the relationship we have with our key regulatory partner, the LSB, and our sponsor department, the Ministry of Justice. However, in a fast-moving world where legal services are increasingly abutting financial and other professional services, our relationships with fellow Ombudsman schemes, particularly the Financial Ombudsman Service, and other regulators and Government departments are of growing significance.

As we approach our planning horizon of 2016, we will need to consider the long-term future for redress for legal services customers. This will coincide with the Ministry of Justice's Triennial Review process and the post-legislative scrutiny of the Legal Services Act. As an independent organisation whose purpose is to seek to resolve complaints in the most effective and efficient manner, we will not approach those debates with our own interests in mind but will contribute to the debate about what is in the best interests of a healthy legal services market and the wider public interest.

## Activities and deliverables

### Business Plan 2013-14

- Research the impact of the changing external environment on our ability to provide redress
- Explore the possibility of establishing a voluntary scheme
- Publish research, feed back evidence from complaints and influence the wider policy debate by mining data to inform regulators and policy-makers
- Contribute to the post-legislative scrutiny of the Legal Services Act 2007
- Work with other ombudsman schemes and relevant stakeholders to ensure joined up redress and a strategic response to the EU Directive on Alternative Dispute Resolution

### Strategy 2014-16

- Engage in and respond to changes in the business market
- Work closely with Ministry of Justice to deliver the 2015 Triennial Review
- Review jurisdictional limits in response to changes in the external market and recommend any changes



## Required resources for 2013-2014

The planned human resources for 2013-2014 in relation to our core business are outlined below. This is based on planned levels of activity

and efficiency. However, these numbers will be subject to an increase to deliver Claims Management work. As of 30 September 2012, 255 full time staff equivalents were employed by the Legal Ombudsman. We forecast that the average headcount during 2013-14 will be 277.

Department	Full time staff equivalents
Ombudsmen and General Counsel	14
Operational Management	8
Assessors and team leaders	40
Investigators and team leaders	148
Coordinators	12
Quality	5
Finance and Business Services	28
Policy and Communications	15
CEO and Compliance	8



## Summary budget for 2013-2014

Our plan for 2013-14 anticipated that an increase in economic activity would feed through into higher numbers of complaints. As the economic outlook has remained poor rather than improving, increased complaint volumes have not materialised. We have therefore matched the capacity of our investigation team to meet demand. This prudent approach to

committing resources has allowed us to continue to manage the cost of the organisation effectively and, as a result, we expect to be under budget for 2012-13.

As we plan for 2013-14, we aim to start with a lean organisation, but also one ready to respond to the challenges of the changes to our Scheme Rules and the expansion of our jurisdiction to include claims management companies. Despite inflationary pressures, we anticipate no increase to our budget for the delivery of complaints about the legal profession in 2013-14. We expect to incur additional start up costs and additional costs as part of providing a complaints handling service for the claims management industry. All CMC costs will be ring fenced and recovered from the Claims Management Regulator: they do not feature in this plan. In total we expect the effect of this to reduce our unit cost as additional economies of scale are achieved.

During the year we consulted on proposed changes to our scheme rules and case fee structure. As a result we have amended the fee structure and from 1 April 2013 will no longer include two free cases per annum for firms. This is expected to result in case fees becoming a larger proportion of our income, and reduce the amount raised through the Levy.

<b>Income</b>	<b>2013-14 £m Core</b>
Levy	15.1
Case fees	1.8
Total	16.9
<b>Expenditure</b>	

Staffing	11.8
Travel and subsistence	0.1
Fees and support	0.8
IT and telecoms	1.1
Premises and facilities	1.8
Other	0.1
Set up costs	-
Total costs	15.7
Depreciation	1.2
Net expenditure	16.9



## Further information

This Strategy and Business Plan is aligned with our performance indicators and projected spend. Other key documents include the Annual Report, Management Statement and Financial Memorandum and our governance framework.

To view these documents or for further information, visit

[www.legalombudsman.org.uk](http://www.legalombudsman.org.uk).

### How to respond

We welcome comments on all aspects of this draft Business Plan, including our Equality Priorities and Objectives (see Annex B) by Friday

1 March 2013. If possible, please send your responses electronically (in Microsoft Word format). Hard copy responses by post are also welcome.

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## Annex A: Regulatory objectives

Section 1(1) of the Legal Services Act 2007 refers to eight regulatory objectives:

- (a) protecting and promoting the public interest;
- (b) supporting the constitutional principle of the rule of law;
- (c) improving access to justice;
- (d) protecting and promoting the interests of consumers;
- (e) promoting competition in the provision of services within subsection (2) [defined as services such as are provided by authorised persons (including services which do not involve the carrying on of activities which are reserved legal activities)];
- (f) encouraging an independent, strong, diverse and effective legal profession;
- (g) increasing public understanding of the citizen's legal rights and duties;
- (h) promoting and maintaining adherence to the professional principles.

## Annex B: Equality Priorities and Objectives

### **To work to ensure that our workforce at all levels better reflects the diversity of the population it serves**

- Ensure our recruitment and employment practices are open and robust
- Embed equality and diversity as part of our culture.

#### Activities and deliverables 2013-14

Monitor and report on the equality data on our recruitment, retention, promotion, attendance, learning and development and other aspects of employment.

Monitor under-representation and the effectiveness of our initiatives to address it, taking positive action where appropriate. Develop a wider understanding of the barriers for under-represented equality groups, where it is not reasonably possible to reflect the diversity of the population.

Publish data and relevant information on our workforce demographics.

Develop organisation-wide staff engagement goals and priorities to improve effectiveness and build employee commitment. Monitor engagement across equality groups using a range of people indicators such as turnover, attendance management, learning and development and staff surveys.

Implement the career development proposals defined in the 2012-13 development and succession plans, ensuring that they have been checked for equality implications.

Monitor the 2012 employee survey against equality groups, identify improvement goals and implement appropriate plans.

Review the flexible working policy with a view to enhance opportunities for flexible working.

Implement a revised competency framework that underpins our cultural aspirations including those set out in our organisational values and equality commitments.

### **Provide fair, accessible and responsive services to all**

- Ensure that our service is non-discriminatory
- Raise awareness of our service in all communities

### Activities and deliverables 2013-14

Improve our equality data collection rates

Implement the findings from our community engagement activity in 2012-13, once they have been assessed to ensure that they meet our strategic aims.

Carry out annual data analysis to improve our understanding of any barriers, bias or discrimination that exist.

Develop action plans to address any areas for improvement in our awareness raising, training, outreach, and so on.

Publish data on customer demographics, outreach and engagement activity and other appropriate aspects of our E&D performance.

Evaluate what, if any, impact our taking over claims management complaints will have on equality groups and socio-economic groups.

Monitor lawyers' experience of our service and address any disparities we identify.

Develop a customer service framework that includes service standards for vulnerable customers.

**Promote and embed equality across the organisation, and provide feedback to help promote equality across the profession and our stakeholders.**

- Assess the maturity of the organisation with respect to equality performance
- Identify opportunities to promote equality externally

#### Activities and deliverables 2013-14

Review our organisation-wide equality performance through a systematic audit process.

Feed back our learning on equality issues arising from complaints to the profession to improve how it handles complaints by, for example, disabled consumers or those whose first language is not English.

Monitor our procurement activity in line with the revised equality framework introduced in 2012-13.

Work with other organisations and agencies to understand equality and accessibility issues.