

Meeting	OLC Board Meeting	Agenda Item No.	7
		Paper No.	142.6
Date of meeting	22 October 2025	Time required	30 Minutes

Title	Service Complaint Adjudicator's Interim Report
Sponsor	Steve Pearson, Interim Chief Executive Officer
Status	OFFICIAL
To be communicated to:	Members and those in attendance

Executive summary	
<p>Sally Berlin was appointed as the Service Complaint Adjudicator on 1 April 2025. The adjudicator is appointed by the Board to provide assurance in regard to the LeO's internal handling of complaints about our customer service.</p> <p>In her first interim report (enclosed), the adjudicator reflects on the standard of service provided by our Service Complaints team, along with a summary of the topics presented in the complaints she has seen at Stage 3 of our service complaints process since her appointment.</p> <p>The adjudicator's observations on the quality of our internal investigation of service complaints are positive. She also references the recent changes made to our service complaints process having a noticeable impact on the timeliness of cases that have escalated to Stage 3.</p> <p>Having considered nine service complaint cases to date, the adjudicator confirms that only one case had resulted in her reaching a partially different conclusion to our Service Complaints team. The adjudicator explains the reasons for this, noting it was our approach to communication with the service provider that had led to the unreasonable service upheld.</p> <p>The adjudicator also notes a recommendation made for revisiting a prior approach of ombudsmen intervention into investigations over a specific age. Whilst this had previously required significant resource, we are exploring ways to include automation in reporting to identify cases requiring intervention; who may be best placed to intervene; and any themes or trends that may be addressed with wider training or support.</p>	
Recommendation / action required	
Board is asked to note the content of the Service Complaint Adjudicator's report.	
Equality Diversity and Inclusion	
EDI implications	No

The adjudicator provides a summary of the topics seen in the nine cases they have reviewed. This includes having seen one complaint relating to the provision of reasonable adjustments, which they note was not upheld.

Freedom of Information Act 2000 (Fol)

Paragraph reference	Fol exemption and summary
----------------------------	----------------------------------

N/A	N/A
-----	-----

Value for Money (VfM)

The adjudicator is appointed by the Board on a fixed term contract at an agreed annual fee. This is already accounted for in the budget agreed.

The volume of cases considered by the adjudicator is consistent with the estimate given in the invitation to tender document (nine cases in six months against an estimate of up to 20 per year.) This represents both value for money and fairness in the contractual sum agreed.

Board Report - Service Complaints Adjudicator - October 2025

1. This provides a summary of the Stage 3 service complaints that I have considered and responded to from April to September 2025.
2. Over this period, I have made decisions on nine stage 3 complaints. Eight complaints were brought by users of legal services and one by a service provider.
3. My view, so far, is that the standard of consideration of complaints by the Service Complaints team is excellent. I have already started to see the positive impact of the recent changes to the service complaint process, through improved timeliness of stage 2 decisions.
4. There is only one of the complaints, in this period, where the outcome of stage 3 varied, partially, to that at stage 2. This related to the service complaint made by a service provider. I felt that, in limited respects, there had been an inappropriate imbalance of approach in communication to the parties during the investigation of the lawyer complaint. This related to: (i) core information about expected timelines and (ii) an unreasonable delay in responding to the service provider's request for a hard copy bundle of the evidence and then, a failure to provide a revised date for the service provider to respond to the Case Decision in the context of the hard copy bundle having been provided.
5. The small number of cases coming to me, so far, make it impossible to draw any safe themes. For completeness, however, complaints that have made their way to me at stage 3 have included topics such as:
 - Delay in investigation (that is, the investigation being too slow). Only one complaint alleged that the wait time to allocation of an investigator was too long. Two were partially upheld (limited periods of time where progress should reasonably have been quicker).
 - Unhappiness with an aspect (or more than one aspect) of the investigator's communication with the individual. Only one of these was partially upheld and that is the service provider service complaint, which I have already summarised above.
 - Just one related directly to reasonable adjustments, that was not upheld.
 - Communication during the service complaint process. None were upheld.
 - Service complaint delay. One was not upheld. One was upheld (at stage 2) for historical reasons.

6. In this period, I made one recommendation that if the 'aged' case review process (by which an ombudsman would review and intervene in investigations over a specific age) has not been revisited in the last 12 months (at 13 June 2025), that it is revisited with a view to considering whether a proportionate variation of it, or another less-resource-intensive process, could be justified to check on, and aid, progress of cases of a certain age (with a view to that age bar gradually being reduced over time).

Sally Berlin
Service Complaints Adjudicator
October 2025