Meeting	OLC Board Meeting	**Agenda Item No.** **Paper No.**	13 146.11
Date of meeting	29 April 2026	**Time required**	15 Minutes

Title	2026 Board Effectiveness Review
Sponsor	Ric Blakeway, OLC Chair
Status	OFFICIAL
To be communicated to:	Members and those in attendance

Executive summary
This paper provides the first of a two-part update on the 2026 Board effectiveness review and focuses on the findings from a thematic analysis of Board members' annual appraisals conducted earlier this year. The review forms part of the Board's ongoing commitment to good governance, continuous improvement and assurance. The appraisal feedback was positive and consistent, highlighting a mature, effective and values-led Board with strong governance discipline, well-functioning Committees and improving strategic confidence. No urgent issues, risks or deficiencies were identified. Overall, the findings provide strong assurance that the Board continues to operate effectively and with a constructive culture, offering a stable governance platform as the organisation navigates a period of transition and transformation.
Recommendation / action required
Board is asked to **note and discuss** this report.

Equality Diversity and Inclusion	
EDI implications	**Yes**
The OLC remains deeply committed to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI), which is a key consideration in Board and Committee business. EDI is therefore considered as part of the Board's annual effectiveness review and is embedded within Board member appraisals and the feedback provided. In keeping with the Legal Ombudsman's commitment to inclusivity, this paper will be published on its website at a future date.	
Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FoI)	
Paragraph reference	**FoI exemption and summary**
N/A	N/A
Value for Money (VfM)	
Value for Money was considered by Board members as part of their annual appraisals and the feedback they provided and is a key consideration at Board and Committee meetings.	

2026 Effectiveness review

Introduction

1. In line with good governance practice, the OLC undertakes effectiveness reviews on an annual basis, with an external review conducted every third year.
2. While it had been planned for this year's Board effectiveness review to be undertaken externally, this approach has been revised to reflect the recent change in OLC Chair. The 2026 review will therefore be conducted internally, enabling the new Chair to develop a fuller understanding of the operation of the Board and its Committees.
3. An external Board effectiveness review is now planned for 2027 and will coincide with the next scheduled ARAC and RemCo effectiveness reviews, which are undertaken every other year in line with their respective terms of reference.
4. It is proposed that the external effectiveness review also incorporates a review of the effectiveness of all other OLC Committees and Sub-Groups.
5. In 2026, the Board's approach to assessing its effectiveness will include the following elements:
   - A thematic review of the annual Board member appraisals.
   - Analysis of a Board evaluation survey, based on a Cabinet Office model and tailored to reflect the OLC's specific governance context.
6. This paper represents the first of a two-part update to the Board and focusses on the findings from the thematic review of Board members' annual appraisals which were conducted in February and March 2026 by the outgoing Chair, Elisabeth Davies.
7. The second part of this update will be presented at July's Board meeting and will focus on the Board effectiveness survey, together with any actions arising.

Board Member appraisals and key themes

8. Board Members completed a self-appraisal form in advance of their meeting with the OLC Chair. Following the appraisal meetings, the completed appraisal forms were

shared with Board Members for agreement and subsequently forwarded to the Legal Services Board (LSB) for record keeping purposes.

9. An analysis of the Board members appraisals identified the following themes and key points:

Board maturity, culture and effectiveness

There was strong and consistent feedback that the Board was operating in a mature, effective and constructive manner, characterised by respectful challenge, collective responsibility and strong relationships with the Executive.

Strategic focus and quality of discussion

Members noted improved clarity of Board papers, sharper strategic debate with reduced repetition and a stronger focus on strategic risks, performance and long-term priorities, rather than operational detail.

Effectiveness of OLC Committees

Appraisals confirmed that OLC Committees and the Sub-Group were functioning effectively, were well-chaired and provided appropriate scrutiny and assurance. Board members highlighted that Committee work had deepened their understanding of the organisation and strengthened overall Board effectiveness. Key points were noted:

- The Audit Risk and Assurance Committee (ARAC) provided strong scrutiny of risk, assurance and financial management.
- Remuneration and Nominations Committee (ReemCo) operated at the right level, supporting people strategy, senior recruitment and organisational stability.
- The Performance Sub Group (PSG) was seen as increasingly important in supporting performance oversight and potentially future transformation governance.
- The Public Interests Decisions Committee (PIDCo) made a clear contribution to transparency and external impact, particularly in its first full year of operation.

Value for Money

Board Members felt that Value for Money (VfM) was embedded across Board and Committee discussions, particularly in budget setting, business planning and external narrative.

OLC strategy

There was strong support for transformation of the Legal Ombudsman Scheme, with Board members expressing support for scenario planning, multi-year thinking and clearer articulation of what transformation outcomes were achievable at different levels of funding. It was recognised that that transformation must be paced appropriately, balancing ambition with organisational capacity and external constraints.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

The appraisals reflected a well-embedded commitment to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) across Board and Committee business, with EDI accepted as being integral to governance rather than a standalone activity. Board members commented on how EDI was embedded in Board discission, decision making and committee work and how this was strengthened by regular engagement with staff networks and mentoring activity.

Feedback highlighted the importance of ensuring sufficient Board time remained available for other strategic risks and priorities, especially as EDI became more embedded.

Leadership changes

Some appraisals referenced recent and forthcoming changes in OLC and LeO leadership and highlighted the importance of the continuity provided by experienced Board members during this period of transition.

Board members expressed a shared intention to provide support to the Chair and Chief Ombudsman.

Learning Points and areas for development

10. Appraisal feedback provided constructive learning points that were consistent with, and built on, previous effectiveness reviews rather than identifying new areas of concern. These included:

- Ensuring that governance arrangements remained proportionate and effective as transformation planning developed.
- Keeping Board development needs under review, with learning opportunities linked to transformation, Artificial Intelligence, deepening understanding of the wider justice system and the stakeholder landscape specifically highlighted.
- Periodically reviewing Board members’ workloads to ensure they were manageable in light of the cumulative demands of Board and Committee responsibilities.
- Assessing whether induction materials and discussions adequately reflected organisational history, stakeholder complexity and learning from the past.
- Ensuring the Board has opportunities to engage informally and develop relationships. These were also areas identified as part of the external review and are ongoing actions.

Conclusions

11. The 2026 Board member appraisals were consistent with the findings of the most recent Board effectiveness review and provide additional assurance that the Board was operating effectively. The feedback highlighted a strong and constructive culture, clear strategic focus and an embedded commitment to continuous improvement.
12. No appraisals identified any urgent issues, risks or deficiencies requiring immediate action.
13. Taken together, the appraisal feedback presents a picture of a high-functioning, values-led Board, with strong governance discipline, effective and well-integrated Committees, and a reflective and self-aware approach. This provides a stable governance platform as the organisation continues through a period of transition and transformation.