

OLC commentary on Legal Ombudsman Sept KPIs

Summary

The Office for Legal Complaints (OLC) scrutinises the performance of the Legal Ombudsman each month at its meetings. At the last meeting, which looked at September figures against KPIs, the OLC noted continued improvement in overall performance, particularly in the increase in number of cases resolved. It noted however, this had not yet been translated into a significant increase in the percentage of cases resolved in three months or less; there remains some way to go to improve performance in this respect.

It had also become apparent in the last few months that the proportion of cases needing an Ombudsman decision had risen markedly and was now about 40% (compared to an original planning assumption of 10%). This is having a significant impact on the closing of cases in a 90 day period.

Assessment Centre

Contact volumes have risen slightly in the last quarter. Volumes are now at a level forecast in the original business plan. This, though, has not resulted in an increase in the number of cases accepted for allocation, with the case conversion rate being less than anticipated.

In terms of performance, the service level (calls answered within 20 seconds) has consistently been above the target level of 80%. September was the first month in which the target level was met on every day. Management will now concentrate on fine tuning resourcing levels to improve efficiency while maintaining acceptable service and quality performance.

Resolution Centre

The OLC spent some time reviewing the time taken to resolve cases. The OLC noted that the issue of accounting properly for premature cases has now been resolved.

In September the number of cases resolved exceeded those accepted for only the second time. Importantly this occurred in every week and the trend has continued into the second week of October. As a result, the number of unallocated cases has reduced from 337 in August to 183 at the end of September. This equates to a reduction in the days taken to allocate a case from c.10 working days to c.6 working days.

The OLC noted that it will take time for this to have a significant effect on the proportion of cases resolved within three and six months. Although these numbers have risen this quarter from 33% to 36% and 68% to 72% respectively, there is still a need to increase these percentages significantly. The OLC noted the sharp rise in the proportion of cases needing an

Ombudsman decision and asked the Executive to produce a paper for the December OLC meeting on the reasons for this and any actions that could be taken to reduce the ratio and, at least for some cases, the extra 4 to 6 weeks that this added to timescales.

The OLC noted that the management actions initiated in the last few months were now having a beneficial effect. There should also be some further improvement as a result of 14 investigators being released from OLSO work, which was now complete, and from the planned recruitment of 50 operations staff to replace leavers and raise the numbers employed up to budget levels.

Unit costs and actual cost against budget

With improved closure rates the unit cost continues to fall and in September was below £2000 – considerably below the unit costs of predecessor bodies as calculated by Price Waterhouse Coopers. Expenditure continues to run below budget and it is now forecast that there will be a saving of £2.2m on budget.

Quality measures

The quality measures for the assessment centre have continued to stay comfortably above the minimum of 80% on all three criteria. An improved process for the Resolution Centre has been trialled and the OLC will see the results for all teams in November. A quality measure for Ombudsmen will be in place by December.

KPI targets for 2012/2013

A first draft of possible targets was shared with LSB representatives in early October and we received some valuable feedback. This was discussed with the OLC and it was agreed that a fuller discussion would take place at our December meeting. It was clear that there needs to be resolution of the impact of the proportion of Ombudsman decisions on timeliness – particularly the three month proportion. It was suggested that rather than have a target and report on X % of cases resolved in Y days, it maybe be more informative to invert this to the number of days to resolve X % of cases. Management were asked to examine this and report back in the December discussion.

**Prepared on behalf of OLC by Tony Foster
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