By Email

12 August 2026

Dear Monisha

Voluntary Assurance: July 2026

I hope all is well.

This Voluntary Assurance letter follows the Office for Legal Complaints (OLC) board meeting on 29 July 2026. It covers:

Transformation
Performance
Insights

Transformation:

Our board meeting took place on the same day the Legal Ombudsman (LeO) launched its model complaints review procedures (MCRP). This reflects months of engagement with regulators and practitioners on how to deliver a step-change in Tier 1 complaints performance. LeO is not a surrogate for effective local complaint handling: achieving a genuine change in customer experience requires a positive complaints culture among practitioners. This would both improve consumer confidence in legal services and reduce avoidable demand on LeO.

The MCRP is a good example of the strategic change we want to deliver in complaints experiences and embedding the procedure will be integral to our next strategic plan for 2027-30.

The OLC discussed our developing strategic plan. We agreed our objectives and the outcomes we expect to be delivered by 2030. The strategy places a stronger emphasis on organisational transformation, improved customer experience and using our expertise to strengthen complaint handling and using complaints to learn and improve. The data generated by our decisions will both help practitioners target improvements as well as regulators to manage the risk environment. This will require different relationships with both and is an area we would welcome the LSB's support to achieve.

We also approved changes to our governance to support transformation. This will see a Board Transformation Sub-Group established to provide oversight and assurance to the OLC during the change programme. We discussed how the board will retain delegation for some areas of transformation, such as approving enabling strategies, including approval of an ethical framework for Artificial Intelligence, but the sub-group will be able to offer more granular scrutiny and support. We also discussed how the sub-group would relate to other board committees, including audit and risk and renumeration, and how internal audit could provide independent assurance of the programme. The board also agreed to retain our performance sub-group which provides oversight of business-as-usual casework activities.

This framework will provide robust assurance to the OLC, who in turn can provide assurance to the LSB.

Performance:

The OLC examined LeO's performance during Q1 2026-27. Demand remains high (4,029 new complaints received, representing a 30% increase compared to the same quarter the previous year) but the benefits of the LEAN programme are starting to be seen. This quarter saw 2,327 complaints resolved, which is 15% more than the same period in 2025-26. This quarter also saw a reduction in the customer journey time.

Despite this progress, concern remains over the length of time in-depth investigations require and there is a significant amount of casework pending at various points in LeO's procedure. The board discussed this at some length and reporting is being developed to ensure clear oversight of the end-to-end customer journey.

The unacceptable queue of cases remains the only strategic issue on LeO's strategic risk register which is outside the risk appetite set by the OLC. This is a significant concern, especially as the risk appetite is open. The board tested the controls to mitigate this risk and requested a glide path for the issue coming within tolerance. This is likely to be dependent on transformation. The residual score is partly a consequence of the LSB decision to approve a lower budget for LeO in 2026-27, which has constrained resources to reduce the queue.

Insight:

The OLC received its first paper on how LeO is supporting the regulatory objectives. The purpose of this paper is three-fold:

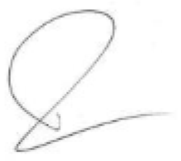
to receive assurance on misconduct referrals.
to identify casework risks, emerging issues and receive assurance about how LeO is responding and raising issues relevant to other regulatory bodies.
to share with LSB insights and concerns in support of your oversight role.

The paper provided an overview of the data LeO captures and identified several areas for development as part of transformation. It is important to note that LeO currently provides a monthly data report to all regulators.

The paper outlined how 1,744 misconduct referrals had been made since 2019-20, of which 82% were to the SRA. It also set out misconduct referrals by service providers. It provided a good overview for the board of emerging risk within the casework, both at an individual provider level and thematically. The board is interested in how a risk matrix develops for the legal sector and how LeO's complaints data both informs it and maps against it. This is an area we will continue to work with the Chief Ombudsman and his team on developing.

Please let me know if it would be helpful to discuss any of these issues.

As ever,



Ric Blakeway
Office for Legal Complaints, Chair