

**Minutes of the Thirty-fourth meeting of the Council of the Telecommunications
Ombudsman Service Limited (TOSL)**

Tuesday 15 February 2005 at 1pm

Otelo Offices, Wilderspool Park, Greenalls Avenue, Warrington

Present:

Council: Peter Holland (Chairman)
Margaret Doyle
Chris Holland
Rosaleen Hubbard
Roger Jefferies
Julie Meadows

In Attendance: Elizabeth France (Ombudsman)
Richard Brown
Richard Sills

1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from Jeremy Mitchell.

2 Minutes of the Council Meeting, held on 18 January 2005

The Minutes were approved for publication on the Otelo website.

3 Matters Arising

The Ombudsman gave an update on the Ofcom re-approval process. Ofcom had been in touch and had indicated that terms of reference were still under discussion, and that comments had been invited from, amongst others, the Ofcom Consumer Panel. It was unlikely that any request for data would be received before March.

Other matters arising were covered by agenda items.

4 Chairman's Report

The Chairman congratulated Julie Meadows on her appointment to Council and welcomed her to the meeting.

The Chairman reported on a visit that he and the Ombudsman had made to DTI Minister Mike O'Brien. He also gave details of his visits to the Contact Centre Director at BT and the CMA Conference. The meetings were positive in confirming the role of the Ombudsman.

It was reported that the Chairman's next round of meetings was being planned and that it would focus on those members with interests in other utilities.

Following discussion the Chairman asked the Council, Member Board and Executive to form a working group, to look at possible improvements to the governance of the Service. The working group would be overseen by the Chairman and would report back in September. It would review the Mem and Arts, and take account of any issues which had arisen in the first years of operation. Roger Jefferies would represent Council in the working group with Richard Brown from the Executive. Rosaleen Hubbard would inform the Council who would represent the Member Board, once she had consulted them.

It was confirmed that Baroness Dean of Thornton Le Fylde had been invited to host the planned event for senior company representatives, Parliamentarians, and others interested in our work. It was hoped that this could be arranged for the autumn, following the successful event held in September 2004 at Portcullis House.

Action Point 1: Richard Brown to coordinate the work of the small group reviewing the structure of the Service.

5 Ombudsman's Report

The Ombudsman reported that the backlog was now under control with only 10 cases older-than-six-weeks of which 5 cases were over 8 weeks. She also noted that there was a reduction in the percentage of returned complaint forms, from 80% in December to 60% in January. Complaints in which there was no deadlock formed the majority of this reduction. The Executive will look to see if reasons for this can be identified and will report back next month.

It was noted that January was the busiest month to date and consideration was given to situations which might affect the expected plateau of complaints the Service will receive. The Ombudsman confirmed that the survey of 500 written enquirers is being completed and its findings will be available at the next meeting.

In discussion Julie Meadows offered to spend some time with the Director of Operations to understand better how the reporting was now done and to share her experience of this type of reporting.

It was confirmed that 80% of member companies had provided updated Total Relevant Retail Revenue figures, on which subscriptions for the next financial year would be based.

Action Point 2: Julie Meadows to meet with Director of Operations to share her experience in reporting on operations processes.

6 Member Board Report

The Chair of the Member Board, Rosaleen Hubbard, reported Member Board discussion on:

- Draft Corporate Plan

None of the Board had substantive comments at this stage but had requested that the ICT plan highlight the benefits that the developments referred to would bring.

- Member Communications

To minimise any feelings of remoteness that smaller members may have, a need to be pro-active in improving communications to all members had been discussed. It had been agreed that this should be a priority. The help of the Executive with this would be important.

- The Member extranet

This was to be the main tool of engagement with members and would include items of interest such as changes to the case fee and membership of the Board. Rosaleen Hubbard would report back on this at the next Council meeting.

- Succession planning

Succession planning for the Member Board, and responsibilities and changes to the process had been discussed.

- Chris Holland's appointment

The Member Board had renewed Chris Holland's appointment to the Council for a further two years.

Action Point 3: Rosaleen Hubbard and Andrew Bradley to work together on the communications issues. Actions would include an email from Rosaleen Hubbard to all members pointing them toward the Otelo customer satisfaction survey and introducing them to the Member extranet. The Member extranet will replicate relevant information from the main site and the Council extranet. It will also include Member Board meeting minutes. Every time a document is uploaded to the site, an email will be sent to members to let them know.

7 Member Update

The Ombudsman reported that a further five members had joined the Service since the last meeting – making 118 members.

8 Event for 'advisers'.

Council noted the update about the event for 'advisers' and asked Margaret Doyle to continue to work with Andrew Bradley on this.

8A Council Representation on the Member Board

It was resolved that, following the resignation of Peter Holland as an Independent Council Member on the Member Board, Julie Meadows would serve as his successor. The initial term of this appointment would be two years.

9 Strategic Plan

Council discussion focussed on the Key Performance Indicators for the year ahead.

Although there were a number of measures of interest to the Council, it was agreed that 5 well chosen indicators as the KPIs would give the picture of the operation of the Service that was needed, on a monthly basis.

Other measures, such as performance on the production of Final Decisions, would be included in the monthly Operations Report, while customer satisfaction would be reported by way of the external research programme.

There was considerable discussion on telephone response rates. While there is no delay in the call being answered the appropriate target for the length of time from the end of the recorded voice message to connection to an Enquiry Officer was questioned. It was agreed that more information would be provided to show the costs involved in meeting a variety of target times. The results of the current ad hoc research into why some complainants write to us rather than telephoning might also help in deciding what level of service callers expect.

The five KPIs for 2005/6 were to be:

- % of Provisional Conclusions issued within 6 weeks of authority, from the customer, to investigate (Target 90%)
- % of Provisional Conclusions issued more than 8 weeks after authority, from the customer, to investigate (Target <1%)
- % of calls answered by Enquiry Officers within [] seconds (Target 90%)
- % of written correspondence receiving a response within 5 working days (Target 95%)
- Unit cost, as an indication of improved efficiency: 80% of costs divided by the number of Provisional Conclusions issued.

Action Point 4: The Director of Operations to provide information to Council about the costs of meeting a range of targets for answering the telephone.

Managing risk was discussed by the Ombudsman. She explained the process which had been used, involving all staff in understanding the importance of identifying risks. The workshops began by explaining that this was a way of anticipating, and so minimising the effect of difficulties. "A problem is a risk whose time has come." All possible risks were identified and then plotted on a chart so that the five which combined the greatest risk with the greatest likelihood of occurrence could be identified. These five would be the particular focus of the Executive team and would be included in the business plan. As last year, notes of the workshops held, showing the full list of risks identified and the weightings given to them would be circulated to the staff and to the Council.

Action Point 5: Further information about risks will be circulated to Council.

With these amendments, the business plan for 2005/6 was approved by Council as suitable for recommendation to the Member Board for adoption.

Action Point 6: The draft would be amended as discussed and passed to the Secretary of the Member Board in time for their meeting on 5 March.

10 Date of Next Meeting

Tuesday 15 March 2005 at 1pm, preceded by Audit committee at 11:30. Following the routine business of the Council, Neville Jones, Deputy Ombudsman, from the Office of the Local Government Ombudsman will speak to the Council and some of the senior staff about the work they have done on remedies.