

**Minutes of the Thirty-First Meeting of the Council of the Telecommunications  
Ombudsman Service Limited (TOSL)**

**Tuesday 16 November 2004 at 11:30**

**Otelo Offices, Wilderspool Park, Greenalls Avenue, Warrington**

**Present:**

**Council:** Peter Holland (Chairman)  
Margaret Doyle  
Chris Holland  
Rosaleen Hubbard  
Roger Jefferies  
Jeremy Mitchell

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

**1 Apologies for Absence**

There were no apologies.

**2 Minutes of the Council Meeting, held on 19 October 2004**

The Minutes were approved for publication on the Otelo website, with a correction to paragraph 3.

**3 Matters Arising**

All action points had been completed, other matters arising were covered under the Agenda items.

**4 Chairman's Report**

The Chairman reported on visits that he and the Ombudsman had made to Vodafone and ntl, visits to 3 and O<sub>2</sub> were planned for January. Both meetings were with the Chief Executive and were positive in confirming the role of the Ombudsman in the company's customer relations and complaints resolution systems.

He noted that a short-list of candidates for the Council member vacancy had been drawn up and that the first interview was to be held after the Council meeting had ended. He and the Council appreciated the support work done by Jane Hannah, the company's HR Manager.

**5 Ombudsman's Report**

The Ombudsman noted that the financial aspects of the report were satisfactory, resulting from more cases than had originally been forecast. The other main feature was the continued, week-on-week reduction of the backlog. As a result of the reduction,

provisional conclusions were being issued more quickly and Otelo would soon be sending a circular to the member companies requesting compliance with their undertaking to provide the case-files to Otelo within 14 days.

There followed several questions about the financial and operational items. An apparent discrepancy was noted between the numbers of disconnections reported by Citizens Advice and those coming to Otelo. The Council also noted the continuing rise in the level of written enquiries, and asked for these to be split between traditional mail and the submission on on-line forms.

**Action Point 1:-** The Executive to provide a more detailed breakdown of the written contacts to Otelo.

The Ombudsman reported on the preliminary meeting with Ofcom to discuss the re-appraisal of Otelo as an ADR scheme. A note of the meeting was issued, which had been agreed by Ofcom. It appeared that Ofcom wanted to focus on both the ADR schemes and their member companies' customer complaint handling systems. The Ombudsman had pointed out to Ofcom that their initial letter had not suggested the participation of either the Ofcom Consumer Panel or the Consumer Association (now 'Which'), in the review. They had agreed that there should be some input invited. Jeremy Mitchell observed that the Communications Act required that the Consumer Panel be involved in the re-appraisal of the ADR schemes. The Ombudsman also said that Ofcom's ongoing reporting requirements from Otelo were not yet clear and that she had concluded from the meeting that Ofcom did not intend re-appraisal to be an annual event.

## **6 Member Board Report**

Rosaleen Hubbard said that there were two main issues for the Member Board:-

- the six-month review of finances; and
- the 2005/6 budget.

The Board was clearly minded to refocus on the 20:80 split between subscription and case fees, and to look closely at the impact of this decision on the level of case fees for next year. They had been very impressed with the clarity of the options portrayed by Richard Brown's spreadsheet presentation. He would now feed their early thinking into work on the preparation of the 2005/6 Business Plan.

## **7 Member Update**

The Ombudsman reported that a further four members had joined the Service since the last meeting – making 101 members. There had been discussion with the UK Internet Forum about the possibility of its members joining Otelo.

## **8 Date of Next Meeting**

The next Council meeting will be held on 15 December in the Otelo offices in Warrington when the main agenda item was to be the draft Corporate Plan and Budget. In the meantime, the remaining candidates for the Council vacancy would be interviewed on 8 December.

## **9 Any Other Business**

Margaret Doyle gave a presentation on Alternative Dispute Resolution systems and practice, for which the Council were joined by members of Otelo staff.