

**Minutes of the ninth meeting of the Member Board of the  
Surveying Ombudsman Service**

**Thursday 24 July 2008  
RICS offices, 12 Great George St, London, 11.00 am**

**Present:**

**Member Board**

**Maggie Jones - Chair  
Patrick Bligh-Cheesman  
Rosemary Carter  
Steven Gould  
Christopher Lloyd  
Jane Pridgeon**

**Secretariat**

**Robbie Allcock**

**In attendance**

**Tony Allen  
Richard Brown  
David Pilling**

**Preliminaries**

The meeting began with a minute's silence to mark the sudden death of Ian Smith (Surveyors Ombudsman).

**1. Apologies for absence**

Apologies were received from James Scott-Lee and Chris Kenny. Tony Allen, an independent member of the tOSI Council who acts as an alternate Council representative to Chris Kenny, was in attendance.

**2. Minutes of the Member Board meeting held on 22 May 2008**

The Minutes were approved for publication on the Surveyors Ombudsman Service website.

**3. Matters Arising from the Minutes**

AP: Patrick Bligh-Cheesman to liaise with RICS, Chris Lloyd and James Scott-Lee re Complaint Types and report back at the next meeting with a view to signing off the Management Information pack. This matter was dealt with under Agenda item 8.

AP: Ian Smith to monitor prevalence of case types and report at a future Board meeting. This action will now be taken up by Richard Brown on behalf of tOSI to report at the next meeting.

AP: Surveyors Ombudsman Service draft response to OFT to be circulated to Member Board. This matter was dealt with under Agenda item 9.

#### **4. Cover arrangements for the Surveyors Ombudsman's post**

The Board noted the resignation of Helen Cumming. Helen, a Chartered Surveyor, had worked with Ian Smith as an Investigation Officer in the Scottish Pilot scheme. This now leaves a gap in the Surveyors Ombudsman Service in terms of technical surveying experience. RICS confirmed it is assisting tOSI in this regard and has a list of potential candidates for the Executive to consider appointing as initial short-term cover.

It was also confirmed that tOSI are working on a replacement for the Surveyor Ombudsman's position.

#### **5. tOSI Council Report**

The Board received reports from the June and July Council meetings.

The main issue discussed at June's meeting was performance of tOSI. David Pilling had also given a presentation on the first year of the Surveyors Ombudsman Service.

The main issues discussed at July's meeting were:

- Succession Planning (including the consideration of cover for the Surveyors Ombudsman post);
- Accommodation – The Council had agreed for tOSI to take on new office space within the current building. It was noted that the 'back office' support staff e.g. HR, Communications, Finance, will relocate here;
- KPIs and performance. This was discussed in more detail under Agenda item 6;
- Approval of the annual accounts from the Auditors;
- Reserve levels – the Finance Board is currently considering a protocol for planning over a longer period;
- tOSI's tender to become an approved redress scheme for Postal Services. tOSI was not successful in this bid, which was awarded to Independent Dispute Resolution Services (IDRS); and
- Ofcom's consultation on complaints handling and Alternative Dispute Resolution which had recently been published

The Council also held a Strategy meeting in which it discussed KPIs and the future of tOSI.

The Board discussed the office move and tOSI's current opening times (in relation to the telephone helpline) in more detail.

The Chair proposed Steven Gould as the new Surveyors Ombudsman Service representative on the tOSI Council. The Board formally approved this proposal on the basis that it is reviewed periodically. Steven will also sit on the Audit Committee.

#### **6. Performance Report**

The performance report was noted. Overall, stock figures and the recent issue regarding KPIs were now under control. The KPIs for the percentage of Provisional Conclusion issued within six weeks was now "amber". The Executive have been working against a weekly action plan in order to try and meet KPI targets. However, work volumes continue to be greater than anticipated. In terms of stock, the majority of cases older than 8 weeks are surveying cases.

In specific relation to surveying cases, it was noted that they can be more complex and take longer to complete than energy and telco cases. This led to a discussion and the

Board agreed to keep the current KPIs under review in terms of staff and funding.

It was confirmed that tOSI now has a pool of staff dedicated to surveying work.

Finance - there was a brief discussion regarding the increase in the debtors balance. Richard Brown explained that this was due to companies systems and tOSI awaiting subscription fees from members.

## **7. Update on Membership**

Just under 10,000 of the surveying firms RICS have written to regarding their regulation have signed up to be regulated by RICS and, of these, (approximately) 3200 firms have chosen to use the Surveyors Ombudsman Service as their redress mechanism.

It was noted that some of those firms may have a large number of offices and regulated surveyors but others may have only a few, for example. RICS confirmed that it has access to this data per regulated firm. The Board agreed that it would be useful for RICS to report to it on the percentage of regulated firms and how many surveyors each have.

RICS confirmed that it was currently awaiting approval of the Surveyors Ombudsman Service from the OFT as a redress scheme for estate agents in order to market potential members who would be eligible for the scheme but are not currently members.

**AP: RICS to report on the percentage of regulated firms and how many surveyors each have as part of its Membership update at Board meetings.**

## **8. Management Information (MI) Pack**

Following a brief from Patrick Bligh-Cheesman the Board agreed to the Level 1 'Complaint Type' categories. A target date of 1 September 2008 was set for the implementation of the Level 1 categories into tOSI's Team Knowledge system. Further deliberations will be undertaken regarding Level 2 categories. It was agreed that Patrick should continue to liaise with Richard Brown in this regard and report back at the next meeting.

**AP: Patrick Bligh-Cheesman to liaise with Richard Brown re Level 2 Complaint Types and report back at the next meeting with a view to signing off the MI pack.**

## **9. OFT update & Surveyors Ombudsman Service Terms of Reference**

The application to the OFT for approval as a redress scheme for estate agents, under CEARA 2007, was still ongoing. tOSI has fielded further responses to more questions posed in several notes to Surveyors Ombudsman Service in June and July and has tried to move swiftly to accommodate OFT's concerns. **[Secretary note: latest submission to OFT dated 1 August].**

This led to a discussion and concern was aired that OFT had already provided formal approval to another applicant, which could have a potential negative impact on SOS membership. The Board was keen to assist in speeding up the application process as much as possible and agreed to delegate any minor amendments to the Terms of Reference to the Chair. Any major amendments will be circulated and approved electronically.

**AP: Board to delegate any minor ToR amendments to Chair.**

## **10. Any other business**

The Board noted that arrangements to fill the vacancy left by Dianne Hayter is ongoing.

It was also agreed for any case files left from the Scottish Pilot scheme should follow tOSI's policy of destroying any data on the Team Knowledge system one year after the last contact on the case. It was noted that the majority of this information would be approximately two years old.

**Date of next meeting**

11.00 on Thursday 25 September at RICS offices, 12 Great George Street, London.

These minutes were approved at the Member Board meeting held on

Signed (on behalf of the Member Board)

**Baroness Maggie Jones**

**Chairman of Member Board**