

Mental Health Taking the Tribunal Forward

A year ago, as part of the process of moving the Mental Health Tribunal out of London, we set ourselves a challenge to: improve customer service, get things right first time, raise the profile of the tribunal within the Tribunals Service, reduce the level of complaints and introduce a programme of improvements and efficiencies.

By the end of March 2008 the London office closed and we began training around 80 new staff in Leicester. Some of the staff were existing Tribunals Service staff but the majority were new to the Civil Service. Within the first few months of the month we were able to take advantage of 'quick wins' in order to improve the service we provide to both customers and stakeholders. Telephones were answered in line with TS standards, complaint handling, all supporting functions such as accommodation, personnel and finance, and Judicial Services transferred to the existing the existing teams within the Leicestershire Administrative Support Centre. There were also improvements with the IT, we moved from the Department of Health to the Ministry of Justice platform which immediately enabled access to management information and phase 1 of the new database (MARTHA) was introduced in September.

At the same time we also reviewed our processes with the focus on quality and efficiency. All of the applications were brought together under one team and all panel bookings under another, we had a programme of data cleansing in readiness for the new database, we have introduced typed decisions from panel chairs rather than handwritten and we have concentrated our efforts on reducing the number of cases awaiting listing by paying closer attention to linking hospitals and enforcing the 48 hour policy.

To date the results of our efforts have been to average 92% of section 2 cases listed within target, a reduction in the number of complaints and Judicial Reviews, the number of outstanding listings reduced from an average of 1400 per week to 850, a review of all of the letters that the Tribunal sends to customers and stakeholders, and the Mental Health Act and, most notably, a change of name with the implementation of the Tribunals Courts Enforcement Act. The Mental Health Review Tribunal is now the Tribunals Service Mental Health.

Feedback from recent visits to hospitals have confirmed improvements in our service since moving to Leicester and improved communication with Stakeholders has been achieved through successful open day events, visits and working together to identify and improve areas where we have shared interests.

Whilst compliments and praise received between March and October recognise our achievements to date we have not lost sight of the task ahead. Major projects continue to progress alongside the day to day business. These include the appointment of salaried members and case management, a review of Tribunal Clerks and increasing the percentage of clerked tribunals, electronic movement of documents, review of Tribunal Hearing Rooms and the Customer Satisfaction Survey.

Our priorities for 2009 / 2010 are to make improvements in performance against targets, consolidation, process efficiencies, customer service excellence and developing our staff by enabling them to make visits to hospitals, stakeholders and attending hearings. We will also be holding more open days so that our teams can share their successes to date with stakeholders and encourage closer working relationships.