



I welcome the Independent Complaints Reviewer's (the ICR) Annual Report for 2020-21 and congratulate the ICR's office for achieving the Crystal Mark at its first attempt.

I agree with the observation in the report that complaints are an essential element of feedback for an organisation prepared to take a constructive and critical look at its own service, placing the culture of customer service and good complaint handling at the heart of the business.

Delivering for our customers is at the heart of HM Land Registry's purpose. The UK property market is one of the most valuable and active markets in the world – it is the greatest store of wealth in our nation and underpins our economic stability. For nearly 160 years HM Land Registry has played an indispensable role in supporting that stability by ensuring that property transactions can proceed safely and securely. We guarantee the ownership of over £7 trillion worth of land and property assets, making our registers part of the UK's Critical National Infrastructure. Our primary role is to ensure that property transactions can take place, without delay or interruption, and on the basis of trusted, accurate, and high-quality information.

As our recently published 2020-21 Annual Report outlines, HM Land Registry received fewer recorded complaints than the year before (5,169 compared with 5,678 in 2019-20) and 47% of those were upheld or partially upheld. Customer feedback about delays with registration applications and associated customer enquiries was the most common area of upheld complaint, comprising 32% of the upheld total. This reflects the fact that some of our processing times for non-automated services are longer than we would like them to be. The other main areas of upheld complaints related to the requests for information (requisitions) we make to customers when their applications lack required information (8%).

It is very important to me and my colleagues that we continually look to improve our approach to complaints handling as part of our commitment to our customers. We analyse all complaints and are implementing changes following a review of our complaints procedure. These include improving how we record our complaints handling, gaining better insight into what the complaints are about, and improving assurance that the complaints procedures are being followed.

The ICR's Annual Report highlights some of difficult challenges that HM Land Registry has had to face during the period, mainly due to the impact of COVID-19. We recognise the importance of managing customers' expectations in the current situation. Our Annual Report sets out a number of steps we have taken in response to customer queries. For example, we have updated and publicised more widely our guidance on how to apply under our "expedite" (fast-track) process and revised the standard wording we use in response. Looking ahead, a planned change to the commercial software provider of our Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system in 2021/22 gives us an opportunity to build in further enhancements to our customer feedback processes.

I am aware of the ICR's views on HM Land Registry publishing service delivery standards. We have been working to deliver a solution that provides our customers a more accurate indicator on when we anticipate to complete a particular application. We provide information on expected completion timescales on our GOV.UK pages and have improved the service for our Business e-services customers who lodge applications via our HM Land Registry portal so that they can now use the View

My Applications service to check the status, progress and estimated completion date of pending applications.

I am grateful to the ICR for the independent and impartial opinions provided when investigating complaints that ultimately reach the ICR's office. Our Independent Complaints Reviewer's Evaluation and Study Team (ICREST) reviews all the ICR's reports, and acts on any failures and lessons to be learnt.

The ICR and the ICR's team continue to provide an invaluable service for both customers and HM Land Registry, and I am very grateful to them for this.

Yours sincerely

Simon Hayes  
Chief Executive and Chief Land Registrar