

## **RAIL OMBUDSMAN BOARD MINUTES**

Minutes of a meeting of the Board of Directors of Rail Ombudsman (Company Number (14303967) (the “company”) held on 6th March 2025

### Present:

Chief Executive and Chief Ombudsman: Kevin Grix (KG)

Executive Directors: Judith Turner (JT) Richard Puckey (RP)

Non-Executive Directors: John Peerless-Mountford (JP) [Chair]

Jonny Westbrooke (JW), James Walker (JWA), Helen Saxon (HS) and Gobi

Ranganathan (GR)

Matt Thomas (MT)

Apologies for Absence: None

### **1. NOTICE, QUORUM AND APOLOGIES**

The Chair reported that sufficient notice of the meeting had been duly given and that a quorum was present.

### **2. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS**

Declaration of Directors' interests notice was circulated prior to the meeting and will be updated accordingly.

### **3. MINUTES OF THE BOARD MEETING**

The minutes of the Rail board meeting 9<sup>th</sup> December 2024 were approved by the board and signed by the Chair on behalf of the board.

### **4. FINANCIAL SUMMARY AGAINST CONTRACT**

RP summarised the financial position against contract with the board

### **5. OPERATIONAL UPDATE**

#### **Operational Update**

##### **Case volume**

MT shared slide depicting last 12 months and explained that volumes had been steady and within the assumed circa 4,000 cases per annum. For the 2024 calendar year, approx. 3,950 cases were handled.

MT shared a slide comparing April-March 2024-25 and 2023-24, noting that some seasonality can be more clearly discerned, which should assist with ongoing forecasting.

## **Service Level Agreement**

MT briefed the Board on performance against the SLA.

## **Scheme Member Engagement**

Typical regime of service reviews and ad-hoc support to members sustained by NF. No significant issues to report; aftercare follow-ups have been necessary to close out payment of awards. Also, some work is taking place regarding consistency of approach to appeals/complaints around Unpaid Fare Notices in the industry. Preparing contracts etc. for the transition of Elizabeth Line to a new operator in May.

## **Key activity**

Trainline membership - live as of 31<sup>st</sup> Jan. MT noted latest case volumes – there currently being no reason to expect a more substantial uplift than assumed – but that 40 working days out from membership going live would be an important milestone in this regard.

Advisory Panels met – JT would deliver update as separate agenda item.

Root Cause Analysis – constructive collaboration between the RO, Transport Focus and Govia Thameslink Railway at a mature stage; MT sought to engage GR ahead of sign-off for expertise on the issues identified and conclusions drawn.

ORR Revenue Protection Review – draft response is with ORR for review and comment.

Website and Case Management System works – work continuing. Engaging with ORR on potentially holding back CMS rollout to allow some additional enhancements which have been scoped to be implemented pre-launch to rail.

## **Future landscape**

DFT's consultation addressing the new watchdog to hold GBR to account is live. Seen very positively by the RO. MT described the approach to the one-stop shop and the options set out by DFT, also the extensive engagement from DFT which has been constructive and reassuring.

KG advised that engagement with the DFT continues. DFT staff have visited the office, the aim is to put passengers at the heart of the rail industry.

There is a desire from DFT to do more training, potentially using the rail ombudsman as an accredited training body.

The DFT is closely involved in creating the Passenger Standards Authority, expected by 2028.

## **6. ADVISORY STATEMENT FROM SCHEME MEMBER PANEL**

There are two advisory panels: a member panel and a consumer panel.

Concerns were raised about the separation of the panels leading to echo chambers. The ORR agreed to bring the panels together for at least one meeting per year.

### **Areas Discussed**

- Awareness and knowledge, particularly among young people, was flagged.
  - Discussion around using social media to engage with young people.
  - Tension between engaging young people and the inability to promote the Ombudsman contractually.
- Information about users and prospective users.
  - Discussion around capturing demographic data about service users.
  - Concerns about potential allegations of impartiality or discrimination.
  - Capturing data as a wider industry initiative was suggested.
- Casework forecasting.
  - GWR offered to help better understand forecasting within the industry.
- Response times on cases.
  - Challenges of working 30 working days on mediations.
  - Keep everyone informed about the process.
- Disabled person's helpline number.
  - A member of staff suggested having a disabled person's helpline number.
  - Challenged on the basis that all team members should be able to deal with all users.
  - Consider championing approaches within the business.
- Terminology used for participating service providers and rail service providers.
  - Looking at terminology to ensure consistency across all user interfaces.

## **7. ACCESSIBILITY AWARDS AND ORR CHANGE REQUEST**

MT introduced this agenda item by presenting to the Board a change request proposed by ORR. The change seeks to add to the Board's explicit accountabilities by adding reference to the Compensation Framework, where currently the contract refers to the Rail ADR Service Rules and Eligibility Criteria (which themselves refer to the Compensation Framework).

MT explained the purpose of the Compensation Framework, and then the background to the change proposed – casework that had given rise to questions of suitability of the Compensation Framework, which JT would discuss further.

JT described a matter that has arisen through casework related to the Equality Act 2010, the Rail Ombudsman's remit in this regard and its ability to make awards of compensation.

The board considered the information

## **8. PL INSURANCE AND STAFF UPDATES**

The group now has professional identity insurance in place. Engagement with the ORR regarding a change request is underway.

JT advise that a new structure is in place in terms of senior management.

## **9. AOB**

JT notified the board that there was a revised version of the fit and proper persons declaration.

There was no further business, and the Chair declared the meeting closed.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John Peerless-Mountford". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "John" being the most prominent.

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John Peerless-Mountford  
For and on behalf of the Board