

MINUTE Meeting of the SLCC Consumer Panel



Tuesday 8 May 2018

Venue: The Stamp Office, 10 – 14 Waterloo Place, Edinburgh, EH1 3EG

Present: Carol Brennan (CB) [Chair], Queen Margaret University Consumer Dispute Resolution Centre
Shaben Begum (SB), Scottish Independent Advocacy Alliance
Sheila Scobie (SS), Competition & Markets Authority
Louise Johnson (LJ) Scottish Women's Aid
Paul Bradley (PB) Scottish Council of Voluntary Organisations [skype]
Keith Dryburgh (KD), Citizens Advice Scotland

David Buchanan-Cook (HoO), Head of Oversight (HoO), SLCC

In attendance: Richard Beevers (RB), Customer Plus (Items 1-6 only)

1. Welcome

The Chair welcomed all present to the meeting of the Panel and thanked Richard Beevers for attending to talk about work he was currently undertaking for the Law Society of Scotland.

2. Apologies

None were received.

3. Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest.

4. Approval of previous Minute

The Minute from the previous Panel meeting was approved.

5. Actions

The HoO advised that Actions 39 and 42 were the only items which remained outstanding. KD advised that we would take these forward separately with the HoO and it was agreed to remove these from the outstanding actions.

6. Richard Beevers – Customer Plus

RB set the scene by describing the work he was currently undertaking for the Law Society of Scotland in terms of improving the LSS' customer experience. He highlighted the challenges arising from the fact that the LSS had many different stakeholders, including their own members who were mandated to be members. He asked the Panel for their thoughts on any issues which he would take back to the LSS.

The Panel suggested that it was unusual for a regulator to describe its service users as "customers" and that this was not necessarily a view which the Panel shared. It was suggested that there was a confusion between the term "customer" and, more accurately, "stakeholder" – and the Panel accepted the stance that it was difficult to balance regulation on the one hand with duties of pastoral support to members on the other.

The Panel questioned what research the LSS had undertaken, or planned to carry out, in relation to consumers of legal services, and RB said he would find out and report back via the HoO. The Panel recorded that it would be happy to input into any such research planning, particularly in light of existing research which indicated that the legal sector had higher levels of “silent sufferers” than other sectors. The Panel wondered whether the LSS had considered forming a high street consumer panel to undertake research into the users of legal services – this could be a demonstration of access and transparency as part of the wider debate around access to justice.

The Panel went on to discuss other issues, such as the need for legal firms and the Society itself to highlight better the fact that clients have the right to complain. The Panel also considered that there was a need for better understanding within the profession of the impact of a case, particularly a need for better appreciation of the wider understanding of vulnerability. The group also questioned why, when there appeared poor service levels in relation to immigration and asylum work, there were relatively few complaints stemming from these areas of work – more work should be done to remove the barriers that prevented such consumers from speaking up. Finally, the Panel noted that it would be desirable for the “find a solicitor” function to be extended to include meaningful information, on complaints for example, to help inform consumer choice.

RB thanked the Panel for all their comments and confirmed that he would take these back to the LSS. The Chair thanked him for instigating such an interesting discussion and looked forward to hearing further.

7. Roundtable event

The Chair suggested that item 11 be taken next due to the remaining time available.

The Panel discussed the content outline for the event which had been circulated by the HoO and agreed who would lead on which sections. It was agreed that members would individually feed back content direct to the MaSPO by first thing on Monday 14 June in order that the slide pack could be finalised.

The HoO noted that the attendee list was already looking very healthy and approaching the cut-off level.

8. Feedback from Board meeting

The Chair gave a brief update to the Panel following her attendance at the SLCC Board meeting on 1 May. She advised that papers discussed included those relating to the proposed budget (now laid in Parliament) and process improvements to clear the backlog at eligibility. On customer feedback, she had reiterated the Panel’s suggestion that this should be followed up, as recorded in the Panel’s Minute which was also before the Board at that meeting. She had noted that a long term trends paper had been produced by the CEO and suggested that this be included with the papers for forthcoming Panel meetings.

9. SLCC Quarterly Statistics and Quarterly Feedback

The HoO gave an overview of the quarterly statistics and feedback and noted that Work in Progress (WIP) was improving – the Panel welcomed this positive move.

In relation to the customer feedback, the Panel noted that similar themes were recurring. It was noted that some of the respondents were particularly articulate, which raised the question of how less articulate complainers voiced their views. It was suggested that other channels might be considered, such as telephone or face to face meetings. The Panel considered that it would be worthwhile inviting a speaker from another organisation along to learn from another body.

10. Feedback questionnaire

As advised under item 5, the HoO confirmed that the suggested amendments to the questionnaire had been completed and the new form would start being used with effect from 1 July – the start of the new operating year.

11. GDPR

The HoO led a short discussion on GDPR and the implications for members of the Panel. He reminded members that SLCC papers were provided to them personally, albeit they were there as representatives of respective organisations. If anyone at any point wished to share these further within their respective organisations a request should first be made to the SLCC so that the necessary arrangements around confidentiality can be put in place. He also advised that members would shortly receive a link to an on-line training module which was being rolled out to all staff.

12. Date of next meeting

The next meeting was noted as being at 10 am on Tuesday 7th August, at the SLCC.

13. AOB

There being no further business, the Chair drew the meeting to a close.