

# Meeting of the SLCC Consumer Panel

Tuesday 6 November 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  
Louise Johnson (LJ), Scottish Women's Aid  
Miriam Simpson (MS), Competition & Markets Authority  
  
David Buchanan-Cook, SLCC Head of Oversight & Communications (HoO)

**Apologies:** Paul Bradley (PB), Scottish Council of Voluntary Organisations  
Susan McPhee (SM), Citizens Advice Scotland

**In attendance:** Jim Martin (JM), SLCC Chair

- 1. Welcome**  
The Chair welcomed all present to the meeting of the Panel, particularly welcoming the SLCC Chair, Jim Martin, and Miriam Simpson, who was attending on behalf of the CMA for the first time.
- 2. Apologies**  
Apologies were received from SM and PB.
- 3. Declarations of interest**  
There were no declarations of interest.
- 4. Approval of previous Minute**  
The Minute of the previous Panel meeting was approved.
- 5. Actions**  
The HoO confirmed that the majority of actions on the register had now been cleared. In relation to action No. 71, he noted that a representative from the SLCC had not been invited to speak at this year's SYLA conference but that an alternative event would be found for later this, or early next, year. On action 76 he advised that representatives from SPSO would be attending the February meeting to give an update on developments which were currently being introduced to the Ombudsman's complainer feedback process.
- 6. Jim Martin – SLCC Chair**  
JM provided the Panel with an overview of the recently published report by Esther Robertson into the future of legal regulation in Scotland, including the background to the report and the principles on which it had developed. He noted that the Panel's

contribution to the consultation, particularly around the consumer principles, had been greatly welcomed and were reflected in the final report. JM considered that the Panel had an important role to play as discussions and developments unfolded in the future. He confirmed that the SLCC Board had yet to come to a final view on the report, but would take the Panel's views into account.

The Chair concurred with her appreciation of the extent to which consumers were referred to in the report, and there followed a discussion around individual recommendations which had been made, and the likely timescales which would be involved were the proposed recommendations to be approved. It was agreed that the HoO would contact the review team at Scottish Government to arrange a meeting to discuss the next stages, with a particular interest in the Panel becoming involved in any opportunities to explore joint consumer research.

#### **7. SLCC quarterly statistics and long-term trends**

The HoO gave a short introduction to these papers (agenda items 7 & 8) which were taken together. He drew the Panel's attention to the fact that, although complaint numbers were continuing to increase, the quarterly figures showed that work in hand (WIP) had decreased. It was considered that this may be due to the new process improvements which had been implemented, although it was too early to be complacent.

The Chair asked if there was any reason for the increase in complaint numbers. The HoO said that this may be due to increasing awareness of the SLCC. However, he noted that similar trends were occurring in other jurisdictions. This was coupled with an increase in the complexity of the complaints which were entering the process – a trend which again was being echoed elsewhere.

#### **8. SLCC feedback (agenda items 9 & 10)**

The HoO advised the Panel that this was the first quarter of responses since the Panel's recommended changes to the feedback questionnaire had been made, although it was noted that, due to timings, some of the results also related to the previous version of the form.

The Panel debated whether there was scope to ask more open questions, particularly whether there were additional aspects not covered by the existing questions on which stakeholders might want to comment. After discussion it was agreed to leave the form as it was until after the meeting in February with representatives from SPSO.

The HoO drew the Panel's attention to a particular commentator who had offered to provide advice on making the feedback form better and easier to complete, and it was agreed that, if possible, they should be contacted and their input obtained.

On the free text comments, particularly around perceived bias by both complainers and practitioners, the Panel asked to what extent this feedback was shared and discussed with staff. The HoO confirmed that this was not widely shared outwith Board and SMT. The Panel considered that this was a missed learning opportunity and recommended that the CEO consider ways of sharing this information, possibly by way of more anonymised examples and, potentially, within the form of workshops.

#### **9. Vulnerable complainers**

The HoO presented a draft outline of the proposed Panel publication arising from the roundtable discussion on vulnerable consumers/complainers. It was agreed that the

suggested outline was in line with the Panel's wishes and the HoO confirmed that he would proceed on that basis and circulate a draft document for comment and agreement by email, still aiming to publish in March of next year to coincide with Consumer Rights Day. He pointed out that, as the document would be going to external publishers, the format would not be finalised until closer to the publication date.

**10. Demographics tracker**

The HoO advised that, due to technical problems following the latest upgrade to the SLCC's case management system, access to the relevant data tables on demographic information had been problematic. This was in the process of being rectified and, again, he would circulate the results by email for comment before the resultant tracker was published.

**11. Messages for the SLCC Board**

The Panel asked that the HoO relay to the Board and/or the CEO:

- The point raised about involvement in future discussions with Scottish Government following the Robertson report (see 6 above);
- Issues relating to stakeholder feedback (see 8 above); and
- The vulnerability document as the next step following the roundtable event, and questioning how the SLCC intended to take this forward in terms of staff awareness.

**12. Dates of next meetings**

It was agreed that meetings for next year would continue on a quarterly basis, moving the August one slightly to early September to avoid the holiday period. It was agreed that the HoO would circulate a Doodle poll with potential dates.

**13. AOB**

On the matter of a possible subject for next year's roundtable event, it was agreed that "valuing complaints" would be a suitable topic, using some good case study examples.

The Chair advised the Panel that she had recently been appointed to the review group set up in England and Wales to review legal regulation south of the border.

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