

Minutes

Consumer Panel Meeting

Tuesday 8 December 2020 (by Zoom conference)

Present: **Acting Chair:** Jane Williams (JW), Queen Margaret University
Eva Groeneveld (EG), Competition & Markets Authority
Gillian Fyfe (GF), Citizens Advice Scotland
Louise Macdonald (LM), Young Scot

Ian Edwards (IE), Investigation Support Manager, SLCC (agenda items 1 & 2 only)
Vicky Crichton (VC), Director of Public Policy, SLCC
Susan Williams (SW), Best Practice Advisor, SLCC

1. **Welcome and apologies**

Jane Williams was appointed as acting Chair.

Apologies were noted from Shaben Begum (SIAA) and Louise Johnson (SWA).

2. **Declaration of interests**

None declared.

3. **Minutes 30 September 2020**

The Minutes were approved with no amendment.

4. **SLCC feedback**

The Panel considered the summary of Q4 feedback, and noted that the SLCC Board had highlighted concerns about telephone accessibility, and the measures that have and are being put in place to address this. The Panel also discussed the impact of the feedback coming after the final outcome and the correlation between those unhappy with their outcome and dissatisfied with the process, and noted plans to consider changes to the feedback process.

The Panel also considered how SLCC could look to benchmark its feedback with other similar organisations, and suggested looking at the way other Ombud schemes compile and present their feedback. It was agreed that this might give a useful comparison tool when deciding on further steps.

5. SLCC Telephone Call Standards

Ian Edwards advised the Panel of plans to develop a set of telephone call standards and asked for the Panel's input to the early development of this work. In particular, this included consideration of how queries about the process could be answered positively to help foster good early communication with parties, and how early discussions with parties about their concerns and motivations could help to achieve early resolution of complaints.

Panel members discussed how communicating by telephone helped with perceptions about being understood, particularly since plain language was more likely, and participants could ask for instant clarification. The timing of the call, and tone conveyed, were important. Panel members suggested relevant useful resources for the SLCC to consider, and asked whether live chat and chatbots might also be incorporated, to ensure channel choice.

It was noted that although the telephone call standards would be a specific tool, this work is part of a wider approach to improving communications and customer service across all channels and across the organisation.

Ian Edwards thanked Panel members for their helpful input and left the meeting.

6. Reform update

VC tabled a paper summarising some of the developments and noted that on 4 December 2020 Scottish Government had advised that they would not be proceeding with the consultation prior to the May Scottish Parliamentary elections. It was noted that the focus groups, on which some Panel members had been working with SG officials, would also not proceed for the moment. However, the consultation on interim changes intended to improve the complaints process was likely to be published in December, and the Panel would wish to respond to that.

Members expressed disappointment that this was not proceeding at this time. They noted that the Working Group had been convened to try to achieve more consensus but there were still many differences, and focused consumer research was still needed. They agreed it would be useful to write to Scottish Government to emphasise the continued willingness to engage.

Draft: SLCC

7. SLCC Operating Plan 2021-22

The Panel noted that the SLCC would be publishing its draft Operating Plan in January for consultation. Members confirmed that the strategic aims for 2020-24 remained relevant, and discussed options for the Consumer Panel workplan for 2021-22, which would be included in this consultation.

This was likely to be focused on assisting with improvements to the complaints process and SLCC improvement work, involvement in the reform process, consumer research and the wider consumer landscape, as well as considering data and learning on equalities.

A final draft would be shared with Panel members for comments and approval prior to publication of the consultation.

Draft: SLCC

8. SLCC Equalities and Vulnerability Review

The Panel received an update on recent work to refresh the SLCC approach to equalities, accessibility and consumer vulnerability in the previous operational year, and noted that the SLCC had found the Panel's *Consumers at Risk of Vulnerability* guide particularly useful. Staff discussions provided a rich source of ideas about possible improvements, some of which have already been implemented and others were fed into next year's operational plan.

9. The following items were noted:

LSS Price Transparency Guidelines: the guidelines, having been postponed in 2020, were now to be implemented from January 2021.

Competition and Markets Authority Review: It was noted that the CMA would be publishing its review into changes in legal services in England and Wales, which included some findings on price transparency and impact into consumer attitudes.

Consumer Scotland appointments: Applications for the Consumer Scotland Board would close on 11 December 2020.

SLCC Board: the SLCC is also recruiting for Board members. Panel members agreed to share with their network and suggested useful contacts.