

Minutes

Consumer Panel Meeting

Tuesday 9 June 2020 (by Zoom conference)

Present: Shaben Begum (Chair), Scottish Independent Advocacy Alliance)
Miriam Simpson (MS), Competition & Markets Authority
Jane Williams (JW), Queen Margaret University
Gillian Fyfe (GF), Citizens Advice Scotland

Vicky Crichton (VC): Director of Public Policy, SLCC
Susan Williams (SW), Best Practice Advisor, SLCC

1. Welcome and apologies:

SB welcomed all to the meeting

Apologies were noted from Louise Macdonald (Young Scot) and Louise Johnson (Scottish Women's Aid).

2. Declaration of interests:

None declared.

3. Minutes 10 March 2020

JW queried the wording used under item 6: Customer Feedback. She suggested that the last paragraph should rather reflect that customer satisfaction feedback surveys have been done by other ombuds, such as the PHSO.

Subject to that amendment, the minutes of 10 March 2020 were approved.

4. Customer Feedback Update

VC tabled a short paper on the process and explained why it had not been possible to table the quarterly feedback report to the May board meeting. She noted that there was ongoing thought on the usefulness of requesting feedback only at the conclusion of the SLCC process. Q 3 and Q4 feedback would be presented to the July board

meeting, and could then be emailed to the Panel, for further discussion at the September meeting.

It was agreed to follow this approach.

SLCC

5. Consumer Panel Strategy and Workplan

VC said that the four areas of work in the draft Consumer Panel Strategy had been included as part of the consultation on the SLCC's four-year Strategic Plan and one-year Operational Plan. All consultation responses had been published on the SLCC website. Three responses were received specifically on the Consumer Panel strategy. The Law Society of Scotland (LSS) commented on the Panel's aims in relation to the reform work and Consumer Scotland, suggesting that the Panel would provide the most value in supporting the SLCC in its statutory function as a complaints-handling body. VC noted that there was ongoing debate about whether the SLCC's work should focus on complaints handling and complaints prevention only. Two comments from the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) related to the Panel's input into the reform work, and welcomed its role in wider policy discussions.

VC noted four other areas where the SLCC felt that the Panel could play a role. GF noted that a project was planned to understand and map key points where more information about the SLCC's work could be made available. CAS had been doing research to feed into work being done in government partnerships on the complaints journey in the public sector, and the lessons learnt from this were likely to be transferrable to other sectors.

The Panel agreed that a revised draft would be circulated, and the organisations would be thanked for their comments.

VC

6. Reform Consultation: Scottish Government Feedback

VC tabled the response from Scottish Government (SG) to the Panel's request for another meeting, and gave an update on the current status of consultation. She noted that at least 12 weeks consultation would be required once any SG proposals had gone through internal sign-off. There was therefore a very tight timeline if the consultation was anticipated prior to the Scottish Parliament rising in March 2021.

GF thought it was important to voice why any delay would be detrimental to consumers, particularly given the need for input on the impact of any options proposed on consumers, not just on legal professionals. MS noted that more information on impacts might be included in the Mason Report on the English and Welsh system, due to be published this week, although that would not have a direct impact on government policy. Panel members discussed whether the approach should be to the Minister or SG.

It was agreed that SB and VC would draft a letter as discussed.

VC,SB

7. SLCC Oversight Review and Strategy

VC introduced her presentation, and reported that the oversight powers had been discussed by the Board in May. There was a role for the Panel in ensuring that the way the SLCC discharged its oversight functions was commensurate with the Panel's vision. VC said that she would report back at a later meeting.

VC

8. LSS price transparency guidelines

MS noted that the LSS Guidance on price transparency had been due to be implemented from June, but had now been postponed until January 2021. CMA felt that the implementation of this guidance would greatly assist consumers' ability to make meaningful comparisons before choosing a firm. While CMA understood the pressure on firms at present, it also felt that the COVID-19 pandemic would increase the demand for a range of legal services, making the guidance even more important. CMA was yet to decide whether to formally approach the LSS to express its views.

Panel members agreed that it was disappointing that the opportunity had been postponed and wanted to express this. GF noted that CAS was presently compiling data on the types of requests and problems being reported and may have conclusive information in a few weeks to support the Panel's points.

It was agreed that VC and SB would continue to monitor the situation.

VC,SB

9 AOB

It was noted that the revised Terms of Reference were now on the SLCC website.

Proposed dates for the next four meetings would be circulated.