

Minutes

Consumer Panel Meeting

Tuesday 8 June 2021 (by Zoom conference)

Present: Jane Williams (JW), Queen Margaret University (Acting Chair)
Eva Groeneveld (EG), Competition & Markets Authority (excluding item 6)
Louise Johnson (LJ), Scottish Women's Aid
Tracey Reilly (TR), Citizens Advice Scotland

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

1. Interim Chair appointment for the meeting

Jane Williams was appointed as Acting Chair.

2. Welcome and apologies

Apologies were noted from Shaben Begum (SIAA) and Gillian Fyfe (CAS).

3. Declarations of Interest

Louise Johnson noted that she was a lay member of the LSS Access to Justice Committee.

4. Approval of Minutes 9 March 2021

Subject to the correction of a typographical error in the date, the Minutes were approved.

5. Options for a Vice/Interim Chair

Members discussed the options for appointing a Vice or Interim Chair, to assist with agenda setting and sign-off in any absence of the Chair. Members also suggested that appointment of additional Panel members should be considered.

Jane Williams agreed to act as Vice-Chair and the Panel agreed to revisit the discussion once the Panel is back up to a fuller complement.

6. SLCC feedback

VC presented the latest quarterly summary of feedback received from SLCC consumers and practitioners about the handling of their complaints. Panel members commented that given the small numbers, it would be useful to see the statistics presented as numbers rather than percentages, and to see trends over time. Members discussed comments from consumers wanting to speak to the SLCC more by phone, and commented that even where letters were necessary, the option of a phone conversation as well was likely to raise customer satisfaction.

7. Workplan 2021-22

The Panel discussed its workplan for the coming year, noting that no comments had been made on it as part of the wider SLCC consultation on its budget and operating plan.

The Panel considered what action it or the SLCC could take to support law firms to consider learning from customer feedback and complaints. The Panel thought the SLCC could consider further how to use the data it already had and encourage firms and CRMs to use the tools available, including the recently published Complaints Analysis Tool.

Members also considered whether more might be done to work with and facilitate the task of advocacy services who were asked to lodge complaints on behalf of others. It was noted that the forthcoming consultation on changes to the SLCC's Rules, including clarifying requirements for complaints made on behalf of others, might be a good opportunity for this. Engagement with consumer organisations and consumers would help to raise awareness that this was a possible route for complaints.

The Panel also discussed a project to drawing on data collected by the SLCC to deliver a qualitative analysis of information about consumer experiences and descriptions of how they wished matters to be resolved.

8. SLCC future working model

VC updated the Panel on the SLCC's considerations about future working models. This included how staff views and consumer needs were being taken into account. Members also heard about a new team of Customer Service Champions being set up to drive action in this area, who will look at options including phone enquiry times, mediation slots and online chat functions. Members were keen to hear more about these as they develop, but stressed the importance of offering channel choice for users. Members with helplines and online chats offered the option to draw insight from them to inform this work.

9. Other business

SLCC User Groups

LJ suggested that a service user group, similar to those used in other organisations, might be useful to allow the SLCC to obtain feedback, for a set period, from those previously involved in the complaints system. VC highlighted the helpful input from users in relation to premature complaints, which had helped inform service change,

and this approach would be important for future improvement work.

SG consultation on registers of child welfare reporters, curators ad litem and appointed solicitors

LJ highlighted the potential impact of this consultation on the complaints that might be received by the SLCC. VC confirmed that the SLCC is responding to the consultation and offered to share the response with members.

Reform

Members noted that there was as yet no indication of when regulation might be discussed again, and the present government focus was on the court and criminal systems. VC reported that the consultation on the medium term changes had concluded before the election.

Access to justice issues

Consumer organisations were concerned that clients may not be well served by having evidential or proof hearings online, and that clients may not understand that matters could be concluded through procedural hearings. The Panel may wish to track these access to justice issues.

Consumer Scotland

JW noted that there had not yet been updates on Consumer Scotland; the recruitment process for the Chair had been done but there had been no announcements yet.

Law Society of Scotland Regulatory Committee

Members noted that the Law Society of Scotland's Regulatory Committee had published their strategic objectives which included setting up a consumer panel.

Meeting dates 2021-22

The proposed dates for the 2021-22 year were:

7 September 2021

7 December 2021

8 March 2022

7 June 2022.

Closing remarks

Members expressed their thanks to Eva Groenewald and Louise Macdonald, who would no longer be serving on the Panel and wished them well in their new positions.