

RESPONSE TO SLCC BUDGET CONSULTATION 2017-18

7 March 2017

We welcome the opportunity to comment on the SLCC's proposed budget and operating plan for 2017 to 2018.

As a Panel, we are particularly encouraged by the focus on improving the service which the Scottish Legal Complaints Commission already provides to complainers and practitioners alike.

Consumer research - and our combined experience in other sectors - shows that complainers are looking for redress which is handled fairly and quickly. We have previously voiced concerns at the 'consumer journey' for legal complaints in Scotland, which we consider to be too lengthy.

Having said that, we appreciate that the Commission is restricted by its current legislation from making radical improvements which could speed up the process. Like both the SLCC and the Law Society of Scotland, we believe that fundamental reform is needed to create a system which provides the 21st Century consumer of legal services with the complaints handling regime they deserve. The legal profession deserves that too. As things stand however, and with complaint numbers rising, we welcome the steps now proposed by the SLCC to meet this upward trend. Whilst the Panel appreciates that there will be pushback from the legal profession, the resultant increase in the levy which lawyers pay each year to

fund the SLCC is unavoidable under the current circumstances unless other funding arrangements are looked at.

Specific aspects of the Operating Plan are particularly attractive from a consumer perspective.

From its inception, the Panel has been keen to raise public awareness of the SLCC's role. I personally welcome therefore the proposed focus on raising awareness and improving accessibility, empowering consumers of legal services to know where to take their complaint when something goes wrong.

Of course, the SLCC provides services to both complainers and the profession. Planned improvements in communication will enable consumers and practitioners to access information more effectively on mobile phones or tablets; the profession will have improved opportunities to learn from complaints, in turn driving service improvements for the benefit of consumers.

In the longer term, however, it is clear to us all that the system for dealing with legal complaints needs radical reform. In conclusion, we therefore encourage the further opening up of the debate about that, and the Consumer Panel looks forward to contributing actively to that debate.