

Minutes

Consumer Panel Meeting

Wednesday 30 September 2020 (by Zoom conference)

Present: Shaben Begum (Chair), Scottish Independent Advocacy Alliance
Eva Groeneveld (EG), Competition & Markets Authority
Jane Williams (JW), Queen Margaret University
Gillian Fyfe (GF), Citizens Advice Scotland
Hilary Kidd (HK), Young Scot
Louise Johnson (LJ), Scottish Women's Aid

Observer: Jim Martin (JM), SLCC Board Chair (until 10:00)

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

1. Welcome and apologies

SB welcomed Jim Martin, SLCC Board Chair, as an observer. She also welcomed Eva Groeneveld, maternity cover for Miriam Simpson (CMA), and Hilary Kidd, attending on behalf of Louise Macdonald (Young Scot).

Apologies were noted from Louise Macdonald (Young Scot).

2. Declaration of interests

None declared.

3. Minutes 9 June 2020

It was agreed to substitute the words "other sectors" for "the legal sector" in the last sentence, penultimate paragraph, of point 5. Subject to that amendment, the Minutes were approved.

4. Customer Feedback

VC tabled the consolidated feedback report from quarters 3 and 4 of 2019/20, which

had been presented to the SLCC Board at its last meeting. She highlighted two issues arising from the free-text comments; one relating to difficulties in contacting the SLCC by phone at the start of lockdown, and the second highlighting customer expectations around the journey time for finalisation of complaints. VC stressed that the SLCC aimed to deliver excellent customer service, irrespective of the outcome of the complaint. She reminded the Panel that they would be asked to give input into the planned update of the SLCC feedback system.

Panel members highlighted that other bodies also found that consumers, particularly vulnerable groups, tended to prefer face-to-face or phone contact, and that channel choice should be available. It was noted that while significant reductions had already been achieved by the SLCC in journey time, and the focus on efficiency would continue, there were limitations caused by the current legislation, which requires reform. The Panel also discussed how complainers' expectations are managed at the start and throughout the process regarding likely timescales.

5. Consumer research

Last year, the Panel gave helpful input to SLCC research on barriers to complaints, which were incorporated into the discussion on reform. Panel members discussed what form further consumer research might take, and the relative merits of public polling and smaller scale, in depth qualitative research. They also discussed the challenge and potential opportunities of carrying out such research in the current circumstances. The Panel also discussed two different areas of focus: public views or awareness of the complaints and redress system, and views from those who had already had experience of the complaints system. SLCC would narrow down the suggestions into a more concrete proposal.

SLCC

6. Resources for consumer, advocacy and support bodies

VC noted that the SLCC was already providing some consumer-facing organisations with targeted information aimed at ensuring that potential complainers were correctly signposted to the SLCC. It was committed to increasing this engagement and sought input from the Panel on the type and format of support and who could be included. The Panel discussed a number of options, including providing web and social media content, articles and accessible case studies. Suggestions by all members on individual organisations or alliances were noted and would be followed up.

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7. Reform update

VC tabled a paper setting out developments since the last meeting. It was noted that the Minister has now confirmed plans to consult by the end of the year. The Minister had, in response to the Panel's recent letter, confirmed that consumer views would be sought, and a meeting had been scheduled to discuss the proposed approach. Meantime the SLCC was expecting further consultation on medium-term changes that

might be effected to the existing Act.

The Panel noted some concerns that the process might not be as inclusive as hoped, and would have a very formal focus. Panel members agreed that Scottish Government needed a formal plan for engagement with consumer groups and third sector organisations, as well as directly with the public. The Panel agreed that whatever model was developed must be strongly focused on consumers and the public interest. The Panel discussed the need for wider awareness of the proposed reform and its implications, and the action the Panel might take to get that message out to others, alongside the need for Scottish Government to actively seek views from those who had not been invited to input to previous discussions. Panel members will attend a meeting with Scottish Government to discuss plans for wider engagement shortly.

8. Consumer Scotland update

The Panel noted the advice that the setting up of Consumer Scotland had been pushed back to September 2021. It was noted that work was ongoing with the aim of enabling a speedy start once the freeze on public appointments had been lifted. In the meantime, an informal network of consumer bodies had been set up and had held one meeting. The Panel will continue to keep a watching brief and engage with the Chair and Board once appointed.

9. AOB

No additional items were raised.