

MINUTE Meeting of the SLCC Consumer Panel



Tuesday 6 February 2018

Venue: The Stamp Office, 10 – 14 Waterloo Place, Edinburgh, EH1 3EG

Present: Carol Brennan (CB) [Chair], Queen Margaret University Consumer Dispute Resolution Centre
Shaben Begum (SB), Scottish Independent Advocacy Alliance
Sheila Scobie (SS), Competition & Markets Authority
Louise Johnson (LJ) Scottish Women's Aid
Paul Bradley (PB) Scottish Council of Voluntary Organisations [skype]
Eilidh McIvor (EM), Citizens Advice Scotland

David Buchanan-Cook (HoO), Head of Oversight (HoO), SLCC
[REDACTED], Marketing and Special Projects Officer (MSPO), SLCC

1. Welcome

The Chair welcomed all present to the meeting of the Panel and thanked EM for attending on behalf of CAS.

2. Apologies

Apologies were received from Keith Dryburgh, Citizens Advice Scotland.

3. Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest.

4. Approval of previous Minute

The Minute from the previous Panel meeting was approved.

5. Actions

The HoO advised that Actions 39 and 42 were the only ones outstanding.

He confirmed that the Ombudsman Association had agreed to a Consumer Panel roundtable being held as a 'fringe event' to their conference. A date (23 May PM) had been agreed.

CB asked for volunteers within the Panel to form a sub-group to help organise the roundtable. All members volunteered to help with this (see also item 13).

SB advised that Hayweight House might be a possibility in terms of venue; PB agreed to ascertain whether facilities were available on the date in question..

6. Regulatory Review

The Chair drew the Panel's attention to the call for evidence as part of the ongoing regulatory review. LJ suggested that it may be an idea to look at six months' worth of consumer feedback on the SLCC and summarise some quotations into themes e.g. time, partiality. LJ also suggested that vulnerable consumers should be part of the Panel's response. As part of that, language difficulties, physical and mental difficulties and the impact of the process on them would need to be addressed.

During discussion, the Panel also agreed to include the following:

- the conflict of interest between LSS being a regulator and a representative body;
- consumers' understanding of how the process works and communications around the process;
- the process takes too long; and
- the lack of research in this area.

SB advised that the Scottish Independent Advocacy would – additionally - be putting in its own response to the consultation. The Chair requested that - if the individual organisations represented on the Panel are making representations – the Consumer Panel's response is aligned with those.

SS briefly outlined what the key issues in the CMA response are likely to be (evidence from England and Wales, Alternative Business Structures, Regulatory landscapes in Scotland – ensuring that there is an ongoing debate that reflects the consumer principles).

The HoO asked whether the Panel's response should answer the questions or be a 'free text' response addressing the most important issues from the Panel's perspective. PB felt it would be more powerful to focus in on specific things which the Panel had knowledge of and views on – there was agreement with this.

There was some discussion around the consultation that had been carried out leading up to the call for evidence. The Panel felt that there should be more public engagement and that their response also should address this.

The Chair asked members to share formal responses to the consultation; it was agreed that an initial draft would be prepared and circulated by the HoO which the Panel could then comment on.

7. SLCC budget consultation

The Chair noted the deadline of 13 March for this consultation.

SS asked the HoO what the big issues were. The HoO outlined these and noted that the consultation included a proposal to raise the levy again.

The Panel agreed that the following points needed to be raised:

- that complaints are rising across the board;
- that the SLCC needs to be properly resourced (but no need to go into detail on the apportionment of the levy);
- that the SLCC should give consideration to the level of direct engagement with consumers (e.g. getting consumers in a room with board members);
- making more of the information we've got (e.g. producing short case studies);
- the importance of learning from complaints and value of any work that can be done around this; and
- the work the Consumer Panel has already done and what it is planning to do.

It was agreed that the HoO would circulate a draft for comment and remind people how long they have to respond.

8. **Consumer Principles – follow up**

The discussion focused around dissemination of the consumer principles leaflet.

Suggestions for dissemination included:

- Piggyback on certain hashtags on social media;
- Ask partner organisations to share the document online;
- Press release; and
- Scottish Young Lawyers' Association conference – make a stack of brochures available and including a leaflet in the delegate pack.

Panel members agreed to act as 'ambassadors' for specific principles. Louise – safety; Eilidh/Keith – access; Shaben – fairness; Carol – redress; Paul – information; Carol – quality; All – representation.

The Panel also agreed that they would like to have hard copies of the Consumer Principles leaflet for dissemination.

It was agreed that the HoO would liaise with SYLA and that the MSPO would provide members with a stock of leaflets.

9. **SLCC Quarterly Statistics and Quarterly Feedback**

The HoO gave an overview of the quarterly statistics and feedback and noted that journey time is currently just over 10 months.

The HoO advised that the CEO and Head of Operations had been tasked with clearing the backlog within six months.

LJ queried why the process takes 10 months. The HoO advised that the issue is largely due to the complexity of the eligibility process. The Panel agreed that this part of the process is particularly onerous and too complicated.

10. **Consumer feedback**

SS noted that comments around timescales were continuing to feature and that having an outcome within a reasonable period is crucial to people feeling that they have had redress.

LJ noted the feedback around understanding and queried whether the SLCC should be going back to people who have said that they couldn't understand the reasoning to ask specifically what they found difficult to understand. PB noted that other organisations have addressed communication issues by simplifying their communications – so it can be done.

11. **Feedback questionnaire**

Connected to 11 above, the Panel also looked at the SLCC feedback questionnaire which had been provided in advance at their request and made some suggestions regarding encouraging better completion rates.

Suggestions included:

- rewording and reordering the questions – with "outcome" earlier on and the current first question as the last one;
- considering a scale rather than yes/no answers;
- making the '5 minutes' more obvious so that people know it won't take long to complete the questionnaire; and
- comparing other organisations' feedback forms.

It was agreed that the HoO would relay these suggestions to the SLCC's Senior Management Team.

12. Roundtable event - Vulnerable complainers

The Chair introduced this item and opened this up to the table in terms of considering how best to do this.

PB suggested that we need to clarify, first, the purpose of the session. It was agreed that the purpose of the session would be framed as an exploratory meeting to start the conversation on vulnerable consumers and to make some recommendations to the SLCC.

The Chair suggested that members provide ideas to the secretariat and that the HoO set up another meeting for the sub-group. The Chair also asked that a link to the Legal Services Consumer Panel's report on vulnerable consumers be circulated to the Panel in advance of that meeting.

13. Date and frequency of next meeting

The next meeting was noted as being at 2pm on Tuesday 8th May, at the SLCC.

14. AOB

There being no further business, the Chair drew the meeting to a close.