

# Minutes

## Consumer Panel Meeting

Tuesday 8 March 2022 (by Zoom conference)

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**Present:** Jane Williams (JW), Queen Margaret University (Acting Chair)  
Miriam Simpson (MS), Competition & Markets Authority  
Louise Johnson (LJ), Scottish Women's Aid (from item 7)  
Tracey Reilly (TR), Citizens Advice Scotland

Vicky Crichton (VC), Director of Public Policy, SLCC  
[REDACTED] Best Practice Advisor, SLCC  
Louise Burnett (LB), Director: Business Performance:, SLCC  
[REDACTED] Case Investigator, SLCC  
[REDACTED] Communications and Information Officer, SLCC

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### 1. Welcome and apologies

Apologies were noted from Rhona Willder, Kirsten Urquhart and Gillian Fyfe (substituted by Tracey Riley for this meeting).

### 2. Declarations of Interest

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

### 3. Approval of Minutes 7 December 2021

The Minutes of 7 December 2021 were approved, subject to a correction that Gillian Fyfe had declared her position on the Access to Justice Committee of the Scottish Civil Justice Council.

### 4. SLCC Feedback

LB presented a paper prepared on customer feedback, summarising and comparing the current year's figures to previous years. Consumers' satisfaction at the outcome still heavily influenced their impressions about communication and helpfulness during the process. The SLCC had achieved dramatic improvements in the time taken, yet this was still perceived as too long. Solicitor feedback was being directly addressed through outreach, sharing of best practice and recent roundtables with the profession.

Panel members agreed that aggregated information was useful, and asked whether the information represented a fair sample, and how this might compare to other schemes. LB confirmed that all complainers were asked to complete the survey, but only a small

proportion chose to do so, and may not be representative. She confirmed that the SLCC could consider other organisations' approaches and findings for comparison. The SLCC is planning an annual report on how it has addressed issues raised, in a "You said – We did" format. The Service Experience Team's work would also encourage consumers' contribution and help give them confidence that their input and comments were valued.

## **5. Service Experience Team**

LS noted that the recent customer survey had shown that service users would value the opportunity to have a pre-arranged time for phone calls, and this was being taken forward in two small sprints, one involving the Enquiries team where anyone requesting a complaint form had the opportunity to request a call at a particular time. Some case investigators were also giving users the option to arrange a call, and this may be extended. So far, only a few people had taken up the offer but it did show that it was useful to some.

Members asked if there were any downsides to implementing this more widely. LS said there may be some logistical challenges to delivering it, but a specific invitation time could help both staff and complainers to plan more effectively to have a more productive conversation. The sprint would assess whether this should be a blanket option or limited to specific cases.

LS noted that other initiatives had included stressing that people may communicate in different ways, as phone calls could be more effective although email might be the option selected in the form. Staff were following some principles on telephone expectations that had been rolled out internally and externally to highlight the approach.

Members welcomed the approach which could be positive for the consumer experience. They hoped ongoing training could also focus on helping to identify and support vulnerable customers by phone.

## **6. Consumer Voice**

VC summarised that a preliminary analysis had been carried out of words and phrases used in the free text of complaint forms. These ask complainers to describe the effects on them of the events, and what might help to resolve the problem. A random sample of 300 complaint forms was used. The tool used had highlighted positive, negative or neutral emotional connotations, although it was clear that single words might have been used in a different context, and that the more formal language often used in the forms might mask emotion. Nonetheless this had been a different and interesting approach.

Members thought a richer analysis might be obtained by looking at full sentences or combining with other data sets. They suggested exploring the availability of funded research in the next year.

## **7. SLCC Budget and Operating Plan consultation**

VC confirmed that the SLCC must publish the responses to its consultation on its 2022/23 budget and operating plan on the 2022/23 budget in March, and lay the budget

before parliament in April. The Panel is a statutory consultee. She summarised that the budget emphasised plans to deliver long term change and a more efficient and sustainable operating model, and projects around external regulatory reform. Savings had been achieved in the last year through efficiency, so the SLCC proposed a 5% reduction in the levy and would use reserves to cover the predicted growth in complaint numbers.

Members highlighted the cost of enforcement actions to recover files from solicitors. Members welcomed the support being given to ABS and regulatory reform. They asked if any budget could be re-directed to work around vulnerable consumers and broadening the base and demographics of those who felt they could approach the SLCC. It was agreed that the Secretariat would circulate the draft Panel response.

**Secretariat – circulate and finalise draft**

#### **8. Chair and vice-chair positions**

JW reminded Members that the Panel could appoint its own chair and needed to make appointments to both positions. Given that the full complement of members was not present, she suggested another reminder for nominations, to be finalised at the next meeting.

**Secretariat round robin**

#### **9. Reform**

VC summarised that Scottish Government would be publishing the responses and an analysis of the reform consultation responses in the coming months, with legislation planned to follow in the 2022-23 legislative year. In addition, it was likely that a short technical consultation could be held on the proposed changes to complaints regulations.

It was noted that some members had hoped to comment on the medium-term changes to ensure that the consumer voice was recognised. VC confirmed that she would pass on further information when it was received.

**Secretariat to follow up**

#### **10. Potential new Panel members**

VC reported that invitations had been extended to two organisations. One had not yet responded, and the other suggested that it might be more appropriate to contact a direct-user organisation. Members had made some other suggestions that the SLCC would now follow up and Consumer Scotland would be approached, and a joint meeting arranged to discuss several matters, once it was fully operational.

**Secretariat to action**

#### **11. Members noted:**

a) The Panel Chair had been invited to observe the March (or another) Board meeting.

b) Further potential dates for the next meeting would be circulated. Those present indicated a preference for using Teams; a hybrid situation was also possible. Dates and formats would be confirmed shortly.

**Secretariat**