

Minutes

Consumer Panel Meeting

Tuesday 4 June 2024 (via Teams)

Present: Gillian Fyfe (GF), Citizens Advice Scotland (Chair)
Tracey Reilly (TR), (Consumer Scotland)
Chris Gill (CG), (University of Glasgow)
Brendan McGinty (BM), (Competition and Markets Authority)

Vicky Crichton (VC), (Director of Public Policy, SLCC)
[REDACTED] (Best Practice Advisor, SLCC)
[REDACTED] (Service Experience Team, SLCC)
Jane Malcolm (Chair, SLCC Board observer)
[REDACTED] (SLCC Observer)

Introduction

Welcome and apologies

1. The Chair welcomed members and observers. She also welcomed Brendan McGinty, the new representative from the Competition and Markets Authority, to his first Panel meeting. She thanked Jane Malcolm, SLCC Board Chair, for her attendance as observer. Ms Malcolm said she appreciated the opportunity to attend. Her previous experience at other organisations has shown how important it was to have strong consumer insight. She thanked the Panel for its important contributions to the reform debate, which hopefully should improve the position for consumers.
2. Apologies were noted from Kirsten Urquhart (YoungScot) and Louise Johnson (Scottish Women's Aid).

The Chair reported that Tim Mouncer had indicated that he was no longer able to serve on the Panel, since legal services were no longer a key area of focus for Which.

3. Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were necessary.

4. Approval of Minutes of 5 March 2024

These were approved, subject to the correction of one typographical error on page 3.

Discussion

5. SLCC Feedback

VC tabled the Q3 SLCC customer feedback report. She pointed out that some of the feedback questions would be revised from July so the format will look different after the next quarter. However, the SLCC will try to map new and existing questions continue to track and compare responses year-on-year. She noted that just this morning the CEO had shared with all staff a very positive letter that expressed appreciation to named staff members but also the whole SLCC, for the way in which the complainer's anxiety about the process, and the case itself, had been well-handled.

VC also briefly described the new process for service delivery complaints that gave the option to both complainer and case investigator to deal directly with each other or escalate to a line manager.

VC answered questions on the increased volume of feedback which could be partially due to the significant increase in incoming complaints over the last few months, but also because the SLCC had recently automated the requests for feedback.

CG thought the new process for service delivery complaints could potentially improve the timelines but wondered if there had been reluctance by complainers or staff to deal with each other. JA confirmed that the Service Experience Team (SET) had considered the implications but felt this was counterbalanced by the option given to complainers and staff to choose which option they felt most appropriate. Further staff training and feedback were continuing. TR commented that the low numbers of referrals to stage 2 seemed to be a positive indication. Members were keen to hear an update on any evaluation of this approach.

TR was interested to see the wide variety of responses from complainers, whereas those from practitioners were relatively neutral. VC said that SLCC was considering how to obtain feedback earlier to test whether this allowed more of a focus on service, rather than being influenced by the outcome.

GF said she realised the numbers were small but wondered if additional questions could draw out further demographic or geographical data.

6. Service Experience Team (SET)

JA gave a verbal update on the work of SET. In the next quarter, SET was working on engaging with Trustpilot reviews more actively, since to date negative reviews on this platform had not been answered. It was also important to note that some complainers were mistaken about the role of the SLCC or were actually expressing dissatisfaction about another organisation, and were not being put on the right track. He would appreciate any feedback from Panel members who had experience of dealing with Trustpilot.

JA said the work on "chill factors" preventing people from making complaints was still ongoing. SLCC would also be updating its contact form so that enquiries would be directed to the right place.

BM asked what volume of reviews were posted, and their nature. JA reported that there

were only a few at present, which had been lodged over several years, but they were overwhelmingly negative. The SLCC did not direct people to that site, so that there were no positive reviews to counterbalance the existing ones. Trustpilot did offer a free opportunity for online responses, which other organisations had used very effectively.

Members supported the idea of engaging with Trustpilot reviews, but cautioned that the SLCC would also have to be very clear that it could not give advice or discuss individual complaints over this platform or over social media. GF suggested that the SLCC might like to look at the wording used by CAS. JA agreed and said that the next SET meeting would set some parameters, and all responses would be formulated by a team. TR asked if the SET was able to do any work on service users with disabilities or those needing support from advocacy workers, and JA said he would ask SET to consider that.

7. Child Friendly Complaints

GF tabled an update on the SPSO project on child-friendly complaints, and asked for comment on any useful pointers in relation to the SLCC's work. CG wondered if the more pressing issue was ensuring that young people were aware of the SLCC and would lodge complaints where appropriate. It was noted that fewer children and young people used legal services for issues such as conveyancing but some may come into contact with legal services either because they were in conflict with the law, or involved in immigration, or family disputes. In addition, people in receipt of legal aid often did not regard themselves as "consumers" able to complain.

Vulnerability was another complicating factor. It would be necessary for SLCC to make adjustments and have a more personalised approach to handling complaints that were made. Raising awareness was important but this would be most effectively done via different agencies who could signpost and refer young people to the SLCC. The SLCC rules had been changed recently to make it clear that support workers could make a complaint in the name of a young or vulnerable complainer, and that seemed the best approach. A child could bring a complaint on their own without adult assistance, but this had not yet happened, and could be unlikely given the findings of the SPSO that most young people in this position wanted to be supported by an adult. GF said this project also suggested wider issues such as the inclusivity of the process to vulnerable adults.

Because she particularly wanted to hear input from the youth sector, and Scottish Women's Aid, the Chair asked that the item be included in the next agenda for further discussion.

8. Consumer Information

SW said that the SLCC had re-written the four booklet-format consumer guides produced about 10 years previously. The information had been consolidated to remove some of the repetition across the guides, rewritten in plainer language, and would now be presented on a new, dedicated "For consumers" webpage, which made it more accessible. The page would also contain links to other pages and information relevant to consumers. The general information was supplemented by five short guides with more information on the most common transaction areas, each with one page at the

end, that could be downloaded or printed, with a reminder of questions to ask the solicitor. It was also made clear that the guides did not attempt to give any legal advice. The SLCC would supplement these with some short videos and case studies, and would signpost the page to other advice agencies and MSP constituency offices, and via social media. The SLCC was ready to “go live” with the webpage if the Consumer Panel were happy with it.

Members appreciated the chronological approach, found the language user-friendly and accessible, and looked forward to the webpage going live, at which point other advice agencies could link to it.

9. Regulatory reform

VC noted that in the last week, it had been confirmed that Stage 2 of the bill was extended, with a new date of 1 November noted for finalisation. GF suggested the Panel should consider inviting the officials from Scottish Government back to the Panel’s September meeting, in particular to ask if they could share any more information about resourcing for the Panel. TR agreed that a joint approach from the Panel would emphasise what the organisations were saying individually. Members discussed the timing and agreed that GF should write to the officials to ask if they could say when the Programme for Government might be published, and to note that the Panel had a meeting scheduled for 3 September, and whether they could attend on that date. GF suggested that if not, it was potentially possible to move the Panel’s meeting to another date when more information might be forthcoming.

Administration and AOB

1. AOB:

GF said that she wanted to discuss future membership of the Panel again at the next meeting. She reported that although the law centres had been approached with an invitation, none had felt able to provide a representative to the Panel. It would be useful still to have a Vice-Chair to assist with procedural matters.

GF thanked Ms Malcolm again for attending the meeting. TR highlighted Consumer Scotland’s ongoing engagement with the Minister for Victims and Community Safety to deal with consumer concerns following the collapse of the firm McClure.

Date of next meeting: Tuesday 3 September 2024, 2pm, MS Teams

Proposed future meetings:

- Tuesday 3 Dember 2024, 2pm, MS Teams
- Tuesday 4 March 2025, 2pm, MS Teams
- Tuesday 3 June 2025, 2pm, MS Teams