

Minutes

Consumer Panel

Extraordinary Meeting

Thursday 15 February 2024 (via Teams)

Present: Gillian Fyfe (GF), Citizens Advice Scotland (Chair)
Tracey Reilly (TR), Consumer Scotland
Carol-Anne Frame (CAF), Competition and Markets Authority
Arish Narendran (AN), Competition and Markets Authority
Lynsey Elder (LE), Competition and Markets Authority
Sharon Horwitz (SH), Competition and Markets Authority
Louise Johnson (LJ), Scottish Women's Aid
Chris Gill (CJ), University of Glasgow
Vicky Crichton (VC), Director of Public Policy, SLCC

Introduction

Welcome and apologies

The Chair welcomed members. Apologies were noted from Kirsten Urquhart (YoungScot) and Tim Mouncer (Which).

Regulatory reform

The Chair thanked everyone for attending at short notice and noted this was an extraordinary meeting of the Panel to discuss the recently published Stage 1 report from the Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee and to agree lines for a briefing from the Panel to be circulated to MSPs in advance of the Stage 1 debate on 22 February 2024.

Panel members agreed to develop a shared briefing and a number of members noted their intentions to also provide a briefing from their organisations. It was agreed that members would share organisational briefings when those were available.

All to share briefings when available

It was noted there was minimal reference to consumers or the Panel in the report or the Minister's response to the Committee and members felt that engagement by the Scottish Government and the attention of the Committee had been primarily on the profession and the judiciary, rather than consumers or consumer groups.

The Panel agreed it would be helpful to speak further to officials in advance of Stage 2 and the Chair asked for the Bill team leader and head of team to be invited to the March Panel meeting.

SLCC: invite SG officials to March meeting

The Panel felt there was some recognition of the consumer viewpoint in the report and it needs protected, but that there was limited recognition of the vulnerability of legal services consumers, both individually and as a market.

The Panel noted the comments made by Lady Dorrian and Lord Erich about the Lord President's engagement with consumers and consumer groups and agreed the Panel would need a better understanding of the revised role of the Lord President and his responsibility for protecting and promoting the consumer interest.

The Panel discussed issues to be included in the briefing, drawing on previous input to the government consultations and the Panel's Stage 1 evidence. This should include comments on transparency, checks and balances within the system, the continued confused landscape for consumers, the complaints system and the Panel's role.

The Panel agreed to support the Committee's call for a further simplification of the complaints system and to welcome the rebuttal of the call for a complainer's fee.

The Panel noted the Committee's comments about the possibility of an extension to Stage 2 to take further evidence on amendments and agreed to include a request to be able to provide further evidence on those significant changes.

The Panel also agreed to reiterate its support for the Robertson proposals and to support the Bill, but with the caveat that it's not the Panel's chosen solution.

It was agreed that GF and VC would draft a briefing and circulate it to members for comment and agreement.

SLCC: Circulate draft Stage 1 briefing for comments and sign off

One agreed, the briefing would be sent to MSPs. CAF also offered to share the briefing with SPICe so they could provide printed copies to members.

SLCC: Send agreed Stage 1 briefing to MSPs

CAF: Send all briefings to SPICe contact for printing