



Neil Stevenson
Chief Executive
Scottish Legal Complaints Commission

By Email only

15 March 2023

Dear Neil,

SLCC 2023-24 Budget and Operating Plan Consultation

I am writing to share the SLCC Consumer Panel's response to your consultation on the SLCC's 2023-24 Budget and Operating Plan. We welcome the opportunity to share our views. We have only responded on those aspects where we have specific comments to make.

Taking action to secure files from firms

The Panel continues to be concerned about the impact of delays in securing files to investigate complaints and the time and cost attached to pursuing this. This is not in the interests of consumers looking for swift resolution of their complaint.

We believe ensuring a robust non-compliance response is also in the profession's best interests as this promotes public confidence, protects the reputation of the profession, and alleviates the cost burden on the wider profession.

We therefore welcome the robust action taken by the SLCC over the past year to secure the information it needs from firms as swiftly as possible and the plans and proposals to continue this approach in the coming year. We encourage the SLCC to engage with the Law Society of Scotland to ensure that the importance of this issue and expectations of compliance are communicated to the profession.

Timely compliance is in everyone's interest from a resolution and a resourcing perspective so that the process operates effectively and efficiently for all concerned.

Customer feedback

The Panel provides regular comments on the SLCC's customer feedback and we have highlighted opportunities to make improvements to the information collected, the method and timing of collection, and the way it is acted upon. We believe there is further action that the SLCC could take to ensure it collects meaningful data that it can utilise to improve the customer experience. Therefore we are pleased to see plans for a customer service project led by the Service Experience Team (SET) to review the full process for collecting and reporting on feedback from users and we look forward to working with SET to deliver this work.

Barriers to making complaints

The Panel has long been concerned about 'silent sufferers' or those who do not bring complaints to the SLCC. We are aware that there are certain groups who might be more likely to face or perceive barriers in making a complaint, particularly those who might be at risk of vulnerability. Given this we welcome plans for a short-life project to review 'chill factors' in terms of making a complaint and look forward to working with SET to deliver this.

Consumer Duty

The Panel welcomes the SLCC's commitment to preparing for the introduction of the consumer duty for public bodies in Scotland.

Oversight activity

For consumers, it is important that the complaints process works efficiently and effectively and that communication with them throughout is clear and timely, regardless of which body is delivering any particular part of the process. The Panel therefore supports the SLCC's work on holding the RPOs to account for how they discharge their duties in relation to complaints and redress. We welcomed the SLCC's recent report on the Law Society of Scotland's conduct complaint investigation timescales and we welcome plans to follow up those recommendations and to publish a report on the Faculty of Advocates' conduct complaint handling processes.

Consumer guides

The Consumer Panel welcomes the commitment to update the SLCC's guides for consumers, test them with consumer groups, and promote them through relevant channels and we look forward to working with the SLCC on this.

Accessibility

We have welcomed the SLCC's move to digital to improve efficiency but have always called for assurances that alternative channels and options are available for consumers who cannot or do not wish to use digital channels. It is vital that those

who might be at greatest risk of vulnerability, are not excluded from the complaints process by use of digital only channels. We also welcome the work to date and further plans for improvements to the SLCC website and digital accessibility to support those who require adaptations or who use assistive technologies.

Reform

The Panel is supportive of the work proposed to continue to shape and respond to the Scottish Government's proposals on reform, especially as they now enter the legislative phase. The Panel also plans to make the case for reform that puts the legal services consumers at the heart of regulation, and we look forward to working with the SLCC, and others to do this.

I hope this is helpful, and we look forward to working together over the coming year.

Yours sincerely,

Gillian Fyfe
Chair
SLCC Consumer Panel

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<https://www.scottishlegalcomplaints.org.uk/about-us/consumer-panel/>