

**For immediate release, Monday 28 May 2012**

## **CONSUMER PANEL URGES LEGAL SECTOR TO SHOW COMMITMENT TO VULNERABLE CONSUMERS**

The Panel is today writing to legal regulators and leading law firms and chambers urging them to adopt an official British Standard on vulnerable consumers.

The British Standard (BS 18477) was written with the help of consumer groups and disability charities and is designed to:

- Encourage the use of fair, ethical and inclusive practices;
- Show organisations how to identify vulnerable consumers and how to treat them fairly to help them to comply with the law;
- Help organisations to understand what consumers have a right to expect from them;
- Improve accessibility to services for all; and
- Increase consumer confidence in service providers.

Organisations that agree to adopt the standard will be listed on the Panel's website.

The call follows the Panel's research with deaf and hard of hearing consumers which revealed that legal services were often inaccessible to people with hearing loss and highlighted a lack of 'deaf awareness' among providers.

Elisabeth Davies, chair of the Legal Services Consumer Panel, said:

*"Consumers rely on legal services at key life moments, but our research shows wide differences in experience across the population and a lack of awareness among lawyers about the needs of vulnerable groups.*

*"We are asking regulators and firms in the sector to show their commitment to tackling these inequalities by adopting this British Standard, which helps organisations to identify vulnerable consumers and treat them fairly."*

**-ends-**

**For more information, contact Steve Brooker, Consumer Panel Manager, on 020 7271 0077.**

## Notes to editors

1. The Legal Services Consumer Panel was established under the Legal Services Act 2007 to provide independent advice to the Legal Services Board about the interests of consumers of legal services in England and Wales. We investigate issues that affect consumers and use this information to influence decisions about the regulation of legal services.
2. The Panel has written to organisations including: the Legal Services Board, the regulatory arms of the approved regulators, the Legal Services Commission, the Crown Prosecution Service, the Claims Management Regulator, HM Courts and Tribunals Service and a selection of solicitor firms and barrister chambers. A copy of the letter can be found here:  
<http://www.legalservicesconsumerpanel.org.uk/ourwork/consumersriskofdisadvantage.html>
3. The standard has to be purchased, but BSI has provided the Panel with a limited number of free copies to distribute to the approved regulators. A leaflet about the standard can be found here:  
[http://www.bsigroup.com/upload/Standards%20&%20Publications/Consumers/BrochureDownloads/BSI\\_Inclusive%20Services%20Brochure\\_Accessible%20Version.pdf](http://www.bsigroup.com/upload/Standards%20&%20Publications/Consumers/BrochureDownloads/BSI_Inclusive%20Services%20Brochure_Accessible%20Version.pdf)
4. The Panel's letter asks organisations to inform us when they adopt the standard and their names will be listed on our website:  
<http://www.legalservicesconsumerpanel.org.uk/ourwork/consumersriskofdisadvantage.html>