

Minutes

Legal Services Consumer Panel

Date: 2 October 2013

Time: 13:00 – 17:00

Venue: Victoria House, Southampton Row, London WC1B 4AD

Present:

Elisabeth Davies	Chair
Jeff Bell	Member
Graham Corbett	Member (Item 7 to 13)
Emma Harrison	Member (Items 7 to 13)
Frances Harrison	Member
Neil Wightman	Member (Items 1 to 12)
Karin Woodley	Member (Item 7 to 13)
Steve Brooker	Consumer Panel Manager
Harriet Gamper	Consumer Panel Associate
Ramandeep Bhatti	Legal Services Board
Michelle Jacobs	Legal Services Board (Items 1 to 10)
Julie Myers	Legal Services Board

Item 1 - Welcome and apologies

1. The Chair welcomed the Legal Services Consumer Panel ('the Panel').
2. The Chair advised that Paul Munden had sent apologies.

Item 2 - Introductions and declarations of interests

3. In relation to item 8, the Panel Manager advised he is a Member of the Consumer Codes Approval Board.

Item 3 - Minutes of the 15 August 2013 meeting

3. The Chair presented the Draft Minutes for the 15 August 2013 meeting of the Panel.

The Panel approved the Minutes in line with comments made.

Item 4 - Matters arising

4. Item 4 – The Chair advised that the third party complaints case studies had been published with a press release that included a quote from Adam Sampson. The Legal Ombudsman has indicated that other priorities mean the steering group cannot start until the new year.

5. Item 4 – The Chair advised discussions are ongoing with the CLC about road-testing the consumer principles paper with their staff prior to publication.
6. Item 7 – The Chair advised a response to the Legal Ombudsman’s consultation had been submitted.
7. Item 13 – The Chair advised the new offices are going to be at 1 Kemble Street and the move is likely to take place early in the new year.

The Panel noted the matters arising.

Item 5 – Chair’s report

8. The Chair presented her report covering recent meetings, speaking engagements and press coverage.
9. In addition to the written report the Chair drew attention to the summary of the responses to the MoJ’s simplification review which had been provided with the Consultation Responses paper.

The Panel noted the Chair’s report and additional items raised.

Item 6 – Members’ updates

10. Frances Harrison advised a consumer principles workshop with Panel Members, LSB staff and Board members will be scheduled in November. Michelle Jacobs advised the consumer principles are featured in the LSB’s Consumer Toolkit and she would share this document with Panel Members.

The Panel noted the Members’ update.

Item 8 – Legal Ombudsman benchmarking

11. Jeff Bell presented the draft report that benchmarks the Legal Ombudsman against other redress schemes. The LSB had requested the Panel undertake this work.
12. Panel Members discussed whether on the basis of the available data and comparisons the right conclusions had been drawn.
13. The Panel discussed how to maximise the impact of this work, points raised include:
 - The Panel should encourage the competent authority, once appointed, to collect data on a consistent basis
 - The findings added further support for a single portal for consumer complaints and this could be a focus of our communications
 - The work should be shared with other consumer panels
 - The Ombudsman Association could be a key stakeholder and a meeting should be set up to explore shared areas of interest.

The Panel Manager would make the suggested revisions to the report and this would then be sent to the Legal Ombudsman for comment.

Item 7 – Litigants in person

14. Frances Harrison introduced the paper which summarises the key issues for the litigants in person project. Panel Members discussed the options presented in the paper, points raised include:

- The Panel Manager made it clear the Panel is not supporting an increase in litigation in person, but simply recognising this is a reality
- This project should be a high priority for the Panel
- Consumer vulnerability should be integrated throughout the work

15. The Panel Manager advised McKenzie friends is the strand that can be explored straight away without the active support of other partners. He would focus on McKenzie friends initially and share a revised version of the document with potential partners, with the expectation that a programme of work would emerge from this exercise.

The Panel noted the paper and agreed the proposed approach.

Item 9 – BEUC partnership agreement

16. Frances Harrison introduced the paper summarising the progress on the Panel's application to BEUC. The Panel was invited to discuss the options presented in the paper and agree next steps. Points raised in the discussion include:

- The Panel needs to consider whether membership offers value for money
- Partnership with BEUC would give the Panel access to information, it would also help to disseminate Panel work to a wider audience
- The Panel should be aware that work on Europe should complement the existing activities of other consumer bodies such as Which? and Citizens Advice.
- The Panel could join with a view to review after one year

17. Following the discussion Panel agreed to establishing a partnership with BEUC with a view to reviewing the membership after a year.

The Panel approved the recommendation of a partnership with BEUC.

Item 10 – Project updates

18. In addition to the project updates:

- Emma Harrison advised she would be attending a Mencap meeting with colleagues at The Law Society to discuss what it's like to access legal services for those with a learning disability. The Law Society had agreed to fund training run by Mencap.
- The Panel Associate advised the Panel had been approached by a comparison website about access to data about solicitors. The SRA have since said they may release some data, however The Law Society has refused to provide data on the

basis of protecting their commercial interests. The matter has been raised with the LSB. The Panel Members agreed further exploration of the issue was required.

- Neil Wightman advised, along with the Panel Manager and Panel Associate, he had met with SRA officials to discuss LETR and next steps. Neil also advised on 17 October he will be speaking at the CILEx conference.

The Panel noted the projects update and additional items raised.

Item 11 – Consultation responses

19. The Consumer Panel Associate presented the paper on consultation responses. The Panel:

- **Noted the Ministry of Justice’s live consultation on Transforming Legal Aid: Next Steps and the LSB’s live consultation on Increasing flexibility in legal education and training**
- **Noted the submission made to the Ministry of Justice’s Review of the Legal Services Regulatory Framework call for evidence.**

Item 12 – Planning for all day meeting in December

20. The Chair sought views from Panel Members on the agenda for the all-day meeting scheduled for 11 December 2013. Key areas identified in the discussion included: external communications; establishing strong working relationships between existing and new Panel members; reviewing where the Panel has had greater impact and identifying a smaller number of future priorities.

The Chair would develop an agenda for the December meeting following comments made.

Item 13 – Any other business

21. The Chair offered sincere thanks on behalf of the Panel to Karin Woodley and Graham Corbett in recognition of all they have contributed to the Panel and given that that this would be their last meeting, with their terms of office finishing at the end of October.