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NEW PARTNERSHIPS REQUIRED TO ADDRESS UNMET NEED

Three areas of law – family, housing, and immigration – should be priorities for regulatory action to increase access to advice and representation, according to the Legal Services Consumer Panel.

Responding to a commission from the Legal Services Board (LSB) the Panel identified three areas of law which face significant demand for advice, and challenges following legal aid and other policy changes. The report recommends that the LSB explore regulatory measures that encourage provision of better information, as well as measures that increase transparency of costs and of legal processes. This would help consumers to choose legal providers and routes to resolution.

The report also identifies key areas where collaboration between the approved regulators, representative bodies and other sectors could lead to improvements in access to legal services for consumers. One example is combined action to address decreasing specialisation and regional inequalities in the availability of housing advice.

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

“These are continuously changing and challenging times which call for a progressive approach. Regulators need to find new and creative ways of combining the provision of effective legal services with consumer protection.

The problem of dealing with unmet need is one which we have a collective responsibility to address. These issues are not new, and are not going away. It is becoming increasingly clear that there must be more cooperation among regulators, representative bodies and third sector advice bodies to support increased access to justice and to safeguard the most vulnerable users. We must find a way forward together.”

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For more information, please contact Stephanie Chapman, Consumer Panel Associate, on 020 7271 0076

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 full report can be found here:
http://www.legalservicesconsumerpanel.org.uk/publications/research_and_reports/documents/PriorityAreasOfLawFinal.pdf
3. Each year the Legal Services Board seeks advice from the Panel to inform its work. In its 2015/16 business plan the LSB commissioned the Panel to identify areas of law for the LSB to priorities in its work on enabling the demand for legal services to be met. This report is the Panel's response.
4. The Panel's membership is drawn from a broad range of backgrounds with expertise including market research, law, competition, consumer advice, campaigning, and communications.