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SURVEY: LAWYERS STILL SEEN AS TOO EXPENSIVE

Just 57% of consumers consider they got value for money the last time they bought legal services – according to new research released today by the Legal Services Consumer Panel.

The third of four briefing notes summarising the results of its new tracker survey supports the popular perception that lawyers are too expensive. Probate deals are the lowest rated – less than half (46%) were considered to be good value.

Meanwhile, complaints about costs accounted for 17% of the Legal Ombudsman's caseload during 2012-13, according to its latest annual report released yesterday. This suggests affordability and cost information remain key challenges for the sector.

Key findings in relation to customer satisfaction with legal services:

- 80% of consumers were satisfied with their provider – the same as in 2012
- Information on costs, timeliness and communication were the worst rated elements of customer service
- Will-writing was the highest rated for value for money (78%) while family matters (50%) and probate cases (46%) were rated the lowest
- Face-to-face advice produced the highest satisfaction levels, at 89%
- Consumers were significantly less satisfied with the service they received from their lawyer when the work was funded through insurers

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

“Value for money matters more than ever at a time when households are really feeling the pinch. Affordability is a key factor when people are deciding whether to get legal advice or go it alone instead, so it’s concerning that our survey suggests lawyers are still widely seen as too expensive.

“Our survey shows where lawyers need to do better at customer service. Being clear about what the likely costs will be, sticking to deadlines and keeping clients updated on progress are all areas needing improvement. Competition for customers will only intensify over the next period – law firms must raise their game on these things or else face being left behind.”

Adam Sampson, Chief Legal Ombudsman, said:

“Costs related issues still account for a high number of the complaints we see at the Legal Ombudsman. I can’t stress enough how important it is for lawyers to be transparent when estimating costs and throughout a case so that consumers don’t get a nasty surprise at the end. These figures show that there is still plenty of room for improvement.

“We have published guidance in this area for lawyers, which is available on our website and I would strongly recommend any lawyers that haven’t to take a look. We are also now offering professional development courses to all legal professionals.”

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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 briefing note released today can be found here http://www.legalservicesconsumerpanel.org.uk/publications/research_and_reports/index.html
3. Legal Ombudsman data for 2012-13: costs excessive (8.71%); costs information deficient (8.53%) http://www.legalombudsman.org.uk/research-decisions/data_charts/what_were_the_complaints_about.pdf
4. The Panel’s first two briefing notes – on the use and funding of legal services and shopping around – can be found here http://www.legalservicesconsumerpanel.org.uk/publications/research_and_reports/index.html
5. The final briefing note – on public confidence in the market – will be released shortly. The raw survey data will be released alongside this final briefing note.
6. The Legal Ombudsman’s guide for lawyers on good costs service is here <http://www.legalombudsman.org.uk/downloads/documents/publications/Ombudsman-view-good-costs-service.pdf>