

Not to be used before 00:01 hours, Thursday 24 February 2011

PUBLIC BACKS PUBLISHING COMPLAINTS DECISIONS

Focus groups jointly commissioned by the Legal Services Consumer Panel and the Legal Ombudsman reveal public support for a policy of naming law firms who regularly provide poor service to their customers.

Consumers said such a scheme would help them to find out the best and worst firms in the market, enhance the profession's accountability and encourage firms to provide better service to their customers.

There was specific support for a policy of listing law firms who were found to have been at fault at least three times. The Consumer Panel is calling on the Legal Ombudsman to adopt this suggestion as it considers responses to its recent consultation on publishing its decisions.

The research also found a strong degree of reluctance to complain about lawyers, because people fear they would be outsmarted and suspect the profession would close ranks in order to protect their own.

Dr Dianne Hayter, chair of the Legal Services Consumer Panel, said:

"This research gives the Legal Ombudsman the final piece of evidence it needs to name those law firms who regularly provide poor service. People depend on lawyers in critical life moments – hiding the identities of the few repeat offenders unfairly puts consumers at risk of harm.

"Consumers' insistence on a fair publication scheme should give everyone confidence that complaints data would be used sensibly and lawyers would not be unfairly penalised as some in the profession claim.

"People's reluctance to complain about lawyers is worrying and shows the need for effective signposting to the Legal Ombudsman. Naming law firms would show consumers that an impartial body is there to act on their problem, giving them the added confidence boost they need to speak out."

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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 Legal Ombudsman and the Legal Services Consumer Panel jointly commissioned qualitative research with consumers, which was conducted by Acute Insight Market Research during November-December 2010. There were a series of ten mini-group discussions, involving 58 consumers. The independent research report is available on the Panel's website:
http://www.legalservicesconsumerpanel.org.uk/publications/research_and_report_s/documents/AIMR_PublishingComplaintDecisions_Report.pdf
3. The Panel's full response to the consultation can be found on its website:
http://www.legalservicesconsumerpanel.org.uk/publications/consultation_responses/documents/2010-12-21_LeO_PublishingDecisions.pdf
4. The Legal Ombudsman's discussion paper on publishing decisions can be found on their website:
http://www.legalombudsman.org.uk/downloads/documents/consultations/Publication-Discussion-Paper_Final.pdf