

Minutes

Legal Services Consumer Panel

Date: 22 January 2014
Time: 13:00 – 17:00
Venue: One Kemble Street, London WC2B 4AN

Present:

Elisabeth Davies	Chair
Jeff Bell	Member
Andrew Foster	Member
Emma Harrison	Member
Frances Harrison	Member
Paul Munden	Member
Catherine Wolthuizen	Member
Steve Brooker	Consumer Panel Manager
Harriet Gamper	Consumer Panel Associate
Ramandeep Bhatti	Legal Services Board (Items 1 to 10)
Cat Mariner	Legal Services Board (Items 1 to 7)
Julie Myers	Legal Services Board (Items 1 to 7)

Item 1 - Welcome and apologies

1. The Chair welcomed the Legal Services Consumer Panel ('the Panel').
2. The Chair advised that Neil Wightman had sent apologies. The Chair welcomed new Members Andy Foster and Catherine Wolthuizen, who both started their terms on 1 November 2013.

Item 2 – Declaration of interests

3. No declarations.

Item 3 – Minutes of 2 October 2013 meeting

4. The Chair presented the Draft Minutes for the 2 October 2013 meeting.

The Panel approved the Minutes of 2 October 2013.

Item 4 – Matters arising

5. Item 9 – The Chair advised the Panel's BEUC membership has now started.

The Panel noted the matters arising.

Item 5 – Shaping our work programme for 2014-15

6. The Consumer Panel Manager presented a paper on the Panel's work programme for 2014-15 and invited Panel Members to discuss the outlined approach.
7. Overall, Panel Members supported the proposed narrative, including support for the research development areas.
8. Panel Members also showed support for a range of ongoing advocacy projects and the criteria used to assess whether to continue or stop work on these.
9. The Panel emphasised the need for flexibility to reflect external developments, for example the outcome of the Simplification Review.

The Panel agreed the proposed narrative for the work programme and noted that they would consider a full draft at the next meeting. Frances Harrison was asked to develop thinking around how repackaging might work.

Item 6 – Communications approach

10. Catherine Wolthuizen presented a paper on the Panel's communications approach and invited Panel Members to discuss the communications strategy.
11. Points raised in the discussion include:
 - The Panel agreed that our communications approach should reflect a broad remit to represent the consumer interest in legal services. This exposes us to a wide range of audiences, consistent with the broader range of issues where we identify a consumer interest, and represent it from a consumer perspective. A communications strategy for this wider view would incorporate relationships with the approved regulators, professional bodies, legal services businesses, government, other consumer organisations and trade media.
 - The extent to which the Panel has a role to educate consumers without seeking a high public profile. For example, the Panel could produce a white label guide for consumers on how to choose a McKenzie Friend.
 - Developing relationships should be an explicit element of the Panel's work programme and a stakeholder map needs to be developed.
 - In relation to other consumer organisations, the Panel needs to engage at a range of levels, e.g. chair, CEO and policy and public affairs staff.
 - The Panel noted that social media is an effective tool to alert stakeholders to our work and agreed to set up a Twitter account.
 - Going forward all projects should have an explicit/individual communications strategy detailed in papers presented at Panel meetings.

The Panel noted the paper and additional points raised.

Item 7 – Comparison websites

12. The Consumer Panel Associate presented the paper on comparison sites and access to data. She reminded the Panel that comparison sites are having problems getting access to the professional registers in a reusable format despite the LSB accepting the Panel's recommendation about this.
13. Panel Members discussed the options and key points raised include:
 - Leadership at a senior level within the LSB is needed to break the deadlock.
 - Reasons behind resistance from regulators to share this information include: commercial sensitivities, general conservatism, integrity of databases, data protection issues and misuse of data, and the risks of misinterpretation on the part of consumers.
 - There is likely to be a good business case for publishing data and the Panel should emphasise the benefits of this approach.
 - As set out in the paper, Panel members were supportive of exploring all options and agreed that the Associate should gather further information to inform next steps.

The Panel agreed to escalate the matter with the LSB and to explore further alternative options based on further feedback from the Panel Associate.

Item 8 – Chair's report

14. The Chair presented her report, covering recent meetings, speaking engagements and press coverage.
15. In addition to the written report:
 - The Chair advised that she and the Panel Associate had visited Cardiff to meet with Welsh stakeholders. The Welsh Law Society agreed to run a McKenzie Friends seminar. Organisers at the Legal Wales Conference (which is held every October) asked the Panel to run a workshop at the next conference.
 - The Chair advised that Shailesh Vara MP (Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Minister for the Courts and Legal Aid) had opened the LSB offices, where the Chair and Panel Secretariat had the chance to speak with the Minister. The Panel Secretariat has sought a follow-up meeting for April/May.

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

Item 9 – Members' update

16. There were no updates, in addition to activity recorded in the projects update paper.

Item 10 – Projects update

17. In addition to the written report:
 - Catherine Wolthuizen advised she attended the Legal Ombudsman consultation event on its draft strategy on 20 January 2014.

- The Chair advised a third party complaints steering group had been established and a report is due to the OLC Board in September.
- The Consumer Panel Manager advised the Panel are hosting a McKenzie Friends roundtable on Friday 7 February.
- Jeff Bell, Andy Foster and the Panel Manager advised they attended a will-writing round table hosted by the LSB on 22 January.

The Panel noted the Projects update and additional items raised.

Item 11 – Consultation responses

18. The Consumer Panel Associate presented a paper on recent and upcoming consultation responses.

The Panel:

- **noted submissions made to the MoJ’s consultation on Transforming Legal Aid, next steps, to the LSB’s consultation’s on Lay Chairs for Frontline Regulators and Increasing flexibility in legal education and training, to the Jeffrey Review on the provision of independent criminal advocacy.**

Item 12 – Draft agenda for next meeting – 5 March 2014

19. The Consumer Panel Manager presented the proposed agenda for the 5 March 2014 meeting.

The Panel agreed the proposed Agenda

Item 13 – Any other business

20. None.