

Minutes

Legal Services Consumer Panel – Additional Meeting

Date: 15 August 2013

Time: 14:00 – 16:00

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

Present:

Elisabeth Davies	Chair
Emma Harrison	Member
Frances Harrison	Member
Paul Munden	Member
Neil Wightman	Member
Karin Woodley	Member (from item 6)
Steve Brooker	Consumer Panel Manager
Harriet Gamper	Consumer Panel Associate
Ramandeep Bhatti	Legal Services Board
Chris Handford	Legal Services Board (Item 6)
Olivia Marley	Legal Services Board (Items 1 to 6)
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 Graham Corbett and Jeff Bell had sent their apologies.

Item 2 - Introductions and declarations of interests

Item 3 - Minutes of the 27 June 2013 meeting

3. The Chair presented the Draft Minutes for the 27 June 2013 meeting of the Panel.

The Panel approved the Minutes.

Item 4 - Matters arising

4. Item 4 – the Chair advised the third party complaint case studies had been written up and findings are expected to be published in September.
5. Item 6 – the learning disabilities research was published on 29 July 2013.
6. Item 7 – the text of the consumer principles paper had been finalised. Frances Harrison advised of a plan to promote the paper internally at a colleague workshop in November. An approved regulator would be approached to test the principles prior to publication.

7. Item 9 – a dossier about the Panel’s work for BEUC had been prepared as part of the Panel’s discussions on a partnership agreement. A proposal would be presented to the Panel at the October meeting.

The Panel noted the matters arising.

Item 5 – General update

8. Emma Harrison advised the BBC Radio 4 show *You and Yours* covered a story on the learning disabilities research, in which one of the Panel’s case studies was featured. There had been a lot of positive feedback following the press coverage.
9. The Chair advised that following recent press activity she and the Panel Secretariat has been actively considering how to use further communications to maximise our impact for consumers. This would be considered at the December Panel meeting.
10. The Chair provided an update on the recruitment of two new Panel Members. A candidate shortlist had been decided and interviews would take place the first week of September.

The Panel noted the general update.

Item 6 – Simplification review

11. The Chair presented the draft response to the Ministry of Justice’s call for evidence on simplifying the legal services regulatory framework. The additional meeting had been called primarily to discuss the Panel’s response to this review.
12. The Panel agreed this was a strong paper, the tone was right and all the issues had been drawn out well. Suggestions were made to strengthen the core messages and recommendations, these included:
 - The clearer indication of preferred solutions without drawing a detailed blueprint
 - Key points should be more direct and less conversational, these should also be highlighted in the communications approach and in the executive summary
 - Lessons learned from other sectors, for example the financial sector, could be used to illustrate points around moving to a single regulator
 - More explicit reference to a single regulator being the preferred solution, based on evidence to date.

The Panel approved the draft response in line with comments made.

Item 7 – Legal Ombudsman

13. The Consumer Panel Manager introduced the Legal Ombudsman (LeO) discussion paper on the future jurisdiction of its scheme. Panel Members were invited to suggest key points that should be raised in the Panel’s response. Points raised included:
 - The merits of a single consumer ombudsman (as in Denmark) versus multiple sectoral ombudsmen. Complaints can fall through the gaps e.g. there are

separate local government and housing ombudsmen and some complaints don't seem to fall under either scheme

- If rationalisation of the ombudsman landscape was to take place, whether it would be better for professional services to be focused around the Legal Ombudsman or whether the Financial Ombudsman was a better option
- The risk that responsibility for legal services complaints could fragment across redress schemes due to the time lag before a voluntary scheme was created. On the one hand a simple landscape for consumers was wanted, but alternatives may be needed if gaps cannot be closed quickly by the Legal Ombudsman
- The Legal Ombudsman's service should be fit for purpose before it expands into other areas; the Panel's benchmarking project would be key

The Panel Manager noted comments and agreed to draft a response accordingly. The draft would be circulated by email for approval.

Item 13 – Any other business

14. Julie Myers advised that the LSB have been given notice to quit Victoria House. Other locations are currently being considered.