

## Minutes

### Legal Services Consumer Panel Meeting

**Date:** 8 December 2010

**Time:** 9:00 – 16:00 pm

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

#### Present:

Dianne Hayter	Chair
Jeff Bell	Member
Graham Corbett	Member
Elisabeth Davies	Member
Emma Harrison	Member
Paul Munden	Member
Neil Wightman	Member
Karin Woodley	Member (Item 4 onwards)
Steve Brooker	Consumer Panel Manager
Alanna Linn	Consumer Panel Associate
Julie Myers	Corporate Affairs Director, Legal Services Board
Crispin Passmore	Strategy Director, Legal Services Board (Item 5)
Adam Sampson	Chief Ombudsman, Legal Ombudsman (Item 11)

#### Item 1 – Welcome and apologies

1. The Chair welcomed the Legal Services Consumer Panel ('the Panel'). The Chair congratulated Elisabeth Davies on her new role as Director of Partner Relations at Age UK.

#### Item 2 – Introductions and declarations of interests

2. No declarations

#### Item 3 – Minutes of the 6 October 2010 meeting

3. The Chair presented the Draft Minutes for the 6 October 2010 meeting.

**The Panel approved the Minutes.**

#### **Item 4 – Matters Arising from the Minutes**

4. Item 6 – the Chair advised that the Secretary of State issued directions to the Office for the Legal Services Ombudsman ordering implementation of the complaints transition plan; all cases received before 31 December must be completed by 28 February 2011.
5. Item 7 - the Panel Manager stated that the Panel's report '*Quality in Legal Services*' was submitted to the Legal Services Board (LSB) at the beginning of November. The LSB will develop a formal response to the report in 2011 and the draft LSB business plan includes a proposal to seek Panel advice on robust accreditation schemes.
6. Item 8 - the Panel Manager advised that IFF Research had been appointed to undertake will writing consumer research and business interviews. The Panel Manager updated the Panel on submissions received from the will writing call for evidence and thanked Jeff for his assistance in shadowing the project.
7. Item 9 – the Chair reported that the LSB expected to publish its consultation on diversity on 15 December.

**The Panel noted the matters arising.**

#### **Item 5 – LSB perspectives**

8. The Chair introduced Crispin Passmore, Strategy Director at the LSB.
9. The Strategy Director reflected upon the LSB's experience of working with the Panel to date and outlined the LSB's thinking on its own role beyond 2011. In particular, the Strategy Director noted that education and training and reserved activities will be key areas of work. The Strategy Director stated that the Panel has delivered useful evidence to the LSB.
10. The Panel discussed the presentation.

**The Panel noted the LSB Strategy Director's presentation.**

#### **Item 6 – Year One Review**

11. The Chair sought Panel member views on three key areas of review:
  - What is the Panel's role?
  - What has the Panel achieved?
  - Lessons learnt in 2010
12. Panel members responded to these questions in turn. Discussion identified a number of matters that the Panel may want to explore for inclusion in its 2011-12 work plan, including a greater emphasis on access to justice and additional

focus on the approved regulators. Panel members suggested that increased communication outside of meetings would also be beneficial.

**The Panel reflected on its first year of operation and agreed to draw on these lessons in preparing its 2011-12 work programme.**

#### **Item 7 – Third sector relations**

13. Karin Woodley gave a presentation on meetings with third sector organisations. These organisations worked across a range of areas, including migrants and refugees, social housing, supplementary schools, black training and enterprise, and children in care.

14. Karin advised that there are some common issues facing the different bodies, including little choice of firms specialising in charity law, the high cost of services, poor service and lack of cultural understanding.

**The Panel noted Karin Woodley's presentation and she agreed to continue her programme of interviews with a view to publishing a summary note of the findings with assistance from the Panel secretariat.**

#### **Item 8 - Chair's report**

15. The Chair presented her report covering recent meetings, speaking engagements and press coverage.

16. In addition to the written report:

- The Chair advised that a meeting was held on 7 December 2011 with around 15 officers from the Union Legal Officers Network (ULON).
- Jeff Bell advised the Legal Ombudsman event in Northumbria on their publishing complaints consultation was being rescheduled for early 2011.

**The Panel noted the paper and the additional items raised.**

#### **Item 9 – Members' updates report**

17. Paul Munden advised that he had attended a meeting of the SRA Financial Protection Arrangements External Reference Group. The SRA had now released a consultation on changes to the financial protection regime.

**The Panel noted the member's update.**

#### **Item 10 – Consultation Responses**

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

19. The Panel discussed the draft response to the Legal Ombudsman's consultation on publishing decisions. Panel members were supportive of the draft response and discussed the need to give strong support to the principle of publication.

**The Panel:**

- **noted the submission made to the Council for Licensed Conveyancers on its new Code of Conduct and to the Joint Advisory Group on the Quality Assurance for Advocates scheme;**
- **agreed the draft response to the Legal Ombudsman's consultation on publication of decisions, subject to minor drafting changes; and**
- **agreed to input to the BSB consultation on regulating entities and to the SRA's third consultation on its new handbook.**

**Item 11 – Legal Ombudsman**

20. The Chair introduced Adam Sampson, Chief Ombudsman at the Legal Ombudsman.

21. The Chief Ombudsman summarised the Legal Ombudsman's experience since opening in November 2010 and outlined its approach to complaints.

22. Panel members discussed the presentation, noting that the Panel supported full publication of decisions, including the name of solicitors or firms. The Panel also discussed issues related to the language used by the Legal Ombudsman in communicating with complainants.

**The Panel noted the Chief Ombudsman presentation and agreed to arrange a meeting with the Office of Legal Complaints Board in early 2011**

**Item 12 – Consumer Welfare Index**

23. Elisabeth Davies and the Panel Manager presented an update on the Consumer Welfare Index (CWI). Progress to date includes a literature review, establishment of an Expert Advisory Group and developmental work on the core outcomes and indicators.

24. Panel members separated into two groups and discussed possible indicators for measurement areas. Panel members noted that more time for input would be useful and an additional session in January 2011 was proposed.

**The Panel noted the progress on the CWI and agreed to hold an additional Panel session in January 2011. Karin Woodley agreed to suggest additional names for the Advisory Group to widen its diversity.**

**Item 13 – Work programme 2011-12**

25. The Chair led discussion on the Panel's work programme for 2011-12.
26. Panel members noted projects which were already locked-in for 2011, including will writing and requests for advice from the LSB. Panel members discussed a number of other potential projects, including more work on vulnerable consumers.
27. Panel members suggested that it would be helpful to have an additional meeting to discuss the 2011-12 work programme in more detail.

**The Panel agreed to hold an additional session on the work plan in January 2011 alongside discussion on the CWI.**

**Item 14 – Final reflections on the day**

28. The Chair sought final reflection on the Panel's all-day meeting. Panel members made comments in turn, noting in particular that there was likely to be a significant amount of work in 2011-12 and that members would be happy to contribute more between meetings.

**The Panel noted members' reflections on the day.**

**Item 15 – Any other business**

29. None

**Item 16 – Draft agenda for next meeting: 16 February 2011**

30. The Panel agreed the Draft Agenda, noting that Baroness Deech, Chair of the Bar Standards Board, and Ed Blades, from the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, would be attending.
31. Panel members noted there was an increasing amount to discuss at meetings and it was proposed that all future meetings be extended by one hour.

**The Panel agreed the draft agenda for the 16 February 2011 meeting and agreed to extend the length of meetings by one hour.**