



Minutes

Legal Services Consumer Panel meeting

Date: 4 March 2020

Time: 13:00-17:00

Venue: 3rd floor, The Rookery, 2 Dyott Street, London, WC1A 1DE

Present:

Sarah Chambers	Chair
David Abbott	Member
Adam Cooper	Member
Owen Derbyshire	Member
Michelle Goddard	Member
Paul Crook	Member
Liz Owen	Member
Mark McLaren	Member
Lola Bello	Consumer Panel Manager
Laurentiu Ciocan	Consumer Panel Associate
Richard Hinton	Pitsford Consulting Limited (item 5 only)
Neil Bayton	Trustpilot (item 9 only)
Danielle Guettier	Trustpilot (item 9 only)

Item 1 – Welcome and apologies

1. The Chair welcomed the Legal Services Consumer Panel ('The Panel'). Apologies had been received from Marlene Winfield.

Item 2 – Declaration of interests

2. None.

Item 3 – Minutes of 29 January 2020 meeting

3. The Chair presented the minutes from 29 January 2020, which had been agreed via electronic correspondence.

The Panel noted the minutes from 29 January 2020.

Item 4 – Matters arising

4. The Chair presented the matters arising.

The Panel noted the matters arising.

Item 5 – Conveyancing analytics presentation – Pitsford Consulting Ltd

5. The Chair welcomed Richard Hinton, CEO of Pitsford Consulting Limited.
6. Richard provided an update on his role and the recent research they have carried out on price and service transparency in conveyancing. In February, Pitsford Consulting reviewed the websites of 1,000 conveyancing firms in England & Wales looking at how conveyancing firms have responded to the transparency measures recently introduced.
7. The overall findings showed there is a disconnect between compliance and consumer needs, as the numbers revealed the following:
 - 24% of firms surveyed offer prospective consumers the opportunity to calculate a conveyancing fee. The remaining 76% do not provide consumers with a price.
 - Another 27% offer prospective consumers no guidance at all on likely costs. 44% offer indicative fee guidance, for example a price range between £660 and £4,000 including VAT.
 - There is little or no evidence of objective, third party reviews, on these firms' websites.
8. The Panel encouraged Richard to disseminate the research results among the regulated community. Richard said that the Panel's work and thinking was one of the catalysts for the research.
9. The Panel further asked Richard about his views on the possible barriers and solutions for increased transparency in the sector. Richard mentioned the following barriers that need to be overcome:
 - There is a resistance to change within the sector, and that there should be more alignment between regulators and those regulated.
 - Regulators should demonstrate more leadership in ensuring the transparency remedies recommended by the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) are implemented to benefit consumers and are not used just as a tick-box compliance exercise.
 - The legal services market is complex, and the onus and power are within the regulators' hands to help consumers navigate it better. incentivise providers to be compliant with the transparency measures and ensure that consumers can compare information in a meaningful way.
 - Firms should have access to suitable and accessible data, but this needs sourcing, collating and disseminating. The regulatory bodies could again assist firms by incentivising them to collect and publish data in a consistent format. The data could be used by independent review platforms in a practical way for consumers.
 - Another solution could be that firms make prices available through a common price generator and define performance metrics for operational efficiency that consumers can understand easily. Richard showed the Panel an example that could be used as a price generator prototype.
10. The Panel highlighted that legal services consumers have limited choice in terms of comparison website in finding a service provider. The Panel agreed to support the publication of the research, perhaps with a public comment to be released contemporaneously.
11. The Chair thanked Richard Hinton for his time.

Action points:

- **The Secretariat to follow up with Richard about the publication date of the research.**
- **To have a policy working level meeting with the LSB on the Legal Choices website future governance framework.**

The Panel noted the update from Pitsford Consulting Ltd.

Item 6 – Chair’s report and Members’ update

12. The Chair presented her report on recent meetings. The Chair reminded Panel members to share their notes from the meetings they attend for it to be recorded and shared with the wider Panel.

The Panel noted the Chair’s report and Members update.

Item 7 and 8 – Projects update and consultations

13. The Panel Associate presented the projects update and the upcoming consultations.

The Panel noted the projects update and the future consultations.

Item 9 – Trustpilot presentation

14. The Chair welcomed Neil Bayton, Partnership Director, and Danielle Guettier, Business Development Manager at Trustpilot. Neil and Danielle gave a short presentation about Trustpilot’s work on independent reviews in conveyancing and shared the following:

- Trustpilot is a consumer review website founded in Denmark in 2007 with nearly 2,250,000+ new reviews posted each month.
- Trustpilot is an open platform and publishes all reviews. However, they remove reviews that do not meet their internal compliance rules, such as reviews that contain foul or defamatory language, or are copied and pasted multiple times.
- Firms need more education about the usefulness of having reviews and they miss out on the leads that could come from having their services reviewed.
- There are benefits for firms in responding to both positive and negative reviews, negative reviews can be turned into positive stories.
- Trustpilot said 92% of online reviews are read by consumers and 88% of consumers read reviews before making a purchase. Another 44% of consumers consider the number of reviews a business receives to be of importance. A minority of consumers (16%) think that reviews older than three months are no longer relevant.
- The consumer journey for conveyancing is changing. Consumers rely more on online reviews when they purchase services and they tend to trust online reviews as much as they would trust friends’ recommendations.

15. The Panel observed that there are companies on Trustpilot’s website who rank high in reviews (between four and five stars) that tend to have organic reviews that are either mixed or negative, but a considerable number of positive reviews were a result of company’s invitation. Trustpilot explained that companies usually send out invitations to (recent) former consumers asking them for a review, and it happens that most of them

tend to be positive, while the organic can be a varied mix because when consumers are dissatisfied they tend to make more of an effort to leave a review compared to when they are happy with a service or product.

16. The Panel asked if Trustpilot have worked with any comparator sector that shared similar industry resistance to change in terms of transparency. Neil mentioned the automotive industry and its transition from buying cars directly from car salesman to online 'showrooms'. The change was done by having big firms onboard leading the change followed up by smaller ones. Neil also said that they also provided extensive education to the sector to facilitate the transition. Neil said that the consumer's buying journey needs to change in conveyancing to achieve change.
17. The Panel wanted to know if there is a tipping point for the conveyancing sector in making a shift towards independent reviews. Neil said that online sellers/estate agents are starting to disrupt the sector by having the Trustpilot's badge published on their website as an indicator for consumer review.
18. The Chair thanked Neil Bayton and Danielle Guettier for their time.

The Panel noted the update from Trustpilot and thanked Neil and Danielle for their time.

Item 10 – LSCP Work Programme 2020/21

19. The Chair and the Panel welcomed the Panel's final draft work programme for its brevity and clarity of the ideas presented. The Panel did not have major recommendations to amend the work programme and the feedback had mostly stylistic comments.
20. The Panel noted the update from the Panel Manager.

The Panel noted the update and thanked the Panel Manager for her time.

Action point: To present the final draft of the work programme to the LSB board meeting in March.

Item 11 – Draft agenda for April meeting

21. The Panel noted the proposed agenda for the next meeting and agreed to start the meeting at the later time of 14:00 and it will be a virtual meeting. Further details to follow.
22. The Panel also agreed to hear from the LSB about their Legal Needs Survey and the setup of the public panel.

Item 12 – Any other business

23. The Chair thanked Michelle and Marlene (although Marlene was not present) for their great contribution and the work they have both done as part of the Panel over the past years.