

Neil Stevenson
Chief Executive
Scottish Legal Complaints Commission

By Email only

5 March 2025

Dear Neil,

SLCC 2025-26 draft Budget and Operating Plan Consultation

I am writing to share the SLCC Consumer Panel's response to the consultation on the SLCC's 2025-26 draft Budget and Operating Plan. We welcome the opportunity to share our views. We have only responded on those aspects where we have specific comments to make.

Two-year refreshed strategy and preparations for change ahead

We appreciate the impact of the continued uncertainty caused by reform. The SLCC needs to continue to engage with the reform debate and legislation in order to maximise the opportunity for improvement. We also welcome the SLCC's continued support for the Panel to bring the voice of consumers in this debate. We therefore agree that the proposed refreshed strategy, focused on continuous improvement, and influencing and implementing the new legislation, is the right approach. We particularly welcome the acknowledgement of the Consumer Panel within the various scenarios that had to be considered as part of the strategy process to ensure the Panel can continue to operate effectively and support the SLCC in taking account of the interests of consumers of legal services in its work regardless of the outcome of the reform process.

Operating plan

We welcome the continued focus on identifying and testing ways to improve customer experience within the system. The creation of the Service Experience Team has brought a real, practical focus to the SLCC's work in this area and we look forward to continuing to engage with them over the coming year.

We also welcome proposed projects to ensure the SLCC's services can be accessed easily by all consumers, including those who may face specific barriers, or have specific vulnerabilities or accessibility needs. This is a key area of interest for the Panel and over the past year we have worked with the SLCC to consider how best to incorporate a child-friendly approach to complaints to ensure children and young people can access its services. We look forward to building on this work in the coming year.

The Panel will consider its own workplan in line with the projects set out in the SLCC operating plan, including influencing the SLCC's policy development and providing a vital consultation and challenge role as the organisation moves to transition planning and implementation, alongside developing its own new ways of working in light of expected new powers and duties coming from reform.

Budget and levies

The SLCC needs to ensure it has sufficient income to deliver its statutory duties. We make no comment on the overall budget and levies beyond the need to satisfy that requirement.

However, the Panel would also highlight the proposed extension of the Panel's powers and remit within the Regulation of Legal Services (Scotland) Bill and the debate that has taken place about how this will be resourced. The extension of the Panel's remit and scope within the Regulation of Legal Services (Scotland) Bill is significant and will see a change in the breadth, number, and frequency of issues the Panel will have to consider and comment on going forward. That work needs to be resourced so the Panel can meet the expectations placed on it by Parliament.

An amendment to the Bill accepted at Stage 2 states that "the Commission must ensure that the panel is adequately funded and resourced to be able to discharge its functions." We welcome the SLCC's support for this amendment and we look forward to working with the SLCC to consider how best to implement this.

Ways to tackle persistently high levels of non-compliance by solicitors with requests for files for investigation

We are dismayed by the continued issue of non-compliance with requests for files which has a significant impact on individual complaints and consumers, but also on wider consumer confidence in legal services and their regulation. It is vital that consumers who bring complaints to the SLCC are able to have those investigated without unnecessary delay. We urge the SLCC to continue to work with others in the regulatory sector to challenge and address this issue.

Policy considerations taken into account in forming the budget and operating plan

The Panel welcomes the SLCC's commitment to a thorough consideration of the impact of its strategic decisions on human rights, equality and diversity issues and its work to ensure compliance with the new statutory consumer duty.

I hope this is helpful, and we look forward to working together over the coming year.

Yours sincerely,

Gillian Fyfe

Chair

SLCC Consumer Panel

Email: consumerpanel@scottishlegalcomplaints.org.uk

<https://www.scottishlegalcomplaints.org.uk/about-us/consumer-panel/>