



RESPONSE TO SLCC BUDGET CONSULTATION 2018-19

12 March 2017

We welcome the opportunity to comment on the SLCC's proposed budget and operating plan for 2018 to 2019.

From our unique vantage point, it is clear that complaints are on the rise across many sectors and it comes as no surprise to us that this continues to be the case again this year for complaints against solicitors in Scotland.

Last year we commented on the fact that it was inevitable, in the face of rising complaint numbers, that the costs for adequately meeting this demand necessarily required an increase in the annual levy. Consumers – both complainers and those complained about – deserve a process which deals effectively and efficiently with complaints and which provides speedy resolution and redress. Under the SLCC's existing funding model, this can only be achieved through increased resources and, by extension, an increase in the annual levy.

We would take this opportunity to reiterate our view that the existing legal regulatory framework in Scotland, particularly surrounding complaint handling, is too complicated for consumers to negotiate. Last year we stated that it was clear to us all that the system for dealing with legal complaints needed radical reform. We were pleased, therefore, to greet the review of legal regulation which is currently underway. The Panel was grateful for the

opportunity to provide early input to that review, and will be submitting its further views imminently following the formal call for evidence.

Turning to the SLCC's proposed Operating Plan for next year, we are again encouraged by the scope of projects proposed. We particularly advocate the importance of learning from complaints and therefore welcome those projects which help promote this. This work is essential to drive service improvements for the benefit of consumers.

Something not specifically addressed in the SLCC's proposed Operating Plan and which we would be keen to see is a programme of work designed to take forward our recommendations to the SLCC on adopting a 'plain English' communication style. Clarity of communication – while we appreciate the challenges associated with this given some of the terminology in the 2007 Act – is an important aspect of providing an effective system of redress.

We also welcome the further work which is proposed in terms of raising general awareness of the Commission and its work – it's vital that consumers experiencing poor levels of service from a legal practitioner know how to obtain redress.

We do note, however, that within the Plan there is little or no anticipated direct engagement with consumers.

As a Panel, we regularly review the feedback which the SLCC encourages from individual complainers and practitioners on the closure of a complaint. However, we feel that there is scope for more direct and interactive engagement and would suggest that the Commission consider hosting a forum for Board members – and potentially members of the Panel – to interact directly with consumers.

The Panel looks forward to working actively with the SLCC in the year ahead.