

Minutes

Consumer Panel Meeting

Tuesday 3 June 2025 (via Teams)

Present

Gillian Fyfe (GF), Citizens Advice Scotland (Chair)
Tracey Reilly (TR), Consumer Scotland
Brendan McGinty (BM), Competition and Markets Authority
Carly Elliott-Scott (CES), Together
Chris Gill (CG), University of Glasgow

Vicky Crichton (VC), Director of Public Policy, SLCC
[Redacted name] Best Practice Adviser, SLCC
[Redacted names] 2 SLCC SET representative – items 5 and 6
[Redacted name] Observer from SLCC]

Introduction

1. Welcome and apologies

The Chair noted apologies from Louise Johnson (Scottish Women's Aid). She welcomed new Panel member Carly Elliot-Scott.

2. Declarations of Interest

No declarations were necessary.

3. Approval of Minutes

The minutes of the meeting on 4 March 2025 were approved, subject to a typographical correction.

Discussion

4. Regulatory Reform

It was noted that the Regulation of Legal Services Bill, making changes to the functioning of the SLCC and Consumer Panel, had been passed on 20 May 2025, but was likely to be implemented incrementally. The Minister, in the Stage 3 debate, had emphasised that it was intended to achieve a more consumer-focused approach that ensured that individuals received high standards of service in a robust system. In the absence of an independent single regulator, the Consumer Panel was vital to ensuring that there was sufficient attention to the consumer perspective. The wider remit of the Panel fell into different categories. It must be consulted whenever significant changes were proposed. The Panel will be able to address and comment on important areas across the whole of the regulatory system, and will be able to make recommendations to SLCC, the professional regulators and the Lord

President's office. After representations to the drafters, the final Bill contained a clearer statement on funding and support, and the SLCC would consider how to clarify the resources to be dedicated to the Panel's work.

Members noted that the Minister had emphasised how long it had taken to reach finalisation, and agreed that it would be useful to arrange a separate meeting, ideally in-person, to consider what priorities the Panel wanted to focus on, what the budget consultation might involve, what "adequate resourcing" would mean, and more broadly, what expertise it might need to call on to fulfil its broader remit. VC said the SLCC Board were very aware of the changes and what that would mean for the budget. She indicated that after the royal assent process, stakeholders (including the Panel) would be consulted before commencement dates for various parts of the Act were fixed. It was unsure what the Panel secretariat would look like as yet; the SLCC would continue this function for the moment.

It was agreed that a meeting would be arranged as soon as possible.

SLCC

5. SLCC Feedback

The Q3 customer feedback report was tabled, and a member of the SET team updated the Panel on the refreshed process. Requests for feedback were sent to every complainer approximately 12 weeks into the complaint journey, as well as on closure. Five key themes were identified from the feedback, including communications, timescales and efficiency. The new Process Assistance Line (PAL) had been set up to take anonymous requests for more clarity on the process.

VC clarified, in answer to a question, that the SLCC had done some work to identify and compare the demographics of service users. The raw data collected from complaints, which the SLCC had also compared to Scottish public data, showed that very few children and younger people tended to make complaints, partially due to the fact that they tended not to use certain types of legal services. The Panel had already considered how the SLCC could make its services accessible to all.

Panel members asked that SET particularly look into the perceptions that were expressed in the free text, suggesting that complaints had not been fully heard or understood. They also noted that some free text comments expressed unhappiness that solicitors had been given extensions of time, yet complainers were asked to submit their comments within a short time frame. The SET member confirmed that these points were not unusual, but SET was already looking into whether it could make its position clearer on both these points.

6. Service Experience Team Report

A SET member reported that the SLCC had become aware that some solicitors were not sure whether they should withdraw from acting, if a complaint was made. The SLCC would not provide advice on whether they must, from an ethical standpoint withdraw, but had drawn up some guidance, for both solicitors and complainers, highlighting that although a complaint did not automatically trigger a withdrawal, there were nonetheless instances where this might be considered appropriate. The PAL service could also provide some

guidance as to what the SLCC process would entail, and how solicitors should liaise with the SLCC when complaints were made. The SLCC had recently received positive feedback on social media indicating that a solicitor had found the SLCC to be helpful. SET was also monitoring the queue time for incoming calls, the information requested, and how useful callers had found the recorded information that they listened to during any waiting time.

GF commented on the perceptions of bias noted in the feedback surveys, from both solicitors and complainers. A member of SET confirmed that although there had been attempts to clarify the process, the feedback was largely influenced by outcomes. TR thought that the fact that SLCC was funded by the profession might generate that perception and wondered if other sectors of the market, or other countries, received similar comments. CG and BM answered that even other ombuds, including those not funded by any industry, received similar criticisms, so it was important to engage and demonstrate impartiality.

SET – consider suggestions

Administration & AOB

7. Updates

VC noted that a new MS Teams channel had been set up for the Consumer Panel to share papers and exchange messages. Over time she hoped to share papers and messages on this rather than individual inboxes.

8. Future Meetings

All by MS Teams, at 2pm on the following days:

Tuesday 2 September 2025

Tuesday 2 December 2025.