

<b>To:</b>	Board	
<b>Date of Meeting:</b>	23 May 2013	<b>Item:</b> Paper (13) 37

<b>Title:</b>	Consumer Panel Annual Report
<b>Workstream(s):</b>	Corporate governance
<b>Presented by:</b>	Elisabeth Davies, Chair of the Consumer Panel chair@legalservicesconsumerpanel.org.uk
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<b>Status:</b>	Protect

<b>Summary:</b>
The Consumer Panel's Annual Report is attached at <b>Annex A</b> . The Board is asked to receive and comment on the report.

<b>Risks and mitigations</b>	
<b>Financial:</b>	N/A
<b>FoIA:</b>	Annex A – Section 22: Information intended for future publication
<b>Legal:</b>	N/A
<b>Reputational:</b>	The Annual Report is the Panel's key accountability tool and allows stakeholders to assess its achievements, impact and value for money.
<b>Resource:</b>	N/A

Consultation	Yes	No	Who / why?
<b>Board Members:</b>		✓	
<b>Consumer Panel:</b>	✓		The Annual Report was agreed by the Consumer Panel following its meeting on 1 May.
<b>Others:</b>	None		

<b>Recommendation(s):</b>
The Board is invited to: a) discuss the Annual Report

## LEGAL SERVICES BOARD

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### Consumer Panel Annual Report

#### Issue

1. The Board is invited to:
  - a) discuss the Annual Report

#### Annual Report

2. The Panel's terms of reference include a commitment to producing an Annual Report. The attached document reports on the Panel's work between April 2012 and March 2013.
3. The Annual Report is an important document as it gives the Legal Services Board and our stakeholders, including legal services consumers, a record of our activities during the previous twelve months and allows them to hold us to account for this work. It is also a key means for us to demonstrate our impact and value for money.
4. In order to reinforce the Panel's outcomes, this year's report has been produced to reflect the five high level themes in the Panel's flagship publication, the Consumer Impact Report. It consists of:
  - A foreword by the Panel Chair, drawing out key areas where our work has had a particularly important impact
  - The five key themes which the Panel uses in the Consumer Impact Report to measure the direction of change in the legal services market: responsive services, high quality advice, diversity, complaints, and consumers being placed at the heart of regulation
  - Each theme sets out brief findings from the latest Consumer Impact Report, followed by the action the Panel has taken, and our impact
  - Our priorities for 2013-14, referring to our Work Programme, which we publish separately
  - Transparency – financial information, attendance record and activity summary
  - Annexes – a comprehensive list of our activities: reports, research, consultation responses, speeches and presentations, events hosted by the Panel, news releases, membership of ongoing committees and working groups, and stakeholder meetings.
5. The main impacts are listed below for ease of reference. It should also be noted that this year has been marked by a significant increase in outputs – including the production of more consumer policy and research reports, responding to more consultation responses, and almost doubling the speeches and presentations we made and the number of meetings we held with our stakeholders.

#### Next steps

6. The Consumer Panel plans to publish the Annual Report shortly after the meeting.

**Harriet Gamper – Consumer Panel Associate**

14.05.13

## Summary of our key activities/impacts in 2012-13

<b>Area</b>	<b>Impact</b>
<b>Comparison websites</b>	Following publication of our 2012 report on comparison sites, the Panel has worked with the SRA and the CLC to promote self-regulatory good practice standards for comparison site operators. These have been endorsed by the two regulators and 5 websites have signed up to the standards so far.
<b>Tracker survey</b>	This yearly survey measures public attitudes towards lawyers and the views of recent users of legal services. We post all the data on our website for interrogation by other parties. At our roundtable in September 2012 stakeholders told us just how much they value the data.
<b>Choosing and using legal services</b>	In March the Panel completed Phase One of this project, providing advice to the LSB on how regulators can help consumers play a more active role. It set out a series of strategic choices for the LSB and frontline regulators to grapple with.
<b>Will-writing and estate administration</b>	The Lord Chancellor's decision not to regulate will-writing was a major disappointment. But we had exposed major consumer detriment and the attention now shifts to self-regulation.
<b>Legal Education and Training Review (LETR)</b>	Our major submission to the LETR review recommended a new education and training system built around an activity-based authorisation regime for individuals and entities.
<b>QASA</b>	The Panel has consistently supported this scheme and has participated in the long consultation process. We were pleased that most of the concerns we raised have now been addressed and our call for greater user representation within the scheme is to be reviewed during the 2015 scheme review.
<b>British Standard on Inclusive Service Provision</b>	In May 2012 the Panel adopted the Standard, and encouraged others to do the same. Since then the CLC have amended incorporated the standard into their code of practice. The LSB has committed to update their consumer toolkit and develop a clear strategy for incorporating the Standard into their work, and to invite the regulators and Legal Ombudsman to demonstrate how they have incorporated the Standard within their operations.
<b>Consumers with learning disabilities</b>	The Panel, in partnership with the LSB and Mencap, appointed the Norah Fry Research Centre (part of the University of Bristol) to look at the experiences and needs of legal services consumers with learning disabilities. The interim report suggests

this will produce some very informative and useful findings.

**Consumer experience of complaint handling**

This report, commissioned jointly with the Legal Ombudsman, found a clear gap between what is supposed to happen under the regulatory framework and what is happening in reality. Following the report the Legal Ombudsman updated its good complaint handling guide for lawyers and published guidance for consumers on how to complain to their lawyer.

**Third party complaints**

Following our paper on this issue in June 2012, the Legal Ombudsman has now committed to working with stakeholders to create a specimen list of third party complaints for consultation. The Panel will shortly compile a dossier of cases that the Legal Ombudsman has had to turn away as the basis for discussion in a working group that it has agreed to establish.

**Independent governance**

All regulatory boards now have independent governance for the first time – this is something the Panel has been calling for ever since we began, and represents a major achievement.

**Improved communications**

Stakeholders have told us they would welcome greater visibility from the Panel. We have developed a number of initiatives to address this over the past year, including holding workshops and events to share our research findings and good practices from other sectors, starting a Regulators' Forum (which will be a regular, informal space for approved regulators to discuss consumer-facing issues), and starting an e-newsletter which we now send out quarterly to over 250 subscribers.