

To:	Legal Services Board	
Date of Meeting:	30 May 2012	Item: Paper 12 (40)

Title:	Legal Services Consumer Panel Annual Report 2011/12	
Workstream(s):	Corporate governance	
Presented by:	Elisabeth Davies, Chair of the Consumer Panel chair@legalservicesconsumerpanel.org.uk	
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Status:	Protected	

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

Risks and mitigations	
Financial:	N/A
FoIA:	S22. To be published unchanged shortly after meeting
Legal:	N/A
Reputational:	The Annual Report is the Panel's key accountability tool and allows stakeholders to assess its achievements and value for money.
Resource:	N/A

Consultation	Yes	No	Who / why?
Board Members:		✓	
Consumer Panel:	✓		The Annual Report was agreed by the Consumer Panel following its meeting on 9 May
Others:			

Recommendation(s):
The Board is invited to discuss the Annual Report.

LEGAL SERVICES BOARD

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Legal Services Consumer Panel Annual Report 2011/12

Issue

1. The Board is invited to 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 in 2011-12.
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. In addition, it provides an opportunity to provide a high-level commentary on developments affecting consumers, although the Consumer Impact Report is the primary vehicle for this.
4. This year's annual report follows the format of the first, as follows:
 - An overview by the Panel Chair
 - Five key themes where the Panel considers its work has made most impact: better choice; consumer vulnerability; getting redress; marking progress on the reforms; and re-drawing the regulatory boundaries
 - A list of our priorities for 2012-13 connecting to the Work Programme document
 - Transparency – financial information, attendance record and activity summary
 - Annexes – a comprehensive list of our activities: reports, research, consultation responses, speeches and presentations, news releases, membership of ongoing committees and working groups, and stakeholder meetings
5. The Chair's introduction to the annual report attempts to draw out key areas where our work has had an impact – a summary is provided in the box overleaf for convenience.

Next steps

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

Steve Brooker – Consumer Panel Manager

Summary of our impact in 2011-12

Area	Impact
Will-writing, probate and estate administration	Our comprehensive and evidence-based review of will-writing, probate and estate administration, established the clear case for the Legal Services Board's announcement of plans to regulate these three activities
Publishing complaint decisions	We were instrumental in persuading the Legal Ombudsman to publish the names of lawyers and firms in complaints leading to formal ombudsman decisions
Consumer Impact Report	Our pioneering report was the first assessment of the legal services reforms from a consumer perspective, providing an annual benchmarking tool that will help track changes in consumer attitudes, experiences and policy developments
Voluntary quality schemes	Our assessment of accreditation schemes has already led to promises of change from the Law Society and Association of Personal Injury Lawyers
Regulatory standards	The Panel's feedback strengthened draft performance standards for the approved regulators that are now more consumer-focused and include consumer engagement
Deaf consumers research	This research project addressed head on the needs of a specific group of consumers through an innovative three-way partnership: the Solicitors Regulation Authority is producing guidance for solicitors; Action on Hearing Loss is producing guidance for consumers; and the Panel has pushed for clarity on who pays for interpreters
Voluntary jurisdiction	We successfully called on the Legal Ombudsman to prepare to switch on the voluntary jurisdiction built into the Legal Services Act, encouraging unregulated businesses to signal a strong commitment to consumer protection
Comparison websites	Some websites are already making improvements in direct response to our report, which exposed poor practice and called on them to adhere to the good practice standards that we developed