LEGAL SERVICES BOARD

Meeting: Legal Services Board

Date: 28 April 2026

Item: Paper (26) 02

Title: Legal Services Consumer Panel Work Plan 2026/27 Cover Paper

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Status: Official

Introduction

1. The Legal Services Consumer Panel (LSCP) Work Plan **2026/27** is attached at Annex A. The Panel Chair will introduce the item.

Recommendation

2. The Board is invited to:

   - **endorse** the draft Legal Services Consumer Panel Work Programme 2026/27; and **note** suggested questions that it may want to pose to the Panel Chair.

Background

3. The Legal Services Consumer Panel (LSCP) is an independent statutory body established under the Legal Services Act 2007 to represent the interests of consumers of legal services. The Board's role is to endorse, rather than approve, the Panel's annual work programme. This reflects the Panel's independence, while also ensuring the Board has the opportunity to consider the plan and provide observations.

Overview of the Work Programme

4. The 2026/27 work programme builds on the Panel's existing strategy and continues to focus on how well the legal services market is working for consumers, particularly those who face barriers to accessing or navigating legal services.

5. The programme covers:

- **consumer experience and unmet legal need**, including affordability, accessibility and outcomes for individuals, small businesses and vulnerable consumers.
- **transparency and information**, examining whether regulatory requirements are delivering meaningful improvements in consumers' ability to understand, compare and choose legal services.
- **innovation and technology**, including the implications of new business models and AI-enabled tools for consumer outcomes and risks; and
- **regulatory effectiveness from a consumer perspective**, with the Panel continuing to act as a critical friend to regulators by assessing whether regulatory approaches are delivering benefits in practice.

6. The programme is delivered through research, analysis, stakeholder engagement and public commentary.

Alignment with LSB priorities

7. There are clear points of alignment between the Panel's programme and the LSB's own priorities for 2026/27, particularly in relation to:

- consumer outcomes and access to justice.
- transparency and consumer empowerment.
- the opportunities and risks presented by technology and innovation; and
- the use of consumer evidence to inform regulatory decision-making.

8. These shared areas provide a strong basis for constructive dialogue and mutual learning, while respecting the Panel's independence.

Engagement on the work programme

9. The former Interim Chair of the LSB and the Chair of the LSCP agreed that the LSB Executive would see the Panel's draft work programme in advance of the Board meeting, to allow sufficient time for informal questions, comments and clarification.

10. The LSB Executive raised three substantive issues:
    Clarity on regulatory tools and powers: The programme referred to the LSB having a "broad armoury of tools" and suggestions that that it should rely less on policy statements. We clarified that under the Legal Services Act 2007, our main levers for policy change are policy statements and statutory guidance, with rule-making powers only being available in specified areas (for example, complaints and separation of function). While reaffirming our commitment to using the full range of powers available, we asked the Panel to be clearer about which specific tools or powers it considers are not being fully used.
    Legal Expenses Insurance: We welcomed the inclusion of legal expenses insurance (LEI) as a timely focus and suggested that any new research should go beyond restating existing evidence and instead inform practical policy options, trade-offs and routes to change, including consumer responses to potential solutions. The Panel's intention to build on previous LSB research was welcomed, alongside an offer to work together where appropriate.
    Voluntary standards and emerging technology: The LSCP work programme argues against voluntary approaches to regulation on the grounds

that the sector lacks the maturity, consistent consumer focus and safeguards needed to protect consumers effectively, particularly in relation to AI and emerging technologies. It therefore advocates ‘proportionate, mandatory safeguards’. The LSB clarified that voluntary standards are being explored rather than adopted as a firm policy position, and noted that much of the growth in AI-powered services offering direct legal information to consumers is occurring in the unregulated space (for example, ChatGPT or Contend Legal), where its powers are limited, primarily to section 163 of the Legal Services Act 2007[1].

11. The Panel welcomed the LSB’s input and clarified that references to a “broad armoury of tools” were intended to highlight concerns about the effectiveness and evaluation of existing approaches, rather than to suggest the LSB is acting outside its statutory remit. It acknowledged the LSB’s clarification on its powers and is in discussions with the legal team on a teach in for its Panel Members on the Act.

12. On LEI, the Panel welcomed the LSB’s comments and agreed that any future work should be action-focused and build on existing evidence. On voluntary standards, the Panel recognised the limits of the LSB’s powers under section 163 but expressed concern that the LSB ought to start from the position of what could be effective for consumers rather than its statutory constraints.

Possible questions for the Panel Chair

13. In endorsing the work programme, the Board may wish to explore with the Panel Chair how the Panel’s priorities and evidence for 2026/27 connect to the LSB’s longer-term strategic direction, including the emerging risks and opportunities facing consumers of legal services. In particular, the Board may wish to ask:

- **Strategic outlook:** Drawing on the 2026/27 work programme, and as the LSB develops its three-year plan to 2030, what **new or emerging trends in consumer behaviour** does the Panel Chair see in 2026/27 and beyond that could positively or negatively affect how consumers access and use legal services?
- **Impact and influence:** How does the Panel expect its research and insight to influence regulatory behaviour and decision-making in practice, particularly where change may be incremental or contested?
- **Innovation and consumer risk:** What does the Panel see as the most significant consumer risks for 26/7, and where should regulatory attention be focused to mitigate these?
- **Impact and prioritisation:** How has the Panel prioritised its work to maximise impact for consumers, particularly given finite resources and a wide-ranging programme?

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[1] Section 163 of the Legal Services Act 2007 allows the LSB to enter voluntary arrangements with any person (including unregulated providers) for the purpose of improving standards of service and promoting best practice in the carrying on of legal activities. These arrangements may include the LSB giving advice on best regulatory practice and on the content of codes of practice or other voluntary arrangements, but they are non-binding and cannot be enforced. The provision is explicitly about assistance and encouragement, not the imposition of requirements or standards.

Risks and mitigations	
Financial:	N/A
Legal:	N/A
Communications and engagement:	N/A
Equality and diversity:	N/A
Resource:	N/A

Annex

Annex A – Legal Services Work Programme 2026/27.

Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FoI)		
Para ref	**FoI exemption and summary**	**Expires**
Annex A	Section 22 – information intended for future publication	N/A