



Changing our requirements on first-tier complaints Responses to our consultation

October 2025

These respondents, listed in the order in which they responded to the consultation, asked us to name them and publish their responses. The text of their responses follows the list of names.

Arthur Michael Robinson
Trudy-Jane Rogers
David Sedgwick
Jonathan Clarke
Andrew Lund
Doncaster and District Law Society
James Perry
Weightmans LLP
Minster Law Solicitors
Liverpool Law Society
Carpenters Limited
Birmingham Law Society
Oldham Law Association
Surrey Law Society
Ambrish Limbachia
Morecrofts LLP
Association of Consumer Support Organisations
Devon & Somerset Law Society
Forum of Insurance Lawyers
Legal Ombudsman
Legal Services Consumer Panel
London Solicitors Litigation Association
Manchester Law Society
The Law Society of England and Wales
Leicestershire Law Society

Changing our requirements on first-tier complaints consultation

Response ID:4 Data

2. About you

1.

First name(s)

Arthur Michael

2.

Last name

Robinson

6.

I am responding..

in a personal capacity

7.

In what personal capacity?

Solicitor

8.

Please enter the name of your firm/employer

Emmersons Solicitors Limited

9.

Please specify if you are

10.

How should we publish your response?

Please select an option below.

Publish the response with my/our name

3. Consultation questions

11.

1a) Do you agree with our proposal to expand 8.3 of our Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs, RFLs and RSLs, which will also apply to firms under section 7.1 (c) of our Code of Conduct for Firms, to include that complaints information must be provided to clients on conclusion of the legal matter?

No

I can't think of any other profession or trade which encourages complaints. If someone has a genuine complaint they will complain.

12.

1b) Do you agree with our proposal to expand 8.3 of our Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs, RFLs and RSLs, which will

also apply to firms under section 7.1 (c) of our Code of Conduct for Firms, to include that complaints information must be provided to clients upon request?

Yes

13.

1c) Do you agree with our proposal to expand 8.3 of our Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs, RFLs and RSLs, which will also apply to firms under section 7.1 (c) of our Code of Conduct for Firms, to include that complaints information must be provided to clients if a complaint is made during a matter?

Yes

and it should also include guidance as to whether the firm should persist with the retainer. In other words if someone wishes to complain it should be made clear that the firm should cease acting.

14.

1d) Please add any comments that you have on when complaints information must be provided to clients.

At the start

And via a link on the website

The right to complain shouldn't be promoted

4. Consultation questions

15.

2a) Do you agree with our proposal to expand Rule 2 of our Transparency Rules to state that complaints information published under this rule must be clear and accessible and in a prominent place on a firms' website?

No

16.

2b) Please explain the reasons for your answer.

Anyone with a genuine complaint will complain

Promoting a complaint process may lead to an increase in fishing expeditions by discount hunters.

17.

2c) What are your views on us mirroring the wording we have in our guidance on transparency in price and service about prominence?

No

18.

2d) What are your views on us including more information in our guidance on prominence - such as including reference to it not requiring multiple clicks to access or that it should be linked from a homepage?

No

19.

2e) What are your views on us including more information in our guidance on how firms or freelance solicitors that do not have a website should provide complaints information? Please give reasons for your answer and tell us what would be helpful to include.

It should be set out in client care letter with all the other stuff.

5. Consultation questions

20.

3) What are your views on us including the LSB's definition of a complaint as a defined term in our Standards and Regulations Glossary?

21.

4a) What are your views on us producing new guidance to help those we regulate meet our requirements on complaints handling? Please give reasons for your answer.

The guidance should make clear what poor service looks like.

22.

4b) What are your views on us combining our new guidance with our existing guidance on publishing complaints procedures? Please give reasons for your answer.

New guidelines are required rather than a messy mish mash

23.

4c) Do you have any suggestions for areas we should include in guidance we develop to help solicitors and firms understand our requirements and how to meet our Standards and Regulations in relation to complaints? If so, please give details.

Detailed examples that are as exhaustive as can be as to poor service.

For example is 40 working days to respond to an email acceptable for a Solicitor or over a year to acknowledge receipt of a complaint?

6. Consultation questions

24.

5a) What are your views on us collecting and publishing timeliness data at firm level?

Crack on.

It would help if CLC gathered and published the same data for Licensed Conveyancers so then we could all see what poor service in conveyancing looks like

25.

5b) What contextual information would be required to make the information useful to consumers and be fair to solicitors and firms?

Quality of work and efficiency of the transaction is more important than anything else.

The problem is that especially with conveyancing that it can only move as fast as the slowest transaction in the chain. Some clients expect us to chase up and down the chain. So defining roles clearly would help.

26.

5c) What information about complaints would be most helpful to consumers and why?

A complaint should be added against poor performance information so that the client knows what poor service actually looks like.

7. Consultation questions

27.

6) Do you agree that introducing a model complaints resolution procedure (MCRP) for the sector would be helpful?

Neutral

Please give reasons for your answer, including anything you think should be taken account of in the development of an MCRP?:

28.

7) Do you have any comments on the regulatory impact of our proposals on first-tier complaints?

You're creating more bureaucracy.

29.

8) Do you have any further comments you would like to share with us when reviewing our requirements and producing guidance on first-tier complaints?

Give clear detailed sector by sector guidance on poor service and how to deal with a complaint when poor service is obvious.

30.

9) Do you have any comments on our draft equalities impact assessment?

No

Changing our requirements on first-tier complaints consultation

Response ID:9 Data

2. About you

1.

First name(s)

Trudy-Jane

2.

Last name

Rogers

6.

I am responding..

in a personal capacity

7.

In what personal capacity?

Solicitor

8.

Please enter the name of your firm/employer

Rogers Legal Limited

9.

Please specify if you are

10.

How should we publish your response?

Please select an option below.

Publish the response with my/our name

3. Consultation questions

11.

1a) Do you agree with our proposal to expand 8.3 of our Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs, RFLs and RSLs, which will also apply to firms under section 7.1 (c) of our Code of Conduct for Firms, to include that complaints information must be provided to clients on conclusion of the legal matter?

No. Clients are made aware of our complaints procedure at the start of a matter. Throughout a matter the individual solicitor having conduct of the file will know if there is unease/complaint issue brewing and as such (as adult officers of the Court) deal with the file in a professional manner. A constant reminder of how to complain puts the issue in the mind of the clients. Will writers, and probate 'factories' are not under this constant scrutiny, we are already unfairly prejudiced with consumers of out services.

12.

1b) Do you agree with our proposal to expand 8.3 of our Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs, RFLs and RSLs, which will also apply to firms under section 7.1 (c) of our Code of Conduct for Firms, to include that complaints information must be provided to clients upon request?

No. Complaint information does not necessarily give an indication of the service/attitude of the firm, but it does give an indication as to their clients and how more likely they are to make a complaint. This encourages firm's to take on 'easy' work with little risk of contentious/ complex issues. Those with little to lose because they are not directly paying or they are only paying part of the costs are more likely to complain.

13.

1c) Do you agree with our proposal to expand 8.3 of our Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs, RFLs and RSLs, which will also apply to firms under section 7.1 (c) of our Code of Conduct for Firms, to include that complaints information must be provided to clients if a complaint is made during a matter?

Yes. This is common sense that a client has access to this information. However, in probate/trust/joint property matters a complaint by one party would prevent the firm from continuing in their instructions because they would be conflicted.

14.

1d) Please add any comments that you have on when complaints information must be provided to clients.

All clients should be informed at the start of a matter and if a complaint arises during a matter. However, providing further information at the conclusion of a file simply adds to our administrative burden further, gives the perception that this is something the client 'should think about'. We are one of the most heavily regulated services available to clients; we are officers of the Court and by our very definition we are professional and upstanding individuals. We are being strangled by the red tape of the SRA compared to companies offering almost the same services that operate outside of the SRA regime. It is no wonder that many private client solicitors have chosen to leave the profession and simply become Will writers/probate practitioners.

4. Consultation questions

15.

2a) Do you agree with our proposal to expand Rule 2 of our Transparency Rules to state that complaints information published under this rule must be clear and accessible and in a prominent place on a firms' website?

No.

16.

2b) Please explain the reasons for your answer.

Why are we always focusing on the negative connotations of our services. No other profession seeks to constantly erode public confidence by hi-lighting issues of complaint/misunderstanding/a client simply not receiving the result that they want as opposed to the result that the law prescribes. The number of complaints compared to the number of successful complaints upheld by the Law Ombudsman would be a clearer indication of whether the complaints were justified.

17.

2c) What are your views on us mirroring the wording we have in our guidance on transparency in price and service about prominence?

It is abhorrent. How are we expected to compete in the market of legal services if we are constantly fettered by the choking regulation of the SRA? The price transparency has done little to encourage/support our profession. 'Factory' conveyancers/probate practitioners still erode our high standards but without the need to explain themselves.

18.

2d) What are your views on us including more information in our guidance on prominence - such as including reference to

it not requiring multiple clicks to access or that it should be linked from a homepage?

As above. The SRA seems obsessed with vilifying our profession and not at all giving any support.

19.

2e) What are your views on us including more information in our guidance on how firms or freelance solicitors that do not have a website should provide complaints information? Please give reasons for your answer and tell us what would be helpful to include.

We are creating a two-tier system within the profession.

5. Consultation questions

20.

3) What are your views on us including the LSB's definition of a complaint as a defined term in our Standards and Regulations Glossary?

Too 'wide' in its definition and not really very helpful.

21.

4a) What are your views on us producing new guidance to help those we regulate meet our requirements on complaints handling? Please give reasons for your answer.

Having been forced to follow the guidance from the SRA on pricing, my clients are worse off because my previous guidance was more detailed, more helpful and easier to understand. As lawyers you would expect us to be capable of defining situations of dispute/complaint.

22.

4b) What are your views on us combining our new guidance with our existing guidance on publishing complaints procedures? Please give reasons for your answer.

Keep matters as they are. We are already under various obligations to our clients, how is this to the benefit of the clients?

23.

4c) Do you have any suggestions for areas we should include in guidance we develop to help solicitors and firms understand our requirements and how to meet our Standards and Regulations in relation to complaints? If so, please give details.

Make clear the difference between a genuine service complaint and a 'whinge' about the client not obtaining what they want - there is a key difference which seems to be blurring in our obsessive self-deprecation of ourselves.

6. Consultation questions

24.

5a) What are your views on us collecting and publishing timeliness data at firm level?

More unpaid administration that will put a strain on firms to balance their non-profit making time and their fee-earning time.

25.

5b) What contextual information would be required to make the information useful to consumers and be fair to solicitors and firms?

Details (as far as possible) of the service complaint issues.

26.

5c) What information about complaints would be most helpful to consumers and why?

Explain the remedy provided to the complaint, but this may just encourage complaints in a bid to reduce costs. Explain the 'success rate' of complaints to deter time-wasters, a complainant does not need to be frustrated even further if they can be told in advance the likelihood of success and the reasons for the success/failure of the complaint.

7. Consultation questions

27.

6) Do you agree that introducing a model complaints resolution procedure (MCRP) for the sector would be helpful?

Strongly disagree

Please give reasons for your answer, including anything you think should be taken account of in the development of an MCRP?: We are unable to compete against many companies outside of the SRA reach, why are we trying to fault our SRA members even further?

28.

7) Do you have any comments on the regulatory impact of our proposals on first-tier complaints?

I believe it will encourage frivolous complaints rather than give a clear path of how to remedy an issue.

29.

8) Do you have any further comments you would like to share with us when reviewing our requirements and producing guidance on first-tier complaints?

As above.

30.

9) Do you have any comments on our draft equalities impact assessment?

More administration and less fee-earning time. Surely this will increase the number of complaints, especially if we need to cover the costs of such drains on our time.

Changing our requirements on first-tier complaints consultation

Response ID:22 Data

2. About you

1.

First name(s)

David

2.

Last name

Sedgwick

6.

I am responding..

in a personal capacity

7.

In what personal capacity?

Solicitor

8.

Please enter the name of your firm/employer

SCMLaw

9.

Please specify if you are

10.

How should we publish your response?

Please select an option below.

Publish the response with my/our name

3. Consultation questions

11.

1a) Do you agree with our proposal to expand 8.3 of our Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs, RFLs and RSLs, which will also apply to firms under section 7.1 (c) of our Code of Conduct for Firms, to include that complaints information must be provided to clients on conclusion of the legal matter?

No. The SRA again seeks to extend its influence and increase the workload and from that its power over solicitors. The suggestion is a nonsense. It is predicated on the absurd notion that e should be telling people to complain about us. If a person does not get the result they feel they should then they would always blame their solicitor. Complaints are normally made by people who seek to blame their solicitor for the result. The vast majority of complaints are without merit and for your own reasons you wish to increase the burden of running a firm with more of your nonsense. I have been a solicitor for more than 40 years and the biggest drain on my time is dealing with the increasing amount of rubbish your organisation spouts. You are a

burden on the profession and should be abolished.

12.

1b) Do you agree with our proposal to expand 8.3 of our Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs, RFLs and RSLs, which will also apply to firms under section 7.1 (c) of our Code of Conduct for Firms, to include that complaints information must be provided to clients upon request?

No. It is not any business of the SRA to force the publication of private matters

13.

1c) Do you agree with our proposal to expand 8.3 of our Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs, RFLs and RSLs, which will also apply to firms under section 7.1 (c) of our Code of Conduct for Firms, to include that complaints information must be provided to clients if a complaint is made during a matter?

No this is of no concern to the individual. The complaints policy should be provided on request but nothing more.

14.

1d) Please add any comments that you have on when complaints information must be provided to clients.

Any formal finding should be on the SRA website

4. Consultation questions

15.

2a) Do you agree with our proposal to expand Rule 2 of our Transparency Rules to state that complaints information published under this rule must be clear and accessible and in a prominent place on a firms' website?

No. The complaints policy should be provided on request. It is absurd to be begging people to complain. It is not reasonable to provide this information on the website

16.

2b) Please explain the reasons for your answer.

You wish to advertise the complaints procedure. You are inviting people to complain. Clearly if there is a good reason for the complaint then it should be made to the firm. Information allowing this to happen should be given but only if required. The purpose behind this is clear and has been outlined by the management of your organisation in that they wish to increase their power and therefore their income at the expense of the profession. Your organisation is widely loathed by the profession as a consequence of its behaviour

17.

2c) What are your views on us mirroring the wording we have in our guidance on transparency in price and service about prominence?

No. It is a nonsense

18.

2d) What are your views on us including more information in our guidance on prominence - such as including reference to it not requiring multiple clicks to access or that it should be linked from a homepage?

As above

19.

2e) What are your views on us including more information in our guidance on how firms or freelance solicitors that do not have a website should provide complaints information? Please give reasons for your answer and tell us what would be helpful to include.

We are forced to provide too much information at the moment. We are lawyers but you wish us to waste time and money on your nonsense

5. Consultation questions

20.

3) What are your views on us including the LSB's definition of a complaint as a defined term in our Standards and Regulations Glossary?

Nonsense

21.

4a) What are your views on us producing new guidance to help those we regulate meet our requirements on complaints handling? Please give reasons for your answer.

Waste of time

22.

4b) What are your views on us combining our new guidance with our existing guidance on publishing complaints procedures? Please give reasons for your answer.

Waste of time. The sole purpose of this nonsense is to increase your footprint in lawyers lives which allows your expansion and increased wage bill. You are clearly not there to help solicitors or in any way support us. You are a disgrace

23.

4c) Do you have any suggestions for areas we should include in guidance we develop to help solicitors and firms understand our requirements and how to meet our Standards and Regulations in relation to complaints? If so, please give details.

I believe that regulation should be cut back. There is too much and time is wasted on this rubbish. Every utterance from you drips with sanctimony and your treatment of individual solicitors is poor. Funnily when you mess things up all we hear is a litany of pathetic explanations. You should refer yourself to the SRA and see how you fare

6. Consultation questions

24.

5a) What are your views on us collecting and publishing timeliness data at firm level?

No. I want as little to do with you as possible. You are involving yourselves in things you should not

25.

5b) What contextual information would be required to make the information useful to consumers and be fair to solicitors and firms?

Why would we waste our time gathering this nonsense

26.

5c) What information about complaints would be most helpful to consumers and why?

The only thing that should be provided is guidance as to the complaints procedure

7. Consultation questions

27.

6) Do you agree that introducing a model complaints resolution procedure (MCRP) for the sector would be helpful?

Strongly disagree

Please give reasons for your answer, including anything you think should be taken account of in the development of an MCRP?: You are witnessing resources on nonsense

28.

7) Do you have any comments on the regulatory impact of our proposals on first-tier complaints?

You need to concentrate on your core role rather than constantly trying to expand

29.

8) Do you have any further comments you would like to share with us when reviewing our requirements and producing guidance on first-tier complaints?

No. It is a waste of time

30.

9) Do you have any comments on our draft equalities impact assessment?

Waste of time.

Changing our requirements on first-tier complaints consultation

Response ID:51 Data

2. About you

1.

First name(s)

Jonathan

2.

Last name

Clarke

6.

I am responding..

in a personal capacity

7.

In what personal capacity?

Solicitor

8.

Please enter the name of your firm/employer

Attwaters Solicitors LLP

9.

Please specify if you are

10.

How should we publish your response?

Please select an option below.

Publish the response with my/our name

3. Consultation questions

11.

1a) Do you agree with our proposal to expand 8.3 of our Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs, RFLs and RSLs, which will also apply to firms under section 7.1 (c) of our Code of Conduct for Firms, to include that complaints information must be provided to clients on conclusion of the legal matter?

No

12.

1b) Do you agree with our proposal to expand 8.3 of our Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs, RFLs and RSLs, which will also apply to firms under section 7.1 (c) of our Code of Conduct for Firms, to include that complaints information must be provided to clients upon request?

We would naturally provide this if requested

13.

1c) Do you agree with our proposal to expand 8.3 of our Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs, RFLs and RSLs, which will also apply to firms under section 7.1 (c) of our Code of Conduct for Firms, to include that complaints information must be provided to clients if a complaint is made during a matter?

We do already

14.

1d) Please add any comments that you have on when complaints information must be provided to clients.

When they make a complaint

4. Consultation questions

15.

2a) Do you agree with our proposal to expand Rule 2 of our Transparency Rules to state that complaints information published under this rule must be clear and accessible and in a prominent place on a firms' website?

We need to decide what information we put on our website which currently includes our complaints procedure

16.

2b) Please explain the reasons for your answer.

Self evident

17.

2c) What are your views on us mirroring the wording we have in our guidance on transparency in price and service about prominence?

unnecessary

18.

2d) What are your views on us including more information in our guidance on prominence - such as including reference to it not requiring multiple clicks to access or that it should be linked from a homepage?

unnecessary

19.

2e) What are your views on us including more information in our guidance on how firms or freelance solicitors that do not have a website should provide complaints information? Please give reasons for your answer and tell us what would be helpful to include.

unnecessary

5. Consultation questions

20.

3) What are your views on us including the LSB's definition of a complaint as a defined term in our Standards and Regulations Glossary?

I do not understand how this would help a client

21.

4a) What are your views on us producing new guidance to help those we regulate meet our requirements on complaints handling? Please give reasons for your answer.

unnecessary

22.

4b) What are your views on us combining our new guidance with our existing guidance on publishing complaints procedures? Please give reasons for your answer.

unnecessary

23.

4c) Do you have any suggestions for areas we should include in guidance we develop to help solicitors and firms understand our requirements and how to meet our Standards and Regulations in relation to complaints? If so, please give details.

Solicitors do not need any such guidance

6. Consultation questions

24.

5a) What are your views on us collecting and publishing timeliness data at firm level?

It would be too general to be of value and may be misleading

25.

5b) What contextual information would be required to make the information useful to consumers and be fair to solicitors and firms?

Much more than would make the exercise proportionate

26.

5c) What information about complaints would be most helpful to consumers and why?

A complainant is not likely to be interested any any issue other than their own

7. Consultation questions

27.

6) Do you agree that introducing a model complaints resolution procedure (MCRP) for the sector would be helpful?

Strongly disagree

Please give reasons for your answer, including anything you think should be taken account of in the development of an MCRP?: The existing arrangements are sufficient

28.

7) Do you have any comments on the regulatory impact of our proposals on first-tier complaints?

29.

8) Do you have any further comments you would like to share with us when reviewing our requirements and producing guidance on first-tier complaints?

30.

9) Do you have any comments on our draft equalities impact assessment?

Changing our requirements on first-tier complaints consultation

Response ID:91 Data

2. About you

1.

First name(s)

Andrew

2.

Last name

Lund

6.

I am responding..

in a personal capacity

7.

In what personal capacity?

Solicitor

8.

Please enter the name of your firm/employer

Rees Page

9.

Please specify if you are

10.

How should we publish your response?

Please select an option below.

Publish the response with my/our name

3. Consultation questions

11.

1a) Do you agree with our proposal to expand 8.3 of our Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs, RFLs and RSLs, which will also apply to firms under section 7.1 (c) of our Code of Conduct for Firms, to include that complaints information must be provided to clients on conclusion of the legal matter?

No

12.

1b) Do you agree with our proposal to expand 8.3 of our Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs, RFLs and RSLs, which will also apply to firms under section 7.1 (c) of our Code of Conduct for Firms, to include that complaints information must be provided to clients upon request?

Yes

13.

1c) Do you agree with our proposal to expand 8.3 of our Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs, RFLs and RSLs, which will also apply to firms under section 7.1 (c) of our Code of Conduct for Firms, to include that complaints information must be provided to clients if a complaint is made during a matter?

Yes

14.

1d) Please add any comments that you have on when complaints information must be provided to clients.

4. Consultation questions

15.

2a) Do you agree with our proposal to expand Rule 2 of our Transparency Rules to state that complaints information published under this rule must be clear and accessible and in a prominent place on a firms' website?

Yes

16.

2b) Please explain the reasons for your answer.

Potential Clients will be reassured that the Firm takes complaints seriously. Existing Clients can use the website to check the position if they are considering making a Complaint.

17.

2c) What are your views on us mirroring the wording we have in our guidance on transparency in price and service about prominence?

This is not necessary

18.

2d) What are your views on us including more information in our guidance on prominence - such as including reference to it not requiring multiple clicks to access or that it should be linked from a homepage?

This is overkill.

19.

2e) What are your views on us including more information in our guidance on how firms or freelance solicitors that do not have a website should provide complaints information? Please give reasons for your answer and tell us what would be helpful to include.

I have no view on this topic

5. Consultation questions

20.

3) What are your views on us including the LSB's definition of a complaint as a defined term in our Standards and Regulations Glossary?

I disagree - the definition should be qualified by using the word "material". Otherwise any expression of dissatisfaction no matter how trivial will be categorised as a Complaint. Clients often get exasperated and frustrated and "vent" as we all do.

21.

4a) What are your views on us producing new guidance to help those we regulate meet our requirements on complaints handling? Please give reasons for your answer.

It is unnecessary.

22.

4b) What are your views on us combining our new guidance with our existing guidance on publishing complaints procedures? Please give reasons for your answer.

See 4a

23.

4c) Do you have any suggestions for areas we should include in guidance we develop to help solicitors and firms understand our requirements and how to meet our Standards and Regulations in relation to complaints? If so, please give details.

No

6. Consultation questions

24.

5a) What are your views on us collecting and publishing timeliness data at firm level?

The SRA should focus its resources elsewhere

25.

5b) What contextual information would be required to make the information useful to consumers and be fair to solicitors and firms?

Contextual information would have to be comprehensive. This cannot be realistically achieved.

26.

5c) What information about complaints would be most helpful to consumers and why?

That they have a right to complain

That they have a right to have their Complaint dealt with timeously and fairly

That they have a right of redress outside the Firm if the complaint is not resolved at First Tier

7. Consultation questions

27.

6) Do you agree that introducing a model complaints resolution procedure (MCRP) for the sector would be helpful?

Disagree

Please give reasons for your answer, including anything you think should be taken account of in the development of an MCRP?: A "one size fits all" approach is inappropriate

28.

7) Do you have any comments on the regulatory impact of our proposals on first-tier complaints?

They will increase formality and deprive Firm's / Clients of the opportunity to resolve minor disagreements or misunderstandings outwith the complaints process.

29.

8) Do you have any further comments you would like to share with us when reviewing our requirements and producing guidance on first-tier complaints?

The SRA and the LSB should be focusing their resources /concerns upon the real driver of Client detriment which is the repeated failure of large providers (eg Axion Ince, Metamorph etc etc) - and the causes of those failures - what use was the Complaints process to Clients of those entities?

30.

9) Do you have any comments on our draft equalities impact assessment?

None

Changing our requirements on first-tier complaints consultation

Response ID:110 Data

2. About you

1.

First name(s)

Diane

2.

Last name

Parker

6.

I am responding..

on behalf of an organisation

7.

On behalf of what type of organisation?

Law society

8.

Please enter the name of the society

Doncaster and District

9.

How should we publish your response?

Please select an option below.

Publish the response with my/our name

3. Consultation questions

10.

1a) Do you agree with our proposal to expand 8.3 of our Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs, RFLs and RSLs, which will also apply to firms under section 7.1 (c) of our Code of Conduct for Firms, to include that complaints information must be provided to clients on conclusion of the legal matter?

No, I do not think it necessary and I think it gives the wrong message to clients.

11.

1b) Do you agree with our proposal to expand 8.3 of our Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs, RFLs and RSLs, which will also apply to firms under section 7.1 (c) of our Code of Conduct for Firms, to include that complaints information must be provided to clients upon request?

I had understood that this was already a requirement. Yes, information should be provided on request.

12.

1c) Do you agree with our proposal to expand 8.3 of our Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs, RFLs and RSLs, which will also apply to firms under section 7.1 (c) of our Code of Conduct for Firms, to include that complaints information must be provided to clients if a complaint is made during a matter?

See response to 1 b) above.

13.

1d) Please add any comments that you have on when complaints information must be provided to clients.

It makes sense to provide complaints information at the outset of the matter, when a client requests it or when a client makes a complaint or advises that they wish to make a complaint.

4. Consultation questions

14.

2a) Do you agree with our proposal to expand Rule 2 of our Transparency Rules to state that complaints information published under this rule must be clear and accessible and in a prominent place on a firms' website?

It depends what is meant by "in a prominent place". Google searching suggests that many law firms have a link to "complaints information" on their home pages. This is sufficient.

15.

2b) Please explain the reasons for your answer.

Most firms home page footers (which stay as you navigate through the website) have a link to click for "complaints". This is not replicated in other professional service websites suggesting that solicitors go above and beyond other professions in making it easy and accessible for clients to complain.

16.

2c) What are your views on us mirroring the wording we have in our guidance on transparency in price and service about prominence?

17.

2d) What are your views on us including more information in our guidance on prominence - such as including reference to it not requiring multiple clicks to access or that it should be linked from a homepage?

18.

2e) What are your views on us including more information in our guidance on how firms or freelance solicitors that do not have a website should provide complaints information? Please give reasons for your answer and tell us what would be helpful to include.

The compliance requirements around having a website is often the reason why firms or freelancers don't have one. Smaller firms/sole practitioners/freelance solicitors are already struggling with the weight of compliance. Clients that want to complain will find a way to do so, without needing constant prompting to do so.

5. Consultation questions

19.

3) What are your views on us including the LSB's definition of a complaint as a defined term in our Standards and Regulations Glossary?

A significant change to regulation is the vagueness that was introduced in the wake of ripping up the old code of conduct and replacing it with "outcomes focussed regulation". Solicitors like rules. A clear and unambiguous rule is much better than anything

that might be open to interpretation. Consistency amongst our regulators is a good thing.

20.

4a) What are your views on us producing new guidance to help those we regulate meet our requirements on complaints handling? Please give reasons for your answer.

It depends whether the guidance was approached from a "top down" perspective or "bottom up" perspective. I am sure that there are very good examples of complaints handling taking place in firms that I would like to see the SRA considering and adopting in terms of any guidance issued. The profession perceives the SRA as aloof and arrogant and guidance needs to avoid being seen as more of the same.

21.

4b) What are your views on us combining our new guidance with our existing guidance on publishing complaints procedures? Please give reasons for your answer.

Again, yes. Firms will be using the existing guidance to handle complaints and wholesale change simply makes for more, unremunerated work within firms, the cost of which eventually has to be borne by the clients - the vast majority of whom (over 87% by your statistics) are happy with their solicitor.

22.

4c) Do you have any suggestions for areas we should include in guidance we develop to help solicitors and firms understand our requirements and how to meet our Standards and Regulations in relation to complaints? If so, please give details.

My suggestion is that you consult with COLP's over a variety of different practices, starting with those who have little interaction with the LEO as this suggests that they are managing complaints in house very well.
What do these firms do to satisfy disgruntled clients?

6. Consultation questions

23.

5a) What are your views on us collecting and publishing timeliness data at firm level?

The profession is feeling very overregulated at present. Collecting yet more information is more time spent unproductively. There is an additional cost in that presumably the SRA will need to employ someone to collect, analyse and report on this data. What will it tell us? Firm X is better than Firm Y at handling complaints promptly? Isn't that simply reflected in the number of complaints referred onto the LeO?

24.

5b) What contextual information would be required to make the information useful to consumers and be fair to solicitors and firms?

See responses to the above. I cannot see that collecting this information is at all useful.

25.

5c) What information about complaints would be most helpful to consumers and why?

Some simple FAQs about possible issues of complaint and the process for referring them to the firm in the first instance followed by referral to the LeO.
Clients often struggle to distinguish poor service from professional negligence - where there are very different options open to them.

7. Consultation questions

26.

6) Do you agree that introducing a model complaints resolution procedure (MCRP) for the sector would be helpful?

Agree

Please give reasons for your answer, including anything you think should be taken account of in the development of an MCRP?: Firstly, it would be helpful to refer to it by its full title the first time the question is asked. I have had to come out of the questionnaire and find the documentation to understand what an MCRP is! I do think a model would help firms provide a consistent response to complaints.

27.

7) Do you have any comments on the regulatory impact of our proposals on first-tier complaints?

The concern that I have is whether a model might be too prescriptive. Not every client is the same, and they don't all want the same from a complaint. Similarly, not every complaint can be easily defined. Often a client will have several "niggles" which taken individually amount to very little, but added up, have the effect of eroding the client's confidence in the process. Any procedure needs to be flexible enough to cope with "out of the norm" presentations.

As previously discussed, clients can make complaints that don't readily fit into a model. Litigation that doesn't secure the result that the client was expecting is often not the fault of the solicitor.

Professional negligence accusations are often presented initially as complaints.

28.

8) Do you have any further comments you would like to share with us when reviewing our requirements and producing guidance on first-tier complaints?

Please consult with the profession and COLPs in particular when devising the procedure. Be prepared to provide non-judgemental support and guidance for any complaints that don't readily fit the model and when these are presented be willing to share and learn from the experience.

29.

9) Do you have any comments on our draft equalities impact assessment?

No

Changing our requirements on first-tier complaints consultation

Response ID:124 Data

2. About you

1.

First name(s)

JAMES

2.

Last name

PERRY

6.

I am responding..

in a personal capacity

7.

In what personal capacity?

Solicitor

8.

Please enter the name of your firm/employer

Legal Studio

9.

Please specify if you are

10.

How should we publish your response?

Please select an option below.

Publish the response with my/our name

3. Consultation questions

11.

1a) Do you agree with our proposal to expand 8.3 of our Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs, RFLs and RSLs, which will also apply to firms under section 7.1 (c) of our Code of Conduct for Firms, to include that complaints information must be provided to clients on conclusion of the legal matter?

No. I believe it will invite trouble. Clients know how to complain and if they really want to then they can. They do not need another nudge. I do not see any benefit introducing a further requirement which has the potential to lead to spurious claims. If introduced I would want to know which notification triggered each complaint. I would want data collecting on it because if complaints increase as a result of this proposed reform and less complaints overall are upheld as a result (because there are more spurious to deal with) I would want someone to be able to analyse the data and pinpoint why that is the case.

12.

1b) Do you agree with our proposal to expand 8.3 of our Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs, RFLs and RSLs, which will also apply to firms under section 7.1 (c) of our Code of Conduct for Firms, to include that complaints information must be provided to clients upon request?

Yes, this is standard. Solicitors explain the complaints procedure at the outset (as they are obligated to do) and then if they ask for the information again during the matter you provide it to the client. We are doing this already so it would be no hardship. How do you act in your client's best interests if they request complaints information and you don't give it to them?

13.

1c) Do you agree with our proposal to expand 8.3 of our Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs, RFLs and RSLs, which will also apply to firms under section 7.1 (c) of our Code of Conduct for Firms, to include that complaints information must be provided to clients if a complaint is made during a matter?

Same answer as above. We already do this. If you need to spell it out then so-be-it but it will not come as a shock to any decent Solicitor.

14.

1d) Please add any comments that you have on when complaints information must be provided to clients.

At the outset as part of the onboarding process. This is when it should be mandatory. Upon request and if a complaint is raised are the other two occasions. That is more than enough.

4. Consultation questions

15.

2a) Do you agree with our proposal to expand Rule 2 of our Transparency Rules to state that complaints information published under this rule must be clear and accessible and in a prominent place on a firms' website?

Not entirely.

16.

2b) Please explain the reasons for your answer.

My view is that if it is on the website and a client goes there first without engaging directly with you then you lose the opportunity to chat things through. A lot of niggles can be ironed out very quickly. There is a danger that those positive opportunities are lost. As a middle ground I think the website should have a feature where you provide your email address and it automatically sends out the information at that point, or if you want to download it, you have to provide your email. That way the Solicitor can monitor those requests and someone can immediately get in touch with the client to understand what is wrong.

17.

2c) What are your views on us mirroring the wording we have in our guidance on transparency in price and service about prominence?

See my answer above. I think if we have to set it out like that then we potentially lose opportunities to quickly resolve matters.

18.

2d) What are your views on us including more information in our guidance on prominence - such as including reference to it not requiring multiple clicks to access or that it should be linked from a homepage?

Unnecessary overkill. If you were to do an audit of websites that already direct you to their complaints process I suspect most are prominent. We are professionals and should be treated as such.

19.

2e) What are your views on us including more information in our guidance on how firms or freelance solicitors that do not

have a website should provide complaints information? Please give reasons for your answer and tell us what would be helpful to include.

That would seem sensible but again, as long as it is available at the start and on request I do not see the issue.

5. Consultation questions

20.

3) What are your views on us including the LSB's definition of a complaint as a defined term in our Standards and Regulations Glossary?

"inconvenience or other detriment" are woefully wide. If it is not actionable then it should be treated as something very minor. A client having to catch a bus to come into the office to speak to their Solicitor might be an "inconvenience" or a financial "detriment". Where is the line here?

21.

4a) What are your views on us producing new guidance to help those we regulate meet our requirements on complaints handling? Please give reasons for your answer.

It all depends on what it looks like. Something that improves on any current guidance would of course be welcomed. This is a very difficult question to answer.

22.

4b) What are your views on us combining our new guidance with our existing guidance on publishing complaints procedures? Please give reasons for your answer.

Again, if the new guidance dovetails with the old then fine, but it all depends doesn't it.

23.

4c) Do you have any suggestions for areas we should include in guidance we develop to help solicitors and firms understand our requirements and how to meet our Standards and Regulations in relation to complaints? If so, please give details.

The use of AI requires guidance. Solicitors need to be under an obligation to confirm to clients when it is being used. Clients should be given a choice as to whether they want their lawyer to use it.

6. Consultation questions

24.

5a) What are your views on us collecting and publishing timeliness data at firm level?

Terrible idea. Because it depends on so many factors that are out of a Solicitor's control it would be unfair to publish such data. It feels almost discriminatory and it will invite complaints. Whether or not a child attends school depends on his health. It is just unfortunate if that child is ever ill but he is not punished for circumstances he cannot control. Similarly, Solicitors should not be punished for their timeliness which at times might be fantastic because all the variables are working well and at other times it might not be as good. If you impose this sort of metric on Solicitors people will leave the profession. We cannot be this binary about everything. If we have not been doing this kind of thing for 200 years there is likely to be a good reason why.

25.

5b) What contextual information would be required to make the information useful to consumers and be fair to solicitors and firms?

There is no information concerning timeliness which would be of any value to consumers other than to point a finger of blame at Solicitors and firms.

26.

5c) What information about complaints would be most helpful to consumers and why?

Previous regulatory misconduct concerning dishonesty when a Solicitor was working for a particular firm because it gives an insight into that firm's judge of character, which feeds into how well they might actually be at delivering legal services. If they cannot pick an honest workforce then culturally there could be something wrong. I would not do it though if only 1 person had been found to be guilty of such misconduct. I would set it by the number of people over a particular timeframe. Perhaps if it is 2 or more separate incidents of dishonesty within a 2 year period.

7. Consultation questions

27.

6) Do you agree that introducing a model complaints resolution procedure (MCRP) for the sector would be helpful?

Neutral

Please give reasons for your answer, including anything you think should be taken account of in the development of an MCRP?: If members help to draft something then it could be great and work well. If only a small group try to draft it, who do not have experience at the coalface, then I would be concerned that it could prove unworkable and even more burdensome.

28.

7) Do you have any comments on the regulatory impact of our proposals on first-tier complaints?

If you introduce an obligation to tell clients about complaints when a job has finished then complaints will soar, time spent on them will increase, and our fees will have to increase to account for lost time.

29.

8) Do you have any further comments you would like to share with us when reviewing our requirements and producing guidance on first-tier complaints?

I believe the majority of firms deal with complaints correctly. Collectively we want our profession to lead the way but we cannot, because of a minority of offenders, continue to strangle members in unnecessary red tape. Whatever you attempt to do that minority will never reduce in its size. If you had wanted better control we should never have moved away from the Partnership model. As with any sector, that kind of minority will exist no matter what lengths you may go to, but what you must avoid is making life even harder for the hard working, client care focussed majority.

30.

9) Do you have any comments on our draft equalities impact assessment?

No.

Changing our requirements on first-tier complaints consultation

Response ID:125 Data

2. About you

1.

First name(s)

Michelle

2.

Last name

Garlick

6.

I am responding..

on behalf of an organisation

7.

On behalf of what type of organisation?

Law firm or other legal services provider

8.

Please enter your organisation's SRA ID (if applicable)

463329

9.

Please enter your organisation's name

Weightmans LLP

10.

How should we publish your response?

Please select an option below.

Publish the response with my/our name

3. Consultation questions

11.

1a) Do you agree with our proposal to expand 8.3 of our Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs, RFLs and RSLs, which will also apply to firms under section 7.1 (c) of our Code of Conduct for Firms, to include that complaints information must be provided to clients on conclusion of the legal matter?

Weightmans is a top 45 full service national law firm with international reach and with c1600 partners and employees. Our clients include large public bodies and corporates as well as family -owned businesses and individual consumers. We pride ourselves on our approach to client care and carry out extensive client engagement surveys in relation not only to service as a whole following completion of matters but also around the client's onboarding experience. Any expressions of dissatisfaction/negative feedback are followed up by the client relationship partner with lessons learned from it.

Our complaints handling is signposted clearly as a link at the footer of the home page of our website. Our complaints policy is downloadable from that complaints page.

We share the SRA's desire for consumers to be happy with the service they receive from us.

The concern however is that the profession is being expected to go way beyond what other professionals are being asked to do and that we often end up having to entertain the disaffected even where they may not actually be the client. There is already a huge administrative and compliance burden involving significant time and cost to businesses and given the LCSPs tracker Survey findings found satisfaction levels at its highest ever at 87% in 2024, we ask the SRA and LSB to bear this in mind when considering imposing further burdens on firms where it is unnecessary and disproportionate to the risks.

We also think it would have been helpful to have issued the full results of the SRA's thematic review of how firms identify, manage and learn from complaints carried out in Jan-March 2025 before launching this consultation, thereby enabling the profession to consider as much available data as possible.

Our response to the specific questions are set out below:

As the SRA has noted in the consultation, 96% of those it surveyed already meet the SRA's requirements and 68% are publishing the information on their websites. There is already a high level of compliance, ourselves included. We are well aware that clients will often not even read the client care letter so it is perhaps not surprising that they will have replied to the SRA/LeO joint research to the effect that they "did not always recall being told about the complaints procedure at the start of their legal matter". But that is, of course, not the firm's fault and we are troubled about the extent to which firms are being expected to pander to/spoonfeed clients at the firm's expense.

We do not object as such to the idea of reminding clients of their right to complain on conclusion of their legal matter but we question whether it is necessary to mandate this in the Code? Has the SRA given any thought to carrying out research on the needs of clients in different size firms and the nature of the client base, work types etc in each? To mandate reminders for certain clients and work may be the right thing to do whereas in others, completely inappropriate particularly in circumstances where the clients would not fall within the Legal Ombudsman's remit.

We also question how the SRA defines "conclusion of the matter"— delivery of final bill? File closure? No further work being carried out?

We are concerned that if the right to complain is included with the final bill, for example, it will merely incentivise complainants to raise a grievance to secure a reduction in their bill without any justification or indication that they had had any concerns during the course of the matter.

12.

1b) Do you agree with our proposal to expand 8.3 of our Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs, RFLs and RSLs, which will also apply to firms under section 7.1 (c) of our Code of Conduct for Firms, to include that complaints information must be provided to clients upon request?

We already do so and subject to our comments above on the mandatory nature of the proposals, we do not object in principle.

13.

1c) Do you agree with our proposal to expand 8.3 of our Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs, RFLs and RSLs, which will also apply to firms under section 7.1 (c) of our Code of Conduct for Firms, to include that complaints information must be provided to clients if a complaint is made during a matter?

Again, we will already do this and so do not object to this proposal.

14.

1d) Please add any comments that you have on when complaints information must be provided to clients.

We are concerned that the more times firms are expected to inform clients of their right to complain and how to do so will simply invite more of it without any justification, on the basis that they may as well have a go at trimming something off the bill. The time involved in fending off bill reduction demands and spending time and cost in pushing back against it is a concern.

These proposals also only address the position in relation to clients – in many instances, complainants are non-client consumers such as beneficiaries or other third parties who complain and take up a huge amount of time and cost to our business in dealing with them. We think the SRA and LeO should give further thought to the current scope and remit of the Legal Ombudsman –

why, for example should beneficiaries be able to complain against solicitors where their grievance should be against the executors?

4. Consultation questions

15.

2a) Do you agree with our proposal to expand Rule 2 of our Transparency Rules to state that complaints information published under this rule must be clear and accessible and in a prominent place on a firms' website?

We agree that the information on a firm's website should be clear and accessible. It is unclear what the SRA has in mind when stating that it must also be in a prominent place on the website – many websites will have a search box on the home page. A client ought to easily be able to insert "complaint" in that search box and will be taken to the relevant page. Many will include reference on the homepage (albeit at the bottom of it alongside other regulatory notice links) and again, we see no issue with this and should be accepted as being prominent. Guidance will be required as to what the SRA considers to be prominent and the SRA is asked to not be overly prescriptive so as to allow flexibility given the very different and multiple ways in which firms of different size, practice areas etc present their services on their websites.

16.

2b) Please explain the reasons for your answer.

See above

17.

2c) What are your views on us mirroring the wording we have in our guidance on transparency in price and service about prominence?

It makes sense to mirror wording used already for consistency reasons.

18.

2d) What are your views on us including more information in our guidance on prominence - such as including reference to it not requiring multiple clicks to access or that it should be linked from a homepage?

We would caution against imposing a limit on the number of clicks for example – provided the links are clear, the number of clicks should not be determinative of prominence or otherwise.

19.

2e) What are your views on us including more information in our guidance on how firms or freelance solicitors that do not have a website should provide complaints information? Please give reasons for your answer and tell us what would be helpful to include.

No comment

5. Consultation questions

20.

3) What are your views on us including the LSB's definition of a complaint as a defined term in our Standards and Regulations Glossary?

We have no objection to including the LSB definition of complaint namely "an oral or written expression of dissatisfaction, which alleges that the complainant has suffered (or might suffer) financial loss, distress, inconvenience, or other detriment" in the Glossary.

21.

4a) What are your views on us producing new guidance to help those we regulate meet our requirements on complaints

handling? Please give reasons for your answer.

We agree that guidance would be welcome covering the areas identified in the consultation including identifying complaints, information to give and when, communications, accessibility, vulnerable clients and resolving complaints.

22.

4b) What are your views on us combining our new guidance with our existing guidance on publishing complaints procedures? Please give reasons for your answer.

No objections

23.

4c) Do you have any suggestions for areas we should include in guidance we develop to help solicitors and firms understand our requirements and how to meet our Standards and Regulations in relation to complaints? If so, please give details.

Nothing to add to the above

6. Consultation questions

24.

5a) What are your views on us collecting and publishing timeliness data at firm level?

Whilst yet another data set that firms would need to implement, we think it would be possible to provide the data as to the average length of time taken to deal with complaints at first tier. However, we caution against its publication at firm level – this is not because of the need for secrecy but rather the concern around contextualisation – it might only take one or two complaints to completely distort the picture.

25.

5b) What contextual information would be required to make the information useful to consumers and be fair to solicitors and firms?

We share the SRA's concerns raised in the 2017 consultation about contextualisation and agree that it is essential that information is presented in a clear and meaningful way but is also presented fairly. If, as we expect, there is a danger of the data at firm level being presented without context, thereby risking it being misleading, then it is better that the data is not published at all.

It would have helped with the consultation for the SRA to have set out some of the things the LCSP identified in its advice about the benefits of contextualisation as well as the principles/guidance on attempting to contextualise. If, as the LCSP accepts, contextualisation will "not be perfect from the start", it would be wrong to publish this information during the early stages where learning lessons. Firms should not have to risk being "named and shamed" in circumstances where neither the profession or its regulator is comfortable with the contextualisation principles.

We also remind the SRA of the high level of satisfaction of consumers identified at the start of this consultation – the reference in the "Publishing the data" section implies there is an issue/need to "raise standards in our regulated community" when in fact, the data suggests otherwise.

26.

5c) What information about complaints would be most helpful to consumers and why?

7. Consultation questions

27.

6) Do you agree that introducing a model complaints resolution procedure (MCRP) for the sector would be helpful?

Neutral

Please give reasons for your answer, including anything you think should be taken account of in the development of an MCRP?: A model complaints resolution procedure (MCRP) template would be helpful for many firms but we do not see it as essential nor should it be mandatory. There are so many nuances to complaint handling given the different types of complainant, personalities and the nature of the complaint that firms should not feel tied to sticking rigidly to a template.

28.

7) Do you have any comments on the regulatory impact of our proposals on first-tier complaints?

As stated above, we are concerned at the additional burdens these proposals may impose with the administrative time and cost to business which flows from them. There will be many firms whose client base falls squarely within the leO's remit and where clear and transparent processes are essential whereas larger firms may often have clients who do not fall into the Legal ombudsman's remit and where a firm's complaints handling process is inevitably driven by the fear of a significant client ceasing to instruct.

There is also the potential to damage the profession's reputation by the publication of non-contextualised/misleading data in circumstances where a firm is generally unable to respond to any negative press arising from complaints due to client confidentiality.

29.

8) Do you have any further comments you would like to share with us when reviewing our requirements and producing guidance on first-tier complaints?

Nothing else to add

30.

9) Do you have any comments on our draft equalities impact assessment?

Nothing further to add

Changing our requirements on first-tier complaints consultation

Response ID:131 Data

2. About you

1.

First name(s)

Richard

2.

Last name

Cleary

6.

I am responding..

on behalf of an organisation

7.

On behalf of what type of organisation?

Law firm or other legal services provider

8.

Please enter your organisation's SRA ID (if applicable)

383018

9.

Please enter your organisation's name

Minster Law Solicitors

10.

How should we publish your response?

Please select an option below.

Publish the response with my/our name

3. Consultation questions

11.

1a) Do you agree with our proposal to expand 8.3 of our Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs, RFLs and RSLs, which will also apply to firms under section 7.1 (c) of our Code of Conduct for Firms, to include that complaints information must be provided to clients on conclusion of the legal matter?

Whilst I agree that all clients must have easy and accessible information on how and when to complain, I don't agree that it's sensible to provide complaints information upon conclusion of a matter as this risks inviting complaints that may not otherwise have been raised with a firm. In turn, this also risks and increase in complaints escalated to both the SRA and the Legal Ombudsman, where clients do not agree with the findings of a firm.

12.

1b) Do you agree with our proposal to expand 8.3 of our Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs, RFLs and RSLs, which will also apply to firms under section 7.1 (c) of our Code of Conduct for Firms, to include that complaints information must be provided to clients upon request?

Yes - wherever a client requests information about how to make a complaint, or relating to a previously raised complaint, this should be provided to them.

13.

1c) Do you agree with our proposal to expand 8.3 of our Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs, RFLs and RSLs, which will also apply to firms under section 7.1 (c) of our Code of Conduct for Firms, to include that complaints information must be provided to clients if a complaint is made during a matter?

Yes - where a complaint is made, a firm's complaint procedure (including how to complain) should be provided as part of the formal acknowledgement of the complaint

14.

1d) Please add any comments that you have on when complaints information must be provided to clients.

How to complain, and the complaints procedure, should be provided to all clients upon inception of a legal service claim (as part of a welcome pack for example) and firms should also publish this on their company website

4. Consultation questions

15.

2a) Do you agree with our proposal to expand Rule 2 of our Transparency Rules to state that complaints information published under this rule must be clear and accessible and in a prominent place on a firms' website?

Yes

16.

2b) Please explain the reasons for your answer.

A complaints procedure, including how to complain should be clear and accessible for all clients to prevent any barriers in a complaint being made. The website is the best place for this, but clients should also be aware that they can request this information be provided to them directly.

17.

2c) What are your views on us mirroring the wording we have in our guidance on transparency in price and service about prominence?

Agree

18.

2d) What are your views on us including more information in our guidance on prominence - such as including reference to it not requiring multiple clicks to access or that it should be linked from a homepage?

Agree

19.

2e) What are your views on us including more information in our guidance on how firms or freelance solicitors that do not have a website should provide complaints information? Please give reasons for your answer and tell us what would be helpful to include.

Agree - where there isn't easy access to the information, this risks barriers in place to prevent customers from complaining

which shouldn't ever be the case.

5. Consultation questions

20.

3) What are your views on us including the LSB's definition of a complaint as a defined term in our Standards and Regulations Glossary?

Agree - this should remove any lack of clarity for both firms and clients as to what is a complaint.

21.

4a) What are your views on us producing new guidance to help those we regulate meet our requirements on complaints handling? Please give reasons for your answer.

Agree - this should assist with ensuring an industry wide understanding of what is expected of firms when handling complaints.

22.

4b) What are your views on us combining our new guidance with our existing guidance on publishing complaints procedures? Please give reasons for your answer.

Agree - whilst the existing guidance is clear, any additional guidance here is welcomed and can only serve to reinforce what is expected of firms.

23.

4c) Do you have any suggestions for areas we should include in guidance we develop to help solicitors and firms understand our requirements and how to meet our Standards and Regulations in relation to complaints? If so, please give details.

I'd suggest some guidance around the need to ensure that where a client remains unhappy with a firm's final response to a complaint, this is correctly escalated to the Legal Ombudsman and not the SRA in the first instance. (perhaps with some standard wording/advice for clients) This should help to reduce the number of complaints that are incorrectly escalated to the SRA when they should be with the Legal Ombudsman

6. Consultation questions

24.

5a) What are your views on us collecting and publishing timeliness data at firm level?

Agree that data should be published to show the timeliness of complaint responses (within the 8 week regulatory timescale) as this adds an additional level to ensure firms meet the requirements

25.

5b) What contextual information would be required to make the information useful to consumers and be fair to solicitors and firms?

Any data published should be as a percentage of complaints investigated rather than the volume of complaints. Firms with higher client numbers may have higher complaint volumes which in turn, may paint an unrealistic picture to consumers and impact the use of legal services.

26.

5c) What information about complaints would be most helpful to consumers and why?

The percentage of all complaints investigated and responded to within the regulatory timescale as this should instill confidence that if a consumer needs to complain, this will be taken seriously and that they will receive a response

7. Consultation questions

27.

6) Do you agree that introducing a model complaints resolution procedure (MCRP) for the sector would be helpful?

Neutral

Please give reasons for your answer, including anything you think should be taken account of in the development of an MCRP?: Whilst in some cases this will be beneficial and would introduce a degree of standardisation across the industry, this would always be appropriate for every single complaint / client dependant on the circumstances of the dissatisfaction and the impact that this has had.

28.

7) Do you have any comments on the regulatory impact of our proposals on first-tier complaints?

N/a

29.

8) Do you have any further comments you would like to share with us when reviewing our requirements and producing guidance on first-tier complaints?

I'd suggest that the MCRP, particularly with standardised complaint responses, is introduced as preferred guidance and not mandatory to account for different circumstances

30.

9) Do you have any comments on our draft equalities impact assessment?

N/a

Changing our requirements on first-tier complaints consultation

Response ID:145 Data

2. About you

1.

First name(s)

Ann

2.

Last name

Murphy

6.

I am responding..

on behalf of an organisation

7.

On behalf of what type of organisation?

Law society

8.

Please enter the name of the society

Liverpool Law Society

9.

How should we publish your response?

Please select an option below.

Publish the response with my/our name

3. Consultation questions

10.

1a) Do you agree with our proposal to expand 8.3 of our Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs, RFLs and RSLs, which will also apply to firms under section 7.1 (c) of our Code of Conduct for Firms, to include that complaints information must be provided to clients on conclusion of the legal matter?

Concerns were raised about providing a copy of the complaints process at the conclusion of the legal matter as, in many cases that is likely to coincide with provision of the final bill to clients. It was felt that the provision of details of how to make a complaint at the conclusion of the case may lead some Clients to believe that the provision of the information may imply that they have a reason to complain, and may encourage others who have not raised any issues during the course of the matter to raise unjustified complaints in the hope of a reduction of their bill.

11.

1b) Do you agree with our proposal to expand 8.3 of our Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs, RFLs and RSLs, which will also apply to firms under section 7.1 (c) of our Code of Conduct for Firms, to include that complaints information must be

provided to clients upon request?

There is no objection to this proposal and it was felt that most firms already do this.

12.

1c) Do you agree with our proposal to expand 8.3 of our Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs, RFLs and RSLs, which will also apply to firms under section 7.1 (c) of our Code of Conduct for Firms, to include that complaints information must be provided to clients if a complaint is made during a matter?

There is no objection to this proposal if a formal complaint is made during that matter, and again it was considered that most firms already do. However, concern was expressed about what would be considered as a complaint and the need to recognise that there are many examples where a client might informally raise a concern during the currency of a matter that can be easily resolved and would not warrant the firm providing complaints information afresh. The example cited by our members was an express of concern about delay in a litigious matter which was the result of the normal court process rather than the fault of the case-handler. It was further noted that at all times firms are required to have information about their complaints handling process on their websites.

13.

1d) Please add any comments that you have on when complaints information must be provided to clients.

During general discussion it was noted that the SRA's recent survey has found a high degree of compliance with its requirement that information about making a complaint is provided to clients at the time of engagement and that a majority of firms provide this information when a client expresses dissatisfaction or suggests that they do wish to make a complaint. It was further noted that the majority of firms do publish their complaints processes on their website (to be referenced further in the response to Q2) meaning that Clients have easy access to the information should they require it.

In the experience of members there is little reason to believe that Clients withhold concerns and complaints about the handling of their legal matters as a result of a lack of access to information about how to raise a complaint and that regularly sending this information. It was further noted that in some practice areas significant time is already spent dealing with complaints made without any justification in an attempt to secure a reduction of a bill, there is a concern that repeated, unprompted provision of information about how to complain may simply serve to encourage unjustified complaints. This could create a significant amount of work and cost causing those complaints made with justification may be dealt with less promptly.

Overall the LLS was concerned about the lack of evidence base for the proposed changes and that the changes represented an increased burden on law firms, especially small and rural law firms, without sufficient justification.

4. Consultation questions

14.

2a) Do you agree with our proposal to expand Rule 2 of our Transparency Rules to state that complaints information published under this rule must be clear and accessible and in a prominent place on a firms' website?

It is agreed that information should be clear, accessible and in a prominent place on firm's websites.

There does seem to be a lack of clarity as to what is meant by "prominent" in this context and it was felt that the definition in the LSB's statutory guidance was appropriate.

15.

2b) Please explain the reasons for your answer.

It was felt that the proposal is reasonable.

16.

2c) What are your views on us mirroring the wording we have in our guidance on transparency in price and service about prominence?

Consistency in the guidance is likely to assist firms, and we agree with this proposal.

17.

2d) What are your views on us including more information in our guidance on prominence - such as including reference to it not requiring multiple clicks to access or that it should be linked from a homepage?

We would welcome greater guidance on prominence.

18.

2e) What are your views on us including more information in our guidance on how firms or freelance solicitors that do not have a website should provide complaints information? Please give reasons for your answer and tell us what would be helpful to include.

It is agreed that greater guidance would be useful for those firms/freelance solicitors who do not have websites. We assume that firms who don't have websites provide the information in written form in hard and/or soft copy. Guidance that provision of written information via a method that is suitable and fits with the client's needs would provide comfort to the small number of firms who do not have websites.

5. Consultation questions

19.

3) What are your views on us including the LSB's definition of a complaint as a defined term in our Standards and Regulations Glossary?

LLS supports the suggestion that "complaint" should be defined. However the LLS takes issue with the SRA's proposed definition as it does not limit "complaints" to loss, distress, inconvenience or detriment resulting from the actions or inactions of the firm. We refer to the example cited above, a client expressing dissatisfaction about a delay in the litigation even if the delay was due to the court processes could be caught by the definition provided for in the consultation.

20.

4a) What are your views on us producing new guidance to help those we regulate meet our requirements on complaints handling? Please give reasons for your answer.

It is considered that clear and consistent guidance on complaints handling would be useful to firms. LLS members considered that the most useful guidance is supported by practical real-life examples and templates to properly assist firm to understand the SRA's requirements thereby ensuring compliance. Any guidance needs to stay relevant, which means that it should be reviewed on a not infrequent basis.

21.

4b) What are your views on us combining our new guidance with our existing guidance on publishing complaints procedures? Please give reasons for your answer.

The LLS has no objection to this provided that the new guidance is consolidated with the existing guidance and that the combined document contains consistent terminology.

22.

4c) Do you have any suggestions for areas we should include in guidance we develop to help solicitors and firms understand our requirements and how to meet our Standards and Regulations in relation to complaints? If so, please give details.

No specific suggestions.

6. Consultation questions

23.

5a) What are your views on us collecting and publishing timeliness data at firm level?

It is not clear that the speed of resolution at the first tier (depending on how "resolution is defined) is a useful metric for assessing the effectiveness of a firm's complaint handling process. There is risk that a handful of complaints could provide a significantly distorted picture, particularly for smaller firms dealing with fewer matters. It must also be borne in mind that some complaints are not capable of being resolved quickly and, quite rightly, it is not a requirement for firms to resolve complaints within eight weeks. The requirement is to issue a final determination within that time frame. Publication of such information would therefore present a distorted view of the firm's performance and would not be fair or proportionate.

24.

5b) What contextual information would be required to make the information useful to consumers and be fair to solicitors and firms?

In order to make the information useful to consumers it is likely that a significant amount of context would be required which might include information (amongst others) about the nature of complaints, the number of complaints received compared to instructions received, the practice areas that the complaints referred to, the practice areas that the firm offers and in some instances information about complaints. There is a risk of a breach of confidentiality here but more significantly that the amount of context required to make the data useful, would make the data extremely difficult to understand leading consumers to rely on any "headline" non-contextualised data that is published.

25.

5c) What information about complaints would be most helpful to consumers and why?

Aside from the provision of clear information about how to complain and the complaints process, it is difficult to identify what further information consumers would find useful. There is no evidence that consumers of legal services seek out data relating to complaints handling before instructing a firm, and if they do it is likely that consumers would interpret the data in a number of ways. As a consumer it is better to instruct a firm that upholds a large proportion of its complaints (which might suggest either pro-active complaints handling, or poor service) or one that upholds a low proportion (which may be a sign of poor engagement with complaints, or good service)

7. Consultation questions

26.

6) Do you agree that introducing a model complaints resolution procedure (MCRP) for the sector would be helpful?

Agree

Please give reasons for your answer, including anything you think should be taken account of in the development of an MCRP?:

It is felt that a MCRP (Model Complaints Resolution Procedure) is likely to be useful to some firms in meeting their regulatory objectives, but it was felt that a MCRP should not be too prescriptive bearing in mind the range of complaints that can be received by firms across practice areas.

27.

7) Do you have any comments on the regulatory impact of our proposals on first-tier complaints?

Proposals in relation to consistent complaints handling and provision of information to clients relating to complaints processes seem reasonable subject to the comments above.

There are concerns about the proposed reporting requirements which risk creating a significant burden on firms whilst providing limited useful information to clients. The requirement to provide the complaint policy at the conclusion of the matter was not supported by evidence. Data is likely to be a poor way of assessing the quality of a complaints process and for an individual client the most important factor in their complaint is the handling of that complaint rather than the time taken or uphold rate for previous complaints which may have no similarities with theirs and may even have arisen from entirely different practice areas. Whilst LLS supported the need for firms who had websites to ensure complaint information was displayed in a prominent place it was concerned of the burden it might impose on some firms if brought in without allowing for a transition period.

28.

8) Do you have any further comments you would like to share with us when reviewing our requirements and producing guidance on first-tier complaints?

No

29.

9) Do you have any comments on our draft equalities impact assessment?

No

Changing our requirements on first-tier complaints consultation

Response ID:155 Data

2. About you

1.

First name(s)

Richard

2.

Last name

Norbury

6.

I am responding..

on behalf of an organisation

7.

On behalf of what type of organisation?

Law firm or other legal services provider

8.

Please enter your organisation's SRA ID (if applicable)

625845

9.

Please enter your organisation's name

Carpenters Limited

10.

How should we publish your response?

Please select an option below.

Publish the response with my/our name

3. Consultation questions

11.

1a) Do you agree with our proposal to expand 8.3 of our Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs, RFLs and RSLs, which will also apply to firms under section 7.1 (c) of our Code of Conduct for Firms, to include that complaints information must be provided to clients on conclusion of the legal matter?

Carpenters wish to express our objection to this proposed amendment on the following grounds:

- The proposal is unnecessary.
- The proposal is unduly onerous.
- The proposal fails to address the underlying issue of non-compliance with existing rules.

12.

1b) Do you agree with our proposal to expand 8.3 of our Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs, RFLs and RSLs, which will also apply to firms under section 7.1 (c) of our Code of Conduct for Firms, to include that complaints information must be provided to clients upon request?

Yes

13.

1c) Do you agree with our proposal to expand 8.3 of our Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs, RFLs and RSLs, which will also apply to firms under section 7.1 (c) of our Code of Conduct for Firms, to include that complaints information must be provided to clients if a complaint is made during a matter?

Yes

14.

1d) Please add any comments that you have on when complaints information must be provided to clients.

Current SRA regulations already require firms to provide clear and accessible information regarding their complaint procedures at the outset of instructions. Clients are thus made aware at the beginning of the solicitor-client relationship of their right to complain, and how to do so. In addition, it is mandatory for this information to be easily accessible on the Solicitors website. There is no evidence that clients are unaware of complaints mechanisms at the conclusion of their matters, nor that any additional notification at this stage is likely to improve understanding or outcomes. Indeed, such duplication risks confusing clients or diminishing the significance of the initial information provided.

4. Consultation questions

15.

2a) Do you agree with our proposal to expand Rule 2 of our Transparency Rules to state that complaints information published under this rule must be clear and accessible and in a prominent place on a firms' website?

Yes

16.

2b) Please explain the reasons for your answer.

17.

2c) What are your views on us mirroring the wording we have in our guidance on transparency in price and service about prominence?

18.

2d) What are your views on us including more information in our guidance on prominence - such as including reference to it not requiring multiple clicks to access or that it should be linked from a homepage?

19.

2e) What are your views on us including more information in our guidance on how firms or freelance solicitors that do not have a website should provide complaints information? Please give reasons for your answer and tell us what would be helpful to include.

The SRA's current concern appears to be that some firms fail to provide complaints information as required by the existing rules. Carpenters submit that adding a new obligation will not address the root cause, which is a lack of compliance or enforcement regarding the present requirements. The appropriate response is for the SRA to focus on targeted enforcement, education, and support to ensure adherence to the current rules, rather than to introduce new, duplicative, and potentially confusing obligations.

5. Consultation questions

20.

3) What are your views on us including the LSB's definition of a complaint as a defined term in our Standards and Regulations Glossary?

21.

4a) What are your views on us producing new guidance to help those we regulate meet our requirements on complaints handling? Please give reasons for your answer.

22.

4b) What are your views on us combining our new guidance with our existing guidance on publishing complaints procedures? Please give reasons for your answer.

23.

4c) Do you have any suggestions for areas we should include in guidance we develop to help solicitors and firms understand our requirements and how to meet our Standards and Regulations in relation to complaints? If so, please give details.

It is important to recognise that the Legal Ombudsman's Model Complaints Response procedure is currently undergoing a pilot phase, with the potential for broader adoption across the profession. If this model is ultimately implemented, it promises to bring about significant improvements in complaint handling by providing a clear, standardised process for firms and clients alike. This development alone will likely address many of the concerns that underpin the proposed SRA amendment by strengthening consistency, transparency, and client confidence in the complaints procedure without necessitating additional regulatory obligations at case closure.

6. Consultation questions

24.

5a) What are your views on us collecting and publishing timeliness data at firm level?

25.

5b) What contextual information would be required to make the information useful to consumers and be fair to solicitors and firms?

Upheld complaint volumes as a percentage of live caseloads

26.

5c) What information about complaints would be most helpful to consumers and why?

7. Consultation questions

27.

6) Do you agree that introducing a model complaints resolution procedure (MCRP) for the sector would be helpful?

Strongly agree

Please give reasons for your answer, including anything you think should be taken account of in the development of an MCRP?:

28.

7) Do you have any comments on the regulatory impact of our proposals on first-tier complaints?

29.

8) Do you have any further comments you would like to share with us when reviewing our requirements and producing guidance on first-tier complaints?

30.

9) Do you have any comments on our draft equalities impact assessment?

Changing our requirements on first-tier complaints consultation

Response ID:156 Data

2. About you

1.

First name(s)

Shona

2.

Last name

Matson-Betts

6.

I am responding..

on behalf of an organisation

7.

On behalf of what type of organisation?

Law society

8.

Please enter the name of the society

Birmingham Law Society

9.

How should we publish your response?

Please select an option below.

Publish the response with my/our name

3. Consultation questions

10.

1a) Do you agree with our proposal to expand 8.3 of our Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs, RFLs and RSLs, which will also apply to firms under section 7.1 (c) of our Code of Conduct for Firms, to include that complaints information must be provided to clients on conclusion of the legal matter?

No

We note that the SRA "carried out a thematic review, visiting 25 firms, and a survey of 750 firms". This consultation notes "That review has yet to be published". Nevertheless, it seems that this unpublished data has "informed our [the SRA] proposals".

The Thematic Review should be published so that it can be seen how the review has informed the proposals. Without sight of the Thematic Review, it makes it difficult to understand the rationale for the SRA proposals. The Thematic Review should be published before these proposals are imposed upon the profession.

The proposal is considered unnecessary as clients are informed of the complaints procedure at the outset of the matter. The proposal that complaints information is provided on conclusion of a matter also presents a practical problem in determining when a matter is concluded. No definition has been provided by the regulator. Some matters such as conveyancing transactions usually have a definite end date. Other matters do not. It is not easy to define the conclusion of a matter.

We are aware that current delays at the Land Registry are such that registration is not completed until 24 months after completion. This may mean that a client are contacted two years after they understood their matter had completed.

A pragmatic solution may be to require complaints information (or more likely where the information can be found) to be published on invoices. Clients will receive a final invoice usually towards the conclusion of a matter even if that is before the file is closed and/or archived.

Requirements (Section 112 Requirements) issued by the Legal Services Board, dated 16 May 2024, in relation to the complaints procedures of authorised persons for first tier complaints, provides (at D11) that "an authorised person must inform each client [of the option to complain and the procedure] at the conclusion of the matter". It is understood that these requirements are not in force until November 2025. On that basis it appears that the SRA is being required by the LSB to make the proposed change.

We are aware that ISO 10002, the International Standard for Complaints Handling, provides that it must be easy for the client to complain and clients must be kept informed about progress of their complaint. Adopting this standard would remove the obligation to specify when such information must be made available.

11.

1b) Do you agree with our proposal to expand 8.3 of our Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs, RFLs and RSLs, which will also apply to firms under section 7.1 (c) of our Code of Conduct for Firms, to include that complaints information must be provided to clients upon request?

Yes.

Where a client requests information on how to make a complaint this must be provided. SRA Guidance should make it clear that this obligation can be fulfilled by directing the client to the appropriate section of the firm's website (if it has one) where the process is published. Where a firm does not have a website then this information should be provided in writing.

It is not understood why this provision is made as a matter of professional conduct rather than in guidance. The SRA should provide an explanation as to why the matter is considered so serious as to require a professional conduct rule. The Legal Services Consumer Panel's research shows that satisfaction with legal service providers is 87%. This shows that the need to complain is at a relatively low level.

12.

1c) Do you agree with our proposal to expand 8.3 of our Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs, RFLs and RSLs, which will also apply to firms under section 7.1 (c) of our Code of Conduct for Firms, to include that complaints information must be provided to clients if a complaint is made during a matter?

Yes.

Where a client requests information on how to make a complaint this must be provided. SRA Guidance should make it clear that this obligation can be fulfilled by directing the client to the appropriate section of the firm's website (if it has one) where the process is published. Where a firm does not have a website then this information should be provided in writing.

It is not understood why this provision is made as a matter of professional conduct rather than in guidance. The SRA should provide an explanation as to why the matter is considered so serious as to require a professional conduct rule. The Legal Services Consumer Panel's research shows that satisfaction with legal service providers is 87%. This shows that the need to complain is at a relatively low level.

13.

1d) Please add any comments that you have on when complaints information must be provided to clients.

Yes.

Where a client requests information on how to make a complaint this must be provided. SRA Guidance should make it clear that this obligation can be fulfilled by directing the client to the appropriate section of the firm's website (if it has one) where the process is published. Where a firm does not have a website then this information should be provided in writing.

It is not understood why this provision is made as a matter of professional conduct rather than in guidance. The SRA should provide an explanation as to why the matter is considered so serious as to require a professional conduct rule. The Legal Services Consumer Panel's research shows that satisfaction with legal service providers is 87%. This shows that the need to complain is at a relatively low level.

4. Consultation questions

14.

2a) Do you agree with our proposal to expand Rule 2 of our Transparency Rules to state that complaints information published under this rule must be clear and accessible and in a prominent place on a firms' website?

Yes.

15.

2b) Please explain the reasons for your answer.

Whilst it is agreed that the information must be published on a firm's website so that it is easy for clients to complain, it is not agreed that this must be clear, accessible and in a prominent place on a firm's website. The reason for this is that there is no guidance on what is a "prominent place" nor what is meant by "clear and accessible".

Most websites follow an established pattern that users have become familiar with. The SRA should specify that this should appear at the foot of the home webpage so that there is consistency across the profession. This will mirror the SRA's own website where "Complaints about our service" appear at the foot of the SRA home webpage.

16.

2c) What are your views on us mirroring the wording we have in our guidance on transparency in price and service about prominence?

The proposed wording is rejected for the reasons given in response to Q2b.

17.

2d) What are your views on us including more information in our guidance on prominence - such as including reference to it not requiring multiple clicks to access or that it should be linked from a homepage?

Any Guidance from the regulator on the interpretation of its rules is welcome. The regulator is encouraged to follow established methods of complaints handling, such as that set out in ISO 10002, so that the SRA's requirements reflect those of other business sectors. In terms of positioning and prominence it is suggested that the SRA specify that the information is displayed (or there is a link to the information) at the foot of the webpage (mirroring the SRA's own webpage).

18.

2e) What are your views on us including more information in our guidance on how firms or freelance solicitors that do not have a website should provide complaints information? Please give reasons for your answer and tell us what would be helpful to include.

Any Guidance from the regulator on the interpretation of its rules is welcome. The simplest solution for any freelancer is for the information to be provided in the documentation setting out the retainer with the client (whether in hard copy or electronic).

format).

5. Consultation questions

19.

3) What are your views on us including the LSB's definition of a complaint as a defined term in our Standards and Regulations Glossary?

Any definition of complaint must be consistent with definitions used by the LSB and the Legal Ombudsman.

The International Standards Organisation (ISO) has published a standard – ISO 10002 Guidelines for Complaints Handling – that sets an internationally recognised definition of a complaint. Adopting this standard definition of the term will ensure that SRA regulated law firms are treated in the same way as other businesses. Further, by having a consistent standard that applies to many types of business will improve client understanding of what is meant by the term 'complaint'.

20.

4a) What are your views on us producing new guidance to help those we regulate meet our requirements on complaints handling? Please give reasons for your answer.

Given that complaints about legal services are made to the Legal Ombudsman then that organisation is best placed to provide the guidance. The SRA may wish to include links to the Legal Ombudsman guidance, but producing SRA guidance is unnecessary and a waste of money for the profession. Any guidance the SRA may wish to produce should be done in consultation with the Legal Ombudsman.

21.

4b) What are your views on us combining our new guidance with our existing guidance on publishing complaints procedures? Please give reasons for your answer.

There is no necessity for the SRA to issue guidance when this is the remit of the Legal Ombudsman.

22.

4c) Do you have any suggestions for areas we should include in guidance we develop to help solicitors and firms understand our requirements and how to meet our Standards and Regulations in relation to complaints? If so, please give details.

There is no necessity for the SRA to issue guidance when this is the remit of the Legal Ombudsman.

6. Consultation questions

23.

5a) What are your views on us collecting and publishing timeliness data at firm level?

The collection and publication of timeliness data by the SRA will be a considerable expense. If it is considered that it is necessary to publish this information then the favoured options are: a) the information is published by LeO; or b) firms are required to publish this information in a specified format.

24.

5b) What contextual information would be required to make the information useful to consumers and be fair to solicitors and firms?

The range of attributes required to provide context are many and varied. For example, one might expect a law firm dealing with volume conveyancing for individuals to attract more complaints than a firm that deals solely with commercial contract matters. It is unlikely to be possible to publish this data in a meaningful way that can be readily understood by those outside of the legal

services market.

25.

5c) What information about complaints would be most helpful to consumers and why?

The information that consumers require about complaints depends upon the nature of the legal service that the consumer is interested in. An individual seeking a solicitor to assist with a property purchase is unlikely to base a decision to use a particular firm based on its complaints data regarding family matters.

7. Consultation questions

26.

6) Do you agree that introducing a model complaints resolution procedure (MCRP) for the sector would be helpful?

Disagree

Please give reasons for your answer, including anything you think should be taken account of in the development of an MCRP?: This is unnecessary given that there is an international standard that deals with managing complaints - ISO 10002 Guidelines for Complaints Handling. Adopting this standard definition of the term will ensure that SRA regulated law firms are treated in the same way as other businesses. Further, by having a consistent standard that applies to many types of business will improve client understanding of what is meant by the term 'complaint'.

27.

7) Do you have any comments on the regulatory impact of our proposals on first-tier complaints?

The creation and adoption of a model complaints resolution procedure specific to the legal sector will be costly and unnecessary given that there is an international standard that can be applied at no cost.

28.

8) Do you have any further comments you would like to share with us when reviewing our requirements and producing guidance on first-tier complaints?

Requirements relating to complaints management are best left to the Legal Ombudsman. The handling of complaints is not a matter of professional conduct. It is accepted that a pattern of behaviour where a firm or a solicitor fails to deal with complaints may be a matter of professional conduct. Having separate SRA and LeO requirements will lead to duplication of effort and increased costs for the profession.

29.

9) Do you have any comments on our draft equalities impact assessment?

The proposals for consumer engagement seem unnecessary and expensive. Any such engagement is a matter for LeO and not the SRA. Whilst guidance and support from the regulator is always welcome in this instance it is considered that this is better provided by LeO and The Law Society.

Changing our requirements on first-tier complaints consultation

Response ID:169 Data

2. About you

1.

First name(s)

Naila

2.

Last name

Akther

6.

I am responding..

on behalf of an organisation

7.

On behalf of what type of organisation?

Law society

8.

Please enter the name of the society

Oldham Law Association

9.

How should we publish your response?

Please select an option below.

Publish the response with my/our name

3. Consultation questions

10.

1a) Do you agree with our proposal to expand 8.3 of our Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs, RFLs and RSLs, which will also apply to firms under section 7.1 (c) of our Code of Conduct for Firms, to include that complaints information must be provided to clients on conclusion of the legal matter?

We do not agree to your proposal to expand 8.3 - a further mandatory requirement to provide complaints information at the conclusion of a legal matter is not necessary. The information is already provided at the outset (paragraph 8.3 SRA Code of Conduct for Solicitors and 7.1 SRA Code of Conduct for Firms), this helps prevent disputes from arising at a later date as expectations have already been set out. Also, when a complaint is received the information is provided again and those firms with websites publish the information.

Oldham comprises of small to medium law firms who on the whole feel this proposal, if implemented, would create additional unnecessary work , which will add to their expense creating a further burden for struggling law firms. We do not believe there will be any gain to the process for consumers. Finally, some cases could be lengthy ie Personal injury/Family care

proceedings/conveyancing and therefore difficult to identify the end of a matter.

The proposal is likely to encourage meritless complaints ie those unhappy with sentences our litigation outcomes.

There is already adequate punishment for firms providing inadequate complaints procedure.

11.

1b) Do you agree with our proposal to expand 8.3 of our Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs, RFLs and RSLs, which will also apply to firms under section 7.1 (c) of our Code of Conduct for Firms, to include that complaints information must be provided to clients upon request?

We agree that the complaints information should be provided upon request, its our understanding that this procedure is already in place as law firms in Oldham have been following this process for many years. Therefore, the proposed amendments to paragraph 8.3 of the Code of Conduct (Annex One) are not necessary.

12.

1c) Do you agree with our proposal to expand 8.3 of our Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs, RFLs and RSLs, which will also apply to firms under section 7.1 (c) of our Code of Conduct for Firms, to include that complaints information must be provided to clients if a complaint is made during a matter?

Its our understanding that law firms in Oldham provide the complaints procedure when a formal complaint is raised and therefore do not consider the proposed amendments to paragraph 8.3 of the Code of Conduct (Annex One) to be necessary. Law firms can assess the situation themselves to see if they need to provide the information again, we do not agree with there being a requirement to provide such information again. Most firms are eager for their clients to receive a positive experience and will be keen to ensure that any concerns they have are resolved to everyone's satisfaction. Most firms continuously conduct risk assessment during the life of the case which will identify any issues that the client may have and gives an early opportunity to resolve matters. Client satisfaction is the business model for most firms. It is important that unnecessary complaints are not encouraged as it will make firms far too cautious which which will have an impact on access to justice.

13.

1d) Please add any comments that you have on when complaints information must be provided to clients.

Complaints procedure is provided at the outset and when a complaint is made.

4. Consultation questions

14.

2a) Do you agree with our proposal to expand Rule 2 of our Transparency Rules to state that complaints information published under this rule must be clear and accessible and in a prominent place on a firms' website?

Current guidelines are sufficient and it should be down to the firm to decide where to publish the information. A lot of small firms state that they do not have a websites as they do not want the added bureaucracy, this means that they are disadvantaged in terms of their financial growth. If a firm has a website, it is down to the individual firm to decide where the information is published - what matters is that the information is clear, concise and easy to find.

15.

2b) Please explain the reasons for your answer.

Transparency rules set out the obligations which law firms already follow in Oldham namely providing cost, service information and complaints procedure.

16.

2c) What are your views on us mirroring the wording we have in our guidance on transparency in price and service about prominence?

Prominence is subject to interpretation and the current guidelines are sufficient. Most law firms in Oldham are aware of the current guidelines. Some small firms in Oldham have stated that they will not have website due to all the regulations. We did a general google exercise and across the country there are lots of law firms that do not have websites, the SRA and Law Society should really do a survey on this topic.

17.

2d) What are your views on us including more information in our guidance on prominence - such as including reference to it not requiring multiple clicks to access or that it should be linked from a homepage?

More guidance will be helpful.

18.

2e) What are your views on us including more information in our guidance on how firms or freelance solicitors that do not have a website should provide complaints information? Please give reasons for your answer and tell us what would be helpful to include.

SRA's October 2023 report on the Transparency Rules does not cover this. We understand from Oldham lawyers that they provide the information in writing by post/email.

5. Consultation questions

19.

3) What are your views on us including the LSB's definition of a complaint as a defined term in our Standards and Regulations Glossary?

Having the same definition in the Glossary of what constitutes a complaint will be helpful as it will promote consistency across the legal sector. The definition has to be clear, concise and easily interpreted.

We do not support the current LSB's definition as it is not a clear definition and it does not reflect: a) consumers' dissatisfaction as it must relate to the service provided by the firm b) the cause of the dissatisfaction. Current wording will encourage unfounded complaints i.e. mere frustration. c) onus is being placed on the firm to identify and deal with frustrated clients.

20.

4a) What are your views on us producing new guidance to help those we regulate meet our requirements on complaints handling? Please give reasons for your answer.

It is important to have clear, concise and easy to follow guidance which is practical and proportionate for all, this includes law firms/consumers/SRA.

21.

4b) What are your views on us combining our new guidance with our existing guidance on publishing complaints procedures? Please give reasons for your answer.

All material should be consolidated so that it is easy to follow.

22.

4c) Do you have any suggestions for areas we should include in guidance we develop to help solicitors and firms understand our requirements and how to meet our Standards and Regulations in relation to complaints? If so, please give details.

There should be a focus and guidance in those areas where law firms are falling short.

6. Consultation questions

23.

5a) What are your views on us collecting and publishing timeliness data at firm level?

Oldham is an economically deprived area, the law firms are small/medium with sole practitioners or two partners and if they are required to provide more data it will be an onerous burden. The question really is, will timeliness data actually assist anyone? what is the actual benefit?

24.

5b) What contextual information would be required to make the information useful to consumers and be fair to solicitors and firms?

Properly contextualising complaints information could be useful to law firms/ individual lawyers and consumers. It is important that the data is understandable and it will be challenging as to how that data is presented. Law firms in Oldham are unconvinced of its usefulness and don't believe that the consumers they deal with will be looking for legal services based on timeliness of first-tier complaints handling as a service quality indicator. Law firms have provided examples that even negative google reviews don't prevent new instructions.

25.

5c) What information about complaints would be most helpful to consumers and why?

Explanation of the complaints procedure and process, contact information, remedy/resolution, escalation if not satisfied with outcome.

7. Consultation questions

26.

6) Do you agree that introducing a model complaints resolution procedure (MCRP) for the sector would be helpful?

Strongly disagree

Please give reasons for your answer, including anything you think should be taken account of in the development of an MCRP?: We are against the imposition of strict frameworks that may not reflect the operational realities of different types of legal practice. We are not against clear guidance being provided to ensure law firms comply with their duties.

27.

7) Do you have any comments on the regulatory impact of our proposals on first-tier complaints?

There is likely to be a financial impact on law firms in Oldham which will have to be passed onto consumers, this will inevitably affect access to justice.

28.

8) Do you have any further comments you would like to share with us when reviewing our requirements and producing guidance on first-tier complaints?

Negative advertisement of law firms must be avoided- small/medium law firms are already struggling to cope financially. in Oldham If firms close down in Oldham this will affect access to justice for a community which is struggling financially and may not be able to travel out of the area to receive the service.

29.

9) Do you have any comments on our draft equalities impact assessment?

Measures have to proportionate- regulatory burden is a concern on firms in Oldham . Full analysis/impact must be considered with the Law Society before any proposal is implemented.

Changing our requirements on first-tier complaints consultation

Response ID:171 Data

2. About you

1.

First name(s)

Helen

2.

Last name

Opie

6.

I am responding..

on behalf of an organisation

7.

On behalf of what type of organisation?

Law society

8.

Please enter the name of the society

Surrey Law Society

9.

How should we publish your response?

Please select an option below.

Publish the response with my/our name

3. Consultation questions

10.

1a) Do you agree with our proposal to expand 8.3 of our Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs, RFLs and RSLs, which will also apply to firms under section 7.1 (c) of our Code of Conduct for Firms, to include that complaints information must be provided to clients on conclusion of the legal matter?

No. The majority of our members surveyed do not support this proposal. They feel that providing complaints information at the end of a matter is unnecessary and risks prompting speculative or tactical complaints — particularly after invoicing — even where the client is satisfied with the service. Many view it as an administrative burden with little benefit to clients, especially as information is already provided at the outset and again if a concern is raised during the matter.

11.

1b) Do you agree with our proposal to expand 8.3 of our Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs, RFLs and RSLs, which will also apply to firms under section 7.1 (c) of our Code of Conduct for Firms, to include that complaints information must be provided to clients upon request?

Yes. This is broadly supported in principle and already common practice among our members. Providing complaints information on request is seen as proportionate and client-focused, without placing an undue burden on firms.

12.

1c) Do you agree with our proposal to expand 8.3 of our Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs, RFLs and RSLs, which will also apply to firms under section 7.1 (c) of our Code of Conduct for Firms, to include that complaints information must be provided to clients if a complaint is made during a matter?

Yes, in practice this already happens for many firms. However, members expressed concern over the vagueness of the term "during a matter" — clarification is needed on what constitutes a trigger for re-issuing complaints information. For example, would this be required every time a concern is raised informally? Without clearer guidance, there is a risk of confusion and unnecessary repetition.

13.

1d) Please add any comments that you have on when complaints information must be provided to clients.

Members are overwhelmingly in favour of clear, accessible complaints information being provided at the outset and if a client expresses dissatisfaction. However, there is strong resistance to expanding the obligation to include sending this information again at the end of the matter, which is widely seen as excessive and counterproductive.

Firms are concerned about increasing administrative burdens and the risk of "information overload" for clients. Many feel that constant signposting to complaints procedures can have the unintended effect of undermining goodwill and inviting trivial or opportunistic complaints, particularly in sensitive or cost-related contexts.

In summary, members support targeted, timely provision of complaints information — at engagement, upon request, and if a complaint arises — but do not support an automatic reminder at matter conclusion.

4. Consultation questions

14.

2a) Do you agree with our proposal to expand Rule 2 of our Transparency Rules to state that complaints information published under this rule must be clear and accessible and in a prominent place on a firms' website?

A majority of our members support this proposal. They agree that complaints information should be easy for clients to find and understand. However, a significant minority expressed concern about the potential for overly prescriptive definitions of "prominent" that could limit flexibility in website design or create unnecessary burdens, especially for smaller firms.

15.

2b) Please explain the reasons for your answer.

Members who supported the proposal felt it would improve transparency and accessibility for clients. Some noted that it aligns with expectations for modern service providers.

However, concerns were raised about proportionality, with smaller firms feeling that requirements to feature complaints information too prominently — such as on the homepage — may give the impression of a service prone to complaints, which could deter clients. Some members also questioned the benefit of greater prominence when complaints procedures are already accessible elsewhere (e.g. terms of business, client care letters, and on request).

16.

2c) What are your views on us mirroring the wording we have in our guidance on transparency in price and service about prominence?

Members generally agreed that mirroring the existing guidance on price transparency would bring helpful consistency. However, it should remain guidance, not a rigid rule, and allow room for firms to determine appropriate placement based on the structure

and tone of their website.

17.

2d) What are your views on us including more information in our guidance on prominence - such as including reference to it not requiring multiple clicks to access or that it should be linked from a homepage?

Some members found these suggestions reasonable in principle, particularly not requiring multiple clicks. However, there was a strong feeling that the guidance should not mandate homepage placement, as this may be inappropriate for some firms' branding and layout. Firms should be allowed to decide how best to make complaints information accessible without being perceived as inviting complaints.

18.

2e) What are your views on us including more information in our guidance on how firms or freelance solicitors that do not have a website should provide complaints information? Please give reasons for your answer and tell us what would be helpful to include.

Members would welcome more practical guidance for firms without websites, particularly around appropriate formats for providing information on request (e.g. printed handouts, email attachments, or inclusion in client care packs). It would be helpful to clarify that clients should not need to supply detailed personal information to receive it. The current requirement is sufficient in principle, but further examples would be useful.

5. Consultation questions

19.

3) What are your views on us including the LSB's definition of a complaint as a defined term in our Standards and Regulations Glossary?

We support this proposal. Most members agreed that a single, consistent definition across regulators would improve clarity and support consistent handling and reporting of complaints. Some concern was expressed about the broad scope of the definition, particularly in capturing informal or minor expressions of dissatisfaction, so clear guidance on application would be helpful.

20.

4a) What are your views on us producing new guidance to help those we regulate meet our requirements on complaints handling? Please give reasons for your answer.

Many members welcomed new guidance, particularly those in smaller firms, who saw value in clearer expectations around identifying and responding to complaints. However, a significant number reported already having robust internal procedures, and felt that guidance should remain optional and flexible, not overly prescriptive. Some expressed concern that existing guidance already leans too heavily in favour of complainants.

21.

4b) What are your views on us combining our new guidance with our existing guidance on publishing complaints procedures? Please give reasons for your answer.

Combining existing and new guidance into a single resource is sensible and supported, as long as it is structured clearly and remains easy to navigate. Members appreciated practical tools and templates, especially for smaller firms without dedicated compliance teams.

22.

4c) Do you have any suggestions for areas we should include in guidance we develop to help solicitors and firms understand our requirements and how to meet our Standards and Regulations in relation to complaints? If so, please give details.

Members suggested the following areas would be particularly helpful:

- Clear examples of what constitutes a complaint (vs. general dissatisfaction or trivial issues)
- Practical thresholds for "financial loss, distress, or inconvenience" to avoid over-reporting
- Template responses and model complaints policies
- Guidance on complaints from vulnerable or distressed clients
- Clarification on when a complaint might require SRA self-reporting
- Distinguishing between complaints and regulatory concerns
- Encouragement of proportionality and professional judgement in responding

Some members urged the SRA to recognise the increasing misuse of complaints as leverage over fees and to adopt a more balanced approach in its tone and treatment of both firms and complainants.

6. Consultation questions

23.

5a) What are your views on us collecting and publishing timeliness data at firm level?

The majority of members do not support publishing complaint handling timeframes at firm level. They highlighted that timeliness varies greatly depending on complaint complexity, client cooperation, and firm size. Many felt the existing Legal Ombudsman timeframes are sufficient, and publishing data risks misinterpretation and unfair comparisons. Some also raised concerns that such publication could encourage superficial handling of complaints to meet deadlines rather than thorough resolution.

24.

5b) What contextual information would be required to make the information useful to consumers and be fair to solicitors and firms?

Members agreed that if data were published, it must be accompanied by clear contextual information to avoid misleading consumers. This could include:

- Explanation of differing complaint complexity and types
- Firm size and resource considerations
- Distinctions between informal dissatisfaction and formal complaints
- Information on complainant engagement and delays caused externally
- Emphasis that speed alone is not an indicator of quality or fairness

Without such context, the data could unfairly damage reputations and incentivise underreporting or misclassification.

25.

5c) What information about complaints would be most helpful to consumers and why?

Members felt that consumers benefit more from:

- Clear, accessible information about the firm's complaints procedure and their rights
- Aggregate, anonymised data to benchmark complaint volumes and outcomes, rather than timeliness
- Access to Legal Ombudsman decisions and findings
- Information on complaint outcomes and how firms learn and improve from complaints

Members cautioned against overwhelming consumers with raw data that lacks context or meaningful explanation.

7. Consultation questions

26.

6) Do you agree that introducing a model complaints resolution procedure (MCRP) for the sector would be helpful?

Agree

Please give reasons for your answer, including anything you think should be taken account of in the development of an

MCRP?: Several firms answered Yes or Possibly, depending on content, showing cautious support. Key reasons and considerations mentioned include: • The MCRP should be fairly balanced and not overly weighted in favour of complainants. • It should include a mechanism to pause complaint timeframes when firms are awaiting responses from complainants. • The procedure should reflect the needs of small and sole practitioner firms, avoiding disproportionate burdens. • Standardised language and formats would promote clarity and consistency across providers. • The MCRP should help firms improve complaints handling without creating excessive administrative or reputational burdens. • Development should consider diverse firm sizes and client bases; one size may not fit all. • Firms want practical, clear, and balanced guidance that helps with transparency and service improvement.

27.

7) Do you have any comments on the regulatory impact of our proposals on first-tier complaints?

Concerns expressed include:

- Current complaints processes are perceived by some as unfairly weighted toward complainants.
 - There is a lack of confidence in the Legal Ombudsman's handling and decision-making processes.
 - Regulatory changes should avoid creating extra burdens especially on small or niche firms.
 - Publication or use of complaints data could have unintended negative consequences if not standardised and contextualised.
 - There is a risk that complaints handling regulations may lead to defensive or excessive administrative approaches rather than improving service.
 - Some firms highlighted the need for better protections for firms in objection rights and complaints procedures.
-

28.

8) Do you have any further comments you would like to share with us when reviewing our requirements and producing guidance on first-tier complaints?

Additional comments included:

- The profession already provides sufficient complaints information and repeating it multiple times may not enhance client experience.
 - The complaints process is seen by some as onerous and punitive, contributing to professional frustration and stress.
 - There should be a greater emphasis on using complaints as an opportunity for service improvement rather than only regulatory compliance.
 - Recognise the diversity of client populations and firms; guidance should be flexible enough to be relevant for all.
 - Requests that the SRA reduce regulatory pressure and avoid adding further administrative demands related to complaints.
 - Strong views that complainants currently have too much power and that some abuse the system, with calls for mechanisms to balance this.
-

29.

9) Do you have any comments on our draft equalities impact assessment?

Changing our requirements on first-tier complaints consultation

Response ID:176 Data

2. About you

1.

First name(s)

Ambrish

2.

Last name

Limbachia

6.

I am responding..

on behalf of an organisation

7.

On behalf of what type of organisation?

Law firm or other legal services provider

8.

Please enter your organisation's SRA ID (if applicable)

9.

Please enter your organisation's name

8006777

10.

How should we publish your response?

Please select an option below.

Publish the response with my/our name

3. Consultation questions

11.

1a) Do you agree with our proposal to expand 8.3 of our Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs, RFLs and RSLs, which will also apply to firms under section 7.1 (c) of our Code of Conduct for Firms, to include that complaints information must be provided to clients on conclusion of the legal matter?

No

12.

1b) Do you agree with our proposal to expand 8.3 of our Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs, RFLs and RSLs, which will also apply to firms under section 7.1 (c) of our Code of Conduct for Firms, to include that complaints information must be provided to clients upon request?

Yes

13.

1c) Do you agree with our proposal to expand 8.3 of our Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs, RFLs and RSLs, which will also apply to firms under section 7.1 (c) of our Code of Conduct for Firms, to include that complaints information must be provided to clients if a complaint is made during a matter?

Yes

14.

1d) Please add any comments that you have on when complaints information must be provided to clients.

4. Consultation questions

15.

2a) Do you agree with our proposal to expand Rule 2 of our Transparency Rules to state that complaints information published under this rule must be clear and accessible and in a prominent place on a firms' website?

My view is that this information is already clear obvious and accessible on a firms website, and therefore no further need to do this.

16.

2b) Please explain the reasons for your answer.

It's unnecessary to keep pointing out a complaints mechanism.

If a client is aggrieved, they will naturally invoke the complaints procedure.

It serves no purpose to over highlight the function.

17.

2c) What are your views on us mirroring the wording we have in our guidance on transparency in price and service about prominence?

No current views held on this.

18.

2d) What are your views on us including more information in our guidance on prominence - such as including reference to it not requiring multiple clicks to access or that it should be linked from a homepage?

I think it can be improved by having less clicks and be placed in a more prominent accessible area.

19.

2e) What are your views on us including more information in our guidance on how firms or freelance solicitors that do not have a website should provide complaints information? Please give reasons for your answer and tell us what would be helpful to include.

No view on this.

5. Consultation questions

20.

3) What are your views on us including the LSB's definition of a complaint as a defined term in our Standards and

Regulations Glossary?

21.

4a) What are your views on us producing new guidance to help those we regulate meet our requirements on complaints handling? Please give reasons for your answer.

22.

4b) What are your views on us combining our new guidance with our existing guidance on publishing complaints procedures? Please give reasons for your answer.

23.

4c) Do you have any suggestions for areas we should include in guidance we develop to help solicitors and firms understand our requirements and how to meet our Standards and Regulations in relation to complaints? If so, please give details.

6. Consultation questions

24.

5a) What are your views on us collecting and publishing timeliness data at firm level?

25.

5b) What contextual information would be required to make the information useful to consumers and be fair to solicitors and firms?

26.

5c) What information about complaints would be most helpful to consumers and why?

7. Consultation questions

27.

6) Do you agree that introducing a model complaints resolution procedure (MCRP) for the sector would be helpful?

Agree

Please give reasons for your answer, including anything you think should be taken account of in the development of an MCRP?:

28.

7) Do you have any comments on the regulatory impact of our proposals on first-tier complaints?

29.

8) Do you have any further comments you would like to share with us when reviewing our requirements and producing guidance on first-tier complaints?

30.

9) Do you have any comments on our draft equalities impact assessment?

Changing our requirements on first-tier complaints consultation

Response ID:180 Data

2. About you

1.

First name(s)

Alison

2.

Last name

Lobb

6.

I am responding..

on behalf of an organisation

7.

On behalf of what type of organisation?

Law firm or other legal services provider

8.

Please enter your organisation's SRA ID (if applicable)

484828

9.

Please enter your organisation's name

Morecrofts LLP

10.

How should we publish your response?

Please select an option below.

Publish the response with my/our name

3. Consultation questions

11.

1a) Do you agree with our proposal to expand 8.3 of our Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs, RFLs and RSLs, which will also apply to firms under section 7.1 (c) of our Code of Conduct for Firms, to include that complaints information must be provided to clients on conclusion of the legal matter?

No. this would increase the amount of unjustified complaints we receive. We live in a society where consumers are much more likely to complain than ever before. For example in matrimonial cases clients are usually satisfied during their matter, however when they have to pay the final bill they will realise that they are effectively worse off than before - i.e. they own less property, have less access to children, are no longer married etc. None of these things are our fault and we will have done our best for them, but they start wondering why, as well as all those things, they have paid legal fees to get them to that position, and often

they will raise a complaint hoping for a reduction in fees. Reinforcing the complaints' procedure in the closing letter gives a trigger for this and also sends a negative message. when the majority of clients are happy with legal services, highlighting the complaints' policy will make them wonder whether there is something they should not be happy about.

12.

1b) Do you agree with our proposal to expand 8.3 of our Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs, RFLs and RSLs, which will also apply to firms under section 7.1 (c) of our Code of Conduct for Firms, to include that complaints information must be provided to clients upon request?

yes - we do this anyway

13.

1c) Do you agree with our proposal to expand 8.3 of our Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs, RFLs and RSLs, which will also apply to firms under section 7.1 (c) of our Code of Conduct for Firms, to include that complaints information must be provided to clients if a complaint is made during a matter?

yes - we do this anyway

14.

1d) Please add any comments that you have on when complaints information must be provided to clients.

there is no problem with them having access to the information at any time - and it right that they should. however it is not a good idea to highlight it at the end of the case and send a negative message.

4. Consultation questions

15.

2a) Do you agree with our proposal to expand Rule 2 of our Transparency Rules to state that complaints information published under this rule must be clear and accessible and in a prominent place on a firms' website?

yes - with certain provisos - see below

16.

2b) Please explain the reasons for your answer.

as long as it doesn't have to be titled "how to complain" then it is right that it should be easily accessible. it may need to be qualified by being applicable only to clients and limited other parties - e.g. beneficiaries. We have had quite a few cases where opposing litigants in person have tried to complain about us in order to gain information or disrupt the litigation, and they should not be encouraged,

17.

2c) What are your views on us mirroring the wording we have in our guidance on transparency in price and service about prominence?

no concerns

18.

2d) What are your views on us including more information in our guidance on prominence - such as including reference to it not requiring multiple clicks to access or that it should be linked from a homepage?

that is difficult to enforce as all websites are different - it might also be costly for firms if they have to get development work done on their websites.

19.

2e) What are your views on us including more information in our guidance on how firms or freelance solicitors that do not

have a website should provide complaints information? Please give reasons for your answer and tell us what would be helpful to include.

n/a

5. Consultation questions

20.

3) What are your views on us including the LSB's definition of a complaint as a defined term in our Standards and Regulations Glossary?

the definition is fine but it might need qualifying as to who we can accept complaints from

21.

4a) What are your views on us producing new guidance to help those we regulate meet our requirements on complaints handling? Please give reasons for your answer.

guidance is fine - the more guidance the better

22.

4b) What are your views on us combining our new guidance with our existing guidance on publishing complaints procedures? Please give reasons for your answer.

no concerns

23.

4c) Do you have any suggestions for areas we should include in guidance we develop to help solicitors and firms understand our requirements and how to meet our Standards and Regulations in relation to complaints? If so, please give details.

it is important that you accept that the majority of complaints' handlers do not do that as full time role and have other constraints on their time, so it must not be made too onerous.

6. Consultation questions

24.

5a) What are your views on us collecting and publishing timeliness data at firm level?

it is sometimes difficult to deal with complaints within the 8 weeks period. the majority are fine (and we usually respond within 4 weeks) but there can be complexities, particularly if we need to seek historic information, or get information from multiple people, which could occasionally mean the matter takes longer to resolve. Also, if there is a suggestion that a negligence claim might be made, we often have to have everything approved by our insurers, which can take some time. timeliness is therefore not always a good indicator of the how seriously the firm takes complaints, or their approach to them

25.

5b) What contextual information would be required to make the information useful to consumers and be fair to solicitors and firms?

i think if it were done it would be better as some form of average figure

26.

5c) What information about complaints would be most helpful to consumers and why?

information about how we can accept complaints from and what we are obliged to deal with

7. Consultation questions

27.

6) Do you agree that introducing a model complaints resolution procedure (MCRP) for the sector would be helpful?

Neutral

Please give reasons for your answer, including anything you think should be taken account of in the development of an MCRP?: i am not sure it makes any difference to us - we have a procedure which suits us and we stick to it. it would be difficult to mandate timescales and processes as all firms deal with complaints differently, have different structures, and some outsource complaints handling. One specific procedure might not fit every firm

28.

7) Do you have any comments on the regulatory impact of our proposals on first-tier complaints?

29.

8) Do you have any further comments you would like to share with us when reviewing our requirements and producing guidance on first-tier complaints?

again, it is important that information is provided as to who we can and cannot accept complaints from.
there is also a difference between publishing data on "complaints" and "justified complaints". The majority of complaints we get are unjustified and are just people trying to get a discount or refund. Different areas of work give rise to more complaints due to their nature so it could be prejudicial against some firms.

30.

9) Do you have any comments on our draft equalities impact assessment?

no

Solicitors Regulation Authority
The Cube
199 Wharfside Street
Birmingham
B1 1RN

Sent by email only to: ftc@sra.org.uk

1 August 2025

Dear Sir/Madam,

The Association of Consumer Support Organisations (ACSO) welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Solicitors Regulation Authority (SRA) open consultation on its proposals to change its requirements on first-tier complaints.¹ This letter constitutes our response.

ACSO represents the interest of consumers in the UK's civil justice systems and the reputable, diverse range of organisations who are united in providing the highest standards of service in support of those consumers. Individuals and organisations who are regulated by the SRA generally have a significant impact on consumers within the UK. Our work is therefore linked with the SRA's objective of protecting and promoting the interests of consumers and therefore, this consultation is important to our work.

While we will not address every question within the consultation because some of it falls outside of ours and our members' interests and expertise, the below comments approximately follow the order of questions in the consultation.

Q1 Do you agree with our proposal to expand 8.3 of our Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs, RFLs and RSLs, which will also apply to firms under section 7.1 (c) of our Code of Conduct for Firms, to include that complaints information must be provided to clients on (i) conclusion of the legal matter (Q1a.), (ii) to clients upon request (Q1b.) and (iii) to a client is a complaint is made during a matter (Q1c.)? Please also add any comments that you have on when complaints information must be provided to clients? (Q1d.)

ACSO welcomes the expanded definition to provide clarity to consumers. We believe that the proposals to include additional points at section 8.3 (as above) are sensible proposals that will allow more opportunity for consumers to be able to complain at key stages of their journey and that by doing so leads to continued confidence and trust in the profession as a whole.

However, while ACSO supports the above proposal, we are also mindful that expanding this definition may impact firms significantly in respect of existing systems in place that would have to be changed in order to cater for the above proposal, e.g. firms which rely on system-led letters or processes. As a result, such firms should be allowed additional time to adjust and comply with these requirements. In addition, caution should be exercised when opening such opportunity for complaints in circumstances where a complaint may not otherwise exist. It may be useful to consider that in order to overcome the potential hurdle of 'inviting

¹ [SRA | Consultation - Changing our requirements on first-tier complaints | Solicitors Regulation Authority](#)

complaints' at key stages of the client relationship, to instead consider customer service questionnaires at each key stage to ensure that consumers' interests are protected and maintained throughout the relationship while being fair to providers and not inundating them with 'complaints' that could be resolved by other means.

Q2a. Do you agree with our proposal to expand Rule 2 of our Transparency Rules to state that complaints information published under this rule must be clear and accessible and in a prominent place on a firms' website? Explain reasons for answer (Q2b.)

ACSO supports the proposal to ensure that complaints information is clear, accessible and in a prominent place, this includes ensuring that where necessary, a firm places such information clearly on its website. ACSO also welcomes the accessibility and format of such a proposal and understands that information on complaints-handling may be difficult to find in some circumstances and therefore, by signposting, a consumer would be able to access such information should they need it. In turn this will maintain trust and confidence into the profession as a consumer feels comfortable complaining about service they have received should it be unsatisfactory.

Q2c. What are your views on us mirroring the wording we have in our guidance on transparency in price and service about prominence?

As above, ACSO agrees with the proposals and understands that such action should motivate firms to ensure that they comply with such requirements.

However, we do have concerns surrounding the 'prominence' aspect of the proposal. This is on the basis that, part of the rules appear to have a subjective element to them, for example "place that is easy for members to locate" and "clearly signposted in a way that is easy to understand". It may be appropriate to tighten the language as to what is "clear" and what is "easy to understand" as it may be difficult for regulators/providers to ensure that they are meeting the guidance as proposed by the SRA.

Q2d. What are your views on us including more information in our guidance on prominence – such as including reference to it not requiring multiple clicks to access or that it should be linked from a homepage?

ACSO understands the need for consumers to have understandable and within-reach access to a provider's complaints procedures. However, as above, it may be appropriate for the SRA to be clear on what constitutes as 'prominence' e.g. complaints information being linked to the homepage. ACSO would like to know that such examples would be communicated with providers and be mindful that this may include some significant changes to a firm's process.

Nevertheless, ACSO also understands that a website which clearly directs a consumer to the complaints procedure, reassures such an individual that this firm is open to receiving complaints and the process would be handled efficiently and without ill intent is welcome.

Q2e. What are your views on us including more information in our guidance on how firms or freelance solicitors that do not have a website should provide complaints information? Please give reasons for your answer and tell us what would be helpful to include.

It is important to ensure that consumer's interests are maintained in circumstances where there are freelance solicitors and/ or firms without a website and to this avail, ACSO welcomes any suggestions by the SRA which promote such information being clearly accessible. ACSO looks forward to viewing guidance which assists the consumer and shows that all appropriate information is provided to a consumer regardless of the set up of the entity providing the legal services.

Some examples could include:

- Placing complaints information within client care letters/ engagement letters; and
- Having a leaflet/email that outlines the complaints procedure.

Q3. What are your views on us including the LSB's definition of a complaint as a defined term in our Standards and Regulations Glossary?

Definition: " Complaint – an oral or written expression of dissatisfaction, which alleges that the complainant has suffered (or might suffer) financial loss, distress, inconvenience, or other detriment."

While ACSO supports the element of transparency in including a definition into the SRA's Standards and Regulations Glossary to ensure that consumers complaints are correctly identified and efficiently handled and that such a definition would provide consistency across the sector, we do also have some concerns surrounding the balance between consumer dissatisfaction and a formal complaint.

The above definition is wide and therefore by inserting it as a defined term, allows for what may have been intended as a mere expression of dissatisfaction to become an official, formal complaint. ACSO suggests that the SRA is mindful of proposing to insert such a wide definition and possibly make provisions for more minimal expressions of dissatisfaction that are not intended to be complaints.

ACSO is aware that some firms have incorporated procedures within them that allow for firms to flag an expression of dissatisfaction prior to submitting a formal complaint with the view of resolving the dissatisfaction before making an official complaint. Evidently, it will ultimately be up to the consumer as to whether they wish to make an official complaint and that this should still be readily accessible for an individual should they wish. However, to have a balance between the two would give more opportunity for a client who has mere discontent, and wishes to express this, e.g. when a consumer is annoyed with a delay in service but just wants that to be known and for it to go no further.

To this avail, ACSO wants to ensure that the SRA is aware of such situations where a consumer may wish to flag an expression of dissatisfaction without having to officially complain. By having this lesser procedure, a consumer's interests are protected and they do not need to get involved in a full complaints procedure should they not wish to. It also provides an element of fairness to a firm, should their complaints data be published and reduce the number of complaints that may appear within such data.

Q4a. What are your views on us producing new guidance to help those we regulate meet our requirements on complaints handling? Please give reasons for your answer.

ACSO welcomes new guidance in relation to requirements on complaints handling, and it is clear from the survey's conducted by the SRA that 70 per cent of firms already use resources produced by other organisations and identifying guidance that have worked for them in the past. ACSO support the examples put forward by the SRA including, identifying complaints, communication and accessibility.

Q4b. What are your views on us combining our new guidance with our existing guidance on publishing complaints procedures? Please give reasons for your answer.

ACSO welcomes additional guidance that expands existing guidance. By doing so, this allows more of an opportunity for firms to incorporate their own publications of complaints procedures that align with their business structure and how they address their consumers. By promoting guidance from other organisations such as the Legal Ombudsman and The Law Society, this allows for more flexibility in what a firm can publish on its own domains in relation to complaints handling but also allows more guidance and scope for consumers who wish to exercise the complaints procedure.

Q4c. Do you have any suggestions for areas we should include in guidance we develop to help solicitors and firms understand our requirements and how to meet our Standards and Regulations in relation to complaints? If so, please give details.

We have no comments on this.

Q5a. What are your views on the SRA collecting and publishing timeliness data at firm level?

This should motivate regulators/firms to ensure that they comply with regulatory complaint-handling requirements. While it is beneficial for consumers to be presented with information re complaints that is clear and transparent, it is also important to ensure that such published information is fair and proportionate for the firms involved and that this does not increase negative perceptions on such firms.

Q5b. What contextual information would be required to make the information useful to consumers and be fair to solicitors and firms? And What information about complaints would be most helpful to consumers and why? (Q5c.)

It may be useful to contextualise:

- the number of consumers/clients that a firm deals with on a daily basis and the number of complaints received in comparison, this is particularly important in relation to the size of a firm and the volume of work they receive;
- the nature of the complaints, e.g. delay, service etc, as these could direct a consumer as to how their case may be handled, e.g. a consumer with a time-sensitive matter may not wish to use said firm and vice versa;
- complaint outcomes may be useful in providing a proportion of those upheld, dismissed or referred to the Legal Ombudsman.

The above examples consist of information that is useful to consumers when considering which firm they would like to use but also holding said firms accountable for any lack in service provided. However, contextualising data (as above) ensures an element of fairness to a firm by showing them in relation to the size of the firm and volume of work received but also displaying the outcomes shows consumers that complaints are handled fairly as there are a variety of outcomes that could occur in respect of complaints depending on the circumstances.

Q6. Do you agree that introducing a MCRP for the sector would be helpful? Please give reasons for your answer, including anything you think should be taken account of in the development of an MCRP?

This should motivate regulators/firms to ensure that they comply with regulatory complaint-handling requirements. While ACSO understands that introducing a MCRP would benefit the consumers in terms of simplicity, clarity and confidence over how their complaints will be handled and similarly will clarify the expectations for providers, ACSO also understands that using 'standardised' processes would likely cause significant system development for processes in larger firms which already rely on a system of standardised letters and templates and that should such MCRP come into effect, to allow an adequate amount of time for such firms to be able to comply with this requirement.

It would also be prudent to mention that introducing a MCRP could also include additional funding for resources, funding that may ultimately be borne by the consumer and therefore ACSO would like guidance on how such additional resource is to be funded and how the introduction of an MCRP may ultimately outweigh the increased burden.

Q7. Do you have any comments on the regulatory impact of our proposals on first-tier complaints?

We have no comments on this.

Q8. Do you have any further comments you would like to share with us when reviewing our requirements and producing guidance on first-tier complaints?

We have no further comments.

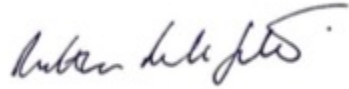
Q9. Do you have any comments on our draft equalities impact assessment?

ACSO supports any recommendations which do not impede the opportunity to complain in relation to services received and which consider the needs of different groups of people who may need to complain, including vulnerable complainants. However, we would ask that the SRA monitors potential barriers in relation to such access to a provider's complaints-handling procedure and would welcome additional comment on emerging challenges and how it intends to address them.

In conclusion, ACSO does not take issue with the majority of the proposals and we conclude that ultimately they will allow a greater opportunity for consumers to be able to access a provider's complaint procedure and ensure that their complaints are handled efficiently and in a timely manner. It is important that emphasis is also placed on the providers and that they do not become inundated with 'complaints' that could be resolved by other means or that such providers are not subject to additional funding for resources that are ultimately borne by the consumer.

We hope this submission assists you to finalise your proposals, but if you require any further detail on any of the points raised, or require any further information, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Matthew J Maxwell Scott'.

Matthew J Maxwell Scott
Executive Director
The Association of Consumer Support Organisations
matthew.maxwellscott@acso.org.uk
07834 288862

Solicitors Regulation Authority
The Cube
199 Wharfside Street
Birmingham
B1 1RN

Sent by email only to: ftc@sra.org.uk

1 August 2025

Dear Sir/Madam,

The Association of Consumer Support Organisations (ACSO) welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Solicitors Regulation Authority (SRA) open consultation on its proposals to change its requirements on first-tier complaints.¹ This letter constitutes our response.

ACSO represents the interest of consumers in the UK's civil justice systems and the reputable, diverse range of organisations who are united in providing the highest standards of service in support of those consumers. Individuals and organisations who are regulated by the SRA generally have a significant impact on consumers within the UK. Our work is therefore linked with the SRA's objective of protecting and promoting the interests of consumers and therefore, this consultation is important to our work.

While we will not address every question within the consultation because some of it falls outside of ours and our members' interests and expertise, the below comments approximately follow the order of questions in the consultation.

Q1 Do you agree with our proposal to expand 8.3 of our Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs, RFLs and RSLs, which will also apply to firms under section 7.1 (c) of our Code of Conduct for Firms, to include that complaints information must be provided to clients on (i) conclusion of the legal matter (Q1a.), (ii) to clients upon request (Q1b.) and (iii) to a client is a complaint is made during a matter (Q1c.)? Please also add any comments that you have on when complaints information must be provided to clients? (Q1d.)

ACSO welcomes the expanded definition to provide clarity to consumers. We believe that the proposals to include additional points at section 8.3 (as above) are sensible proposals that will allow more opportunity for consumers to be able to complain at key stages of their journey and that by doing so leads to continued confidence and trust in the profession as a whole.

However, while ACSO supports the above proposal, we are also mindful that expanding this definition may impact firms significantly in respect of existing systems in place that would have to be changed in order to cater for the above proposal, e.g. firms which rely on system-led letters or processes. As a result, such firms should be allowed additional time to adjust and comply with these requirements. In addition, caution should be exercised when opening such opportunity for complaints in circumstances where a complaint may not otherwise exist. It may be useful to consider that in order to overcome the potential hurdle of 'inviting

¹ [SRA | Consultation - Changing our requirements on first-tier complaints | Solicitors Regulation Authority](#)

complaints’ at key stages of the client relationship, to instead consider customer service questionnaires at each key stage to ensure that consumers’ interests are protected and maintained throughout the relationship while being fair to providers and not inundating them with ‘complaints’ that could be resolved by other means.

Q2a. Do you agree with our proposal to expand Rule 2 of our Transparency Rules to state that complaints information published under this rule must be clear and accessible and in a prominent place on a firms' website? Explain reasons for answer (Q2b.)

ACSO supports the proposal to ensure that complaints information is clear, accessible and in a prominent place, this includes ensuring that where necessary, a firm places such information clearly on its website. ACSO also welcomes the accessibility and format of such a proposal and understands that information on complaints-handling may be difficult to find in some circumstances and therefore, by signposting, a consumer would be able to access such information should they need it. In turn this will maintain trust and confidence into the profession as a consumer feels comfortable complaining about service they have received should it be unsatisfactory.

Q2c. What are your views on us mirroring the wording we have in our guidance on transparency in price and service about prominence?

As above, ACSO agrees with the proposals and understands that such action should motivate firms to ensure that they comply with such requirements.

However, we do have concerns surrounding the ‘prominence’ aspect of the proposal. This is on the basis that, part of the rules appear to have a subjective element to them, for example “place that is easy for members to locate” and “clearly signposted in a way that is easy to understand”. It may be appropriate to tighten the language as to what is “clear” and what is “easy to understand” as it may be difficult for regulators/providers to ensure that they are meeting the guidance as proposed by the SRA.

Q2d. What are your views on us including more information in our guidance on prominence – such as including reference to it not requiring multiple clicks to access or that it should be linked from a homepage?

ACSO understands the need for consumers to have understandable and within-reach access to a provider’s complaints procedures. However, as above, it may be appropriate for the SRA to be clear on what constitutes as ‘prominence’ e.g. complaints information being linked to the homepage. ACSO would like to know that such examples would be communicated with providers and be mindful that this may include some significant changes to a firm’s process.

Nevertheless, ACSO also understands that a website which clearly directs a consumer to the complaints procedure, reassures such an individual that this firm is open to receiving complaints and the process would be handled efficiently and without ill intent is welcome.

Q2e. What are your views on us including more information in our guidance on how firms or freelance solicitors that do not have a website should provide complaints information? Please give reasons for your answer and tell us what would be helpful to include.

It is important to ensure that consumer's interests are maintained in circumstances where there are freelance solicitors and/ or firms without a website and to this avail, ACSO welcomes any suggestions by the SRA which promote such information being clearly accessible. ACSO looks forward to viewing guidance which assists the consumer and shows that all appropriate information is provided to a consumer regardless of the set up of the entity providing the legal services.

Some examples could include:

- Placing complaints information within client care letters/ engagement letters; and
- Having a leaflet/email that outlines the complaints procedure.

Q3. What are your views on us including the LSB's definition of a complaint as a defined term in our Standards and Regulations Glossary?

Definition: " Complaint – an oral or written expression of dissatisfaction, which alleges that the complainant has suffered (or might suffer) financial loss, distress, inconvenience, or other detriment."

While ACSO supports the element of transparency in including a definition into the SRA's Standards and Regulations Glossary to ensure that consumers complaints are correctly identified and efficiently handled and that such a definition would provide consistency across the sector, we do also have some concerns surrounding the balance between consumer dissatisfaction and a formal complaint.

The above definition is wide and therefore by inserting it as a defined term, allows for what may have been intended as a mere expression of dissatisfaction to become an official, formal complaint. ACSO suggests that the SRA is mindful of proposing to insert such a wide definition and possibly make provisions for more minimal expressions of dissatisfaction that are not intended to be complaints.

ACSO is aware that some firms have incorporated procedures within them that allow for firms to flag an expression of dissatisfaction prior to submitting a formal complaint with the view of resolving the dissatisfaction before making an official complaint. Evidently, it will ultimately be up to the consumer as to whether they wish to make an official complaint and that this should still be readily accessible for an individual should they wish. However, to have a balance between the two would give more opportunity for a client who has mere discontent, and wishes to express this, e.g. when a consumer is annoyed with a delay in service but just wants that to be known and for it to go no further.

To this avail, ACSO wants to ensure that the SRA is aware of such situations where a consumer may wish to flag an expression of dissatisfaction without having to officially complain. By having this lesser procedure, a consumer's interests are protected and they do not need to get involved in a full complaints procedure should they not wish to. It also provides an element of fairness to a firm, should their complaints data be published and reduce the number of complaints that may appear within such data.

Q4a. What are your views on us producing new guidance to help those we regulate meet our requirements on complaints handling? Please give reasons for your answer.

ACSO welcomes new guidance in relation to requirements on complaints handling, and it is clear from the survey's conducted by the SRA that 70 per cent of firms already use resources produced by other organisations and identifying guidance that have worked for them in the past. ACSO support the examples put forward by the SRA including, identifying complaints, communication and accessibility.

Q4b. What are your views on us combining our new guidance with our existing guidance on publishing complaints procedures? Please give reasons for your answer.

ACSO welcomes additional guidance that expands existing guidance. By doing so, this allows more of an opportunity for firms to incorporate their own publications of complaints procedures that align with their business structure and how they address their consumers. By promoting guidance from other organisations such as the Legal Ombudsman and The Law Society, this allows for more flexibility in what a firm can publish on its own domains in relation to complaints handling but also allows more guidance and scope for consumers who wish to exercise the complaints procedure.

Q4c. Do you have any suggestions for areas we should include in guidance we develop to help solicitors and firms understand our requirements and how to meet our Standards and Regulations in relation to complaints? If so, please give details.

We have no comments on this.

Q5a. What are your views on the SRA collecting and publishing timeliness data at firm level?

This should motivate regulators/firms to ensure that they comply with regulatory complaint-handling requirements. While it is beneficial for consumers to be presented with information re complaints that is clear and transparent, it is also important to ensure that such published information is fair and proportionate for the firms involved and that this does not increase negative perceptions on such firms.

Q5b. What contextual information would be required to make the information useful to consumers and be fair to solicitors and firms? And What information about complaints would be most helpful to consumers and why? (Q5c.)

It may be useful to contextualise:

- the number of consumers/clients that a firm deals with on a daily basis and the number of complaints received in comparison, this is particularly important in relation to the size of a firm and the volume of work they receive;
- the nature of the complaints, e.g. delay, service etc, as these could direct a consumer as to how their case may be handled, e.g. a consumer with a time-sensitive matter may not wish to use said firm and vice versa;
- complaint outcomes may be useful in providing a proportion of those upheld, dismissed or referred to the Legal Ombudsman.

The above examples consist of information that is useful to consumers when considering which firm they would like to use but also holding said firms accountable for any lack in service provided. However, contextualising data (as above) ensures an element of fairness to a firm by showing them in relation to the size of the firm and volume of work received but also displaying the outcomes shows consumers that complaints are handled fairly as there are a variety of outcomes that could occur in respect of complaints depending on the circumstances.

Q6. Do you agree that introducing a MCRP for the sector would be helpful? Please give reasons for your answer, including anything you think should be taken account of in the development of an MCRP?

This should motivate regulators/firms to ensure that they comply with regulatory complaint-handling requirements. While ACSO understands that introducing a MCRP would benefit the consumers in terms of simplicity, clarity and confidence over how their complaints will be handled and similarly will clarify the expectations for providers, ACSO also understands that using 'standardised' processes would likely cause significant system development for processes in larger firms which already rely on a system of standardised letters and templates and that should such MCRP come into effect, to allow an adequate amount of time for such firms to be able to comply with this requirement.

It would also be prudent to mention that introducing a MCRP could also include additional funding for resources, funding that may ultimately be borne by the consumer and therefore ACSO would like guidance on how such additional resource is to be funded and how the introduction of an MCRP may ultimately outweigh the increased burden.

Q7. Do you have any comments on the regulatory impact of our proposals on first-tier complaints?

We have no comments on this.

Q8. Do you have any further comments you would like to share with us when reviewing our requirements and producing guidance on first-tier complaints?

We have no further comments.

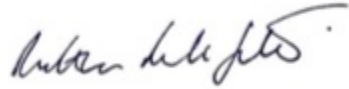
Q9. Do you have any comments on our draft equalities impact assessment?

ACSO supports any recommendations which do not impede the opportunity to complain in relation to services received and which consider the needs of different groups of people who may need to complain, including vulnerable complainants. However, we would ask that the SRA monitors potential barriers in relation to such access to a provider's complaints-handling procedure and would welcome additional comment on emerging challenges and how it intends to address them.

In conclusion, ACSO does not take issue with the majority of the proposals and we conclude that ultimately they will allow a greater opportunity for consumers to be able to access a provider's complaint procedure and ensure that their complaints are handled efficiently and in a timely manner. It is important that emphasis is also placed on the providers and that they do not become inundated with 'complaints' that could be resolved by other means or that such providers are not subject to additional funding for resources that are ultimately borne by the consumer.

We hope this submission assists you to finalise your proposals, but if you require any further detail on any of the points raised, or require any further information, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Matthew J Maxwell Scott'.

Matthew J Maxwell Scott
Executive Director
The Association of Consumer Support Organisations
matthew.maxwellscott@acso.org.uk
07834 288862

SRA consultation - Changing our requirements on first-tier complaints - response from Devon & Somerset Law Society

Good afternoon,

I am responding on behalf of the members of Devon & Somerset Law Society to the SRA's consultation: 'Changing our requirements on first-tier complaints'.

We have had the benefit of reading the response prepared by The Law Society and fully support their comments but make the additional submissions of our own:

1. There is strong feeling amongst our members against the proposal to require firms to give details of their complaints process at the end of a matter.

As was suggested at the SRA's round table on 31 July, not only can it be unclear when a matter is concluded, but also we do not believe that this is good practice.

The President of the Liverpool Law Society made the point well in his submission to the round table that firms need to have the opportunity to deal with complaints as the matter progresses. This is good for consumers as the complaint can be addressed promptly and effectively allowing the firm to put right the service complained of and conclude the work in a satisfactory manner.

We do not believe the giving of this information at conclusion will add any value to the consumer. The more likely outcome will be an increase in staff time and cost dealing with additional unfounded and speculative complaints made simply in the hope of a reduction in fees.

2. We believe a clear definition of a complaint would be helpful. It has been expressed that whilst the LSB's is useful it would help if it were focused on complaints of service.
3. We do not believe that the SRA should publish data in this respect. Complaint handling to meet the demands of a 'league table' will not encourage proper investigation and resolution of issues for the consumer. The Legal Ombudsman has responsibility for first-tier level service complaints and is better placed to measure this.

We believe publishing data is a complex issue as there are many factors that will affect levels of complaints. For example, some areas of work give rise to a greater level of complaints than others. Any attempt to publish data would have to take this into account to avoid prejudice to firms practicing in particular areas of work.

It has been reported to us that the quality of service from the Ombudsman is failing consumers and firms. We suggest that a joined up collaborative consultation about complaints handling might be more useful.

Devon & Somerset Law Society is the largest non-metropolitan local law society in England and Wales and represents around 1200 solicitors and 700 other legal professionals living and working in the two counties. Firms in the area are typically small and medium size organisations employing between 20 and 150 people.

Tony Steiner MBA
Chief Executive
Devon & Somerset Law Society



Informing Progress – Shaping the Future

SRA Consultation - Changing our requirements on first-tier complaints

This response is made on behalf of the **Forum of Insurance Lawyers (FOIL)** in respect of the SRA Consultation - Changing our requirements on first-tier complaints.

FOIL represents lawyers across the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland. It exists to provide a forum for communication and the exchange of information between lawyers acting predominantly or exclusively for insurance clients.

This response has been developed following a survey of FOIL members and via internal discussion of relevant sector focus groups within FOIL.

FOIL has responded to the various questions in the order that they have been presented in the consultation:

Q1a. Do you agree with our proposal to expand 8.3 of our Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs, RFLs and RSLs, which will also apply to firms under section 7.1 (c) of our Code of Conduct for Firms, to include that complaints information must be provided to clients on conclusion of the legal matter?

No, the clear majority view across FOIL members is that it is unnecessary to include additional complaints information at the conclusion of a legal matter (in addition to the provision of information on a firm's website, at the outset of a legal matter and on client request). The proposed change would produce unnecessary duplication and provide further unwarranted communications for clients that had not expressed any previous dissatisfaction with the legal service supplied. There was a general feeling across our members that additional disclosure obligations relating to complaints information would impose an unfair regulatory burden on individual solicitors and law firms.

The interpretation of the term '*conclusion of the legal matter*' could also vary, depending on the type of work in question and the processes involved. If interpreted literally the proposal could lead to multiple (unnecessary) communications for institutional and corporate clients where repeat instructions often occur. There would need to be some adaptation of this proposal to accommodate these kinds of situations and/or clients.

Q1b. Do you agree with our proposal to expand 8.3 of our Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs, RFLs and RSLs, which will also apply to firms under section 7.1 (c) of our Code of Conduct for Firms, to include that complaints information must be provided to clients upon request?

Yes – FOIL agrees with this proposal.

Q1c. Do you agree with our proposal to expand 8.3 of our Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs, RFLs and RSLs, which will also apply to firms under section 7.1 (c) of our Code of Conduct for Firms, to include that complaints information must be provided to clients if a complaint is made during a matter?

Yes – there is no significant disagreement with this aspect of the SRA's proposals.

Q1d. Please add any comments that you have on when complaints information must be provided to clients.

FOIL believes that complaints information should continue to be provided to clients at the outset of a legal matter.¹ Again, some adaptation to this process may be required for institutional and corporate clients, where repeat instructions occur.

Q2a. Do you agree with our proposal to expand Rule 2 of our Transparency Rules to state that complaints information published under this rule must be clear and accessible and in a prominent place on a firms' website?

FOIL members generally agree with this proposal in terms of clarity and accessibility. There is a minority view that would prioritise the clarity/accessibility features over the placement proposal.

Q2b. Please explain the reasons for your answer.

The publication of complaints information on firm's websites is in line with existing regulatory expectations.

Q2c. What are your views on us mirroring the wording we have in our guidance on transparency in price and service about prominence?

Yes, subject to the point made in the answer to Q2a above.

Q2d. What are your views on us including more information in our guidance on prominence – such as including reference to it not requiring multiple clicks to access or that it should be linked from a homepage?

FOIL agrees that any further guidance should make it clear that the requirement of accessibility means that website users should not require multiple clicks from the homepage to secure access to relevant complaints information.

Q2e. What are your views on us including more information in our guidance on how firms or freelance solicitors that do not have a website should provide complaints information? Please give reasons for your answer and tell us what would be helpful to include.

We have no detailed comment to make on the content of any such guidance. FOIL agrees that it would be helpful to offer freelance solicitors without a website, clarity in respect of the regulatory expectations regarding the provision of complaints information.

¹ I.e., at the time of original engagement by the client.

Q3. What are your views on us including the LSB's definition of a complaint as a defined term in our Standards and Regulations Glossary²?

There is some support for the proposed definition of a complaint amongst FOIL members. The focus of the definition is on effect and not expressly on the quality of service that should reasonably be expected. A few responses have expressed concern about the absence of an express causal link between the expression of dissatisfaction/service complained of and the financial loss, distress or detriment that is the subject of any complaint. There is also concern about the potential for overlap and creep in respect of professional indemnity claims.

Q4a. What are your views on us producing new guidance to help those we regulate meet our requirements on complaints handling? Please give reasons for your answer.

There is broad support across FOIL members for the SRA to produce new guidance on complaints handling in the areas identified in the consultation. The area with the greatest support for further guidance concerns supporting vulnerable clients and the signposting of relevant SRA resources. It would be helpful to update and issue guidance to address any changes to the regulatory rules around complaints.

Q4b. What are your views on us combining our new guidance with our existing guidance on publishing complaints procedures? Please give reasons for your answer.

FOIL is generally supportive of this proposal.

Q4c. Do you have any suggestions for areas we should include in guidance we develop to help solicitors and firms understand our requirements and how to meet our Standards and Regulations in relation to complaints? If so, please give details.

See the answer to Q4A above.

Q5a. What are your views on the SRA collecting and publishing timeliness data at firm level?

There is general concern across FOIL members about the proposals to collect and publish complaints data. Specifically, there is concern about the potential regulatory burden on firms and individual solicitors. Whilst the SRA already collects complaints data through the practicing certificate bulk renewal process, they also acknowledge the need for contextualised/verified complaints data in the event of publication. FOIL members are concerned about how this might be achieved in practice. The consultation infers that a practical solution is possible, but the general FOIL view is that it is neither feasible or proportionate to do this at a firm or individual solicitor level in a way that would be fair to both consumers and solicitors. For example, it is not immediately clear how temporal complaints data could be easily updated where complaints are subsequently found to be invalid, misleading or unfounded. The resourcing implications for the regulator and firms are potentially significant.

The SRA's own research acknowledges the potential regulatory impact that receiving complaints can have on individual solicitors and firms. The publication of complaints data for individual solicitors has the greatest potential regulatory impact and burden. There is a significant risk that the publication of complaints data could offer a misleading and inaccurate temporal picture of performance. There is

² A complaint is defined by the SRA as 'an oral or written expression of dissatisfaction, which alleges that the complainant has suffered (or might suffer) financial loss, distress, inconvenience, or other detriment.'

also scope for this to be abused by unscrupulous clients, determined to cause harm and to distort the complaints data in relation to individual solicitors and firms.

If timeliness data must be published, it should be offered at an aggregated level and not at firm or individual solicitor level.

Q5b. What contextual information would be required to make the information useful to consumers and be fair to solicitors and firms?

FOIL does not consider that it would be practicable or cost effective to contextualise and validate published complaints data at a firm or individual level in way that is fair to consumers and the subjects of regulation. See the answer to Q5a above.

Q5c. What information about complaints would be most helpful to consumers and why?

If complaints data as to timeliness is to be published, it would be preferable to do so in an aggregated way and not at an individual firm or solicitor level.

Q6. Do you agree that introducing a MCRP for the sector would be helpful? Please give reasons for your answer, including anything you think should be taken account of in the development of an MCRP?

FOIL agrees that the provision of a model complaints resolution procedure might be helpful for the sector but offers no specific views on content beyond the comments already expressed in this response.

Q7. Do you have any comments on the regulatory impact of our proposals on first-tier complaints?

See our answer to Q5a above. The collation and publication of complaints data on individual solicitors has the greatest potential regulatory impact. There is considerable scope for inaccuracy and abuse. There are resourcing issues to consider. The likely behavioural effects of the collation and publication of complaints data remain unclear.

FOIL sees no need to change the current level of complaint data collated and provided to the SRA during the practicing certificate bulk renewal process. Some FOIL members are concerned by the administrative burden that further data collation on an individual solicitor basis would cause.

Q8. Do you have any further comments you would like to share with us when reviewing our requirements and producing guidance on first-tier complaints?

No.

Q9. Do you have any comments on our draft equalities impact assessment?

The current assessment pays limited attention to the equalities impact on individual solicitors. The impact assessment will need reviewing if a decision is made to publish complaints data at an individual solicitor level.

Date: 24 July 2025

Contact:

Dr Jeffrey Wale, Technical Director

Forum of Insurance Lawyers

1 Esher Close

Basingstoke

Hampshire RG22 6JP

Email: jeffrey.wale@foil.org.uk

Tel: 07775 251129

To Email: ftc@sra.org.uk

LeO Response to SRA Consultation: *Changing our Requirements on First- Tier Complaints*

August 2025



About us

1. The Legal Ombudsman (LeO) was set up in England and Wales by the Office for Legal Complaints (OLC) and established under the Legal Services Act 2007. LeO has two core roles. First, we resolve complaints about providers of legal services that have not been resolved to customers' satisfaction – as quickly and informally as possible. LeO covers the majority of legal services provided in England and Wales. The rules and limits about what complaints LeO can help with are set out on our website.
2. The second vital part of our work is sharing learning and insight from the complaints we see. This promotes better complaint handling, prevents future complaints, and helps drive higher standards in legal services.

Summary of LeO's response

3. We welcome the opportunity to respond to this consultation and would like to note our appreciation of the continued collaborative efforts to improve first-tier complaints handling across the sector – including through the development of a Model Complaint Handling Procedure (MCRP). We value the constructive relationship we have developed and are committed to working closely with the SRA to support the profession in making the necessary improvements.
4. Over the last five years, demand for our service has increased by almost 50%. Drivers of this demand are many and various, but we strongly believe that collaborating with the SRA and other regulators to support the sector with higher standards and a common approach to complaint handling will help manage this demand.
5. A significant focus of the OLC's 2024-7 Strategy is supporting improvement and sharing more insight. Too many complaints are escalated to LeO which could be resolved effectively at first tier. Addressing this is a shared responsibility, which can only be addressed through collaborative action by the profession and regulators. It is to the long-term benefit of service providers and consumers of legal services for these improvements to be made.
6. As our response outlines, we fully support the overall aim of ensuring consumers understand both their right to complain and how to do so. This is a critical feature of a good service and an important component of ensuring public confidence in legal services. From our experience of investigating complaints, we know there is room for

improvement in both how and when complaint procedures are communicated to clients. We therefore welcome the intention to take action in this area.

7. The question of when complaint information should be provided to consumers is a very important one and we are eager to work with you in maximising the opportunity to improve the quality of services on this point, and managing the risks involved. From our experience, we believe there are clear opportunities to help support consumers and service providers to resolve complaints as early as possible.
8. We agree that providing complaints information at the conclusion of a legal matter but we would also recommend this is supplemented by earlier prompts during the client journey. Early engagement with feedback can often prevent escalation and foster a culture of continuous improvement.
9. Clarity and consistency of messaging is also important, and we welcome the proposals which focus on ensuring information available on a service provider's website is available to consumers in a transparent way – presented clearly and prominently, not within the footers of website.
10. We look forward to exploring further opportunities to share insight, develop practical guidance and promote a culture of openness and continuous improvement in complaint handling.

Responses to questions

Q1a. Do you agree with our proposal to expand 8.3 of our Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs, RFLs and RSLs, which will also apply to firms under section 7.1 (c) of our Code of Conduct for Firms, to include that complaints information must be provided to clients on conclusion of the legal matter?

11. We recognise that the proposal to provide complaints information at the end of a legal matter aligns with the requirements set out by the Legal Services Board and agree in principle that this could provide greater support for clients to raise concerns if something has gone wrong. However, we believe the proposal could be strengthened by broadening its scope and refining its timing further.
12. We want complaint handling procedures to be used in any case where a consumer is unhappy with the legal service they have received and wants their legal service provider to take action to address their concerns. It is important that the demands on lawyers in carrying out this exercise are balanced with the benefits of them doing so.
13. A risk is that the proposal is too narrow in scope, focusing only on an invitation to report any negative impressions or experiences the consumer has had with the service provided.

14. Most firms we see advertise an ethos of high standards of customer care. There is no doubt that consumers who provide constructive feedback about how a service could be improved are an asset to the business. They reflect not just a firm willing to listen to its consumers, but also a firm creating a culture where consumers feel that their voices will be heard and valued.
15. We find most firms also welcome constructive feedback from LeO and the small changes to business practices as a result of that feedback can often help to avoid complaints in the future.
16. In our view, it is much better that firms hear this from consumers during the retainer than at the end, because it gives the opportunity for the relationship still to end on good terms. It is also better than firms hearing this once a complaint has already escalated to LeO, or from consumers posting feedback or reviews elsewhere.
17. We know word of mouth is extremely important for businesses. As evidenced by the Legal Services Consumer Panel Tracker Survey 2025, almost half (48%) of people surveyed chose their provider based on the experience or recommendation of a family member, or they did so based on an internet search.
18. Finally, getting feedback during the retainer is always better than consumers not giving their feedback at all, particularly in cases where the consumer doesn't get the service they wanted, and the service provider might lose that client on future retainers without knowing why.
19. The timing of communications is crucial. Almost a quarter (24%) of the complaints we accepted for in-depth investigation in 2024/5 related to communication. Our investigations therefore rely on evidence of what the provider told the client to expect from the service at the start of the work. This will typically include the client care letter, terms of business and any funding agreement. These documents will often have been sent to the client long before the client had reason to complain – in some cases, several years – and recollections are likely to differ, without reference to these documents.
20. When sent, the documents will also have had different perceived importance for provider and consumer. For providers, they represent the contract; for consumers, the significance is often less clear. We regularly see the provider has referred to these documents in dealing with a complaint, and so will we. This indicates a gap in the perceived importance of these documents between provider and consumer.
21. Rather than waiting until the very end of the retainer, there are natural points earlier in the client journey, such as an exchange of contracts in conveyancing, or shortly before trial – where a reminder of the key information and an invitation for positive or

negative feedback could be more effective. This would allow service providers to understand what each consumer perceives as good service, and to address any misunderstandings and examples of ongoing poor service before they escalate into complaints.

22. This proposal would need careful consideration, as it could risk affecting the progress of cases at crucial times. However, there exists, in our view, a significant opportunity to improve both the service and the perception of the service with a reminder of key information at an appropriate point, including what to do if the consumer is unhappy. The end of the retainer might well be too late.
23. Of the cases with investigative outcomes in 2024/25, 30% saw no failing in the provider's service, and not all of the issues in the remaining complaints were upheld. In our dialogue with providers, we commonly acknowledge when a service was provided well, as we recognise that this gives providers the chance to build their service around what we consider to be good practice.
24. In summary, we would like to see the SRA encouraging feedback on the service at the most appropriate point in the retainer, rather than being focused solely on complaints at the end of the service provided.
25. Improving a service is rarely limited to changing processes. The best law firms we encounter identify good practice. They build their services around what works for them and their consumers. We consider the opportunity for feedback on this is significant and it will embed an attractive culture of continuous improvement in the legal sector.

Q1b. Do you agree with our proposal to expand 8.3 of our Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs, RFLs and RSLs, which will also apply to firms under section 7.1 (c) of our Code of Conduct for Firms, to include that complaints information must be provided to clients upon request?

26. We agree that, if a consumer asks for information about a firm's complaint handling procedure, the firm should comply with the request and do so promptly.

Q1c. Do you agree with our proposal to expand 8.3 of our Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs, RFLs and RSLs, which will also apply to firms under section 7.1 (c) of our Code of Conduct for Firms, to include that complaints information must be provided to clients if a complaint is made during a matter?

18. We agree with this approach and understand the benefits of firms doing this.

Q1d. Please add any comments that you have on when complaints information must be provided to clients.

19. Please refer to our comments under Q1a above.

Q2a. Do you agree with our proposal to expand Rule 2 of our Transparency Rules to state that complaints information published under this rule must be clear and accessible and in a prominent place on a firm's website?

20. Yes. We share your views on this issue and agree with you that the prominence of the information on the website is critical.

Q2b. Please explain the reasons for your answer.

21. Research LeO conducted in 2022 in relation to the transparency of complaints information on legal service providers' websites showed that, when participants opted to look for links to complaint information in the main body of the home page, or within the 'Contact us' tab, they had little success.
22. A number of legal service providers make an assumption that consumers will 'read the small print' contained within the footer of a web page, when, in reality, research participants demonstrated that consumers would have different levels of familiarity with corporate websites; if information is in the footer, it will not always be found.
23. Also, some participants will consider it purposely 'hidden' and reflective of an organisational culture that is not open to learning from complaints.

Q2c. What are your views on us mirroring the wording we have in our guidance on transparency in price and service about prominence?

24. We support this consistency of approach.

Q2d. What are your views on us including more information in our guidance on prominence – such as including reference to it not requiring multiple clicks to access or that it should be linked from a homepage?

25. We support your inclusion of this in guidance. Whilst we recognise that increasing the ability to access information about how to complain might lead to an increase in complaints, we have seen from the Legal Services Consumer Panel's research¹ that only 51% of clients who use a lawyer know how to complain. Addressing the latter is the greater need.

Q2e. What are your views on us including more information in our guidance on how firms or freelance solicitors that do not have a website should provide complaints information? Please give reasons for your answer and tell us what would be helpful to include.

26. We support this, recognising that a website is a business decision for each firm. We would be happy to collaborate with you on a future edition of the guidance.

¹ <https://www.legalservicesconsumerpanel.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/25.06.06-Briefing-on-First-Tier-Complaints.pdf>

Q3. What are your views on us including the LSB's definition of a complaint as a defined term in our Standards and Regulations Glossary?

27. This definition mirrors the definition in our Scheme Rule 1.6a). As such, we support its inclusion in your glossary.

Q4a. What are your views on us producing new guidance to help those we regulate meet our requirements on complaints handling? Please give reasons for your answer.

28. We believe more guidance on expectations and practical help will be of benefit to the profession and we support you on this.
29. Promoting consistency of message, we would be happy to collaborate with you in the production of further guidance, building on the work we are currently doing in this space, including our Model Complaints Resolution Procedure.

Q4b. What are your views on us combining our new guidance with our existing guidance on publishing complaints procedures? Please give reasons for your answer.

30. We do not have a view on this, save to encourage clarity in the messages delivered.

Q4c. Do you have any suggestions for areas we should include in guidance we develop to help solicitors and firms understand our requirements and how to meet our Standards and Regulations in relation to complaints? If so, please give details.

31. We would be happy to collaborate with you in the production of further guidance, building on the work we are currently doing in this space, which includes guidance on handling complaints.

Q5a. What are your views on the SRA collecting and publishing timeliness data at firm level?

32. We welcome the proposal's emphasis on promoting a culture of good complaint handling. Encouraging firms to assess their performance critically and to make complaint handling a key part of their service would be a positive step forward.
33. We found the service provider's complaint handling to be below a reasonable standard on 48.7% of the cases with an investigative outcome in 2024/25.
34. 45% of the cases we resolved in 2024/25 were within 90 days of the complaint being received. We expect that this proportion would be significantly increased if the standard of complaint handling across the profession were to improve.
35. We believe it is important to note that there is a range of quality in complaint procedures across the profession. Many service providers invest significant time,

resource and emotions in both avoiding and dealing with complaints. For firms who genuinely value and encourage feedback and support clients to make complaints when dissatisfied, the number of complaints they receive may naturally be higher than those who aren't transparent or respond to their client feedback. However, there is considerable room for the overall quality of complaint handling to improve: poor complaint handling can be brought up to a reasonable standard, reasonable to good, and good to excellent.

36. Whilst your collation of the data might primarily serve as an exercise for you to assess the timeliness of firms' handling of complaints, we believe it will encourage firms to reflect on their procedure and their attitude towards complaints. We welcome this.

Q5b. What contextual information would be required to make the information useful to consumers and be fair to solicitors and firms?

37. We encourage any published data from you to link to our published data on decisions ². This will add context, which should be of benefit to both consumers and firms.
38. Data on the size of a firm – including the number of fee earners – would add useful context for consumers.

Q5c. What information about complaints would be most helpful to consumers and why?

39. We do not currently have any evidence to contribute to this question but would be happy to contribute to discussions on the subject, after the consultation.

Q6. Do you agree that introducing a MCRP for the sector would be helpful? Please give reasons for your answer, including anything you think should be taken account of in the development of an MCRP?

40. For LeO, supporting improvements to first-tier complaint handling, including through the implementation of a sector-wide MCRP, is a key strategic aim. We have been working on the MCRP for much of this year, in consultation with you and other regulators. We are pleased that regulators including the SRA have shown support for our initiative and we welcome your continued support for this important development.
41. As you are aware, we are currently in a Pilot stage of a draft MCRP, including with some SRA-regulated firms. After gathering evidence from that, we will be going out to consultation before we launch the MCRP. We absolutely welcome the feedback given by consultees here on useful features in the final MCRP and the supporting materials.

² <https://www.legalombudsman.org.uk/information-centre/data-centre/ombudsman-decision-data/>

42. If successful, the MCRP will provide an opportunity for a reduction in the wide range of quality and experience of complaint procedures in the legal sector, enhance consumer confidence in complaint procedures and give providers assurance that their procedure is fair and effective. To be successful, it will need support, including that of the sector.

Q7. Do you have any comments on the regulatory impact of our proposals on first-tier complaints?

43. We want to ensure that complaints handling isn't seen as a burden on firms, just as it shouldn't be seen as inaccessible to clients. In the right culture, both lawyers and consumers should welcome dialogue about service, and any opportunity to improve a service should be encouraged.

Q8. Do you have any further comments you would like to share with us when reviewing our requirements and producing guidance on first-tier complaints?

44. No, other than to repeat our offer to work with you on its development.

Q9. Do you have any comments on our draft equalities impact assessment?

45. We welcome your attention to avoiding any equality impacts.

Sent by email only to ftc@sra.org.uk

1 August 2025

Changing Our Requirements on First-Tier Complaints: Consultation

The Legal Services Consumer Panel welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Solicitors Regulation Authority's (SRA) consultation on first-tier complaints. The Panel has consistently called for reform in how legal service providers handle complaints at the first point of contact. This consultation marks an important opportunity to rethink existing systems and introduce more robust, user-centred measures that restore consumer trust and drive meaningful accountability.

There is an important point the Panel would like to make upfront. While the Tracker Survey reports that 87% of consumers are satisfied with their legal services, this masks a concerning disconnect in first-tier complaints engagement. Only 51% of consumers say they would know how to make a complaint, and nearly a third would not raise issues directly with providers, citing barriers like fear, mistrust, or concern over delays and costs.

This suggests that high satisfaction does not equate to a well-functioning complaints system. Instead, it may indicate that dissatisfied consumers are silently disengaging, unable or unwilling to challenge poor service — a potential regulatory blind spot.

Summary of our response

The Panel welcomes the SRA's efforts to reform first-tier complaints handling and broadly supports the SRA's approach and proposals. For many years we have noted key concerns, which include low consumer awareness of complaints processes, systemic issues in first-tier handling (with 46% found by the Legal Ombudsman to be unreasonable), and a culture that deters feedback from 'silent sufferers' (those who are dissatisfied with the service they received but felt unable to complain).

The Panel strongly supports mandating the Model Complaints Resolution Procedure (MCRP), improving the clarity and availability of complaints information, and enriching data transparency. While we acknowledge the SRA's publication of aggregate

complaints data, the Panel identifies shortcomings with what is published, including poor accessibility, lack of granularity, and absence of demographic insights.

Background and Evidence base for the Panel’s position and recommendations

Despite first-tier complaints being the primary route for redressing poor service, consumer awareness remains alarmingly low. According to the Panel’s 2024 Tracker Survey, just 51% of consumers know how to complain, and fewer than half (48%) say they would complain to their provider first. This is compounded by barriers within client care communication¹: complaints procedures are often buried in lengthy documentation, presented in legalistic language, and lack clarity or empathy. Such practices fail to meet the needs of the most vulnerable, leaving many consumers disempowered at the very moment they need support.

The Legal Ombudsman’s data reinforces these concerns. In the 2023/24 reporting period, 46% of complaints investigated revealed unreasonable handling at the first tier, and 69% involved poor service overall. This signals not isolated missteps but widespread failure to treat complaints seriously and constructively. A significant group of consumers (21%) don’t complain at all², becoming what the Panel terms “silent sufferers.” Their reasons range from lack of trust to fears over fee increases or difficulty in contacting firms. These are not administrative oversights; they are cultural failings that stifle feedback and enable complacency.

The SRA must lead with standardisation

Over the years, the Panel has advocated for a standardised approach to complaints handling. In 2022, we highlighted that complaints communication was mostly ineffective, and we said:

“In our view, information on first tier complaints, including an indication of when consumers may escalate to the Legal Ombudsman, should be standardised, so that all consumers across all the regulated communities receive the same information, in the same format and with the same words. This information should have the benefit of being trialed and tested prior to its dissemination, and expert input sought on what is likely to work, e.g. from behavioral scientists who have contributed to similar developments in other sectors. In addition to standardisation helping with the communication of consumers’ rights, it can also help with general communication. One barrier to access to justice is unclear or over-complicated language. Effective standardisation, which is tested with consumers, can drive better use of consumer-friendly language and formats to address accessibility”³

¹ Client Care letters are the vehicle in which providers typically use to fulfil their obligation of informing consumers about their right to make a complaint.

² Legal Services Consumer Panel, Tracker Survey 2025

³ <https://www.legalservicesconsumerpanel.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/22.10.19-Standardisation-of-Consumer-Information-in-Legal-Services.pdf> (Page 5)

We therefore strongly support the development of the Model Complaints Resolution Procedure (MCRP), currently being piloted by the Legal Ombudsman. Our 2022 report, *“Standardisation of Consumer Information in Legal Services⁴”*, laid the foundation for this initiative. However, as emphasised in the report, the effectiveness of such an approach is dependent on robust consumer testing, it is therefore imperative that consumer testing is undertaken as part of this exercise. Once finalised, the MCRP should be mandated across the sector to ensure all consumers receive consistent and fair treatment, regardless of the provider they choose.

Better Complaints Data

While the SRA deserves credit for publishing aggregate data on first-tier complaints, gaps in scope and accessibility undermine its value. The data lacks granularity, offering little insight into complaint trends by firm, legal service area, or geographic region. Categorisation is opaque, with excessive reliance on the “other” label, and the absence of demographic breakdowns prevents meaningful analysis of barriers faced by marginalised groups. Furthermore, the data exists in static PDF formats with limited visibility and no link to enforcement outcomes or quality improvements. This approach falls short of empowering consumers or enabling regulators to act with precision.

To address the issues noted above, the Panel puts forward the following recommendations:

- Establish and mandate MCRP to ensure accessibility, consistency, and responsiveness across all providers.
- Enforce stronger requirements for complaints communication, including mandatory provision of standardised complaints communication at onboarding, service conclusion, upon request, and when a complaint is initiated. Providers should also be required to publish complaints guidance prominently on their websites.
- Expand and enhance the SRA’s complaints data strategy, introducing clearer categorisation of issues, demographic insights, and a searchable interactive dashboard. This data should also be linked to enforcement actions and improvements in service delivery.
- Foster a feedback-positive culture, where complaints are viewed not as threats but opportunities for learning and growth. This should be supported with training, sector-wide best practice resources, and clear incentives for improvement.

⁴ <https://www.legalservicesconsumerpanel.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/22.10.19-Standardisation-of-Consumer-Information-in-Legal-Services.pdf>

- Monitor and evaluate the impact of reforms, actively engaging with consumer groups and using data to iterate and refine the complaints framework over time.

Reflections on the consultation questions

Q1a. Do you agree with our proposal to expand 8.3 of our Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs, RFLs and RSLs, which will also apply to firms under section 7.1 (c) of our Code of Conduct for Firms, to include that complaints information must be provided to clients on conclusion of the legal matter?

Yes, the Panel fully supports this proposal. As noted above, there is ample evidence showing that the current information remedy is not working and has not been working for many years. It is unacceptable that 51% of consumers do not know how to make a complaint, this must be addressed with mandatory requirements. Consumers have already noted in both the client care research and in the Legal Ombudsman's research with Community Research that they would find it useful to obtain communication on how to make a complaint at varying points, the SRA should give effect to this.

Q1b. Do you agree with our proposal to expand 8.3 of our Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs, RFLs and RSLs, which will also apply to firms under section 7.1 (c) of our Code of Conduct for Firms, to include that complaints information must be provided to clients upon request?

Yes, we agree. We see no compelling reason complaints information should not be provided to clients upon request. This is a straightforward expectation aligned with principles of transparency, accountability, and consumer empowerment. Ensuring consumers can easily access complaints information when they ask for it respects their right to be informed and supports early resolution of issues, in line with good regulatory practice.

Q1c. Do you agree with our proposal to expand 8.3 of our Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs, RFLs and RSLs, which will also apply to firms under section 7.1 (c) of our Code of Conduct for Firms, to include that complaints information must be provided to clients if a complaint is made during a matter?

Yes, we agree. It is both logical and appropriate to make this a formal requirement. When a client raises concern during a matter, the obligation to provide information about complaints procedures becomes even more pressing. This not only facilitates

timely resolution but also helps to embed a culture of openness and responsiveness within legal service providers.

Q1d. Please add any comments that you have on when complaints information must be provided to clients.

The timing of when complaints information is shared with clients should be determined with reference to consumer research and behavioural insights. Evidence-led policymaking is critical here, particularly in understanding what triggers consumers to seek redress and how best to support them at those decision points.

Q2a. Do you agree with our proposal to expand Rule 2 of our Transparency Rules to state that complaints information published under this rule must be clear and accessible and in a prominent place on a firms' website?

Yes, we agree. Given the scale and persistence of the problem with accessibility of complaints information, requiring it to be clearly visible and in a prominent location on providers' websites is the absolute minimum necessary. This proposal partly addresses a long-standing issue regarding obscured or overly technical complaints pathways.

Q2b. Please explain the reasons for your answer.

Complaints information is of little practical use if consumers cannot find or interpret it easily. The Panel has consistently supported interventions that enhance visibility and comprehension, and believes this change is a proportionate and effective regulatory step that prioritises consumer needs.

Q2c. What are your views on us mirroring the wording we have in our guidance on transparency in price and service about prominence?

We do not object to mirroring existing guidance wording on prominence. However, we encourage the SRA to review its current evaluation activity to assess the effectiveness of the transparency rules on price and service before finalising this approach. If the evaluation demonstrates positive consumer outcomes, then alignment strengthens consistency across regulatory frameworks; if not, this warrants further scrutiny.

Q2d. What are your views on us including more information in our guidance on prominence – such as including reference to it not requiring multiple clicks to access or that it should be linked from a homepage?

We support the inclusion of practical guidance to ensure firms understand what "prominence" means in practice. Explicit recommendations such as avoiding multiple clicks and linking from the homepage will drive consistency, reduce consumer frustration, and support regulatory enforcement.

Q2e. What are your views on us including more information in our guidance on how firms or freelance solicitors that do not have a website should provide complaints information? Please give reasons for your answer and tell us what would be helpful to include.

We agree that firms and freelance solicitors who do not maintain websites should nonetheless be required to signpost complaints effectively. The Panel urges the SRA to work in collaboration with the Law Society and others to compile illustrative examples of good practice, particularly for printed materials or direct communications. How information is presented is as important as the fact of its inclusion and this should be informed by consumer testing and behavioural design principles.

Q3. What are your views on us including the LSB's definition of a complaint as a defined term in our Standards and Regulations Glossary?

We support the inclusion of the Legal Services Board's definition as a defined term within the SRA's Standards and Regulations Glossary. This promotes regulatory coherence and provides clarity for consumers and providers alike. Nevertheless, the definition's effectiveness should be monitored, particularly in terms of whether it facilitates appropriate reporting and resolution of consumer issues.

Q4a. What are your views on us producing new guidance to help those we regulate meet our requirements on complaints handling? Please give reasons for your answer.

We agree. New guidance that is well-structured, outcome-focused, and rich with examples of good practice will support providers in fulfilling their obligations and facilitate the culture shift required in complaints handling. This is a timely and welcome intervention.

Q4b. What are your views on us combining our new guidance with our existing guidance on publishing complaints procedures? Please give reasons for your answer.

We do not support combining new guidance with the existing publication on complaints procedures. The SRA should take the opportunity to reset and reshape the complaints landscape with a clear focus on desired regulatory outcomes. One cohesive document, with clarity of vision and purpose, will be more impactful than a layered or fragmented approach.

Q4c. Do you have any suggestions for areas we should include in guidance we develop to help solicitors and firms understand our requirements and how to meet our Standards and Regulations in relation to complaints? If so, please give details.

- Case studies illustrating best practice in early resolution
- The role of tone, empathy, and clarity in effective complaints responses

- Signposting external redress mechanisms clearly and consistently
- Handling complaints from vulnerable consumers or those with additional support needs

Q5a. What are your views on the SRA collecting and publishing timeliness data at firm level?

We support this proposal. Publishing timeliness data will encourage better performance and responsiveness among providers. It also enriches the SRA's evidence base, enabling earlier identification of risk patterns and more effective regulatory interventions.

Q5b. What contextual information would be required to make the information useful to consumers and be fair to solicitors and firms?

The Panel has held discussion with regulators on this topic in the past. We have attached a link to the minutes of that discussion⁵ to help the SRA's thinking.

The Panel has always been at pains to stress that there is no one-size-fits-all model for contextualising complaints data, but the principles of fairness, transparency, and usability must guide implementation. The sector can learn from other regulators outside of legal services who have had to contextualise complaints data e.g. the Financial Conduct Authority.

Q5c. What information about complaints would be most helpful to consumers and why?

Consumers would benefit most from information that:

- Summarises the nature and types of complaints upheld
- Shows the average resolution time
- Explains how providers have responded or improved following complaints Such information empowers informed decision-making and builds trust in the system.

Q6. Do you agree that introducing a MCRP for the sector would be helpful?

Yes, we strongly support the introduction of an MCRP, subject to appropriate testing. It has significant potential to set expectations, reduce variation, and improve consumer outcomes. However, consumer engagement is critical in shaping the format, language, and delivery method to ensure that it is not only adopted but effective.

⁵

https://www.legalservicesconsumerpanel.org.uk/publications/policy_briefings/documents/Agenda_And_Summary_Of_LSCP_Complaints_Data_Roundtable.pdf

Q7. Do you have any comments on the regulatory impact of our proposals on first-tier complaints?

The proposed measures will support regulatory objectives concerning consumer protection and access to redress. They place proportionate expectations on providers and offer tools that can drive improvements without imposing undue burdens.

Q8. Do you have any further comments you would like to share with us when reviewing our requirements and producing guidance on first-tier complaints?

The Panel encourages the SRA to embed behavioural science and inclusive design principles into the development of future guidance. Proactive engagement with consumer advocates and ongoing evaluation will be vital to delivering long-term impact.

Q9. Do you have any comments on our draft equalities impact assessment?

We welcome the draft equalities impact assessment and encourage the SRA to work closely with equality stakeholders to explore how first-tier complaint processes can better serve marginalised groups. Attention should be paid to accessibility of language, communication channels, and support for neurodiverse clients and those with limited digital literacy

In conclusion, the Panel urges the SRA to embrace the full potential of this consultation as a vehicle for transformation. Incremental adjustments will not suffice. What is required is a bold, collaborative effort to build a system that meets consumers where they are, with clarity, compassion, and consequence. The Panel stands ready to support this journey toward a more transparent and accountable legal services market.

I hope you find these comments helpful, should you have any questions pertaining to this response, please contact Lola Bello, Head, Consumer Panel (lola.bello@legalservicesconsumerpanel.org.uk)

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tom Hayhoe', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Tom Hayhoe
Chair

Legal Services Consumer Panel.

**SRA CONSULTATION ON REQUIREMENTS ON FIRST-TIER COMPLAINTS HANDLING
RESPONSE OF THE LONDON SOLICITORS LITIGATION ASSOCIATION ("LSLA")
DRAFT – 31 JULY 2025**

The LSLA was formed in 1952 and currently represents the interests of a wide range of civil litigators in London. It has almost 4,000 members throughout London among all the major litigation practices, ranging from the sole practitioner to major international firms. Members of the LSLA Committee sit on the Civil Justice Council, the Chancery Court Users Committee, the Rolls Building Users Committee, the Law Society Civil Litigation Committee and the Commercial Court Users Committee to name but a few. As a consequence, the LSLA has become the first port of call for consultation on issues affecting civil and commercial litigation in London, and it has on many occasions been at the forefront of the process of change.

This document sets out the response of the LSLA to the consultation exercise by the Solicitors' Regulation Authority on its proposals to change the requirements on first-tier complaints. In this, we draw on the wide experience of our members and the views that are expressed below reflect a range of perspectives. Rather than responding to each individual question, we provide some observations on the broad points of principle, which we hope will assist the SRA in its ongoing consultation.

The LSLA supports the spirit behind the SRA's consultation. Effective handling of client complaints is a core part of the duty of a solicitor. Beyond that, being receptive to feedback from clients, including through complaints, should be seen as an opportunity for practitioners to improve. Where a client is dissatisfied, understanding the reasons for that, and addressing the root cause, may help to improve overall service delivery, to the benefit of the firm and its wider client base. That should only increase the success of the firm in the longer term and ensure that the reputation of the legal profession is upheld.

Against that background, we comment briefly on the areas on which the SRA is consulting as follows.

1. Make changes to when complaints information must be provided to a client

- 1.1 Providing clear information to clients about the route for raising complaints is sensible. However, it is important that clients are not drowned with information. The SRA needs to consider the risk of diminishing returns – the more information clients are provided with, the less they are likely to digest it, which would defeat the purpose.
- 1.2 It should remain a given that complaints handling information is provided at the outset of a matter and upon request during the course of a matter or after its conclusion. However, we question the need to send complaints information to clients again at the conclusion of a matter. The client will already have this information, and it will remain available upon request. The proposal to routinely send this at the end of a matter risks clients who are faced with a disappointing outcome before a court or tribunal, redirecting their frustration into blame. We anticipate that this would generate unjustified complaints against solicitors at a point at which a client feels they have no other route to vent their frustration. Some clients may also wrongly understand that providing the complaints information indicates that a mistake has been made or that grounds exist for a complaint to be lodged.
- 1.3 In the litigation context, there is much more risk of that, where the ultimate outcome is determined by a third party judge or tribunal and inevitably someone will have to "lose". This will usually be due to no fault on the part of the solicitors. It is important that unwarranted, vexatious or frivolous complaints are not generated or encouraged as a result of the proposed changes. This would unnecessarily increase the administrative and cost burden for solicitors, ultimately to the detriment of clients.

2. **Require complaints information to be clear, accessible and in a prominent place on firms' websites, where they have one (and made available on request when they don't have a website)**
 - 2.1 We support this proposal. Publishing complaints handling information in a prominent place on a firm's website seems sensible.
3. **Include the LSB's definition of a complaint in our glossary of defined terms**
 - 3.1 It seems sensible to adopt the LSB's definition from the section 112 requirement, provided that this relates to complaints made by clients. However, we raise for consideration whether practitioners should be afforded a degree of discretion to categorise some complaints as vexatious or frivolous, which would not therefore require triggering of a formal complaints process. A firm should not have to treat a trivial complaint about a matter unrelated to the actual work being done in the same way as a complaint relating to the work done and service provided.
4. **Develop new guidance to help those we regulate to understand our new requirements and how to meet our Standards and Regulations and combine this with our existing guidance on publishing complaints procedures**
 - 4.1 As to this, and the last point below, consistency and certainty should be a goal, to assist firms and their clients and manage expectations. We are in favour of clear guidance on complaints handling, and consistent with this support the work being done by the Legal Ombudsman on the development of a model complaints resolution procedure.
5. **Collecting and publishing additional complaints data**
 - 5.1 We consider that a move to more transparency in relation to complaints data could lead to some firms being unfairly perceived. Fluctuations in complaint volumes across firms will vary for a variety of reasons, many of which will be unrelated to the quality of service being provided, and it would be unfair for unmeritorious and vexatious complaints to factor into the balance. Firms dealing with volume work may also be susceptible to repeated complaints. There is a large difference between simply logging a complaint being made, as opposed to then looking see whether it is rejected or upheld or somehow otherwise resolved. It is important to note that the SRA has the ability to intervene where systemic issues are identified within a particular firm.
 - 5.2 We recommend considering publication of data on an anonymised basis, supplemented with contextual data such as firm size, practice areas and region. This approach would support transparency without the risk of unfairly impacting individual firms. Releasing identifiable data may discourage firms from properly classifying complaints, which would undermine the integrity of the data.
6. **Co-development of a model complaints resolution procedure.**
 - 6.1 See section 4 above.



Response to SRA Consultation on Changing requirements on first-tier complaints

This response is submitted on behalf of Manchester Law Society ('MLS') members. By way of background, MLS has a membership of c4,600 solicitors and firms. It is one of the Joint V local law societies along with Birmingham, Bristol, Liverpool and Leeds. MLS has an active COLP, COFA and MLRO forum which meets regularly and this consultation has been discussed within that forum.

Opening remarks:

Our members share the SRA's desire for consumers to be happy with the service they receive from their firms. They take great pride in their work and have already taken significant steps to improve their client care approach through compliance with the Transparency rules and including the signposting of complaints via the client engagement process, on their websites and also when dealing with complaints. Many of our members go further and issue closure letters and questionnaires with follow ups by senior casehandlers where any expression of dissatisfaction has been raised.

The concern however is that the profession is being expected to go way beyond what other professionals are being asked to do and that we often end up having to entertain the disaffected even where they may not actually be the client. There is already a huge administrative and compliance burden involving significant time and cost to businesses and given the LCSPs tracker Survey findings found satisfaction levels at its highest ever at 87% in 2024, we ask the SRA and LSB to bear this in mind when considering imposing further burdens on firms where it is unnecessary and disproportionate to the risks.

We also think it would have been helpful to have issued the full results of the SRA's thematic review of how firms identify, manage and learn from complaints carried out in Jan–March 2025 **before** launching this consultation, thereby enabling the profession to consider as much available data as possible.

Where the SRA has found variations in approaches to complaints handling, guidance will always be welcome.

Q1a. Do you agree with our proposal to expand 8.3 of our Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs, RFLs and RSLs, which will also apply to firms under section 7.1 (c) of our Code of Conduct for Firms, to include that complaints information must be provided to clients on conclusion of the legal matter?

As the SRA has noted in the consultation, 96% of those it surveyed already meet the SRA's requirements and 68% are publishing the information on their websites. There is already a high level of compliance. Our members are well aware that consumers will often not even read the client care letter so it is perhaps not surprising that they will have replied to the SRA/LeO joint research to the effect that they "*did not always recall being told about the complaints procedure at the start of their legal matter*".



Our members did not object as such to the idea of reminding clients of their right to complain on conclusion of their legal matter (indeed some already do so as part of their closure letter/ satisfaction surveys etc) but they also expressed some concerns around mandating this in the Code and what “conclusion of the matter” might actually mean – delivery of final bill? File closure? No further work being carried out?

There is some concern that if the right to complain is included with the final bill, it will merely incentivise complainants to raise a grievance to secure a reduction in their bill without any justification or indication that they had had any concerns during the course of the matter. The SRA is asked to consider this and the impact it has on smaller firms in particular. See further our comments at 1.d below.

Q1b. Do you agree with our proposal to expand 8.3 of our Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs, RFLs and RSLs, which will also apply to firms under section 7.1 (c) of our Code of Conduct for Firms, to include that complaints information must be provided to clients upon request?

Many of our members already do this and do not object in principle.

Q1c. Do you agree with our proposal to expand 8.3 of our Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs, RFLs and RSLs, which will also apply to firms under section 7.1 (c) of our Code of Conduct for Firms, to include that complaints information must be provided to clients if a complaint is made during a matter?

Members do not object to this proposal. Again, many will already do so.

Q1d. Please add any comments that you have on when complaints information must be provided to clients.

Some members have expressed concern that the more times firms are expected to inform clients of their right to complain and how to do so will simply invite more of it without any justification, on the basis that they may as well have a go at trimming something off the bill. This could lead to many firms who have a high proportion of consumer clients in particular having to fend off bill reduction demands and spend time and cost in pushing back against it.

These proposals only address the position in relation to clients – in many instances, complainants are non-client consumers such as beneficiaries or other third parties who complain and take up a huge amount of time and cost to businesses in dealing with them. We think the SRA and LeO should give further thought to the current scope and remit of the Legal ombudsman – why, for example should beneficiaries be able to complain against solicitors where their grievance should be against the executors?



Q2a. Do you agree with our proposal to expand Rule 2 of our Transparency Rules to state that complaints information published under this rule must be clear and accessible and in a prominent place on a firms' website?

Members agree that the information on a firm's website should be clear and accessible. It is unclear what the SRA has in mind when stating that it must also be in a prominent place on the website – many websites will have a search box on the home page. A client ought to easily be able to insert complaint in that search box and will be taken to the relevant page. Many will include reference on the homepage (albeit at the bottom of it alongside other regulatory notice links) and again, our members see no issue with this and should be seen as being prominent. Guidance will be required as to what the SRA considers to be prominent and the SRA is asked to not be overly prescriptive so as to allow flexibility given the very different and multiple ways in which firms of different size, practice areas etc present their services on their websites.

Q2b. Please explain the reasons for your answer

See above.

Q2c. What are your views on us mirroring the wording we have in our guidance on transparency in price and service about prominence?

It makes sense to mirror wording used already for consistency reasons

Q2d. What are your views on us including more information in our guidance on prominence – such as including reference to it not requiring multiple clicks to access or that it should be linked from a homepage?

We would caution against imposing a limit on the number of clicks for example – provided the links are clear, the number of clicks should not be determinative of prominence or otherwise.

Q2e. What are your views on us including more information in our guidance on how firms or freelance solicitors that do not have a website should provide complaints information? Please give reasons for your answer and tell us what would be helpful to include.

We agree guidance will be helpful for those firms/freelance solicitors who do not have a website.



Q3. What are your views on us including the LSB's definition of a complaint as a defined term in our Standards and Regulations Glossary?

Members had no objection to including the LSB definition of complaint namely “an oral or written expression of dissatisfaction, which alleges that the complainant has suffered (or might suffer) financial loss, distress, inconvenience, or other detriment” in the Glossary.

Q4a. What are your views on us producing new guidance to help those we regulate meet our requirements on complaints handling? Please give reasons for your answer.

Our members agree that guidance would be welcome covering the areas identified in the consultation including identifying complaints, information to give and when, communications, accessibility, vulnerable clients and resolving complaints.

Q4b. What are your views on us combining our new guidance with our existing guidance on publishing complaints procedures? Please give reasons for your answer.

No objections

Q4c. Do you have any suggestions for areas we should include in guidance we develop to help solicitors and firms understand our requirements and how to meet our Standards and Regulations in relation to complaints? If so, please give details.

Nothing to add to the above

Q5a. What are your views on us collecting and publishing timeliness data at firm level?

Whilst yet another data set that firms would need to implement, we think it would be possible to provide the data as to the average length of time taken to deal with complaints at first tier. However, we caution against its publication at firm level – this is not because of the need for secrecy but rather the concern around contextualisation – it might only take one or two complaints to completely distort the picture.

Q5b. What contextual information would be required to make the information useful to consumers and be fair to solicitors and firms?

We share the SRA’s concerns raised in the 2017 consultation about contextualisation and agree that it is essential that information is presented in a clear and meaningful way but is also presented fairly. If, as we expect, there is a danger of the data at firm level being presented without context, thereby risking it being misleading, then it is better that the data is not published at all.



It would have helped with the consultation for the SRA to have set out some of the things the LCSP identified in its advice about the benefits of contextualisation as well as the principles/guidance on attempting to contextualise. If, as the LCSP accepts, contextualisation will “not be perfect from the start”, it would be wrong to publish this information during the early stages where learning lessons. Firms should not have to risk being “named and shamed” in circumstances where neither the profession or its regulator is comfortable with the contextualisation principles.

We also remind the SRA of the high level of satisfaction of consumers identified at the start of this consultation – the reference in the “Publishing the data” section implies there is an issue/need to “raise standards in our regulated community” when in fact, the data suggests otherwise.

Q5c. What information about complaints would be most helpful to consumers and why?

We are not sure it is appropriate for our members to comment on what we think would be most helpful to consumers. It is a question best asked of the consumers.

Q6. Do you agree that introducing a MCRP for the sector would be helpful? Please give reasons for your answer, including anything you think should be taken account of in the development of an MCRP?

A model complaints resolution procedure (MCRP) template would be helpful for many firms but we do not see it as essential nor should it be mandatory. There are so many nuances to complaint handling given the different types of complainant, personalities and the nature of the complaint that firms should not feel tied to sticking rigidly to a template.

Q7. Do you have any comments on the regulatory impact of our proposals on first-tier complaints?

As stated above, we are concerned at the additional burdens these proposals may impose with the administrative time and cost to business which flows from them. There will be many firms whose client base falls squarely within the leO’s remit and where clear and transparent processes are essential whereas larger firms may often have clients who do not fall into the Legal ombudsman’s remit and where a firm’s complaints handling process is inevitably driven by the fear of a significant client ceasing to instruct.

There is also the potential to damage the profession’s reputation by the publication of non-contextualised/misleading data in circumstances where a firm is generally unable to respond to any negative press arising from complaints due to client confidentiality.



Manchester Law Society
Instituted 1838 Incorporated 1871

Q8. Do you have any further comments you would like to share with us when reviewing our requirements and producing guidance on first-tier complaints?

Nothing else to add

Q9. Do you have any comments on our draft equalities impact assessment?

Nothing further to add

Solicitors Regulation Authority Changing our requirements on first-tier complaints consultation – Law Society response

July 2025

Introduction

1. The Law Society is responding to the Solicitors Regulation Authority's (SRA) consultation¹ in its representative capacity as the independent professional body for solicitors in England and Wales. Our role is to be the voice of solicitors, to drive excellence in the profession and to safeguard the rule of law.
2. The SRA is consulting on proposals to change its requirements on first-tier complaints, following the Legal Service Board's First-tier complaints consultation² (the LSB consultation) in August 2023. The Law Society responded to the LSB's consultation in November 2023³. The LSB published its new [Statutory Requirements](#), [Statutory Guidance](#) and [statement of policy](#) in May 2024, which frontline regulators are required to implement.
3. In our response to the LSB consultation, we stated our broad support for the policy aim of improving first-tier service complaints processes. We expressed the Law Society's wish to encourage a culture of learning from complaints, thereby enhancing the quality of legal services for users and supporting a strong and diverse profession.
4. However, we expressed serious misgivings about the evidence base for the LSB's position. The Legal Services Consumer Panel (LSCP) Tracker2024 found that 87% of consumers were satisfied with the legal services they received⁴. Such high levels of satisfaction suggest that such problems as exist affect only a small proportion of consumers, and we call into question the need for any extensive reforms.
5. As a general principle, regulators should only introduce process changes that are backed up by strong evidence for change and are proportionate to the level of risk or potential consumer harm.
6. Any proposed changes should also minimise the burden on firm where possible, especially for small firms which have limited resources to manage an ever-increasing number of compliance processes.
7. Small, rural and local firms will be impacted the most by these proposed reforms. Most will have little option but to pass on the additional regulatory costs to consumers. Such changes risk undermining the objectives of the Legal Services Act 2007, particularly as regards promoting access to justice and protecting and promoting the interests of consumers beyond complaints' processes themselves.
8. The SRA's consultation similarly suffers from the lack of sufficient evidence demonstrating an actual need for the proposed reforms. The SRA has carried out a thematic review, involving a survey of some 750 firms and more detailed discussions with a further 25, and this work is referenced several times in the consultation document. However, despite requesting it, the review has not been published.

¹ [SRA Changing our requirements on first-tier complaints consultation](#)

² [LSB First-tier complaints Consultation](#)

³ [Law Society response to LSB consultation](#)

⁴ The SRA has acknowledged this high level of consumer satisfaction in their own consultation paper.

9. For the profession to engage with the consultation effectively and provide substantive, properly considered feedback, it would be helpful if the SRA provided all the evidence on which it has relied to formulate its policy proposals. We remain hopeful that it will do so as a matter of routine for future consultations.
10. We note that the LSB, the Legal Ombudsman (LeO) and the SRA have all focused their attention on the handling of first-tier complaints in recent times. We recommend that the SRA and LeO should work collaboratively on issues such as the data already captured by LeO, the model complaints process and other matters, to avoid a duplication of effort as well as valuable resources, funded by the profession.
11. The consultation states that it seeks views on proposals *“to improve complaints handling at firm level to instil trust and confidence in the legal provider and as an opportunity for learning and to identify areas for improvement”*. We provide our responses to these questions below.

Executive summary

- The Law Society supports proportionate improvements to complaints handling but cautions against overregulation or regulatory overreach by the SRA, into matters which are already part of the remit of LeO.
- LeO has been operating as the independent body investigating legal complaints since 2010. It has the power to (and does) report firms to the SRA that transgress complaints requirements. Changes to regulation should be evidence based. We have seen little evidence that require or necessitate changes to the SRA rules, or the publication of timeliness data, nor have we seen any convincing explanation of any benefit these would bring for the consumer as primary stakeholder. In fact, we consider there could be negative impacts on both firms and consumers. Some proposals could increase the regulatory costs for firms (and in turn increase legal costs for consumers), reduce efficiency, and hinder access to justice.
- The LSCP Tracker Survey in 2024 found that 87% of consumers of legal services are satisfied with the service provided. We question the necessity of some of the proposals given the statutory requirement of proportionality⁵ and the inevitable regulatory burden on law firms.
- Furthermore, the insights from the LSCP Tracker Survey align with findings from the joint LSB/ Law Society Legal Needs of Individuals in England & Wales Survey 2024⁶ - with 88% of consumers satisfied with the service provided by legal providers generally and 90% amongst those using solicitors. This also revealed that levels of dissatisfaction are very low (6%), and of those that were dissatisfied, 22% raised their concerns with the provider, 10% made a formal complaint, and 9% intended to complain but had not yet done so. As a proportion of people with a legal issue - the percentage making a formal complaint was 0.4% - it was just one in 250. We therefore question the need for the proposed measures, particularly bearing in mind the information from the

⁵ The LSCP Tracker Survey 2024 showed that satisfaction with the outcome of cases was even higher, at 89 per cent

⁶ [Legal Needs of Individuals in England & Wales Summary Report 2024](#)

SRA's own survey, given 97% of respondent firms complied with the eight-week time limit.

- Firms are already required to inform clients about their right to complain and how to do so at the time of engagement. We agree it is good practice that firms should provide complaints procedure information on request or when a formal complaint arises and most firms already do this. However, we do not support the mandatory provision of complaints information at the conclusion of a matter due to practical difficulties, as well as the fact that the introduction of such a process could encourage unwarranted complaints.
- We support greater prominence of firms' complaints procedures on their websites so that the procedure is more visible and easier to locate and demonstrable of a commitment to client satisfaction.
- We recognise the benefit of adopting a universal definition of what constitutes 'a complaint'. This would be useful in terms of consistency. Embedding this definition in the SRA Glossary would help to ensure that all regulated firms and individuals have a shared understanding of what constitutes a complaint. However, we consider the LSB's suggested definition of a complaint to be inadequate. Any definition adopted must be sufficiently accurate to be of practical use to legal service providers and consumers. We provide more detail below.
- We strongly support the development of a single, practical complaints handling guidance document in consultation with the profession, with sector-specific examples and templates. The SRA's existing guidance on the topic and any proposed new guidance should be consolidated.
- There are serious concerns about publishing firm-level timeliness data, due to contextualisation, the time it can take to resolve complex complaints which can distort average timescales and the disproportionate burden on law firms. We suggest an alternative approach tied to annual reporting.
- We broadly support the idea of a Model Complaints Resolution Procedure (MCRP), but have concerns about a rigid, one-size-fits-all model due to the diversity of the profession, areas of practice and clients. Flexibility needs to be built in any new procedure and there needs to be coordination between the SRA and LeO.
- There is an increased risk of extra compliance costs as a result of the proposals, especially for small firms. Accordingly, a full equalities impact assessment must be carried out by the SRA before any proposals are considered for implementation.

SRA Proposals

12. In response to the LSB's statement of policy and requirements, the SRA is seeking views on the following proposals to:

- Make changes to when complaints information must be provided to a client

- Require complaints information to be clear, accessible and in a prominent place on firms' websites, where they have one (and made available on request when they don't have a website)
- Include the LSB's definition of a complaint in its Glossary of defined terms
- Develop new guidance to help regulated firms and individuals to meet its updated requirements and combine this with existing guidance on publishing complaints procedures
- Collect and publish additional complaints data, and
- Develop a Model Complaints Resolution Procedure.

Q1a. Do you agree with our proposal to expand 8.3 of our Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs, RFLs and RSLs, which will also apply to firms under section 7.1 (c) of our Code of Conduct for Firms, to include that complaints information must be provided to clients on conclusion of the legal matter?

13. It is generally considered best practice to inform clients about the complaints process at the beginning of a professional retainer. This approach helps set clear expectations and provides transparency from the outset, which can prevent misunderstandings and disputes from arising later. The obligation to provide information at the time of engagement is already set out at paragraph 8.3 SRA Code of Conduct for Solicitors and 7.1 SRA Code of Conduct for Firms.
14. Given our overall support for the proposals in Questions 1(b) and (c) below, we do not consider that a further mandatory requirement to provide complaints information at the conclusion of a legal matter is necessary. Our members consider that this proposal, if implemented, would only create an additional layer of bureaucracy and expense that would add little or no value to the process for consumers.
15. Such a requirement could also be problematic in practice, as it is often difficult to identify the end of a matter. For example, a complicated litigation case lasting several years may conclude but, in many instances, there will still be outstanding work such as communications with third parties, billing of final costs and accounting to the client, possibly after a detailed assessment of costs by the court. Another example is that, following completion of a purchase, stamping and registration formalities need to be undertaken. Firms may be also dealing with retentions, and it may take several months for a management company or a local authority to compute what is payable. The land registration processes may take up to two years to complete.
16. Many commercial clients have bespoke arrangements with their solicitors, who may deal with thousands of matters each year. Sophisticated corporate clients will therefore not require or appreciate such additional correspondence. Furthermore, many corporate law firms may not have any, or very few, clients eligible to access the Legal Ombudsman scheme. They will also often have their own legal departments, and indeed their own terms of business, setting out how they wish complaints to be handled.

17. Such a process might also, inadvertently, encourage and lead to a greater number of unwarranted complaints being raised. For example, a defendant convicted of a criminal offence may be unhappy with the outcome but may have received a good service. A firm's letter outlining the outcome to the client, flagging the complaints process, may encourage the client to make a meritless complaint. Anecdotal information from members indicates that complaints without merit often take longer to address (adding to the costs to the firm) than those where mistakes have clearly been made. Firms would not uphold such a complaint at first-tier, in this example, which might lead in turn to greater numbers of improper, frivolous second-tier complaints being raised with LeO. This would be contrary to one of the LSB's aims, to avoid complaints being escalated to LeO unnecessarily.
18. Bearing in mind the above examples, firms should be allowed to use their professional judgement as to when to refer clients to the complaints information previously provided in the client care letter or on the firm's website, which is not necessarily dictated by the end of a retainer.
19. In the very rare cases where complaints information is not provided by a firm either on request or when a complaint is made, such failure can be dealt with by an additional award of compensation for inadequate complaints handling by the LeO, just as it is currently. The requirements do not need to be imposed upon the majority of the profession as part of the Code of Conduct. It also removes the need for the SRA to become involved in considering enforcement action for relatively minor matters. Very serious cases can be referred to the SRA by the LeO for action but there is no need to impose yet further burdens on the majority where there is an existing, workable and effective process in place.
20. Therefore, for the reasons provided above, we do not consider the proposed amendments to paragraph 8.3 of the Code of Conduct (Annex One) to be necessary.

Q1b. Do you agree with our proposal to expand 8.3 of our Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs, RFLs and RSLs, which will also apply to firms under section 7.1 (c) of our Code of Conduct for Firms, to include that complaints information must be provided to clients upon request?

21. We agree that complaints information should be provided to clients upon request. We are confident that in such circumstances most firms already provide the relevant information. We therefore do not consider the proposed amendments to paragraph 8.3 of the Code of Conduct (Annex One) to be necessary, unless the SRA can point to evidence of extensive failure to do so by firms.

Q1c. Do you agree with our proposal to expand 8.3 of our Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs, RFLs and RSLs, which will also apply to firms under section 7.1 (c) of our Code of Conduct for Firms, to include that complaints information must be provided to clients if a complaint is made during a matter?

22. If a formal complaint is raised during the retainer, then we agree that complaints information must be provided to clients. The majority of firms would provide the information in these circumstances and we therefore do not consider the proposed amendments to paragraph 8.3 of the Code of Conduct (Annex One) to be

necessary, unless the SRA can point to any evidence that suggests that firms are not doing so.

23. However, if an informal query is raised, which is capable of being easily resolved, we do not think that there should be a requirement to provide such information again. After addressing the query, a firm can follow up with a client to ensure the issue has been resolved to their satisfaction. This shows that the firm is proactive and cares about the client experience. This type of scenario should be covered in any guidance the SRA proposes to issue. To treat everything as a complaint will lead to client dissatisfaction and the danger of firms potentially withdrawing from cases, which will inevitably impact access to justice.

Q1d. Please add any comments that you have on when complaints information must be provided to clients.

24. Complaints information should be provided at the outset in the client care letter or terms of business and again, if requested or when a complaint is received.

Q2a. Do you agree with our proposal to expand Rule 2 of our Transparency Rules to state that complaints information published under this rule must be clear and accessible and in a prominent place on a firms' website?

25. Yes, we support the SRA's proposal to require complaints information to be clear, accessible, and prominently displayed. In our response to question 2 of the LSB's first-tier consultation we stated: -

'...we support the proposed amendment that firms' complaints procedures should be more prominent and accessible to all clients for the purpose of transparency, fairness and in the public interest.

26. Our views align with the findings in the Complaints Transparency report 2022⁷ commissioned by LeO, which highlighted that many consumers struggle to locate complaints procedures on firms' website and therefore need to be accessible and more prominent.
27. The SRA's Publishing complaints procedure guidance⁸, developed with the assistance of LeO, might be extended to ensure, for example, that there is a link prominently displayed on all firms' websites to their complaint's procedure'.

Q2b. Please explain the reasons for your answer.

28. In October 2023, in its Three-Year Evaluation of the SRA Transparency Rules⁹, the SRA reported that the transparency rules "are beginning to deliver tangible results" and that "consumers are increasingly looking for and using this information when they have a legal need". It must therefore be the case that ensuring that complaints information published by firms is clear and accessible and in a prominent place on

⁷ Community Research report March 2022

⁸ [SRA Publishing complaints procedure guidance \(March 2023\)](#)

⁹ [Year-three-evaluation - Transparency Rules](#)

their websites can only assist the trend towards consumers finding and reading helpful information, as it will make it easier for them to discover this information.

29. Furthermore, the research that underpinned the SRA's October 2023 report found that common areas where firms were not compliant in fulfilling the rules included: *"compliance with only certain aspects of rules (for example publishing price and service information but complaints information is missing)"*. It would therefore appear sensible to expand the Transparency Rules in this way as it could also prompt the minority of firms who are currently failing to publish the complaints information at all.

Q2c. What are your views on us mirroring the wording we have in our guidance on transparency in price and service about prominence?

30. The wording in the guidance on transparency in price and service is clear and unambiguous so we would support it being mirrored in Rule 2 of the Transparency Rules.

Q2d. What are your views on us including more information in our guidance on prominence - such as including reference to it not requiring multiple clicks to access or that it should be linked from a homepage?

31. The Three-Year Evaluation of the SRA Transparency Rules also said that the research undertaken suggested *"an apparent gap between what firms think they need to do to comply, and what the rules actually require"* with significant numbers of firms reporting that their site was compliant when this was not the case. Furthermore, firms in this survey suggested that they would like more support materials and clarity around certain elements of the rules.
32. We would support the SRA including more information in its guidance on prominence, particularly if there is evidence of the knowledge gap referred to in the paragraph above.

Q2e. What are your views on us including more information in our guidance on how firms or freelance solicitors that do not have a website should provide complaints information? Please give reasons for your answer and tell us what would be helpful to include.

33. This does not appear to have been covered in the SRA's October 2023 report on the Transparency Rules. We presume that such firms and individuals provide the information in writing by post or email. Unless the SRA has evidence that demonstrates a significant lack of compliance with the rules we see no need for further guidance.

Q3. What are your views on us including the LSB's definition of a complaint as a defined term in our Standards and Regulations Glossary?

34. The Law Society supports the inclusion of a clear and consistent definition of a "complaint" within the SRA's Standards and Regulations Glossary. If all frontline regulators adopted the same definition, it should promote consistency among professions and across the legal sector. Embedding this definition in the Glossary

would help to ensure that all SRA-regulated firms and individuals operate from a shared understanding of what constitutes a complaint.

35. The consultation proposes adopting the LSB's definition – *"an oral or written expression of dissatisfaction that alleges that the complainant has suffered (or may suffer) financial loss, distress, inconvenience or other detriment."*
36. We do not support the adoption of the LSB's definition as it is currently constructed. Firstly, the definition does not reflect the fact that consumers' dissatisfaction must relate to the service provided by the firm. This is fundamental. Under the LSB's definition we can imagine a scenario in which a conveyancing transaction is delayed by the client's mortgage broker, the other party to the sale, or as a result of registration backlogs at HM Land Registry, and yet an expression of dissatisfaction from the client that alleges that they might suffer inconvenience would – on a strict reading of the LSB definition – justify a formal complaint.
37. Furthermore, we do not consider that the LSB's definition is adequate to deal with real-world problems. For instance, the definition makes no provision about the cause of the dissatisfaction. The complainant may be frustrated by the long delays at HM Courts and Tribunals Service (HMCTS), which is beyond the firm's control and nothing to do with the service provided by the firm. This is a serious omission as the definition does not reflect what the client's dissatisfaction stems from or what outcome they want, or indeed if it is in the gift of the firm to achieve the desired outcome.
38. The LSB's definition seems to place the onus on the firm to treat any frustrated comment by a client (in person, via text or email) about the predicament in which they might find themselves in relation to their legal matter as a complaint when:
 - a) it might not be the firm's service that is the issue; and
 - b) they might not be seeking any response or redress as a consequence of making the comment.
39. Another example relates to probate delays at HMCTS. Many firms receive communications from frustrated clients about hold-ups in grants of probate impeding the sale of a property. Such delay incurs additional costs such as paying more for utility bills and property maintenance, or may extend the grieving process for clients, etc. A complaint about such circumstances could confirm that a client has suffered financial loss, distress and inconvenience and would therefore technically fall within the LSB's definition. The LSB definition would require such a communication by a client to be treated as a complaint. This would be an absurd outcome given the client's loss, distress or inconvenience has not arisen due to the poor service of the firm, nor has the client set an expectation of what outcome they want to achieve by making the statement. In this example the LSB's definition only identifies someone who is complaining.
40. When considering the wording for the definition the SRA might find it instructive to consider the definition of a complaint given by LeO in its Scheme Rules at paragraphs 1.6 in combination with 2.6-2.8¹⁰.

¹⁰ [LeO Scheme Rules 2023](#)

41. We caution against an overly vague definition or overly expansive interpretation of the definition that could inadvertently capture routine client queries or mild expressions of discontent that are swiftly resolved without formal escalation to the first-tier complaints process.
42. The Law Society's November 2023 response to the LSB consultation highlighted the importance of proportionality and warned against reforms that could increase regulatory burdens without clear evidence of benefit. We therefore recommend that the SRA adopt a pragmatic approach, distinguishing between informal service issues raised by a client and formal complaints, and ensuring that firms are not penalised for resolving informal matters efficiently at the first point the expression of discontent is raised.

Q4a. What are your views on us producing new guidance to help those we regulate meet our requirements on complaints handling? Please give reasons for your answer.

43. Clear, consolidated guidance on first-tier complaints handling would be helpful for both firms and consumers. A single, authoritative source of guidance would reduce confusion, promote consistency in approach, and support firms in meeting their regulatory obligations efficiently. This is particularly important given the diversity of the legal services market, where firms vary significantly in size, structure, areas of practice and client base.
44. We note that the LSB's Section 112 Requirements (2024) place a strong emphasis on transparency, accessibility, and fairness in complaints handling. However, the implementation of these principles must be supported by practical tools. Consolidated guidance would help firms interpret and apply the SRA's expectations in a way that is proportionate to their resources and risk profile. It would also help to avoid duplication of effort and reduce the compliance burden, particularly for smaller or rural practices that may not have dedicated compliance teams.
45. Moreover, consolidated guidance would support the SRA's own regulatory objectives by improving the quality and consistency of complaints handling across the sector. It would also help ensure that complaints data collected by firms is more reliable and comparable, thereby enhancing the SRA's ability to identify systemic issues and target regulatory interventions more effectively. This could also help firms learn from their own complaints, which is one of the objectives stated in the consultation document.
46. We recommend that the SRA develop this guidance in consultation with the profession, including the Law Society. This would help ensure that the guidance is practical, proportionate, and responsive to the realities of legal practice. It should also include worked examples, model templates, and FAQs to support implementation. In line with the Law Society's previous consultation responses, we would also urge the SRA to ensure that any guidance is kept under review and updated in light of feedback and evolving best practice.

Q4b. What are your views on us combining our new guidance with our existing guidance on publishing complaints procedures? Please give reasons for your answer.

47. If the SRA intends to publish guidance on complaints handling, we strongly recommend that it consolidates this material with all relevant existing guidance that it intends to retain. Practitioners are already navigating a complex regulatory landscape, and the proliferation of separate documents risks creating confusion, duplication, and inefficiency. A single, comprehensive guidance document that explicitly supersedes previous guidance would significantly improve accessibility and usability for firms.
48. From the perspective of regulatory compliance, clarity and ease of access are essential. Consolidated guidance would allow firms to quickly locate the relevant information they need to meet their obligations, reducing the risk of inadvertent non-compliance. This is particularly important for smaller firms and sole practitioners, who may not have the resources to monitor multiple sources of regulatory information.
49. This approach would also align with the LSB's emphasis on transparency and accessibility under the Section 112 Requirements (2024). The LSB has made clear that regulators must support regulated entities in understanding and meeting their obligations. A fragmented approach to guidance risks undermining this objective by making it harder for firms to engage with and implement regulatory expectations effectively.

Q4c. Do you have any suggestions for areas we should include in guidance we develop to help solicitors and firms understand our requirements and how to meet our Standards and Regulations in relation to complaints? If so, please give details.

50. The areas suggested in the consultation are a useful starting point, particularly if examples were provided of what constitutes prominent placement on a website, and also of clear, plain, appropriate language.
51. We also think that guidance could usefully focus on the areas of law where there is evidence that the profession may be falling short in first-tier complaints handling. If guidance were directed towards practitioners in those areas, using examples of good and poor practice, clearly demonstrating why that area is not performing as well as other areas, and promoting good practice from other areas, this would be likely to improve performance, whilst complementing the more general guidance aimed at all solicitors. It would also assist representative bodies in targeting communications about the requirements and best practice to key groups.
52. By way of example, the Legal Ombudsman 2023/24¹¹ annual complaints data and insight found inadequate first-tier complaints handling in 61% of the immigration cases it considered. Although less than 5% of all complaints to LeO related to this practice area, 80% of such complaints were upheld. In residential conveyancing the figure for inadequate first-tier complaints handling was 56%, and in wills and probate the figure was 48%. It is arguable that practitioners in these areas, the three

¹¹ [Legal Ombudsman 2023/24 annual complaints data and insight | Legal Ombudsman](#)

poorest in terms of first-tier complaints handling, would benefit most from targeted and specific guidance. However, it is important that LeO is clear why it considered the complaints handling in these practice areas to be inadequate, in order that any guidance produced can be as impactful as possible.

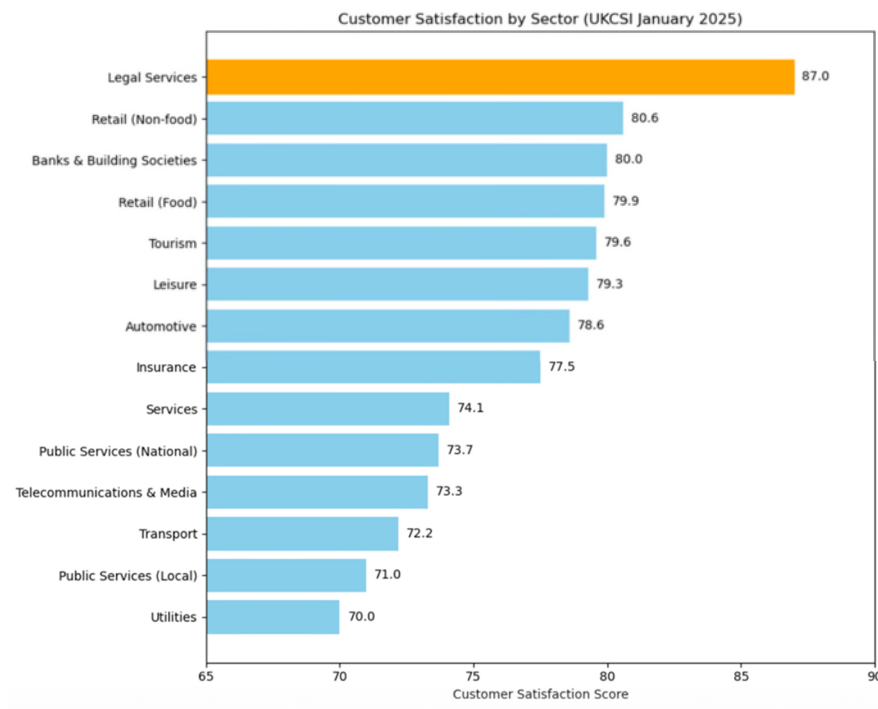
Q5a. What are your views on the SRA collecting and publishing timeliness data at firm level?

53. In our view, LeO, as an independent body that investigates legal complaints, in relation to first-tier complaints handling, already holds sufficient data which can identify the small minority of firms who do not handle such complaints competently. That data is available to it from the complaints which LeO upholds. LeO has the power to and does actively report firms to the SRA that transgress complaints requirements. Changes to regulation should be evidence based. We have no evidence that publication of timeliness data is necessary or required or of what benefits it would bring to consumers. In fact, we consider there could be negative impacts on both firms and consumers.
54. We reiterate the point made in our response to the LSB's consultation. *"There is no regulatory or legal requirement to resolve a complaint within eight weeks but rather to issue a final determination.... It is not always in the gift of the law firm to 'resolve' a complaint."* The time taken to resolve a complaint will often depend on the approach taken by the client concerned, their circumstances and the client's own timeliness in responding to clarification sought from the firm.
55. In our response to the LSB's consultation in November 2023 we explained that some of the *"premature complaints"* reported by LeO may not always be due to failings by the service provider. (LeO defines a premature complaint as a complaint that is made to LeO before the first-tier process has been exhausted). For example, a complainant may contact LeO because the firm they instructed is uncontactable as a result of closure or intervention. There are also a small number of individual firms known to LeO who routinely do not deal with first tier complaints adequately. These firms are the ones to target instead of penalising the majority of the profession who comply.
56. There might also be instances where clients mistakenly believe that it is not a mandatory requirement to go through the firm's complaints process and consequently make a complaint immediately to LeO. This is supported by research participants to the Complaints Transparency report,¹² who suggested the LeO should more clearly communicate that it is not the first point of contact and that such complaints would inevitably be referred back to the legal provider.
57. The SRA's own First-tier Complaints Reports (2019-2022)¹³ showed clear improvements with the profession's handling of first-tier complaints, with the rate of resolution of complaints rising to 81% in 2022 from 72% in 2012. The reasons for this trend of improvement will likely include the strength of existing regulatory requirements, professional indemnity insurance requirements, the commercial interests of firms and better availability of information to help firms operate complaints handling procedures.

¹² Community Research report March 2022

¹³ [SRA First-tier Complaints Report 2019-20](#), [SRA First-tier Complaints Report 2021-22](#)

58. As mentioned above, 87% of consumers of legal services are satisfied with the service provided, and 89% are satisfied with the outcome. We therefore question the proportionality of this proposal and whether, as a quality indicator, it will be used by or be useful to consumers. Given what we say above, we have serious concerns about the SRA, as an additional oversight body, seeking further data and burdening firms with further requirements in an area that is already heavily regulated. If detailed information is required from all firms, we would have concerns about the burden on small and medium sized firms, in terms of administration and compliance costs. Such costs are likely to be passed on to consumers which may ultimately have a negative impact on access to justice.
59. The following table compares customer satisfaction with legal service providers in England and Wales, as detailed in the LSCP Tracker Survey, with other representative sectors, using data presented in the Institute of Consumer Service's United Kingdom Customer Satisfaction Index (UKCSI) January 2025¹⁴.



60. The above data demonstrates that legal services leads with a consumer satisfaction score of 87%, substantially higher than any of the 13 sectors tracked by UKCSI:

Sectors with the highest levels of satisfaction include:

- Retail (Non-food): 80.6%
- Banks and Building Societies: 80.0%
- Utilities: 70.0%

¹⁴ <https://ip.instituteofconsumerservice.com/ukcsi-jan-25>

Sectors with the lowest levels of satisfaction include:

- public services (local): 71.0%
- utilities: 70.0%

61. Legal services in England and Wales are outperforming all of the major professional and consumer service sectors covered in the UKCSI, in terms of customer satisfaction. Indeed, with a score of 87%, the legal profession is setting a benchmark that exceeds even the best-performing sectors in the UKCSI by a margin of more than 6 percentage points¹⁵.
62. This performance underscores the legal sector's success in delivering trusted, high-quality, and client-focused services. Far from suggesting an urgent need for greater scrutiny or regulation of law firms, this comparative analysis suggests that other sectors could benefit from studying the legal professions' approach to transparency, responsiveness, and client care.
63. Based on the satisfaction figures in the LSCP Tracker Survey, only around one in ten complaints were not handled to the satisfaction of the complainant within the sample group (which is not necessarily the same thing as a mishandled complaint); there will be frivolous complaints or those made by vexatious litigants or serial complainants. Such complaints are likely to be resource intensive, with many destined never to be resolved to the satisfaction of the complainant, no matter how well they are dealt with, perhaps because the complainant may have mental health issues, or is not receptive to the issue being resolved at all.
64. The insights from the LSCP Tracker Survey align with findings from the joint LSB/ Law Society Legal Needs of Individuals in England & Wales Survey 2024¹⁶ – in that there are high levels of satisfaction with legal service providers generally (88%) and particularly amongst those using solicitors (90%).
65. The Legal Needs Survey also reveals that levels of dissatisfaction are very low (6%), and of those that were dissatisfied, 22% raised their concerns with the provider, 10% made a formal complaint, and 9% intended to complain but had not yet done so. As a proportion of people with a legal issue – the percentage making a formal complaint was 0.4% – just one in 250.
66. We would therefore question the need for the proposed measures, particularly bearing in mind the information *from the SRA's own survey*, given 97% of respondent firms complied with the eight-week time limit.
67. Unless the SRA's, as yet unreleased, thematic review contains evidence that fundamentally undermines the findings of other available sources of consumer

¹⁵ There may have been different measures of consumer satisfaction used between different sectors under consideration here, but a statistical comparison using a two-sample z-test strongly suggests that the difference between Legal Services (87%) and the next highest sector, Retail (Non-food) at 80.6, would be statistically significant. Assuming a standard deviation of 10 and a sample size of 4,000 respondents per sector, the z-score is 28.62 with a p-value < 0.00001. This indicates that the observed difference is not due to random variation and is highly significant. A similar analysis of first-tier complaint handling (and beyond) in the NHS is likely to compare unfavourably with the figures for first-tier handling among solicitors See: [A pain to complain: Why it's time to fix the NHS complaints process](#).

¹⁶ [Legal Needs of Individuals in England & Wales Summary Report 2024](#)

satisfaction and performance data, to impose further regulation in this area appears to be the regulatory equivalent of using a sledgehammer to crack a nut.

68. The LSB Statement of policy – first-tier complaints¹⁷ (May 2024) set out the outcomes expected from regulators. This provided *“In pursuing these outcomes, regulators should use intelligence gathered from first-tier and second-tier complaints to:*
- (v) understand the timeliness with which authorised persons resolve first-tier complaints to the complainant’s satisfaction. This data should be appropriately contextualised and published in order to increase transparency about performance levels...”*
69. In its [Statement of Policy](#), the LSB set out that regulators, such as the SRA, should understand the timeliness with which authorised persons resolve first-tier complaints. However, the LSB’s consultation¹⁸ stated that *“The draft outcomes and expectations are expressed in general terms, with the intention of providing flexibility for regulators to interpret these in a way that is proportionate, targeted and appropriate for their regulated community.”*
70. The collection and publication of such data, which may be incomplete or lack the correct context, could lead to misinterpretation, providing a misleading picture and causing unfairness. Any publication of complaints information must take such factors into account and be properly contextualised to be a fair, transparent and a proper indicator of the quality of the service provided. There may be extenuating circumstances¹⁹ that account for a client’s dissatisfaction beyond issues of pure service provision which need to be considered too.
71. If individual complaints data is to be considered fairly, its detailed context must be taken into account. Any data supplied would require verification, and as the consultation paper establishes, verification would also be resource intensive²⁰. Bearing in mind the LSB’s directions following from the Axiom Ince intervention, SRA resources need to be directed in the appropriate areas, now more than ever.
72. It is difficult to see how complaints data could be contextualised across the entire profession, bearing in mind the huge diversity in the profession in terms of firm size, varied areas of practice and the fact that most legal matters are generally not standard and can be complex in nature. One client complaint in a corporate law firm will be vastly different in complexity and context to another and the length of time it has taken to respond to a client complaint will not provide any meaningful information on the quality of the legal service provided. The difference between a complaint from a corporate client and that of an individual may be vast.
73. Furthermore, firms that do more work, in terms of the number of cases and clients, are at greater risk of receiving a higher number of complaints relative to another (smaller) firm offering the same standard of service but working on fewer cases: 2% of 500 cases is ten, while 2% of 50 cases is just one.

¹⁷ [LSB Statement of policy – first-tier complaints](#)

¹⁸ [LSB First-tier complaints Consultation](#) – page 22 para 73

¹⁹ [Law Society response to LSB Consultation](#) -p11

²⁰ [SRA Changing our requirements on first-tier complaints](#) -p11

74. Some areas of legal work also tend to generate more complaints. It is difficult to account fairly for the number of case files held by different firms (being commercially sensitive information), or for the complexity of each case, or for the vulnerable characteristics of the client in each case or for the type of matters on which the client had sought help. All these factors may have an impact on the level of complaints. Providing detailed information could place firms, particularly small and medium sized firms, under a disproportionate burden to provide a huge amount of data and context about complaints.
75. We have concerns about how consumers will realistically evaluate, use or benefit from detailed contextualised information on timeliness, even if this were possible.
76. We have not seen the data/ thematic review information which is referred to in the SRA's consultation to support its proposals. We note that the consultation paper states: *"In our survey, the majority of firms (97%) - excluding those that received no or few complaints - told us they provided a final response to complaints, on average, within eight weeks, ..."* However, this data indicates a very high rate of compliance.
77. We acknowledge that the regulator is required to monitor information about timeliness and take appropriate action against firms which fail to adhere to the timeliness requirements without good reason. However, we do not agree that the publication of such information in the manner proposed in the consultation would be fair or proportionate due to our concerns about contextualisation. We suggest a possible way of monitoring timeliness data below, which we consider to be proportionate, effective, efficient and fair.

Q5b. What contextual information would be required to make the information useful to consumers and be fair to solicitors and firms?

78. The consultation document refers to the LSCP advice²¹ to the LSB in relation to the contextualising of information for consumers. We agree that properly contextualising complaints information is imperative if it is to be useful to the regulator and to consumers. The LSCP advice acknowledges that there are inherent risks and challenges to such a process, for instance the complexity in presenting information meaningfully, consumers not understanding the data, the visibility and usage of published data and the regulatory burden of gathering and presenting such data.
79. The LSCP advice refers to contextualisation by the Food Standards Agency (FSA) and the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) as comparators. These are not fair comparisons given the nature of the industries, numbers of entities regulated, impact on the public and the resources available to the comparator regulators.
80. There are enormous differences between the businesses regulated by these organisations in comparison to law firms, which are predominately small in size (as is the level of complaints). For instance, in 2024 the FCA received over 3.5 million complaints related to product issues and service failures. Financial complaints are more frequent due to the sheer volume of transactions and customers. Financial organisations that receive 500+ complaints in six months or 1,000+ annually are

²¹ [LSCP Advice to LSB](#)

required to publish detailed data. In respect of timeliness for each firm the FCA reports on the:

- Number of complaints received (opened);
- Number of complaints closed;
- The percentage closed within three days;
- The percentage closed after three days but within eight weeks;
- The percentage upheld (where the firm agreed with the complainant).
- Contextual data: Complaints per number of accounts or policies in force

81. Consumers or interested parties can view information using an interactive sortable table that is available on the FCA website. Two illustrative examples from this are as follows:-

FCA -Firm-level complaints data sortable table: 2024 H2

Firm Name	Product Group	Complaints per 1,000 (Context A)
Allianz Insurance Plc	Insurance & Protection	0.59
Aviva Insurance Ltd	Insurance & Protection	2.91
Atlanta Insurance Intermediaries	Insurance & Protection	5.24
Action 365 Ltd	Insurance & Protection	15.00

82. So, regarding the above example, Action 365 Ltd had a much higher complaint rate than Allianz, even if their total complaint numbers might be lower.
83. The information in the table below shows the percentage closed after three days and within eight weeks.

Firm Name	Group	Joint Reporting	Reporting period	Banking and credit cards	Decumulation & pensions	Home finance	Insurance & pure protection	Investments	Grand Total
Accord Mortgages Limited	YORKSHIRE BUILDING SOCIETY	no	2024-07-01 to 2024-12-31	68.00%		65.26%			65.34%
Accredited Insurance (Europe) Ltd	NO GROUP	no	2024-07-01 to 2024-12-31				69.79%		69.79%
Acm Ulr Limited	MARKERSTUDY GROUP	no	2024-07-01 to 2024-12-31				89.84%		89.84%
Acorn Insurance & Financial Services Ltd	NO GROUP	no	2024-07-01 to 2024-12-31				72.47%		72.47%
Action 365 Ltd	NO GROUP	no	2024-07-01 to 2024-12-31				69.84%		69.84%
Adrian Flux Insurance Services Group	NO GROUP	no	2024-04-01 to 2024-09-30				6.19%		6.19%
Advisory Insurance Brokers	ARDONAGH GROUP LIMITED	no	2024-07-01 to 2024-12-31				70.57%		70.57%

84. The information set out in the two tables above is quite opaque and would mean little to the average consumer. It would be of little or no assistance as a quality indicator for the average consumer trying to choose a financial institution.
85. In comparison, LeO received 6,500 complaints in 2024 which related to service delays, costs and communications. Legal complaints are far fewer in number but are often much more complex and personal in nature.
86. In the absence of compelling data demonstrating a clear consumer need for firm level data, we remain unconvinced of its usefulness. In our view, an average consumer looking for legal services would not be looking at timeliness of first-tier complaints handling as a service quality indicator. The LSCP Tracker 2020²² indicated that consumers often look at the knowledge and experience of a legal provider, their reputation, locality and longevity of a firm as indicators of quality; the timeliness of first-tier complaints handling is notably absent from this list.
87. While we remain deeply sceptical about the case for providing such data to consumers, and do not see that it would have any positive effect on consumer decision-making, we believe there is a way that the SRA could implement such a measure with minimal cost and disruption, were it nonetheless determined to do so.
88. The following approach should allow the SRA to monitor firms' timeliness in dealing with complaints without being unduly costly or onerous, and which could provide a single useful, easily understandable data point that would inform consumer decision-making in a meaningful way (regardless of whether or not consumers used it). The approach could work as follows: -

²² [LSCP Tracker 2020](#)

Annual Data Collection

89. The SRA would request first-tier timeliness data from firms annually, aligned with Practising Certificate renewal.

Data Submitted by Firms

90. Each firm would provide: -
- The number of formal complaints received (opened) during the year;
 - The number of complaints closed;
 - The percentage of complaints closed within 8 weeks;
 - The percentage of complaints upheld at first-tier (that is where the firm agreed with the complainant).

Monitoring and Follow-Up

91. The SRA could then monitor and supervise on the following basis: -
- If a significant proportion of complaints (for example 25-30% - the SRA should determine an appropriate proportion, based on empirical research) are not closed within eight weeks, the SRA would investigate further
 - The firm would be asked for an explanation for the delays
 - If no reasonable explanation is provided, the SRA may publish this information to notify consumers
 - Publication could take the form of a brief note on the webpage listing the firm on the Solicitors Register, informing consumers that the firm fell outside the expected response time for handling first-tier complaints from clients in the previous year
 - If improvements are made, and this is evidenced in the data provided by the firm in its next annual submission, then the notice cautioning consumers would be removed
 - Any process should be piloted in the first instance before full implementation is considered

Encouraging Improvement

92. In practice this would mean: -
- Firms would be given time to undertake training and improve their complaints handling (a key LSB aim) over the coming year
 - The SRA can have reasonable measures in place to identify and address systemic issues and risks
 - If improvements are demonstrated in the data submitted to the SRA the following year, then the note informing consumers about the firm's tardy complaints handling should be removed
 - If improvements are not demonstrated then the SRA may specify actions for non-compliance, for instance a financial penalty

Q5c. What information about complaints would be most helpful to consumers and why?

93. For consumers, the most helpful information about complaints would include: -
- **Clear explanation of the complaints process:** including detailed steps on how to make a complaint, including the provision of any evidence and expected timeframes for each stage of the complaint process.
 - **Contact information:** such as the names, phone numbers, and email addresses of the individuals or departments responsible for handling complaints. An alternative contact if the primary contact is unavailable, might also be helpful.
 - **Rights and responsibilities:** clear information on the information consumers are entitled to when making a complaint and in turn their responsibilities, that is, what is expected from consumers in terms of providing information and co-operation.
 - **Possible resolution options:** information on the potential resolutions or remedies available to ensure that consumer expectations are properly managed as to likely outcomes.
 - **Escalation process:** if the complaint to the firm is not resolved at the first-tier, then escalation of the matter to LeO
94. The reasons for providing the above information are transparency, efficiency and fairness. Transparency builds trust in the process; efficiency reduces confusion and delays by providing all necessary information upfront, and fairness enable both parties to understand what is expected of them.
95. Bearing in mind what we say about “premature complaints” above, we recommend that the SRA work closely with LeO to ensure consistent messaging across platforms, particularly regarding the requirement to exhaust first-tier complaints before escalation. Clear signposting and consumer education are essential to reduce premature complaints and improve outcomes.

Q6. Do you agree that introducing a MCRP for the sector would be helpful?

Please give reasons for your answer, including anything you think should be taken account of in the development of an MCRP?

96. It is assumed that any Model Complaints Resolution Procedure (MCRP) would only be of relevance to those complaints referred to LeO. Provision of the highest standard of client service is something that most firms pride themselves on and it is unlikely that a MCRP will be useful or of relevance to corporate firms who may need the ability to respond to clients in an adaptable and flexible manner.
97. We also advise caution, as the nature of legal work is often highly specific, and the types of complaints that arise can vary significantly in complexity depending on the area of law, the structure of the firm, and the characteristics of the client base. It would be extremely challenging to develop an MCRP that is both sufficiently high-

level to accommodate this diversity and sufficiently detailed to provide genuinely useful guidance across all scenarios. There is a real risk that a one-size-fits-all model would be either too generic to be useful, or too prescriptive to be workable.

98. Bearing the above in mind, the Law Society recognises the potential value of MCRPs in supporting firms to meet their regulatory obligations and improve the consistency and quality of complaints handling. In principle, we support the development of tools that can assist firms – particularly smaller practices or those with limited compliance resources – in navigating the complaints process more effectively.
99. This concern is reflected in the Law Society’s November 2023 response to the LSB’s consultation on first-tier complaints, where we emphasised the importance of proportionality and flexibility in regulatory design. We warned against imposing rigid frameworks that may not reflect the operational realities of different types of legal practice. Any MCRP developed by the LeO/ SRA must therefore be presented as an optional, adaptable tool – not a de facto standard – and should be accompanied by clear guidance on how it can be tailored to suit different firm profiles.
100. We also recommend that the SRA co-ordinate efforts with LeO regarding any MCRP in close consultation with the profession, including representative bodies such as the Law Society. This would help ensure that the model reflects the practical challenges firms face and avoid unintended consequences. The MCRP should be supported by worked examples, sector-specific adaptations, and clear signposting to relevant regulatory requirements. Only through such a collaborative and flexible approach can the SRA ensure that MCRPs are genuinely helpful, rather than burdensome or counterproductive.
101. Accordingly, we are surprised by the fact that LeO plans to run a pilot across the summer and autumn 2025, testing the MCRP with a small number of legal service providers²³. It is even more concerning that the consultation states that *“Subject to the results of LeO’s pilot, it is anticipated that the MCRP and accompanying guidance will be published next year”*.
102. It would be helpful to receive the assurance that the SRA and LeO are co-ordinating their efforts in this extremely important process.

Q7. Do you have any comments on the regulatory impact of our proposals on first-tier complaints?

103. Please see our responses above.
104. We are concerned about the impact on small and medium-sized firms, in particular. If the regulatory burden results in an increase in associated costs, these are likely to be passed onto consumers which may then have an impact on access to justice.

²³ LeO – [Introducing the Model Complaints Resolution Procedure](#)

Q8. Do you have any further comments you would like to share with us when reviewing our requirements and producing guidance on first-tier complaints?

105. Please see our response above. We urge the SRA to frame any guidance in a way that firms should treat complaints as a service improvement tool and to avoid producing guidance which appears merely as negative advertisement of the profession and thereby damages consumer trust and confidence.

Q9. Do you have any comments on our draft equalities impact assessment?

106. The consultation paper attaches a draft Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) in which the SRA states that no adverse equality diversity and inclusion impacts have been identified. However, for the reasons set out below we consider that it would be beneficial to include a more detailed impact assessment. This should involve outlining all the potential risks to both members of the profession as well as consumers and how they will be mitigated. Whilst acknowledging this is a draft EIA, it would benefit from a clearer outline of the next steps and timelines for implementing the proposed changes. This would serve as a roadmap for stakeholders and ensure accountability.
107. As explained in our response to question 5 above, we are concerned about the proportionality of the proposed measures and the regulatory burden, particularly on small and medium-sized firms. If all firms are required to provide detailed information, it could lead to increased administration and compliance costs. These costs are likely to be passed on to consumers, which could negatively impact access to justice.
108. Such firms employ greater proportions of black, Asian and minority ethnic solicitors. The Law Society's Annual Statistics Report 2023²⁴ indicates that there is a significantly higher proportion of this demographic of the profession working in one-partner firms (39%) than in any other firm size. This proportion decreases as the firm size increases: 23% in firms with 2-5 partners, 16% in firms with 6-9 partners, and 15% in firms with 10-50 partners. Account also needs to be taken of the nature and type of work they do - immigration, criminal, and family law attract higher numbers of complaints than other practice areas, which means that the proportionate increase in regulatory burden as a consequence of these proposals would fall more heavily on solicitors from a non-white British background.
109. The regulatory burden of complying with any new requirements, is likely to take valuable resources from the core work of such firms which may exacerbate problems. In turn this may have a greater impact on the often vulnerable and underrepresented communities smaller firms serve.
110. For the above-mentioned reasons, we consider a full and proper impact assessment to be a necessity before any proposals are considered further.

²⁴ [Law Society Annual Statistics Report 2023](#)



Changing Requirements on First Tier Complaints

SRA Consultation Response by Leicestershire Law Society

About Leicestershire Law Society

Leicestershire law Society was founded in 1860 as an organisation for local solicitors. Its current objects include representing the interests of its members locally and nationally. Further information can be found on our website

www.leicestershirelawsociety.org.uk

Having read both the SRA Consultation document and the Response from The Law Society we agree with everything recited in The Law Society's Response. In particular in a city with many (currently very successful) small niche practices we are concerned about the effect on those firms and their clients in our multicultural community.

Leicestershire Law Society.

July 2025

These are the responses from respondents who asked us to publish their responses but not their names.

Changing our requirements on first-tier complaints consultation

Response ID:12 Data

3. Consultation questions

11.

1a) Do you agree with our proposal to expand 8.3 of our Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs, RFLs and RSLs, which will also apply to firms under section 7.1 (c) of our Code of Conduct for Firms, to include that complaints information must be provided to clients on conclusion of the legal matter?

NO

12.

1b) Do you agree with our proposal to expand 8.3 of our Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs, RFLs and RSLs, which will also apply to firms under section 7.1 (c) of our Code of Conduct for Firms, to include that complaints information must be provided to clients upon request?

Yes

13.

1c) Do you agree with our proposal to expand 8.3 of our Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs, RFLs and RSLs, which will also apply to firms under section 7.1 (c) of our Code of Conduct for Firms, to include that complaints information must be provided to clients if a complaint is made during a matter?

Yes

14.

1d) Please add any comments that you have on when complaints information must be provided to clients.

4. Consultation questions

15.

2a) Do you agree with our proposal to expand Rule 2 of our Transparency Rules to state that complaints information published under this rule must be clear and accessible and in a prominent place on a firms' website?

Yes to clear and accessible, no to prominent

16.

2b) Please explain the reasons for your answer.

Having a complaints procedure on our website is fine, and a link to it on the firm's Home Page and any other pages is sensible, however what do you mean by "prominent"? Remember a firm's website is their shop window, and a lot of time and money is spent on maintaining these. If "prominent" means somewhere on the Home Page, this is fine, but having a banner heading "How to Complain" is totally unreasonable for example. The SRA MUST give proper guidance to allow firms to comply.

17.

2c) What are your views on us mirroring the wording we have in our guidance on transparency in price and service about prominence?

See above. The current guidance on transparency would not be fit for purpose.

18.

2d) What are your views on us including more information in our guidance on prominence - such as including reference to it not requiring multiple clicks to access or that it should be linked from a homepage?

This should be within your guidance, yes

19.

2e) What are your views on us including more information in our guidance on how firms or freelance solicitors that do not have a website should provide complaints information? Please give reasons for your answer and tell us what would be helpful to include.

5. Consultation questions

20.

3) What are your views on us including the LSB's definition of a complaint as a defined term in our Standards and Regulations Glossary?

21.

4a) What are your views on us producing new guidance to help those we regulate meet our requirements on complaints handling? Please give reasons for your answer.

22.

4b) What are your views on us combining our new guidance with our existing guidance on publishing complaints procedures? Please give reasons for your answer.

23.

4c) Do you have any suggestions for areas we should include in guidance we develop to help solicitors and firms understand our requirements and how to meet our Standards and Regulations in relation to complaints? If so, please give details.

6. Consultation questions

24.

5a) What are your views on us collecting and publishing timeliness data at firm level?

25.

5b) What contextual information would be required to make the information useful to consumers and be fair to solicitors and firms?

Not just the number of complaints but information around how many, if any, were justifiable. Also, whether the result of any complaint to LeO differed from the resolution offered by the firm. This will give an indication as to whether the complainant simply went to LeO to extract further concession from the law firm, unjustifiably, for example.

26.

5c) What information about complaints would be most helpful to consumers and why?

Publishing only those that resulted in a finding against the firm, but will need to be put in context of the number of clients for example. A firm receiving say 50 complaints in a year for example, will look bad if they only have 100 clients. But if they have several thousand, then actually their rate of complaints is a lot lower.

7. Consultation questions

27.

6) Do you agree that introducing a model complaints resolution procedure (MCRP) for the sector would be helpful?

Neutral

Please give reasons for your answer, including anything you think should be taken account of in the development of an MCRP?: Useful ONLY if it is appropriate and realistic in terms of timescales for investigating and responding to complaints

28.

7) Do you have any comments on the regulatory impact of our proposals on first-tier complaints?

Concern this is another regulatory "trap" to catch hard working lawyers who are doing their best not only to provide a good service to their clients, but also to comply with the guidance and rules. If the SRA proceed, then they MUST provide proper guidance and not simply leave it to firms to seek to comply and then sanction those who have innocently misinterpreted requirements.

29.

8) Do you have any further comments you would like to share with us when reviewing our requirements and producing guidance on first-tier complaints?

30.

9) Do you have any comments on our draft equalities impact assessment?

Changing our requirements on first-tier complaints consultation

Response ID:14 Data

3. Consultation questions

10.

1a) Do you agree with our proposal to expand 8.3 of our Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs, RFLs and RSLs, which will also apply to firms under section 7.1 (c) of our Code of Conduct for Firms, to include that complaints information must be provided to clients on conclusion of the legal matter?

No. This is nonsense. Can't believe how crass, insensitive and incompetent the SRA / Mr Philip is. This is likely to destroy the profession. They will already know how to complain, and this proposal will just be a chancer's charter to reduce fees, especially the 'loser' in any contentious matter.

11.

1b) Do you agree with our proposal to expand 8.3 of our Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs, RFLs and RSLs, which will also apply to firms under section 7.1 (c) of our Code of Conduct for Firms, to include that complaints information must be provided to clients upon request?

This information is already required to be made available. This whole proposal appears to be a smokescreen to divert attention from Mr Philip's / the SRA's gross incompetence in dealing with Axiom Ince, and other debacle.

12.

1c) Do you agree with our proposal to expand 8.3 of our Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs, RFLs and RSLs, which will also apply to firms under section 7.1 (c) of our Code of Conduct for Firms, to include that complaints information must be provided to clients if a complaint is made during a matter?

No. Again, they will already have been provided with this information. Is the SRA completely tone deaf?

13.

1d) Please add any comments that you have on when complaints information must be provided to clients.

It must already be provided at the outset, why keep banging on about how to complain? This all smacks of massive overreach and a knee jerk reaction by an incompetent SRA who is floundering around to try to deflect attention from its own short comings and look as if it is trying to do something. All this shows is that the SRA is running around like a headless chicken and hasn't got a clue what it is doing, or what needs to be done.

4. Consultation questions

14.

2a) Do you agree with our proposal to expand Rule 2 of our Transparency Rules to state that complaints information published under this rule must be clear and accessible and in a prominent place on a firms' website?

No. Perhaps the SRA should lead the way on transparency, although for many years, it has steadfastly refused to do so. Get your own house in order Mr Philip before you condescending to patronise and insult what was a noble profession before your catastrophic meddling, or in many cases, inaction and negligence.

15.

2b) Please explain the reasons for your answer.

Get your own house in order first. Try leading by example!

16.

2c) What are your views on us mirroring the wording we have in our guidance on transparency in price and service about

prominence?

Utter rubbish.

17.

2d) What are your views on us including more information in our guidance on prominence - such as including reference to it not requiring multiple clicks to access or that it should be linked from a homepage?

Utter rubbish. The websites should be about the provision of professional legal services by professional lawyers. The main focus should be about those services and people providing them, not how to complain, with the services as a secondary item.

18.

2e) What are your views on us including more information in our guidance on how firms or freelance solicitors that do not have a website should provide complaints information? Please give reasons for your answer and tell us what would be helpful to include.

Utter rubbish. The current regulations and guidance already set out what is required. The actions of the SRA appear to be directed mainly at killing the legal profession, at least the small high street practices who don't have the resources to fight back against the tyranny and bully boy tactics of an out of control SRA.

5. Consultation questions

19.

3) What are your views on us including the LSB's definition of a complaint as a defined term in our Standards and Regulations Glossary?

This is highly patronising. Clients will complain if they are dissatisfied, irrespective of any definitions. They will have their own ideas of what constitutes a complaint and don't need patronising by the SRA.

20.

4a) What are your views on us producing new guidance to help those we regulate meet our requirements on complaints handling? Please give reasons for your answer.

Pointless. From past experience, whatever a regulated firm does makes no difference to how the SRA acts. It will persecute the small high street firm and penalise it if it isn't dotted or comma us in the wrong place, but overlook egregious activities of larger practices.

21.

4b) What are your views on us combining our new guidance with our existing guidance on publishing complaints procedures? Please give reasons for your answer.

So you are planning to have two sets of guidance? That doesn't sound very logical or joined up. It will be very confusing. Having said that, the new guidance appears to be largely nonsense.

22.

4c) Do you have any suggestions for areas we should include in guidance we develop to help solicitors and firms understand our requirements and how to meet our Standards and Regulations in relation to complaints? If so, please give details.

Be transparent, consistent across law firms of different sizes, proportionate and show at least a modicum of integrity and competence. Try to behave as you would have smaller law firms behave. Only then might the SRA start to be held by the profession in anything but utter contempt.

6. Consultation questions

23.

5a) What are your views on us collecting and publishing timeliness data at firm level?

Not before the SRA has attained some level of credibility and trust within the profession. To date, it seems that the overriding objective of the SRA has been to undermine and destroy the profession that it regulates. Otherwise, you will continue to be held in complete contempt and loathing.

24.

5b) What contextual information would be required to make the information useful to consumers and be fair to solicitors and firms?

Many of the issues are outside of the control of the Solicitors and law firms, and lie at the door of delays and incompetence by Government agencies, HMLR, probate registry, court system. Fix that before you start battering solicitors and law firms, otherwise you will just be peddling useless and misleading data and wasting money and resources that could be better spent.

25.

5c) What information about complaints would be most helpful to consumers and why?

First thing to be published should be the complaints that the profession and members of the public makes against the SRA, and how satisfied the profession and public is with the SRA.

7. Consultation questions

26.

6) Do you agree that introducing a model complaints resolution procedure (MCRP) for the sector would be helpful?

Disagree

Please give reasons for your answer, including anything you think should be taken account of in the development of an MCRP?: Any model could not possibly be workable across the profession. How can you expect a model suitable for a sole practitioner doing high street private client work be suitable to a magic circle firm dealing with multi million / billion pound corporate deals and disputes.

27.

7) Do you have any comments on the regulatory impact of our proposals on first-tier complaints?

28.

8) Do you have any further comments you would like to share with us when reviewing our requirements and producing guidance on first-tier complaints?

It needs to be flexible, and suitable to high street practices, not overly rigid, and it would need to be implemented proportionately, not with the usual SRA overbearing bully boy attitudes of high street bad, large corporate untouchable, so that small firms don't end up tying themselves up in knots on complaints and as a result doing much less work and going bust.

29.

9) Do you have any comments on our draft equalities impact assessment?

Changing our requirements on first-tier complaints consultation

Response ID:15 Data

3. Consultation questions

10.

1a) Do you agree with our proposal to expand 8.3 of our Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs, RFLs and RSLs, which will also apply to firms under section 7.1 (c) of our Code of Conduct for Firms, to include that complaints information must be provided to clients on conclusion of the legal matter?

No.

11.

1b) Do you agree with our proposal to expand 8.3 of our Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs, RFLs and RSLs, which will also apply to firms under section 7.1 (c) of our Code of Conduct for Firms, to include that complaints information must be provided to clients upon request?

Yes but isn't this the current position? Why change?

12.

1c) Do you agree with our proposal to expand 8.3 of our Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs, RFLs and RSLs, which will also apply to firms under section 7.1 (c) of our Code of Conduct for Firms, to include that complaints information must be provided to clients if a complaint is made during a matter?

As above, isn't this already the position?

13.

1d) Please add any comments that you have on when complaints information must be provided to clients.

At the outset and if requested by the client throughout the matter is enough. Consumers know their rights nowadays. A change to the existing position is not needed. What is needed is more support and encouragement for lawyers faced with ever more scrutiny, stress, reduced fee income and so on.

4. Consultation questions

14.

2a) Do you agree with our proposal to expand Rule 2 of our Transparency Rules to state that complaints information published under this rule must be clear and accessible and in a prominent place on a firms' website?

I agree the complaints information should be clear and accessible but I see no reason why it needs to be in a so-called prominent place on the website. How is prominent defined? Would this not also encourage clients to complain where no complaint is justified? It creates a negative impression of a firm if the first thing a client sees is how they can complain.

15.

2b) Please explain the reasons for your answer.

See above.

16.

2c) What are your views on us mirroring the wording we have in our guidance on transparency in price and service about prominence?

Price and service levels ought to be clear, I agree.

17.

2d) What are your views on us including more information in our guidance on prominence - such as including reference to it not requiring multiple clicks to access or that it should be linked from a homepage?

I think linked from the homepage would suffice. No need to have a huge banner though. It can be in the links at the bottom, as most other industries do. Why should law be any different? I don't think FCA-regulated firms are required to have this for example.

18.

2e) What are your views on us including more information in our guidance on how firms or freelance solicitors that do not have a website should provide complaints information? Please give reasons for your answer and tell us what would be helpful to include.

Clear information about how to complain should form part of the client care letter already. It should be enough to email either a dedicated email address and/or the person dealing.

5. Consultation questions

19.

3) What are your views on us including the LSB's definition of a complaint as a defined term in our Standards and Regulations Glossary?

The definition is "We consider that a complaint means an oral or written expression of dissatisfaction which alleges that the complainant has suffered (or may suffer) financial loss, distress, inconvenience or other detriment." Taking the example of a conveyancing transaction where the client's own solicitor is not at fault for (say) a delay, why should they be punished for that? The definition is too wide. By virtue of the fact people need lawyers for many things, they are already inconvenienced.

20.

4a) What are your views on us producing new guidance to help those we regulate meet our requirements on complaints handling? Please give reasons for your answer.

Sorry maybe I don't understand but surely if the code changes then there has to be a change in guidance that needs to be effectively disseminated to all concerned.

21.

4b) What are your views on us combining our new guidance with our existing guidance on publishing complaints procedures? Please give reasons for your answer.

? Why would you not combine? Strange question.

22.

4c) Do you have any suggestions for areas we should include in guidance we develop to help solicitors and firms understand our requirements and how to meet our Standards and Regulations in relation to complaints? If so, please give details.

6. Consultation questions

23.

5a) What are your views on us collecting and publishing timeliness data at firm level?

As in when complaints are acknowledged, responded to etc.? I see no reason why this cannot be recorded but I don't think it should be published. It is something that could be provided to the SRA periodically and then it's up to the SRA whether they decide to do anything.

24.

5b) What contextual information would be required to make the information useful to consumers and be fair to solicitors and firms?

That consumers understand that for a personal injury practitioner for example (of which I am one) we have multiple cases, cannot answer emails/calls immediately and drop everything at once when we are faced with deadlines, regulatory pressure and high levels of stress, something the SRA seems to willfully disregard.

25.

5c) What information about complaints would be most helpful to consumers and why?

What the complaints actually relate to. If a client complains about something but it turns out that is not the fault of their representative, that needs to be made clear.

7. Consultation questions

26.

6) Do you agree that introducing a model complaints resolution procedure (MCRP) for the sector would be helpful?

Neutral

Please give reasons for your answer, including anything you think should be taken account of in the development of an MCRP?: I don't know what this stands for, sorry.

27.

7) Do you have any comments on the regulatory impact of our proposals on first-tier complaints?

?

28.

8) Do you have any further comments you would like to share with us when reviewing our requirements and producing guidance on first-tier complaints?

Yes, start taking into account the pressures of that particular legal sector. For example PI fee earners have to have high numbers of files to make doing the work profitable. They and the firm they work for should not be criticised for this.

29.

9) Do you have any comments on our draft equalities impact assessment?

No.

Changing our requirements on first-tier complaints consultation

Response ID:19 Data

3. Consultation questions

11.

1a) Do you agree with our proposal to expand 8.3 of our Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs, RFLs and RSLs, which will also apply to firms under section 7.1 (c) of our Code of Conduct for Firms, to include that complaints information must be provided to clients on conclusion of the legal matter?

No - any clients who wish to complain but do not have immediate sight of a firm's complaints procedure can so by email to the fee-earner or the senior partner, or any one of many channels.

When an instruction has gone well, or for almost every business client, who is likely to be an ongoing client, it would be very odd to have to say "Glad it went well. Here's my complaints procedure." Surreal in engagement of any professional service and unique amongst professions in the UK and globally.

In my extensive experience in private practice, clients who have lost a litigation (however advised) or who are unhappy with the fees they've paid (even if extremely good value and within communicated estimates), are disproportionately likely to complain as a form of leverage to try to get a discount on, or repayment of, fees. Automatically providing them with a reminder of the complaints process will simply encourage this.

12.

1b) Do you agree with our proposal to expand 8.3 of our Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs, RFLs and RSLs, which will also apply to firms under section 7.1 (c) of our Code of Conduct for Firms, to include that complaints information must be provided to clients upon request?

Yes

13.

1c) Do you agree with our proposal to expand 8.3 of our Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs, RFLs and RSLs, which will also apply to firms under section 7.1 (c) of our Code of Conduct for Firms, to include that complaints information must be provided to clients if a complaint is made during a matter?

Yes

14.

1d) Please add any comments that you have on when complaints information must be provided to clients.

It should be provided on request, in a comprehensible format.

4. Consultation questions

15.

2a) Do you agree with our proposal to expand Rule 2 of our Transparency Rules to state that complaints information published under this rule must be clear and accessible and in a prominent place on a firms' website?

Complaints information should be readily accessible on a website.

16.

2b) Please explain the reasons for your answer.

There is no logic or compelling (or even moderate) case to make the complaints procedure "prominent" on a firm's website. If a client asks (by phone, in person, by email or online) for the complaints procedure they should be entitled to it. Why should

solicitors have a unique obligation amongst professional services providers to make the procedure prominent? What unique evil is this addressing?

17.

2c) What are your views on us mirroring the wording we have in our guidance on transparency in price and service about prominence?

Comment to 2b) above.

18.

2d) What are your views on us including more information in our guidance on prominence - such as including reference to it not requiring multiple clicks to access or that it should be linked from a homepage?

Unnecessary and pointlessly rigid interference in private businesses, especially if there is an obligation to provide the complaints procedure on request.

19.

2e) What are your views on us including more information in our guidance on how firms or freelance solicitors that do not have a website should provide complaints information? Please give reasons for your answer and tell us what would be helpful to include.

As above, it should be clear in an engagement letter or otherwise that the client can request the complaints procedure at any time.

5. Consultation questions

20.

3) What are your views on us including the LSB's definition of a complaint as a defined term in our Standards and Regulations Glossary?

Unnecessarily rigid, and not helpful to consumer clients, and not necessary for professional ones. The ordinary meaning of the word "complaint" is clear and obvious.

21.

4a) What are your views on us producing new guidance to help those we regulate meet our requirements on complaints handling? Please give reasons for your answer.

If sensible and written as guidance, with understanding of the dynamics of the range of relationships between solicitors and their clients in the real world, hard to object to. A "model complaints handling process", for small firms, which they could adopt or edit as appropriate for their set up and circumstances, would seem helpful.

22.

4b) What are your views on us combining our new guidance with our existing guidance on publishing complaints procedures? Please give reasons for your answer.

As above, provide guidance on a model complaints process, and guidance on publishing complaints procedures. Access to a complaints process, and conduct of a complaints process, are separate issues.

23.

4c) Do you have any suggestions for areas we should include in guidance we develop to help solicitors and firms understand our requirements and how to meet our Standards and Regulations in relation to complaints? If so, please give details.

Seek to control less, more thoughtfully.

6. Consultation questions

24.

5a) What are your views on us collecting and publishing timeliness data at firm level?

Impractical and inappropriate, especially for smaller firms.

25.

5b) What contextual information would be required to make the information useful to consumers and be fair to solicitors and firms?

No consumer is likely to look at, or be swayed by, complaints timeliness data at the outset of an engagement. Pointless.

26.

5c) What information about complaints would be most helpful to consumers and why?

None - see above.

7. Consultation questions

27.

6) Do you agree that introducing a model complaints resolution procedure (MCRP) for the sector would be helpful?

Disagree

Please give reasons for your answer, including anything you think should be taken account of in the development of an MCRP?:

28.

7) Do you have any comments on the regulatory impact of our proposals on first-tier complaints?

No

29.

8) Do you have any further comments you would like to share with us when reviewing our requirements and producing guidance on first-tier complaints?

No

30.

9) Do you have any comments on our draft equalities impact assessment?

No

Changing our requirements on first-tier complaints consultation

Response ID:24 Data

3. Consultation questions

10.

1a) Do you agree with our proposal to expand 8.3 of our Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs, RFLs and RSLs, which will also apply to firms under section 7.1 (c) of our Code of Conduct for Firms, to include that complaints information must be provided to clients on conclusion of the legal matter?

No

11.

1b) Do you agree with our proposal to expand 8.3 of our Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs, RFLs and RSLs, which will also apply to firms under section 7.1 (c) of our Code of Conduct for Firms, to include that complaints information must be provided to clients upon request?

Yes

12.

1c) Do you agree with our proposal to expand 8.3 of our Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs, RFLs and RSLs, which will also apply to firms under section 7.1 (c) of our Code of Conduct for Firms, to include that complaints information must be provided to clients if a complaint is made during a matter?

Yes

13.

1d) Please add any comments that you have on when complaints information must be provided to clients.

At issue of letter of engagement and if requested

4. Consultation questions

14.

2a) Do you agree with our proposal to expand Rule 2 of our Transparency Rules to state that complaints information published under this rule must be clear and accessible and in a prominent place on a firms' website?

No

15.

2b) Please explain the reasons for your answer.

It does not need to be 'prominent'. For the vast majority clients and indeed firms, this is a small matter.

16.

2c) What are your views on us mirroring the wording we have in our guidance on transparency in price and service about prominence?

Your guidance has made not one scrap of difference to solicitor behaviour towards their clients, or vice versa.

17.

2d) What are your views on us including more information in our guidance on prominence - such as including reference to it not requiring multiple clicks to access or that it should be linked from a homepage?

See answer 2c. No more 'guidance' is necessary and that which exists merely undermines the status of the profession.

18.

2e) What are your views on us including more information in our guidance on how firms or freelance solicitors that do not have a website should provide complaints information? Please give reasons for your answer and tell us what would be helpful to include.

Simply state that sufficient information is in the letter of engagement.

5. Consultation questions

19.

3) What are your views on us including the LSB's definition of a complaint as a defined term in our Standards and Regulations Glossary?

If the relevant parties do not know what a complaint is they can ask.

20.

4a) What are your views on us producing new guidance to help those we regulate meet our requirements on complaints handling? Please give reasons for your answer.

No new guidance is needed. Since you came into being you have inundated the profession with self serving guidance and regulations, none of which has improved service to clients and most have which have sought to undermine the dignity and status of the profession.

21.

4b) What are your views on us combining our new guidance with our existing guidance on publishing complaints procedures? Please give reasons for your answer.

Don't. No more so called guidance is needed.

22.

4c) Do you have any suggestions for areas we should include in guidance we develop to help solicitors and firms understand our requirements and how to meet our Standards and Regulations in relation to complaints? If so, please give details.

Lessen your self serving requirements and that will remove the need for you to develop anything. There is absolutely nothing you can do or have done that has improved service to clients or enhanced the solicitor/ client relationship.

6. Consultation questions

23.

5a) What are your views on us collecting and publishing timeliness data at firm level?

A complete waste of your and the profession's time.

24.

5b) What contextual information would be required to make the information useful to consumers and be fair to solicitors and firms?

Solicitors engage with clients, not consumers. When you understand that and what it means you will realise how counterproductive is your interference.

25.

5c) What information about complaints would be most helpful to consumers and why?

Clients should be told how to complain in the letter of engagement.

7. Consultation questions

26.

6) Do you agree that introducing a model complaints resolution procedure (MCRP) for the sector would be helpful?

Neutral

Please give reasons for your answer, including anything you think should be taken account of in the development of an MCRP?: Do not use acronyms

27.

7) Do you have any comments on the regulatory impact of our proposals on first-tier complaints?

You are wasting your and the profession's time.

28.

8) Do you have any further comments you would like to share with us when reviewing our requirements and producing guidance on first-tier complaints?

No

29.

9) Do you have any comments on our draft equalities impact assessment?

As the commercial world has discovered, pandering to cries for Equality Diversity and Inclusion slowly strangles enterprise and business.

Changing our requirements on first-tier complaints consultation

Response ID:27 Data

3. Consultation questions

11.

1a) Do you agree with our proposal to expand 8.3 of our Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs, RFLs and RSLs, which will also apply to firms under section 7.1 (c) of our Code of Conduct for Firms, to include that complaints information must be provided to clients on conclusion of the legal matter?

No, it could be set as a best practice not a requirement - we are already over regulated

12.

1b) Do you agree with our proposal to expand 8.3 of our Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs, RFLs and RSLs, which will also apply to firms under section 7.1 (c) of our Code of Conduct for Firms, to include that complaints information must be provided to clients upon request?

yes

13.

1c) Do you agree with our proposal to expand 8.3 of our Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs, RFLs and RSLs, which will also apply to firms under section 7.1 (c) of our Code of Conduct for Firms, to include that complaints information must be provided to clients if a complaint is made during a matter?

No, it could be set as a best practice not a requirement - we are already over regulated

14.

1d) Please add any comments that you have on when complaints information must be provided to clients.

We are already over regulated and the reason to stay regulated becomes less and less important when one can simply become an unregulated lawyer - have lower costs and less regulation to worry about. If the SRA continues to witch hunt solicitors and regulate every little aspect of our business, putting on more and more pressure, more will just decide to become unregulated lawyers - the public will have less protection as they do not understand the difference.

4. Consultation questions

15.

2a) Do you agree with our proposal to expand Rule 2 of our Transparency Rules to state that complaints information published under this rule must be clear and accessible and in a prominent place on a firms' website?

No, it could be set as a best practice not a requirement - we are already over regulated

16.

2b) Please explain the reasons for your answer.

It could be set as a best practice not a requirement - we are already over regulated

17.

2c) What are your views on us mirroring the wording we have in our guidance on transparency in price and service about prominence?

Only some solicitors (like us) actually adhere to the rules on transparency in price and service, so perhaps concentrating on ensuring existing rules are adhered to would be better than expanding rules.

18.

2d) What are your views on us including more information in our guidance on prominence - such as including reference to it not requiring multiple clicks to access or that it should be linked from a homepage?

Not necessary - perhaps the SRA could simply have the information on their website?

19.

2e) What are your views on us including more information in our guidance on how firms or freelance solicitors that do not have a website should provide complaints information? Please give reasons for your answer and tell us what would be helpful to include.

In the CCL in the post should be sufficient

5. Consultation questions

20.

3) What are your views on us including the LSB's definition of a complaint as a defined term in our Standards and Regulations Glossary?

I feel the definition is too wide 'expression of dissatisfaction' can be anything from an unfounded 'complaint' because in their eyes 'getting probate is taking too long' (4 weeks after instructing) or a solicitor not responding to endless emails for months - both currently have to be treated the same, with invoking the complaints procedure and recording it as a complaint, when a quick call to explain (again) the expected length of time would suffice for one and only the latter requires the full monty.

21.

4a) What are your views on us producing new guidance to help those we regulate meet our requirements on complaints handling? Please give reasons for your answer.

We get so much 'guidance' which is often so vague it is unhelpful

22.

4b) What are your views on us combining our new guidance with our existing guidance on publishing complaints procedures? Please give reasons for your answer.

Guidance upon guidance - joy!

23.

4c) Do you have any suggestions for areas we should include in guidance we develop to help solicitors and firms understand our requirements and how to meet our Standards and Regulations in relation to complaints? If so, please give details.

Simplify!

6. Consultation questions

24.

5a) What are your views on us collecting and publishing timeliness data at firm level?

Timeliness on answering complaints, or progression of work? How could that ever be objectively useful in either case.

25.

5b) What contextual information would be required to make the information useful to consumers and be fair to solicitors and firms?

As above - it cannot possibly be contextual without great detail

26.

5c) What information about complaints would be most helpful to consumers and why?

Only ever complaints upheld by the ombudsman are useful and only for a number of years otherwise a firm could be tarnished with historic complaints which are no longer relevant.

7. Consultation questions

27.

6) Do you agree that introducing a model complaints resolution procedure (MCRP) for the sector would be helpful?

Neutral

Please give reasons for your answer, including anything you think should be taken account of in the development of an MCRP?: Some firms might find it helpful to assist in establishing a framework, but if it will be used to bash solicitors over the head if they did not follow it to the letter it would not be useful. Each complaint might require different approach and due to circumstances may have to follow a different pathway.

28.

7) Do you have any comments on the regulatory impact of our proposals on first-tier complaints?

It looks like you are just trying to justify your existence and create another stick to bash us with

29.

8) Do you have any further comments you would like to share with us when reviewing our requirements and producing guidance on first-tier complaints?

Find something else more productive to focus on.

30.

9) Do you have any comments on our draft equalities impact assessment?

no

Changing our requirements on first-tier complaints consultation

Response ID:31 Data

3. Consultation questions

10.

1a) Do you agree with our proposal to expand 8.3 of our Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs, RFLs and RSLs, which will also apply to firms under section 7.1 (c) of our Code of Conduct for Firms, to include that complaints information must be provided to clients on conclusion of the legal matter?

No. Put your own house in order first and stop trying to deflect the blame.

11.

1b) Do you agree with our proposal to expand 8.3 of our Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs, RFLs and RSLs, which will also apply to firms under section 7.1 (c) of our Code of Conduct for Firms, to include that complaints information must be provided to clients upon request?

No. Put your own house in order first and stop trying to deflect the blame.

12.

1c) Do you agree with our proposal to expand 8.3 of our Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs, RFLs and RSLs, which will also apply to firms under section 7.1 (c) of our Code of Conduct for Firms, to include that complaints information must be provided to clients if a complaint is made during a matter?

No. Put your own house in order first and stop trying to deflect the blame.

13.

1d) Please add any comments that you have on when complaints information must be provided to clients.

4. Consultation questions

14.

2a) Do you agree with our proposal to expand Rule 2 of our Transparency Rules to state that complaints information published under this rule must be clear and accessible and in a prominent place on a firms' website?

No. Put your own house in order first and stop trying to deflect the blame.

15.

2b) Please explain the reasons for your answer.

16.

2c) What are your views on us mirroring the wording we have in our guidance on transparency in price and service about prominence?

17.

2d) What are your views on us including more information in our guidance on prominence - such as including reference to it not requiring multiple clicks to access or that it should be linked from a homepage?

18.

2e) What are your views on us including more information in our guidance on how firms or freelance solicitors that do not have a website should provide complaints information? Please give reasons for your answer and tell us what would be helpful to include.

5. Consultation questions

19.

3) What are your views on us including the LSB's definition of a complaint as a defined term in our Standards and Regulations Glossary?

20.

4a) What are your views on us producing new guidance to help those we regulate meet our requirements on complaints handling? Please give reasons for your answer.

21.

4b) What are your views on us combining our new guidance with our existing guidance on publishing complaints procedures? Please give reasons for your answer.

22.

4c) Do you have any suggestions for areas we should include in guidance we develop to help solicitors and firms understand our requirements and how to meet our Standards and Regulations in relation to complaints? If so, please give details.

6. Consultation questions

23.

5a) What are your views on us collecting and publishing timeliness data at firm level?

Don't agree. Put your own house in order first and stop trying to deflect the blame.

24.

5b) What contextual information would be required to make the information useful to consumers and be fair to solicitors and firms?

25.

5c) What information about complaints would be most helpful to consumers and why?

7. Consultation questions

26.

6) Do you agree that introducing a model complaints resolution procedure (MCRP) for the sector would be helpful?

Please give reasons for your answer, including anything you think should be taken account of in the development of an MCRP?:

27.

7) Do you have any comments on the regulatory impact of our proposals on first-tier complaints?

28.

8) Do you have any further comments you would like to share with us when reviewing our requirements and producing guidance on first-tier complaints?

29.

9) Do you have any comments on our draft equalities impact assessment?

Changing our requirements on first-tier complaints consultation

Response ID:46 Data

3. Consultation questions

10.

1a) Do you agree with our proposal to expand 8.3 of our Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs, RFLs and RSLs, which will also apply to firms under section 7.1 (c) of our Code of Conduct for Firms, to include that complaints information must be provided to clients on conclusion of the legal matter?

NO, it has to be provided at the outset and that is enough.

11.

1b) Do you agree with our proposal to expand 8.3 of our Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs, RFLs and RSLs, which will also apply to firms under section 7.1 (c) of our Code of Conduct for Firms, to include that complaints information must be provided to clients upon request?

No, it is not necessary. Solicitors have a duty to respond to clients so it is not necessary to expand the code of conduct, the requirement is already there.

12.

1c) Do you agree with our proposal to expand 8.3 of our Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs, RFLs and RSLs, which will also apply to firms under section 7.1 (c) of our Code of Conduct for Firms, to include that complaints information must be provided to clients if a complaint is made during a matter?

No, it is not necessary. Solicitors have a duty to respond to clients so it is not necessary to expand the code of conduct, the requirement is already there.

13.

1d) Please add any comments that you have on when complaints information must be provided to clients.

It has to be provided at the outset. It is simpler to have the information in one document in one place. Requiring it to be provided more frequently adds to the cost, creates additional work (all of which will be paid for by clients through increased fees) and adds to the amount of paper so is damaging to the environment.

4. Consultation questions

14.

2a) Do you agree with our proposal to expand Rule 2 of our Transparency Rules to state that complaints information published under this rule must be clear and accessible and in a prominent place on a firms' website?

Clear and accessible, yes, prominent place NO.

15.

2b) Please explain the reasons for your answer.

Unless you define prominent place it will create disputes over whether the positioning is prominent. It is too subjective.

16.

2c) What are your views on us mirroring the wording we have in our guidance on transparency in price and service about prominence?

I disagree. The SRA need to treat solicitors are responsible adults, not little school children.

17.

2d) What are your views on us including more information in our guidance on prominence - such as including reference to it not requiring multiple clicks to access or that it should be linked from a homepage?

I disagree. The SRA need to treat solicitors are responsible adults, not little school children. it is not the SRA's job to design solicitors websites.

18.

2e) What are your views on us including more information in our guidance on how firms or freelance solicitors that do not have a website should provide complaints information? Please give reasons for your answer and tell us what would be helpful to include.

Firms that do not have websites and freelance solicitors are, almost by definition (and particularly freelance solicitors), small. Information has to be in the retainer letter and all that is required is that information be provided to a client again on request.

5. Consultation questions

19.

3) What are your views on us including the LSB's definition of a complaint as a defined term in our Standards and Regulations Glossary?

Is it necessary, or just needless repetition?

20.

4a) What are your views on us producing new guidance to help those we regulate meet our requirements on complaints handling? Please give reasons for your answer.

Only if it is sufficiently clear so solicitors following the requirements are deemed to have complied with them and no action is taken against a solicitor who follows the requirements then in force (and is treated as following the requirements if the requirements were complied with at the time of the response, even if the requirements have changed by the time the SRA investigate a matter).

21.

4b) What are your views on us combining our new guidance with our existing guidance on publishing complaints procedures? Please give reasons for your answer.

The guidance needs to be sufficiently clear so it is understood by solicitors and clients. Further solicitors following the guidance must be deemed to have complied with it as it is/was at the time and no action may be taken against a solicitor who follows the guidance then in force (and is treated as following the guidance if the guidance was complied with at the time of the response, even if the guidance has been changed by the time the SRA investigate a matter).

22.

4c) Do you have any suggestions for areas we should include in guidance we develop to help solicitors and firms understand our requirements and how to meet our Standards and Regulations in relation to complaints? If so, please give details.

See above.

6. Consultation questions

23.

5a) What are your views on us collecting and publishing timeliness data at firm level?

An unnecessary waste of time and money.

24.

5b) What contextual information would be required to make the information useful to consumers and be fair to solicitors and firms?

This is an impossible task which is why the data should not be published.

25.

5c) What information about complaints would be most helpful to consumers and why?

Details of how to complain so it is available to clients if they cannot find it elsewhere. It will be on one website instead of thousands.

7. Consultation questions

26.

6) Do you agree that introducing a model complaints resolution procedure (MCRP) for the sector would be helpful?

Strongly disagree

Please give reasons for your answer, including anything you think should be taken account of in the development of an MCRP?: It adds to costs which will ultimately be borne by solicitors' clients.

27.

7) Do you have any comments on the regulatory impact of our proposals on first-tier complaints?

It will add to costs which will ultimately be borne by solicitors' clients.

28.

8) Do you have any further comments you would like to share with us when reviewing our requirements and producing guidance on first-tier complaints?

Leave alone and stop wasting time and money on this project.

29.

9) Do you have any comments on our draft equalities impact assessment?

Leave alone and stop wasting time and money on this project.

Changing our requirements on first-tier complaints consultation

Response ID:57 Data

3. Consultation questions

11.

1a) Do you agree with our proposal to expand 8.3 of our Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs, RFLs and RSLs, which will also apply to firms under section 7.1 (c) of our Code of Conduct for Firms, to include that complaints information must be provided to clients on conclusion of the legal matter?

No. Why would this need to be done where a client has not expressed any dissatisfaction in relation to the handling of their matter. If anything, this might suggest to the client that there is a reason they should complain! Lay clients will not necessarily have any understanding as to why they are being told this at conclusion of their matter. It may also lead a more unscrupulous client to make a complaint, with no basis, in the hope of being compensated. Complaints do take up a considerable amount of time for a firm and these are genuine complaints, let alone complaints which may be baseless.

12.

1b) Do you agree with our proposal to expand 8.3 of our Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs, RFLs and RSLs, which will also apply to firms under section 7.1 (c) of our Code of Conduct for Firms, to include that complaints information must be provided to clients upon request?

Yes, this is sensible, and firms should not have any reason not to do so. This would then allow for the complaints information to be provided at the outset, on request, and via the firm's website if they have one.

13.

1c) Do you agree with our proposal to expand 8.3 of our Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs, RFLs and RSLs, which will also apply to firms under section 7.1 (c) of our Code of Conduct for Firms, to include that complaints information must be provided to clients if a complaint is made during a matter?

Yes, this is appropriate. If a client complains then they should be provided automatically with the firm's complaints policy.

14.

1d) Please add any comments that you have on when complaints information must be provided to clients.

4. Consultation questions

15.

2a) Do you agree with our proposal to expand Rule 2 of our Transparency Rules to state that complaints information published under this rule must be clear and accessible and in a prominent place on a firms' website?

Yes.

16.

2b) Please explain the reasons for your answer.

This would ensure that the complaints policy is easily accessible to clients and they may not then need to request it. It may not be evident on firms' websites and so this would ensure that it is more visible.

17.

2c) What are your views on us mirroring the wording we have in our guidance on transparency in price and service about prominence?

Agreed.

18.

2d) What are your views on us including more information in our guidance on prominence - such as including reference to it not requiring multiple clicks to access or that it should be linked from a homepage?

Agreed.

19.

2e) What are your views on us including more information in our guidance on how firms or freelance solicitors that do not have a website should provide complaints information? Please give reasons for your answer and tell us what would be helpful to include.

Agreed. It may be that such firms/solicitors do not know how to approach this where they don't have a website so additional guidance would be helpful. They will also then know how they are required to deal with provision of complaints information.

5. Consultation questions

20.

3) What are your views on us including the LSB's definition of a complaint as a defined term in our Standards and Regulations Glossary?

Agreed.

21.

4a) What are your views on us producing new guidance to help those we regulate meet our requirements on complaints handling? Please give reasons for your answer.

Agreed. Solicitors like rules and guidance. this will then not be debatable and we will know exactly what is expected of us with regard to our complaint handling. This can also be circulated within a firm so that all staff are made aware of the requirements. This can also encourage staff to avoid complaints, or at least seek to nip them in the bud if a client is unhappy.

22.

4b) What are your views on us combining our new guidance with our existing guidance on publishing complaints procedures? Please give reasons for your answer.

Agreed on the basis this won't include any duplication. Alternatively, consider existing guidance and whether this needs to be incorporated in the new guidance. Firms already have complaints information obligations and if this is made too onerous, you may have firms who just don't comply, whether inadvertently or deliberately.

23.

4c) Do you have any suggestions for areas we should include in guidance we develop to help solicitors and firms understand our requirements and how to meet our Standards and Regulations in relation to complaints? If so, please give details.

No.

6. Consultation questions

24.

5a) What are your views on us collecting and publishing timeliness data at firm level?

What additional obligations would this place on firms to collect the data? No objection per se, but this should be anonymised.

25.

5b) What contextual information would be required to make the information useful to consumers and be fair to solicitors

and firms?

Areas of complaint
Work types
Responsiveness of the firm
Complaints escalated to the LeO and upheld

26.

5c) What information about complaints would be most helpful to consumers and why?

See above. Consumers can then take a firm's complaints record into account when choosing a firm.

7. Consultation questions

27.

6) Do you agree that introducing a model complaints resolution procedure (MCRP) for the sector would be helpful?

Neutral

Please give reasons for your answer, including anything you think should be taken account of in the development of an MCRP?: This may be helpful. Not all firms however are the same so this would also need to be considered. It would however ensure consistency across the sector and provide a clear procedure for firms on complaint handling which clients would know should be in place and adhered to. This may then provide them with additional reassurance should they have a complaint.

28.

7) Do you have any comments on the regulatory impact of our proposals on first-tier complaints?

No.

29.

8) Do you have any further comments you would like to share with us when reviewing our requirements and producing guidance on first-tier complaints?

No.

30.

9) Do you have any comments on our draft equalities impact assessment?

No.

Changing our requirements on first-tier complaints consultation

Response ID:66 Data

3. Consultation questions

11.

1a) Do you agree with our proposal to expand 8.3 of our Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs, RFLs and RSLs, which will also apply to firms under section 7.1 (c) of our Code of Conduct for Firms, to include that complaints information must be provided to clients on conclusion of the legal matter?

No

12.

1b) Do you agree with our proposal to expand 8.3 of our Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs, RFLs and RSLs, which will also apply to firms under section 7.1 (c) of our Code of Conduct for Firms, to include that complaints information must be provided to clients upon request?

No - this is already done as a matter of course

13.

1c) Do you agree with our proposal to expand 8.3 of our Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs, RFLs and RSLs, which will also apply to firms under section 7.1 (c) of our Code of Conduct for Firms, to include that complaints information must be provided to clients if a complaint is made during a matter?

Yes - but everyone does this already

14.

1d) Please add any comments that you have on when complaints information must be provided to clients.

I see no need to give further information on making complaints on file closure

4. Consultation questions

15.

2a) Do you agree with our proposal to expand Rule 2 of our Transparency Rules to state that complaints information published under this rule must be clear and accessible and in a prominent place on a firms' website?

Yes

16.

2b) Please explain the reasons for your answer.

Yes, clients should be able to find this information

17.

2c) What are your views on us mirroring the wording we have in our guidance on transparency in price and service about prominence?

That seems reasonable

18.

2d) What are your views on us including more information in our guidance on prominence - such as including reference to it not requiring multiple clicks to access or that it should be linked from a homepage?

I think that the more you try to set out exactly where these links should be, the easier it will be for firms to fall foul of it. It's like

trying to define "reasonable" - best not to

19.

2e) What are your views on us including more information in our guidance on how firms or freelance solicitors that do not have a website should provide complaints information? Please give reasons for your answer and tell us what would be helpful to include.

How many firms don't have a website? Genuine question

5. Consultation questions

20.

3) What are your views on us including the LSB's definition of a complaint as a defined term in our Standards and Regulations Glossary?

That seems fair

21.

4a) What are your views on us producing new guidance to help those we regulate meet our requirements on complaints handling? Please give reasons for your answer.

When you say guidance - how stringent is it going to be and how punitive are you going to be if anyone contravenes it?

22.

4b) What are your views on us combining our new guidance with our existing guidance on publishing complaints procedures? Please give reasons for your answer.

It seems reasonable that all complaints information/requirements should be in one place and not multiple different ones. It should be easy to access and easy to navigate - with a comprehensive index that allows you to jump to relevant sections

23.

4c) Do you have any suggestions for areas we should include in guidance we develop to help solicitors and firms understand our requirements and how to meet our Standards and Regulations in relation to complaints? If so, please give details.

No

6. Consultation questions

24.

5a) What are your views on us collecting and publishing timeliness data at firm level?

I don't see how this could be of any use to consumers, to be honest. No-one is choosing a firm by looking at how long it takes for them to deal with customer complaints

25.

5b) What contextual information would be required to make the information useful to consumers and be fair to solicitors and firms?

I don't see that this is useful, as set out above

26.

5c) What information about complaints would be most helpful to consumers and why?

I think what we already give them is fine - how to complain, who to complain to, who to escalate it to if they think there is a problem and they aren't being dealt with

7. Consultation questions

27.

6) Do you agree that introducing a model complaints resolution procedure (MCRP) for the sector would be helpful?

Please give reasons for your answer, including anything you think should be taken account of in the development of an MCRP?: I do not know - can you define this term?

28.

7) Do you have any comments on the regulatory impact of our proposals on first-tier complaints?

A light-touch regime for the first year or so would be a good idea

29.

8) Do you have any further comments you would like to share with us when reviewing our requirements and producing guidance on first-tier complaints?

30.

9) Do you have any comments on our draft equalities impact assessment?

Changing our requirements on first-tier complaints consultation

Response ID:67 Data

3. Consultation questions

11.

1a) Do you agree with our proposal to expand 8.3 of our Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs, RFLs and RSLs, which will also apply to firms under section 7.1 (c) of our Code of Conduct for Firms, to include that complaints information must be provided to clients on conclusion of the legal matter?

No because they will have had this during the matter and at the outset and at the start and on the website. Suggesting complaint at the end would simply encourage clients to avoid paying fees or getting a reduction. They have no incentive not to raise a complaint even if spurious and in so doing could create more tie and sunk cost that outweighs the issue or the original costs charged.

12.

1b) Do you agree with our proposal to expand 8.3 of our Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs, RFLs and RSLs, which will also apply to firms under section 7.1 (c) of our Code of Conduct for Firms, to include that complaints information must be provided to clients upon request?

Yes but define complaint

13.

1c) Do you agree with our proposal to expand 8.3 of our Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs, RFLs and RSLs, which will also apply to firms under section 7.1 (c) of our Code of Conduct for Firms, to include that complaints information must be provided to clients if a complaint is made during a matter?

Yes but define complaint

14.

1d) Please add any comments that you have on when complaints information must be provided to clients.

as above -

4. Consultation questions

15.

2a) Do you agree with our proposal to expand Rule 2 of our Transparency Rules to state that complaints information published under this rule must be clear and accessible and in a prominent place on a firms' website?

yes provided there is provision for vexatious complaints to be excluded

16.

2b) Please explain the reasons for your answer.

because certainly in conveyancing complaints are often made without foundation based on delays outside of our control or unrealistic expectations. Also firms with high volumes may have high numbers of complaints but they may only actually represent a tiny fraction of the overall case load. So a small firm that does 10 conveyancing matters in a month may get 1 complaint and so have a 10% ratio but only 1 complaint. A large firm may have 100 matters and 2 complaints so look worse but actually only have a 2% ratio

17.

2c) What are your views on us mirroring the wording we have in our guidance on transparency in price and service about prominence?

No views but I don't think it would make anything any better - there are already many on line reviews clients can look at and any data can be skewed or misunderstood without context as above

18.

2d) What are your views on us including more information in our guidance on prominence - such as including reference to it not requiring multiple clicks to access or that it should be linked from a homepage?

I see no benefit to consumers or law firms

19.

2e) What are your views on us including more information in our guidance on how firms or freelance solicitors that do not have a website should provide complaints information? Please give reasons for your answer and tell us what would be helpful to include.

NO views

5. Consultation questions

20.

3) What are your views on us including the LSB's definition of a complaint as a defined term in our Standards and Regulations Glossary?

Very positive about this - depending on what the definition is. If too wide we will have complaints that are not complaints and that will cost time money and client relationships.

21.

4a) What are your views on us producing new guidance to help those we regulate meet our requirements on complaints handling? Please give reasons for your answer.

Very positive as at present we do not know sometimes how to address things or when we can pass or decline to do so

22.

4b) What are your views on us combining our new guidance with our existing guidance on publishing complaints procedures? Please give reasons for your answer.

Any clarity is welcome provided it does not make work for the sake of it simply to pay lip service. Any process and guidance must be pragmatic achievable and economic.

23.

4c) Do you have any suggestions for areas we should include in guidance we develop to help solicitors and firms understand our requirements and how to meet our Standards and Regulations in relation to complaints? If so, please give details.

6. Consultation questions

24.

5a) What are your views on us collecting and publishing timeliness data at firm level?

I don't understand the question but what would this achieve?

25.

5b) What contextual information would be required to make the information useful to consumers and be fair to solicitors and firms?

See earlier answers - ratio on complaints to matters may help but also split by type - a firm that does no conveyancing or private client work may have no complaints but a general practice doing all private client work will statistically have more because private clients are more likely to complain from a point of ignorance or understanding

26.

5c) What information about complaints would be most helpful to consumers and why?

I do not believe that complaints information IS useful to consumers. It is all retrospective and may have related to a fee earner that has left, a particular time or circumstance or have been unfounded. How can this be contextualised in a helpful way that is fair? A firm that has changed its team or management should not be dragged down by having made positive changes or what incentive do they have to change at all? How does past information that is no longer value help a client make a future decision on whether to instruct? All firms will get complaints but the vast majority if clients are completely happy with their work.

7. Consultation questions

27.

6) Do you agree that introducing a model complaints resolution procedure (MCRP) for the sector would be helpful?

Agree

Please give reasons for your answer, including anything you think should be taken account of in the development of an MCRP?: clarity but fairness needed and this should not be a process that simply creates work to pay lip service and create stats. Law firm must have ability to challenge complaint where reasonable without fear and cost

28.

7) Do you have any comments on the regulatory impact of our proposals on first-tier complaints?

Don't make work just to be seen to be doing something and creating more time and cost for the law firm. Clients can be unreasonable in their expectations and they are not always right

29.

8) Do you have any further comments you would like to share with us when reviewing our requirements and producing guidance on first-tier complaints?

30.

9) Do you have any comments on our draft equalities impact assessment?

Changing our requirements on first-tier complaints consultation

Response ID:68 Data

3. Consultation questions

11.

1a) Do you agree with our proposal to expand 8.3 of our Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs, RFLs and RSLs, which will also apply to firms under section 7.1 (c) of our Code of Conduct for Firms, to include that complaints information must be provided to clients on conclusion of the legal matter?

I don't have a strong view one way or another. We already send a client feedback form when a matter concludes and clients are signposted to complaints information in the client care letter. It would be straightforward to add a line to a concluding letter or email signposting the complaints information.

12.

1b) Do you agree with our proposal to expand 8.3 of our Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs, RFLs and RSLs, which will also apply to firms under section 7.1 (c) of our Code of Conduct for Firms, to include that complaints information must be provided to clients upon request?

This depends on what you mean by "complaints information" - this is available on our website so are you proposing that this is printed off and sent by post? Would a link to the website via email be sufficient or would we have to cut and paste into an email the full text? Would a hyperlink to the website be sufficient?

13.

1c) Do you agree with our proposal to expand 8.3 of our Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs, RFLs and RSLs, which will also apply to firms under section 7.1 (c) of our Code of Conduct for Firms, to include that complaints information must be provided to clients if a complaint is made during a matter?

This depends on what you mean by "complaints information" - this is available on our website so are you proposing that this is printed off and sent by post? Would a link to the website via email be sufficient or would we have to cut and paste into an email the full text? Would a hyperlink to the website be sufficient?

14.

1d) Please add any comments that you have on when complaints information must be provided to clients.

See responses above. We could print out and send a paper copy to clients but this seems rather at odds with the move to a paperless working environment.

4. Consultation questions

15.

2a) Do you agree with our proposal to expand Rule 2 of our Transparency Rules to state that complaints information published under this rule must be clear and accessible and in a prominent place on a firms' website?

Yes

16.

2b) Please explain the reasons for your answer.

I thought this was the case already

17.

2c) What are your views on us mirroring the wording we have in our guidance on transparency in price and service about prominence?

No view

18.

2d) What are your views on us including more information in our guidance on prominence - such as including reference to it not requiring multiple clicks to access or that it should be linked from a homepage?

No view

19.

2e) What are your views on us including more information in our guidance on how firms or freelance solicitors that do not have a website should provide complaints information? Please give reasons for your answer and tell us what would be helpful to include.

No view

5. Consultation questions

20.

3) What are your views on us including the LSB's definition of a complaint as a defined term in our Standards and Regulations Glossary?

No view

21.

4a) What are your views on us producing new guidance to help those we regulate meet our requirements on complaints handling? Please give reasons for your answer.

This might be helpful as long as it wasn't onerous.

22.

4b) What are your views on us combining our new guidance with our existing guidance on publishing complaints procedures? Please give reasons for your answer.

No view

23.

4c) Do you have any suggestions for areas we should include in guidance we develop to help solicitors and firms understand our requirements and how to meet our Standards and Regulations in relation to complaints? If so, please give details.

No view

6. Consultation questions

24.

5a) What are your views on us collecting and publishing timeliness data at firm level?

How would this information be gathered - would you ask for the data to be monitored by firms?

25.

5b) What contextual information would be required to make the information useful to consumers and be fair to solicitors and firms?

I don't think it is possible to square this circle.

26.

5c) What information about complaints would be most helpful to consumers and why?

How to make a complaint and who will deal with it.

7. Consultation questions

27.

6) Do you agree that introducing a model complaints resolution procedure (MCRP) for the sector would be helpful?

Neutral

Please give reasons for your answer, including anything you think should be taken account of in the development of an MCRP?:

28.

7) Do you have any comments on the regulatory impact of our proposals on first-tier complaints?

It is likely to mean more admin for firms if reporting requirements for a website are mandatory.

29.

8) Do you have any further comments you would like to share with us when reviewing our requirements and producing guidance on first-tier complaints?

No

30.

9) Do you have any comments on our draft equalities impact assessment?

No

Changing our requirements on first-tier complaints consultation

Response ID:95 Data

3. Consultation questions

11.

1a) Do you agree with our proposal to expand 8.3 of our Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs, RFLs and RSLs, which will also apply to firms under section 7.1 (c) of our Code of Conduct for Firms, to include that complaints information must be provided to clients on conclusion of the legal matter?

We disagree with the proposal that firms should be required to provide information on complaints procedures again at the end of a matter, given that it is already a regulatory requirement to do so at the outset.

In our view, duplicating this information is unnecessary and risks creating regulatory fatigue for clients. It may also unintentionally undermine confidence by implying dissatisfaction is expected at the conclusion of a matter. Additionally, this could place a disproportionate administrative burden on firms without clear evidence that it improves outcomes for clients.

We believe maintaining the current approach—providing clear and accessible complaints information at the outset—is both sufficient and appropriate.

12.

1b) Do you agree with our proposal to expand 8.3 of our Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs, RFLs and RSLs, which will also apply to firms under section 7.1 (c) of our Code of Conduct for Firms, to include that complaints information must be provided to clients upon request?

We would support a balanced approach that ensures clients can easily access this information when needed, without imposing additional blanket requirements on firms.

13.

1c) Do you agree with our proposal to expand 8.3 of our Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs, RFLs and RSLs, which will also apply to firms under section 7.1 (c) of our Code of Conduct for Firms, to include that complaints information must be provided to clients if a complaint is made during a matter?

Yes, provided a clear distinction is made between clients makes a true complaint and clients merely expressing mild dissatisfaction. It would not be appropriate to exacerbate a situation by providing complaints information when a simple conversation might suffice.

14.

1d) Please add any comments that you have on when complaints information must be provided to clients.

We believe it is appropriate to provide complaints information when a client is clearly making a complaint or expressing genuine unhappiness with the service. However, doing so in response to every minor grumble or momentary dissatisfaction risks escalating issues unnecessarily and may strain the client relationship. A proportionate and context-sensitive approach is more effective in supporting good outcomes.

4. Consultation questions

15.

2a) Do you agree with our proposal to expand Rule 2 of our Transparency Rules to state that complaints information published under this rule must be clear and accessible and in a prominent place on a firms' website?

We agree that complaints information should be clearly displayed on firms' websites. However, we believe the regulator should provide specific guidance or examples of what would be considered a "prominent display" to ensure consistency and avoid

uncertainty. For example, does this mean the information must appear in the header bar, or would a clearly labelled link in the footer or on a dedicated "Contact" or "Client Care" page be sufficient?

Clear parameters would help firms meet expectations without over-engineering their websites.

16.

2b) Please explain the reasons for your answer.

Whilst the definition may seem obvious to the regulator, without worked examples there is a real risk that firms will believe they have met their obligations, only to find that the regulator disagrees due to a different interpretation of what is required. This lack of clarity could lead to unnecessary compliance issues and undermine confidence in the guidance.

17.

2c) What are your views on us mirroring the wording we have in our guidance on transparency in price and service about prominence?

Please see above. We think that guidance would benefit from more specific examples. For example, how many clicks to access a page would the regulator consider "too many" to meet the "prominent place" criteria?

18.

2d) What are your views on us including more information in our guidance on prominence - such as including reference to it not requiring multiple clicks to access or that it should be linked from a homepage?

We would strongly support the provision of more specific guidance from the regulator, including worked examples, to help firms clearly understand how to meet expectations. This would promote consistency across the profession and reduce the risk of misunderstandings or inadvertent non-compliance.

19.

2e) What are your views on us including more information in our guidance on how firms or freelance solicitors that do not have a website should provide complaints information? Please give reasons for your answer and tell us what would be helpful to include.

N/A - we have always had a website so do not feel it appropriate to provide a response to this question.

5. Consultation questions

20.

3) What are your views on us including the LSB's definition of a complaint as a defined term in our Standards and Regulations Glossary?

We would agree to an extent, but as we mentioned earlier if a client is alleging a minor inconvenience which can be easily and quickly rectified, it does not seem appropriate to treat this as a complaint. Complaints procedures should be reserved for clients expressing real dissatisfaction with the service provided.

21.

4a) What are your views on us producing new guidance to help those we regulate meet our requirements on complaints handling? Please give reasons for your answer.

We would always welcome more guidance provided it is explicit and gives examples.

22.

4b) What are your views on us combining our new guidance with our existing guidance on publishing complaints procedures? Please give reasons for your answer.

Provided changes/departures from previous guidance are clearly signposted this seems sensible.

23.

4c) Do you have any suggestions for areas we should include in guidance we develop to help solicitors and firms understand our requirements and how to meet our Standards and Regulations in relation to complaints? If so, please give details.

6. Consultation questions

24.

5a) What are your views on us collecting and publishing timeliness data at firm level?

We are unclear on the tangible benefit to consumers of publishing firm-level data on the timeliness of complaint responses. Without a clear and persuasive rationale, this proposal risks adding further administrative burden—particularly on small and medium-sized firms that are already under pressure from existing regulatory requirements. Introducing additional obligations without demonstrating meaningful value to the public could risk further disengagement between professionals and the regulator. As the SRA have noted, if the data cannot be verified then the consumer cannot rely on it - at which point what purpose does its publication serve?

25.

5b) What contextual information would be required to make the information useful to consumers and be fair to solicitors and firms?

What the expectation for response time is by the regulator and why they have set that threshold.
Metrics by firm size - a large multinational firm may well have far more resources to put to resolving complaints than a small local firm.

26.

5c) What information about complaints would be most helpful to consumers and why?

Helpful Complaints Metrics for Consumers

1. Complaints Upheld vs. Dismissed
2. Themes or Common Issues
3. Resolution Rate
4. Complaints Escalated to the Legal Ombudsman
5. Client Feedback Post-Complaint

Metrics that may be less helpful

Raw complaint numbers - without context (firm size, case volume) can be misleading.
Timeliness alone - may not reflect fairness or quality of resolution.

7. Consultation questions

27.

6) Do you agree that introducing a model complaints resolution procedure (MCRP) for the sector would be helpful?

Disagree

Please give reasons for your answer, including anything you think should be taken account of in the development of an MCRP?:

28.

7) Do you have any comments on the regulatory impact of our proposals on first-tier complaints?

29.

8) Do you have any further comments you would like to share with us when reviewing our requirements and producing guidance on first-tier complaints?

30.

9) Do you have any comments on our draft equalities impact assessment?

Changing our requirements on first-tier complaints consultation

Response ID:100 Data

3. Consultation questions

10.

1a) Do you agree with our proposal to expand 8.3 of our Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs, RFLs and RSLs, which will also apply to firms under section 7.1 (c) of our Code of Conduct for Firms, to include that complaints information must be provided to clients on conclusion of the legal matter?

No. I feel that right at the end of the matter, especially for example in Conveyancing where there could be 2 years or more of Land Registry delays which are outside our control, or where money has been held back for a retention pending service charges, is totally the wrong time. If the client has not mentioned any dissatisfaction during the transaction, why would we highlight at that point (after the job is done) how to complain.

11.

1b) Do you agree with our proposal to expand 8.3 of our Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs, RFLs and RSLs, which will also apply to firms under section 7.1 (c) of our Code of Conduct for Firms, to include that complaints information must be provided to clients upon request?

Yes complaints information should always be provided on request. We do this already at my firm.

12.

1c) Do you agree with our proposal to expand 8.3 of our Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs, RFLs and RSLs, which will also apply to firms under section 7.1 (c) of our Code of Conduct for Firms, to include that complaints information must be provided to clients if a complaint is made during a matter?

Yes, and we do this already.

13.

1d) Please add any comments that you have on when complaints information must be provided to clients.

At the outset is the ideal time, and again if they ask or complain. But at the end, after a successful transaction, I do not agree with. It remains on all their initial paperwork, and the firms website if they need it, and they can call or email and ask for it, so why volunteer this information at that stage after completion - I feel this will encourage more complaints about things outside the firm control.

4. Consultation questions

14.

2a) Do you agree with our proposal to expand Rule 2 of our Transparency Rules to state that complaints information published under this rule must be clear and accessible and in a prominent place on a firms' website?

Yes.

15.

2b) Please explain the reasons for your answer.

.

16.

2c) What are your views on us mirroring the wording we have in our guidance on transparency in price and service about prominence?

17.

2d) What are your views on us including more information in our guidance on prominence - such as including reference to it not requiring multiple clicks to access or that it should be linked from a homepage?

18.

2e) What are your views on us including more information in our guidance on how firms or freelance solicitors that do not have a website should provide complaints information? Please give reasons for your answer and tell us what would be helpful to include.

I don't work for a firm like this, so difficult to comment, but clients should have the same experience working with a large firm than they do working with a one man band or a consultant within a large consultancy firm for example and this should be fair to all clients/consumers.

5. Consultation questions

19.

3) What are your views on us including the LSB's definition of a complaint as a defined term in our Standards and Regulations Glossary?

Not sure this will help, but happy for this to be consistent across the board.

20.

4a) What are your views on us producing new guidance to help those we regulate meet our requirements on complaints handling? Please give reasons for your answer.

New guidance always welcome, especially if there are specific examples or training provided.

21.

4b) What are your views on us combining our new guidance with our existing guidance on publishing complaints procedures? Please give reasons for your answer.

Think producing something new is better, as people are more likely to read and engage with something brand new, rather than updates to something they have seen and read before.

22.

4c) Do you have any suggestions for areas we should include in guidance we develop to help solicitors and firms understand our requirements and how to meet our Standards and Regulations in relation to complaints? If so, please give details.

6. Consultation questions

23.

5a) What are your views on us collecting and publishing timeliness data at firm level?

Don't think this is appropriate or needed, and just creates more red tape and work for firms to do.

24.

5b) What contextual information would be required to make the information useful to consumers and be fair to solicitors

and firms?

.

25.

5c) What information about complaints would be most helpful to consumers and why?

.

7. Consultation questions

26.

6) Do you agree that introducing a model complaints resolution procedure (MCRP) for the sector would be helpful?

Disagree

Please give reasons for your answer, including anything you think should be taken account of in the development of an MCRP?:

27.

7) Do you have any comments on the regulatory impact of our proposals on first-tier complaints?

.

28.

8) Do you have any further comments you would like to share with us when reviewing our requirements and producing guidance on first-tier complaints?

.

29.

9) Do you have any comments on our draft equalities impact assessment?

.

Changing our requirements on first-tier complaints consultation

Response ID:101 Data

3. Consultation questions

11.

1a) Do you agree with our proposal to expand 8.3 of our Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs, RFLs and RSLs, which will also apply to firms under section 7.1 (c) of our Code of Conduct for Firms, to include that complaints information must be provided to clients on conclusion of the legal matter?

This approach may not always be appropriate, especially when a firm is handling multiple matters for a client—particularly a large corporate client—as it could result in the client receiving excessive or duplicate correspondence regarding the firm's complaints procedure. Many of our clients would likely find this level of communication from the firm unwelcome or excessive.

12.

1b) Do you agree with our proposal to expand 8.3 of our Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs, RFLs and RSLs, which will also apply to firms under section 7.1 (c) of our Code of Conduct for Firms, to include that complaints information must be provided to clients upon request?

13.

1c) Do you agree with our proposal to expand 8.3 of our Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs, RFLs and RSLs, which will also apply to firms under section 7.1 (c) of our Code of Conduct for Firms, to include that complaints information must be provided to clients if a complaint is made during a matter?

14.

1d) Please add any comments that you have on when complaints information must be provided to clients.

A proportionate approach should be taken, taking into account the type of client and the nature of the relationship. For example, it may be appropriate to provide complaints information at the conclusion of a conveyancing matter for an individual client. However, this approach may not be suitable for a corporate client for whom a large firm is handling multiple matters simultaneously.

4. Consultation questions

15.

2a) Do you agree with our proposal to expand Rule 2 of our Transparency Rules to state that complaints information published under this rule must be clear and accessible and in a prominent place on a firms' website?

Yes - although I don't believe complaints information should be flagged on the front page of a website. I think it is reasonable for a client to locate this information via, for example, the firm's legal & regulatory page which is signposted on the homepage.

16.

2b) Please explain the reasons for your answer.

The above approach is proportionate and sufficient.

17.

2c) What are your views on us mirroring the wording we have in our guidance on transparency in price and service about prominence?

18.

2d) What are your views on us including more information in our guidance on prominence - such as including reference to

it not requiring multiple clicks to access or that it should be linked from a homepage?

Please see above. I do not agree with this approach. Requiring users to make two clicks is entirely reasonable. Firms should not be obligated to place complaints information directly on their homepage. Providing access via a 'Legal & Regulatory Notices' link is both sufficient and appropriate.

19.

2e) What are your views on us including more information in our guidance on how firms or freelance solicitors that do not have a website should provide complaints information? Please give reasons for your answer and tell us what would be helpful to include.

5. Consultation questions

20.

3) What are your views on us including the LSB's definition of a complaint as a defined term in our Standards and Regulations Glossary?

I think the definition needs to be reviewed. It doesn't distinguish between a professional indemnity/negligence issue rather than a service issue.

21.

4a) What are your views on us producing new guidance to help those we regulate meet our requirements on complaints handling? Please give reasons for your answer.

22.

4b) What are your views on us combining our new guidance with our existing guidance on publishing complaints procedures? Please give reasons for your answer.

Any guidance should be consolidated.

23.

4c) Do you have any suggestions for areas we should include in guidance we develop to help solicitors and firms understand our requirements and how to meet our Standards and Regulations in relation to complaints? If so, please give details.

6. Consultation questions

24.

5a) What are your views on us collecting and publishing timeliness data at firm level?

This is not necessary and I fail to see what publishing the timelines will achieve.

25.

5b) What contextual information would be required to make the information useful to consumers and be fair to solicitors and firms?

26.

5c) What information about complaints would be most helpful to consumers and why?

7. Consultation questions

27.

6) Do you agree that introducing a model complaints resolution procedure (MCRP) for the sector would be helpful?

Disagree

Please give reasons for your answer, including anything you think should be taken account of in the development of an MCRP?: It is unlikely that this approach would address the nuances in dealing complaints depending on the type o firms, client or matters.

28.

7) Do you have any comments on the regulatory impact of our proposals on first-tier complaints?

29.

8) Do you have any further comments you would like to share with us when reviewing our requirements and producing guidance on first-tier complaints?

30.

9) Do you have any comments on our draft equalities impact assessment?

Changing our requirements on first-tier complaints consultation

Response ID:103 Data

3. Consultation questions

10.

1a) Do you agree with our proposal to expand 8.3 of our Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs, RFLs and RSLs, which will also apply to firms under section 7.1 (c) of our Code of Conduct for Firms, to include that complaints information must be provided to clients on conclusion of the legal matter?

Yes, however, I think that firms which currently abide by the present Legal Ombudsman Scheme Rules already provide sufficient prominence to complaints information available to clients who may wish to make a complaint.

11.

1b) Do you agree with our proposal to expand 8.3 of our Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs, RFLs and RSLs, which will also apply to firms under section 7.1 (c) of our Code of Conduct for Firms, to include that complaints information must be provided to clients upon request?

Yes, but the Legal Ombudsman Scheme Rules already require this - complaints should be acknowledged within 2 working days as good practice and a copy of the firm's complaints procedure must be provided.

12.

1c) Do you agree with our proposal to expand 8.3 of our Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs, RFLs and RSLs, which will also apply to firms under section 7.1 (c) of our Code of Conduct for Firms, to include that complaints information must be provided to clients if a complaint is made during a matter?

Yes, but this already exists as per the response provided at 1b) above.

13.

1d) Please add any comments that you have on when complaints information must be provided to clients.

I think the prominence given to complaints information is already sufficient as per the current Legal Ombudsman Scheme Rules.

4. Consultation questions

14.

2a) Do you agree with our proposal to expand Rule 2 of our Transparency Rules to state that complaints information published under this rule must be clear and accessible and in a prominent place on a firms' website?

Yes.

15.

2b) Please explain the reasons for your answer.

All firms ought to be doing this already.

16.

2c) What are your views on us mirroring the wording we have in our guidance on transparency in price and service about prominence?

It is already adequate, however, not all firms may abide.

17.

2d) What are your views on us including more information in our guidance on prominence - such as including reference to

it not requiring multiple clicks to access or that it should be linked from a homepage?

I think it is currently adequate.

18.

2e) What are your views on us including more information in our guidance on how firms or freelance solicitors that do not have a website should provide complaints information? Please give reasons for your answer and tell us what would be helpful to include.

Most firms will advise clients of who to complain in their client engagement letter and or terms and conditions of business regardless of whether or not they have a website.

5. Consultation questions

19.

3) What are your views on us including the LSB's definition of a complaint as a defined term in our Standards and Regulations Glossary?

Makes sense for consistency.

20.

4a) What are your views on us producing new guidance to help those we regulate meet our requirements on complaints handling? Please give reasons for your answer.

Yes, if it assists firms who don't already do this well. They should.

21.

4b) What are your views on us combining our new guidance with our existing guidance on publishing complaints procedures? Please give reasons for your answer.

Yes you should, if it assists firms who don't already do this well.

22.

4c) Do you have any suggestions for areas we should include in guidance we develop to help solicitors and firms understand our requirements and how to meet our Standards and Regulations in relation to complaints? If so, please give details.

I've always thought that it is adequate to ask firms to abide by the Legal Ombudsman Scheme Rules, but if reiterating those rules in the SRA's Standards and Regulations is judged to assist firms, then you should.

6. Consultation questions

23.

5a) What are your views on us collecting and publishing timeliness data at firm level?

Good and firms which manage complaints well should be ok with this.

24.

5b) What contextual information would be required to make the information useful to consumers and be fair to solicitors and firms?

Firms providing a Final Response within the 8 week time frame.

25.

5c) What information about complaints would be most helpful to consumers and why?

The reasons for complaints so that consumers may factor that in to their determination of whether or not they wish to make a complaint. For example, consumers may not be aware of Paragraph 8.7 of the SRA Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs, RFLs and RSLs. But if data published by the SRA stated that consumers may complain if fees exceeded the original estimate without being informed, that may assist consumers in making a legitimate complaint they may not have otherwise made.

7. Consultation questions

26.

6) Do you agree that introducing a model complaints resolution procedure (MCRP) for the sector would be helpful?

Neutral

Please give reasons for your answer, including anything you think should be taken account of in the development of an MCRP?: Not one size fits all and each complaint is unique and individual.

27.

7) Do you have any comments on the regulatory impact of our proposals on first-tier complaints?

No.

28.

8) Do you have any further comments you would like to share with us when reviewing our requirements and producing guidance on first-tier complaints?

I question why asking firms to abide by the Legal Ombudsman Scheme Rules is insufficient?

29.

9) Do you have any comments on our draft equalities impact assessment?

No.

Changing our requirements on first-tier complaints consultation

Response ID:109 Data

3. Consultation questions

11.

1a) Do you agree with our proposal to expand 8.3 of our Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs, RFLs and RSLs, which will also apply to firms under section 7.1 (c) of our Code of Conduct for Firms, to include that complaints information must be provided to clients on conclusion of the legal matter?

No

12.

1b) Do you agree with our proposal to expand 8.3 of our Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs, RFLs and RSLs, which will also apply to firms under section 7.1 (c) of our Code of Conduct for Firms, to include that complaints information must be provided to clients upon request?

Yes

13.

1c) Do you agree with our proposal to expand 8.3 of our Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs, RFLs and RSLs, which will also apply to firms under section 7.1 (c) of our Code of Conduct for Firms, to include that complaints information must be provided to clients if a complaint is made during a matter?

Yes

14.

1d) Please add any comments that you have on when complaints information must be provided to clients.

One of the first things that we have to do on a new matter is tell a client how to complain about us. The suggestion that we should also do this when closing the matter seems to suggest to clients that they should be complaining about us. I personally feel that clients are being led to believe that we're going to do things wrong, that they need to be considering just how to complain given the frequency with which you are suggesting that we need to remind that about their ability to do so. It feels like you have no faith in us as a profession, so why should the client?

4. Consultation questions

15.

2a) Do you agree with our proposal to expand Rule 2 of our Transparency Rules to state that complaints information published under this rule must be clear and accessible and in a prominent place on a firms' website?

It depends on your definition of prominent.

16.

2b) Please explain the reasons for your answer.

See my earlier comments about seeming to want to encourage complaints rather than supporting complaints when needed. The details should be available on the website but I would like more discuss about the term 'prominent'.

17.

2c) What are your views on us mirroring the wording we have in our guidance on transparency in price and service about prominence?

I think that more work needs to be done on enforcing the current rules before changing them.

18.

2d) What are your views on us including more information in our guidance on prominence - such as including reference to it not requiring multiple clicks to access or that it should be linked from a homepage?

See above

19.

2e) What are your views on us including more information in our guidance on how firms or freelance solicitors that do not have a website should provide complaints information? Please give reasons for your answer and tell us what would be helpful to include.

Would be helpful

5. Consultation questions

20.

3) What are your views on us including the LSB's definition of a complaint as a defined term in our Standards and Regulations Glossary?

I am surprised that the definition was removed with the introduction of the 2019 rules so would find this helpful.

21.

4a) What are your views on us producing new guidance to help those we regulate meet our requirements on complaints handling? Please give reasons for your answer.

As always, this would be helpful but please try to keep it as brief as possible - some guidance notes are excessively long.

22.

4b) What are your views on us combining our new guidance with our existing guidance on publishing complaints procedures? Please give reasons for your answer.

None

23.

4c) Do you have any suggestions for areas we should include in guidance we develop to help solicitors and firms understand our requirements and how to meet our Standards and Regulations in relation to complaints? If so, please give details.

No

6. Consultation questions

24.

5a) What are your views on us collecting and publishing timeliness data at firm level?

This is too subjective and would be unhelpful. You need to focus on more important aspects of regulation.

25.

5b) What contextual information would be required to make the information useful to consumers and be fair to solicitors and firms?

The difference between solicitors and other authorised bodies. Explain, for example, how the fees quoted by licensed conveyancers may appear to be lower than those quoted by solicitors but how they are likely to rise over the course of the matter whereas solicitors are more heavily regulated and will be more transparent. Explain how your work benefits consumers

rather than making it appear as if we're not also trying to do right by them.

26.

5c) What information about complaints would be most helpful to consumers and why?

I think para 8.3 requires little amendment to be honest.

7. Consultation questions

27.

6) Do you agree that introducing a model complaints resolution procedure (MCRP) for the sector would be helpful?

Please give reasons for your answer, including anything you think should be taken account of in the development of an MCRP?: What does MCRP mean? You should not simply use acronyms!

28.

7) Do you have any comments on the regulatory impact of our proposals on first-tier complaints?

Shows lack of faith in the profession

29.

8) Do you have any further comments you would like to share with us when reviewing our requirements and producing guidance on first-tier complaints?

No

30.

9) Do you have any comments on our draft equalities impact assessment?

No

Changing our requirements on first-tier complaints consultation

Response ID:116 Data

3. Consultation questions

11.

1a) Do you agree with our proposal to expand 8.3 of our Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs, RFLs and RSLs, which will also apply to firms under section 7.1 (c) of our Code of Conduct for Firms, to include that complaints information must be provided to clients on conclusion of the legal matter?

No - why prompt complaints. If a client wants to complain they will

12.

1b) Do you agree with our proposal to expand 8.3 of our Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs, RFLs and RSLs, which will also apply to firms under section 7.1 (c) of our Code of Conduct for Firms, to include that complaints information must be provided to clients upon request?

No if they have had it at the outset and it is available on the website, otherwise yes.

13.

1c) Do you agree with our proposal to expand 8.3 of our Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs, RFLs and RSLs, which will also apply to firms under section 7.1 (c) of our Code of Conduct for Firms, to include that complaints information must be provided to clients if a complaint is made during a matter?

No the client is already making the complaint and has already had the complaints information

14.

1d) Please add any comments that you have on when complaints information must be provided to clients.

4. Consultation questions

15.

2a) Do you agree with our proposal to expand Rule 2 of our Transparency Rules to state that complaints information published under this rule must be clear and accessible and in a prominent place on a firms' website?

yes and no

16.

2b) Please explain the reasons for your answer.

clear and accessible is fine but bottom of website with T's & C's should be fine

17.

2c) What are your views on us mirroring the wording we have in our guidance on transparency in price and service about prominence?

18.

2d) What are your views on us including more information in our guidance on prominence - such as including reference to it not requiring multiple clicks to access or that it should be linked from a homepage?

fine

19.

2e) What are your views on us including more information in our guidance on how firms or freelance solicitors that do not have a website should provide complaints information? Please give reasons for your answer and tell us what would be helpful to include.

5. Consultation questions

20.

3) What are your views on us including the LSB's definition of a complaint as a defined term in our Standards and Regulations Glossary?

21.

4a) What are your views on us producing new guidance to help those we regulate meet our requirements on complaints handling? Please give reasons for your answer.

22.

4b) What are your views on us combining our new guidance with our existing guidance on publishing complaints procedures? Please give reasons for your answer.

23.

4c) Do you have any suggestions for areas we should include in guidance we develop to help solicitors and firms understand our requirements and how to meet our Standards and Regulations in relation to complaints? If so, please give details.

6. Consultation questions

24.

5a) What are your views on us collecting and publishing timeliness data at firm level?

25.

5b) What contextual information would be required to make the information useful to consumers and be fair to solicitors and firms?

26.

5c) What information about complaints would be most helpful to consumers and why?

7. Consultation questions

27.

6) Do you agree that introducing a model complaints resolution procedure (MCRP) for the sector would be helpful?

Neutral

Please give reasons for your answer, including anything you think should be taken account of in the development of an MCRP?:

28.

7) Do you have any comments on the regulatory impact of our proposals on first-tier complaints?

29.

8) Do you have any further comments you would like to share with us when reviewing our requirements and producing guidance on first-tier complaints?

30.

9) Do you have any comments on our draft equalities impact assessment?

Changing our requirements on first-tier complaints consultation

Response ID:126 Data

3. Consultation questions

11.

1a) Do you agree with our proposal to expand 8.3 of our Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs, RFLs and RSLs, which will also apply to firms under section 7.1 (c) of our Code of Conduct for Firms, to include that complaints information must be provided to clients on conclusion of the legal matter?

No.

12.

1b) Do you agree with our proposal to expand 8.3 of our Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs, RFLs and RSLs, which will also apply to firms under section 7.1 (c) of our Code of Conduct for Firms, to include that complaints information must be provided to clients upon request?

Yes.

13.

1c) Do you agree with our proposal to expand 8.3 of our Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs, RFLs and RSLs, which will also apply to firms under section 7.1 (c) of our Code of Conduct for Firms, to include that complaints information must be provided to clients if a complaint is made during a matter?

Yes.

14.

1d) Please add any comments that you have on when complaints information must be provided to clients.

Complaints can often be frivolous, but are always time consuming to deal with. Providing complaints information to clients at the conclusion of a matter is likely to generate additional frivolous complaints, placing an unnecessary burden on law firms. This information should only be provided if requested by the client.

If a complaint is raised during a matter, there should be the opportunity for the firm to defer responding to the complaint until the matter is completed, particularly where the matter is close to completion.

4. Consultation questions

15.

2a) Do you agree with our proposal to expand Rule 2 of our Transparency Rules to state that complaints information published under this rule must be clear and accessible and in a prominent place on a firms' website?

Not completely.

16.

2b) Please explain the reasons for your answer.

Complaints information should be on a firms website and in a way that is accessible, but it doesn't need to be prominent. Websites are for sharing information and promoting the good work that the firm will do. The firm shouldn't have to promote the fact that clients can easily complaint about their service.

17.

2c) What are your views on us mirroring the wording we have in our guidance on transparency in price and service about prominence?

Strongly disagree. Complaints information should be made available if a complaint is raised. Law firms should not have to provide or comply with higher standards regarding complaints than other professional services such as accountants or dentists.

18.

2d) What are your views on us including more information in our guidance on prominence - such as including reference to it not requiring multiple clicks to access or that it should be linked from a homepage?

Strongly disagree for the reasons stated above.

19.

2e) What are your views on us including more information in our guidance on how firms or freelance solicitors that do not have a website should provide complaints information? Please give reasons for your answer and tell us what would be helpful to include.

No strong views.

5. Consultation questions

20.

3) What are your views on us including the LSB's definition of a complaint as a defined term in our Standards and Regulations Glossary?

The definition is very broad and some reference to materiality would be helpful. Clients seek perfection in the service that is provided, often complaining about poor service levels when email correspondence isn't dealt with within an hour or so.

21.

4a) What are your views on us producing new guidance to help those we regulate meet our requirements on complaints handling? Please give reasons for your answer.

Guidance is always helpful as long as it is constructive.

22.

4b) What are your views on us combining our new guidance with our existing guidance on publishing complaints procedures? Please give reasons for your answer.

A single source of guidance is needed.

23.

4c) Do you have any suggestions for areas we should include in guidance we develop to help solicitors and firms understand our requirements and how to meet our Standards and Regulations in relation to complaints? If so, please give details.

6. Consultation questions

24.

5a) What are your views on us collecting and publishing timeliness data at firm level?

We need to avoid a situation where data is collected for the sake of it. If data is to be collected, there needs to be a clear purpose as to why it is being collected and what it will be used for. There is also likely to be a significant overlap here with the LeO.

25.

5b) What contextual information would be required to make the information useful to consumers and be fair to solicitors

and firms?

This is extremely difficult to comply with. Firms are bound by confidentiality obligations, so it is often next to impossible for firms to provide contextual information. We see this constantly with online reviews. Those reviews and complaints are often made by parties who are not our clients with effectively no right of reply from the firm as we are prohibited from adding context in a reply by our client confidentiality obligations.

26.

5c) What information about complaints would be most helpful to consumers and why?

This information is already provided by the LeO. Why do the SRA also need to publish the same information? Does it benefit a consumer to know that a client has complained and the firm dealt with it without the complaint escalating further? I doubt it.

7. Consultation questions

27.

6) Do you agree that introducing a model complaints resolution procedure (MCRP) for the sector would be helpful?

Agree

Please give reasons for your answer, including anything you think should be taken account of in the development of an MCRP?:

28.

7) Do you have any comments on the regulatory impact of our proposals on first-tier complaints?

No

29.

8) Do you have any further comments you would like to share with us when reviewing our requirements and producing guidance on first-tier complaints?

The SRA needs to acknowledge that we live in a claim culture, with clients often complaining about frivolous matters as they see it as an entitlement to a fee reduction. Where there are serious failings in service they need to be addressed, but consumers have a huge choice of firms to instruct and have a voice through social media and review services about the level of service offered by a firm.

30.

9) Do you have any comments on our draft equalities impact assessment?

No.

Changing our requirements on first-tier complaints consultation

Response ID:139 Data

3. Consultation questions

11.

1a) Do you agree with our proposal to expand 8.3 of our Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs, RFLs and RSLs, which will also apply to firms under section 7.1 (c) of our Code of Conduct for Firms, to include that complaints information must be provided to clients on conclusion of the legal matter?

No. Currently we provide complaints information on our website, within client care letters and upon request. Where we receive an expression of dissatisfaction we expect our staff to signpost our policy. We consider that this is sufficient to ensure that clients are aware that they are entitled to complain and how their complaint will be handled.

We consider that an additional communication at the conclusion of the matter is both unnecessary and also risks being interpreted by clients as an encouragement to complain, which would be inappropriate.

12.

1b) Do you agree with our proposal to expand 8.3 of our Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs, RFLs and RSLs, which will also apply to firms under section 7.1 (c) of our Code of Conduct for Firms, to include that complaints information must be provided to clients upon request?

We have no serious objection to this, albeit we would be surprised if this did not happen already and to that extent would question whether this was really necessary.

13.

1c) Do you agree with our proposal to expand 8.3 of our Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs, RFLs and RSLs, which will also apply to firms under section 7.1 (c) of our Code of Conduct for Firms, to include that complaints information must be provided to clients if a complaint is made during a matter?

We have no serious objection to this, albeit we would be surprised if this did not happen already and to that extent would question whether this was really necessary.

14.

1d) Please add any comments that you have on when complaints information must be provided to clients.

We have nothing further to add.

4. Consultation questions

15.

2a) Do you agree with our proposal to expand Rule 2 of our Transparency Rules to state that complaints information published under this rule must be clear and accessible and in a prominent place on a firms' website?

In principle, yes. We would expect that complaints information would be accessible via a tab either at the bottom of a website home page or within a menu accessible from that homepage. If your understanding of "prominent" is different to this then we may disagree.

16.

2b) Please explain the reasons for your answer.

We think this strikes a balance between the need to provide complaints information to clients and third parties and the primary function of a website as a marketing and business development tool.

17.

2c) What are your views on us mirroring the wording we have in our guidance on transparency in price and service about prominence?

Please see 2a and 2b above.

18.

2d) What are your views on us including more information in our guidance on prominence - such as including reference to it not requiring multiple clicks to access or that it should be linked from a homepage?

Provided that this is guidance only and includes an appropriate degree of flexibility then we cannot see any harm. We would not support any hard rules since a degree of flexibility is often important for technical reasons and since the profession is not homogenous in its practice areas and/or client base.

By way of example, international firms may choose to operate a single website across different jurisdictions, which will likely mean that there may be an additional click required to move from a general complaints page to a specific page for each jurisdiction. Similarly, firms may operate websites in different languages which may require an additional click to choose the appropriate language before moving through to the complaints page. It would therefore be unhelpful to set any hard rules around a maximum number of clicks.

19.

2e) What are your views on us including more information in our guidance on how firms or freelance solicitors that do not have a website should provide complaints information? Please give reasons for your answer and tell us what would be helpful to include.

We have no views on this.

5. Consultation questions

20.

3) What are your views on us including the LSB's definition of a complaint as a defined term in our Standards and Regulations Glossary?

We would suggest the inclusion of the word "Client" at the start of the text before the word "Complaint". We assume that this definition is intended to apply to client complaints only, as opposed to non-client complaints, i.e. breaches of the Code or Regulations, where there may be no loss, distress, inconvenience or other detriment and where it would be inappropriate to impose any such qualifying factors.

We would suggest the inclusion of the word "material" before the word "financial". Where the profession is expected to operate a highly formal complaints process it is neither fair nor desirable that it should have to do so in relation to complaints of an obviously trivial nature.

Subject to both these points we think this is a positive step and would be helpful.

21.

4a) What are your views on us producing new guidance to help those we regulate meet our requirements on complaints handling? Please give reasons for your answer.

Provided that it is guidance and not mandatory then we would have no objection. It would be helpful if it included practical examples.

22.

4b) What are your views on us combining our new guidance with our existing guidance on publishing complaints procedures? Please give reasons for your answer.

In principle a single comprehensive guidance document is preferable to multiple documents.

23.

4c) Do you have any suggestions for areas we should include in guidance we develop to help solicitors and firms understand our requirements and how to meet our Standards and Regulations in relation to complaints? If so, please give details.

No.

6. Consultation questions

24.

5a) What are your views on us collecting and publishing timeliness data at firm level?

We would not support a proposal in these terms.

We do not consider that this is a reasonable yardstick by which to measure firms. In practice complaints are highly variable in their nature and can demand very different approaches to their investigation and resolution, leading to correspondingly different response times. That is reflected in LEO's existing 8 week limit for a complaint response which we consider to be a sufficient safeguard for clients whilst providing an appropriate degree of flexibility to the profession.

That apart there will inevitably be question marks around the accuracy and interpretation data and this will be an additional burden to smaller practices, with limited obvious benefit to the client/consumer.

25.

5b) What contextual information would be required to make the information useful to consumers and be fair to solicitors and firms?

The profession is highly diverse, as are its clients and the individual matters they are handling on their behalf. To provide context which allows a decision to be understood (and so is fair to the solicitor/firms) is likely to require a significant amount of detail. This would inevitably be a time consuming process for both the parties and the regulator. That is likely to result in a record that does not lend itself to the extraction/presentation of consistent or meaningful data that the public could sensibly make use of.

26.

5c) What information about complaints would be most helpful to consumers and why?

We consider that the information currently published by LEO is sufficient for purpose.

7. Consultation questions

27.

6) Do you agree that introducing a model complaints resolution procedure (MCRP) for the sector would be helpful?

Strongly disagree

Please give reasons for your answer, including anything you think should be taken account of in the development of an MCRP?: The variety of complaints received within firms and across firms would potentially make this unworkable and is in any event undesirable. No one size is likely to fit all and as a professional service provider, we should resist the temptation to adopt a formulaic tick box process that will ill serve the consumer. It is much better to allow firms the scope to address complaints in a flexible manner.

28.

7) Do you have any comments on the regulatory impact of our proposals on first-tier complaints?

We do not consider that there is anything fundamentally wrong with the current process and we are not convinced that the suggested changes would materially improve consumer satisfaction levels. However, they have the potential to considerably add to the administrative burden placed on firms.

29.

8) Do you have any further comments you would like to share with us when reviewing our requirements and producing guidance on first-tier complaints?

No

30.

9) Do you have any comments on our draft equalities impact assessment?

No

3. Consultation questions

11.

1a) Do you agree with our proposal to expand 8.3 of our Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs, RFLs and RSLs, which will also apply to firms under section 7.1 (c) of our Code of Conduct for Firms, to include that complaints information must be provided to clients on conclusion of the legal matter?

Firstly, it is unclear why there is a proposed change as the SRA's recent survey of 750 firms found that 96% are meeting requirements and providing information on how to complain. We receive little, if any, complaints about our current and compliant process.

The proposed change appears excessive given clients are advised, or where appropriate, provided with our complaints procedure a) in our client care letter at the start of a matter b) on the front page of our website which is available at any time c) if they complain d) if they request a copy e) with every bill (ordinarily sent monthly) referencing our procedure and signposting to the Legal Ombudsman, and f) on a google search of "How to complain about a solicitor" the first hit is the Law Society Website – Complain about a Solicitor.

It is highly unusual for a client to advise us they have not been able to locate our complaints procedure or they do not know how to complain to us. If a complaint is made they have either located it on the front page of our website or they will request it.

While the proposal is to allow for more opportunity in the client journey to be told how to complain the large majority would know to check the firm's website or their initial contract/terms with the firm or to simply ask.

Where a firm has provided a high standard of service and in some cases already received a verbal or written thank you and/or positive feedback, it is unfitting and inappropriate to then advise them how to complain.

Signposting the complaint procedure at the conclusion of the matter is also not appropriate for 'sophisticated' and/or regular users of legal services who may have a dedicated client Partner and / or be working with the service provider on several other transactions simultaneously or be re-instructing the service provider on other matters subsequently. Its preferable for firms to be trusted to identify which clients / type of client it might be preferable to signpost the complaints procedure at the conclusion of the matter, rather than it being a requirement.

It may not be clear on some types of matters what the SRA consider to be the "conclusion of their legal matter" and mis-interpretation may result in an inadvertent breach. For e.g. on completion of the property transaction or when the Land Registry have completed registration some months later and should they be sent it on matters which are abortive.

We are also concerned that the proposal may encourage a large number of totally unfounded complaints to be made. In some practice areas, particularly where the clients have been through very emotional processes, they may not understand the difference between the outcome of their matter (e.g. the decision imposed by a court) and service issues from the solicitor, resulting in them making a totally inappropriate "complaint" which the solicitor will nonetheless have to deal with in full under their complaints' procedure. This will increase the costs to the firms, which in turn is likely to result in costs to clients increasing.

We would suggest this is better managed in providing guidance (non-mandatory) as to how to gather feedback at the end of a matter should a firm wish to do so, therefore giving them the choice to do so or not.

12.

1b) Do you agree with our proposal to expand 8.3 of our Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs, RFLs and RSLs, which will also apply to firms under section 7.1 (c) of our Code of Conduct for Firms, to include that complaints information must be provided to clients upon request?

13.

1c) Do you agree with our proposal to expand 8.3 of our Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs, RFLs and RSLs, which will also apply to firms under section 7.1 (c) of our Code of Conduct for Firms, to include that complaints information must be provided to clients if a complaint is made during a matter?

14.

1d) Please add any comments that you have on when complaints information must be provided to clients.

4. Consultation questions

15.

2a) Do you agree with our proposal to expand Rule 2 of our Transparency Rules to state that complaints information published under this rule must be clear and accessible and in a prominent place on a firms' website?

On the understanding that by accessible and prominent the SRA mean to interpret this as linking from anywhere on the firm's homepage of the website, we have no objections and already do this.

16.

2b) Please explain the reasons for your answer.

We are always keen to hear from clients who have feedback about our service and are committed to making changes where we feel we could be doing better. However, it is worth remembering that there is a significant volume of clients at all law firms who are satisfied with the service. The proposal appears to be prescribing a process for the very small percentage who are not.

As a result there has to be a sensible balance to making the information accessible without it being the first thing, or last thing a client or a prospective client sees.

17.

2c) What are your views on us mirroring the wording we have in our guidance on transparency in price and service about prominence?

18.

2d) What are your views on us including more information in our guidance on prominence - such as including reference to it not requiring multiple clicks to access or that it should be linked from a homepage?

See answers to Q2 (a) and (b)

19.

2e) What are your views on us including more information in our guidance on how firms or freelance solicitors that do not have a website should provide complaints information? Please give reasons for your answer and tell us what would be helpful to include.

5. Consultation questions

20.

3) What are your views on us including the LSB's definition of a complaint as a defined term in our Standards and Regulations Glossary?

The definition would need to reference that the complaint is about legal services provided by the law firm to avoid any ambiguity and to prevent firms dealing with a complaint about a third party for e.g. an expert, the other side's solicitors or the court.

21.

4a) What are your views on us producing new guidance to help those we regulate meet our requirements on complaints handling? Please give reasons for your answer.

22.

4b) What are your views on us combining our new guidance with our existing guidance on publishing complaints procedures? Please give reasons for your answer.

23.

4c) Do you have any suggestions for areas we should include in guidance we develop to help solicitors and firms understand our requirements and how to meet our Standards and Regulations in relation to complaints? If so, please give details.

6. Consultation questions

24.

5a) What are your views on us collecting and publishing timeliness data at firm level?

First tier complaints are so wide ranging from the most minor to the more complex, they have various strands and outcomes and to capture data that is fair, proportionate, non-prejudicial and that would provide a consumer with the context is a near impossible task.

We would like to understand the drive behind publishing the data and what it is likely to achieve. Is there any evidence that consumers would choose a solicitor based on the complaints data the SRA proposes to collect. Could it possibly put consumers off choosing to seek legal advice at all.

The LeO already report outcomes on their website and make it clear if a firm has not complied with their complaints procedure so there is already data available to clients or potential clients. In addition the LeO can, and we understand do, report firms to the SRA.

Publishing the volume of complaints a firm has, is not an accurate reflection on its standards, and often some are unjustified complaints. Do you propose to publish number of complaints which were justified or not?

It could be prejudicial to those firms who accurately and diligently keep a record of all of their complaints as compared to others who may not.

Firms are vastly diverse in their size and areas of practice (some areas of which attract more complaints) and so it is difficult to see how the complaints data can be contextualised and therefore be fair and proportionate.

If the view continues to be as it was in 2017 that the data cannot be contextualised, then it should not be published.

25.

5b) What contextual information would be required to make the information useful to consumers and be fair to solicitors and firms?

26.

5c) What information about complaints would be most helpful to consumers and why?

7. Consultation questions

27.

6) Do you agree that introducing a model complaints resolution procedure (MCRP) for the sector would be helpful?

Disagree

Please give reasons for your answer, including anything you think should be taken account of in the development of an MCRP?:

It appears from the consultation document that a pilot for the summer and autumn of 2025 will be taking place in any event, regardless of the consultation. It is unclear if the MCRP would apply to all firms and at what point during the complaints process. The model and templates may assist some smaller firms who may not have dedicated resource. However, while we would check our procedures against the model, we would not agree to the MCRP being mandatory for all firms, given the procedure we (and the majority of firms as confirmed in the SRA survey) have in place is fit for purpose and one size will not fit all. Firms need the ability to be adaptable and flexible to enable them to work with the complainant.

28.

7) Do you have any comments on the regulatory impact of our proposals on first-tier complaints?

29.

8) Do you have any further comments you would like to share with us when reviewing our requirements and producing guidance on first-tier complaints?

Any changes ought not to be so prescriptive that we lose the ability to manage a complaint on a more informal basis if it is appropriate to do so, and it suits both the client and the firm. Many complaints can be resolved with a simple apology and quick rectification and the need to go down the formal process is not always necessary or what the consumer wants.

We ask that any updated guidance provided is consistent with that of the LeO.

30.

9) Do you have any comments on our draft equalities impact assessment?

Changing our requirements on first-tier complaints consultation

Response ID:158 Data

3. Consultation questions

11.

1a) Do you agree with our proposal to expand 8.3 of our Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs, RFLs and RSLs, which will also apply to firms under section 7.1 (c) of our Code of Conduct for Firms, to include that complaints information must be provided to clients on conclusion of the legal matter?

We believe that our final communication to clients on the conclusion of a matter should be a positive one. We want them to instruct us again and want to promote proactive client care. We do not believe that referring a client to a complaints policy in the final closing letter is helpful. We think that it would be better to ask for client 'feedback' as that could be positive or negative.

12.

1b) Do you agree with our proposal to expand 8.3 of our Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs, RFLs and RSLs, which will also apply to firms under section 7.1 (c) of our Code of Conduct for Firms, to include that complaints information must be provided to clients upon request?

We do not believe this is required as it appears to us a very basic point. We as a firm would never not provide complaints information to clients if they requested it or raised a complaint. We think the current code already covers this.

13.

1c) Do you agree with our proposal to expand 8.3 of our Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs, RFLs and RSLs, which will also apply to firms under section 7.1 (c) of our Code of Conduct for Firms, to include that complaints information must be provided to clients if a complaint is made during a matter?

As above we think that on conclusion a better way to ask is to ask for feedback which allows for positive and negative.

14.

1d) Please add any comments that you have on when complaints information must be provided to clients.

Our view is that it is appropriate to send this out at the outset and upon request and as long as it is easily accessible on the website.

4. Consultation questions

15.

2a) Do you agree with our proposal to expand Rule 2 of our Transparency Rules to state that complaints information published under this rule must be clear and accessible and in a prominent place on a firms' website?

We don't have a view here

16.

2b) Please explain the reasons for your answer.

If the rules are going to be changed then there needs to be guidance about number of clicks ect. We believe that a complaints policy needs to be accessible and easy to find (not hidden) but think it is not reasonable to expect it to be at the top of a home page on a website. Bottom bar would be the normal place for most websites and people now know that is generally where to look so actually that is most convenient for a client.

17.

2c) What are your views on us mirroring the wording we have in our guidance on transparency in price and service about prominence?

We think this is fine

18.

2d) What are your views on us including more information in our guidance on prominence - such as including reference to it not requiring multiple clicks to access or that it should be linked from a homepage?

It is up to the SRA but they should bear in mind points made above at 2b

19.

2e) What are your views on us including more information in our guidance on how firms or freelance solicitors that do not have a website should provide complaints information? Please give reasons for your answer and tell us what would be helpful to include.

This would not apply to our firm

5. Consultation questions

20.

3) What are your views on us including the LSB's definition of a complaint as a defined term in our Standards and Regulations Glossary?

We think it is important to distinguish between complaint and dissatisfaction. This is why we like the idea of feedback as that could cover dissatisfaction and give the firm a chance to rectify issues before it becomes a complaint.

21.

4a) What are your views on us producing new guidance to help those we regulate meet our requirements on complaints handling? Please give reasons for your answer.

Fine with this

22.

4b) What are your views on us combining our new guidance with our existing guidance on publishing complaints procedures? Please give reasons for your answer.

Fine

23.

4c) Do you have any suggestions for areas we should include in guidance we develop to help solicitors and firms understand our requirements and how to meet our Standards and Regulations in relation to complaints? If so, please give details.

No

6. Consultation questions

24.

5a) What are your views on us collecting and publishing timeliness data at firm level?

We strongly object to this. We think that this information could be unhelpful to both firms and consumers because of vexatious complaints or complaints without merit. We don't believe this is what the consumer actually wants or needs. Timeliness can also be outside of the firm's control, depending on what data was intended to be published. Delays could be caused by the court, third parties etc. Without context the data may be meaningless. We believe properly contextualising this information would be very difficult.

25.

5b) What contextual information would be required to make the information useful to consumers and be fair to solicitors and firms?

The data would need to be scrutinised and potentially the impacted law firm would need the ability to comment on the data – it might not always be reflective of the circumstances. We think there is enough scrutiny from the SRA with regulatory decisions publicised on the SRA's website/the gazette etc already. LeO also hold firms accountable for example if there are delays in responding to complaints – it seems disproportionate in our view.

26.

5c) What information about complaints would be most helpful to consumers and why?

For reasons stated above we don't think publication of complaints data can be useful or verifiable. We think the SRA's current approach is proportionate and does not need to be changed at this time.

7. Consultation questions

27.

6) Do you agree that introducing a model complaints resolution procedure (MCRP) for the sector would be helpful?

Neutral

Please give reasons for your answer, including anything you think should be taken account of in the development of an MCRP?: We can see that this would help smaller law firms and think having the option to rely on a MCRP could be useful. Subject to clarity on what is classed as a complaint that falls under it because there is a risk it could be too broad.

28.

7) Do you have any comments on the regulatory impact of our proposals on first-tier complaints?

We refer to our answer under 5b. In addition we believe that this would be administratively burdensome to have to provide the sort of responses firms would want to give and consumer left not knowing who to believe. No need to change current publishing. We think if the SRA deal with regulatory issues more quickly then this would give consumers more up to date/accurate information about a firm/lawyer. Again, concerns about how broad the definition of complaint might be.

29.

8) Do you have any further comments you would like to share with us when reviewing our requirements and producing guidance on first-tier complaints?

Concerned about the risk of making the definition of complaint too broad and including niggles/dissatisfaction which should be resolved before it becomes a complaint. Arguably it would be more positive to focus on that, i.e. achieving a resolution before the issue escalates or resolving an issue at an early stage. Giving a client information about how to make a complaint at the end of their matter is too late and changes could be better earlier in the process, not at the end.

30.

9) Do you have any comments on our draft equalities impact assessment?

No

Changing our requirements on first-tier complaints consultation

Response ID:161 Data

3. Consultation questions

11.

1a) Do you agree with our proposal to expand 8.3 of our Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs, RFLs and RSLs, which will also apply to firms under section 7.1 (c) of our Code of Conduct for Firms, to include that complaints information must be provided to clients on conclusion of the legal matter?

No.

1) If a client is unhappy with the service they are receiving they will raise a complaint at the relevant time with a view to seeking a resolution; that is the appropriate point for law firms to help their clients by reminding them how to complain and working with them to get things back on track and ensure that the client retains confidence in legal profession.

2) In the majority of matters, a final invoice is submitted to clients at the conclusion of a matter. By providing a copy of the complaints information at the same time as submitting a final invoice, it is likely that many clients, who have been entirely satisfied with the work carried out, will make a complaint simply as a means to justify not paying or arguing for a reduction in the final invoice. By the time a matter concludes, it is also likely too late for the law firm to be able to resolve any issues (other than via a fee reduction) for the client.

3) There is also a risk that clients will view the complaints information as a form of customer satisfaction survey, similar to those submitted by hotels or online auction sites. Clients who simply intend to provide feedback may identify minor service issues which did not impact on their overall experience. This would then require the law firm to carry out a full investigation into those service issues, even where the client does not in fact want to make a formal complaint. The time and cost to the firm of investigating whether the feedback is justified could be significant and could divert limited resources from resolving genuine complaints.

12.

1b) Do you agree with our proposal to expand 8.3 of our Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs, RFLs and RSLs, which will also apply to firms under section 7.1 (c) of our Code of Conduct for Firms, to include that complaints information must be provided to clients upon request?

Yes. This is a process we already apply.

13.

1c) Do you agree with our proposal to expand 8.3 of our Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs, RFLs and RSLs, which will also apply to firms under section 7.1 (c) of our Code of Conduct for Firms, to include that complaints information must be provided to clients if a complaint is made during a matter?

Yes. This is a process we already apply.

14.

1d) Please add any comments that you have on when complaints information must be provided to clients.

It is our experience that clients (and particularly our clients' unrepresented opponents) are very aware of their rights to make a complaint about the service they receive, whether from a law firm or any other organisation, and are willing to raise their concerns either with the person conducting the matter or our General Counsel, Managing Partner or Complaints team.

4. Consultation questions

15.

2a) Do you agree with our proposal to expand Rule 2 of our Transparency Rules to state that complaints information published under this rule must be clear and accessible and in a prominent place on a firms' website?

We agree that complaints information must be clear and accessible. It should be easy to locate on a firm's website, but it does not need to be in a prominent position. Clients are able to navigate websites to locate complaints information.

16.

2b) Please explain the reasons for your answer.

Placing information about complaints in a prominent position (eg at the top of the home page) may give a poor impression of the firm to new and existing clients, who may interpret it as a sign that the firm experiences such a high volume of complaints that it needs to publish complaints information prominently. A quick review of a sample number of bank, insurance and utility companies shows that there is no information about or link to a complaints policy on their homepage.

17.

2c) What are your views on us mirroring the wording we have in our guidance on transparency in price and service about prominence?

We do not agree that the complaints information needs to be in a prominent place so the wording should not be mirrored. However if it is considered necessary to place complaints information in a prominent place, guidance should be given on what amounts to a prominent place.

18.

2d) What are your views on us including more information in our guidance on prominence - such as including reference to it not requiring multiple clicks to access or that it should be linked from a homepage?

Such guidance is critical to avoid subjective interpretation on what amounts to a prominent place.

19.

2e) What are your views on us including more information in our guidance on how firms or freelance solicitors that do not have a website should provide complaints information? Please give reasons for your answer and tell us what would be helpful to include.

No views.

5. Consultation questions

20.

3) What are your views on us including the LSB's definition of a complaint as a defined term in our Standards and Regulations Glossary?

No view.

21.

4a) What are your views on us producing new guidance to help those we regulate meet our requirements on complaints handling? Please give reasons for your answer.

More guidance would be helpful, but such guidance needs to take account of the fact that one size does not necessarily fit all when it comes to complaints handling. Each complainant is different, with different needs and expectations, and each matter is different.

22.

4b) What are your views on us combining our new guidance with our existing guidance on publishing complaints procedures? Please give reasons for your answer.

It is preferable for there to be one clear piece of guidance, rather than several pieces of guidance. This will ensure that legal practitioners have viewed all the relevant guidance available.

23.

4c) Do you have any suggestions for areas we should include in guidance we develop to help solicitors and firms understand our requirements and how to meet our Standards and Regulations in relation to complaints? If so, please give details.

No comment

6. Consultation questions

24.

5a) What are your views on us collecting and publishing timeliness data at firm level?

This will increase the burden of both firms and the SRA unnecessarily. It may also result in misleading information being collected and published. For example, complaints may take more than eight weeks to finalise because the lawyer and client enter into negotiations over the appropriate level of compensation for any admitted failures of service. Even though the complaint may be resolved to the entire satisfaction of the client, this would result in publication of adverse data against the law firm if those negotiations take longer than eight weeks. Another example would be where a client makes a complaint, but fails to provide information reasonably requested by the law firm to enable them to respond promptly; this could drag out the complaint procedure beyond the eight week deadline.

25.

5b) What contextual information would be required to make the information useful to consumers and be fair to solicitors and firms?

No comment

26.

5c) What information about complaints would be most helpful to consumers and why?

LeO already provides helpful guidance.

7. Consultation questions

27.

6) Do you agree that introducing a model complaints resolution procedure (MCRP) for the sector would be helpful?

Neutral

Please give reasons for your answer, including anything you think should be taken account of in the development of an MCRP?: A MCRP could be helpful, but without seeing the detail it is impossible to be confident that it will assist. As mentioned previously in this response, an MCRP needs to take account of the fact that all complaints and complainants are different, with different needs and expectations, so one size does not fit all.

28.

7) Do you have any comments on the regulatory impact of our proposals on first-tier complaints?

No

29.

8) Do you have any further comments you would like to share with us when reviewing our requirements and producing guidance on first-tier complaints?

No

30.

9) Do you have any comments on our draft equalities impact assessment?

No

Changing our requirements on first-tier complaints consultation

Response ID:162 Data

3. Consultation questions

11.

1a) Do you agree with our proposal to expand 8.3 of our Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs, RFLs and RSLs, which will also apply to firms under section 7.1 (c) of our Code of Conduct for Firms, to include that complaints information must be provided to clients on conclusion of the legal matter?

No we do not agree with this suggestion. The firm already complies with existing requirements to provide complaints information at the outset of the matter (contained in our Terms of Business) and publishes the information on our website. If clients are unhappy with any aspect of the firm's fees, service or advice they are not backwards in coming forwards, and to virtually invite clients to make a complaint at the end of a matter seems unnecessary, and will possibly only generate spurious complaints from those seeking to shave something off their fees, even if these were agreed at the outset, or within estimate, rather than encourage those who have genuine issues, who will most likely already have raised their concerns.

12.

1b) Do you agree with our proposal to expand 8.3 of our Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs, RFLs and RSLs, which will also apply to firms under section 7.1 (c) of our Code of Conduct for Firms, to include that complaints information must be provided to clients upon request?

We would be somewhat surprised if firms didn't already provide the information on request. We provide this information when requested by a client, or if they express dissatisfaction.

13.

1c) Do you agree with our proposal to expand 8.3 of our Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs, RFLs and RSLs, which will also apply to firms under section 7.1 (c) of our Code of Conduct for Firms, to include that complaints information must be provided to clients if a complaint is made during a matter?

We have no issue with firms being required to provide complaints information to clients if a complaint is made during the course of the matter. We usually provide this when acknowledging the complaint so that the complainant is aware of the likely timeframe, and what steps are available if we are unable to resolve the complaint.

14.

1d) Please add any comments that you have on when complaints information must be provided to clients.

Nothing to add to our comments in 1a) above.

4. Consultation questions

15.

2a) Do you agree with our proposal to expand Rule 2 of our Transparency Rules to state that complaints information published under this rule must be clear and accessible and in a prominent place on a firms' website?

We have no issue with this proposal as we already have information which can be accessed with a single click from our home page.

16.

2b) Please explain the reasons for your answer.

See 2a)

17.

2c) What are your views on us mirroring the wording we have in our guidance on transparency in price and service about prominence?

If the proposal is to say "Complaints information published under this rule must be clear and accessible and in a prominent place on your website." we have no issue with this.

18.

2d) What are your views on us including more information in our guidance on prominence - such as including reference to it not requiring multiple clicks to access or that it should be linked from a homepage?

What do you mean by 'multiple clicks'? It would be reasonable if on a home page of a website there were a 'Contact us' link which gave 'Complaints' as a further link to open. This, after all, is what your own organisation does.

19.

2e) What are your views on us including more information in our guidance on how firms or freelance solicitors that do not have a website should provide complaints information? Please give reasons for your answer and tell us what would be helpful to include.

The current guidance states "The rule requires you to publish information on your website or make it available on request if you do not have a website.". Is it really envisaged that this would need to be expanded to such a basic level as to spell out to firms that they could have a printed sheet with information that could be emailed or posted out on request?

5. Consultation questions

20.

3) What are your views on us including the LSB's definition of a complaint as a defined term in our Standards and Regulations Glossary?

We do not have an issue with the definition "Complaint – an oral or written expression of dissatisfaction, which alleges that the complainant has suffered (or might suffer) financial loss, distress, inconvenience, or other detriment."

21.

4a) What are your views on us producing new guidance to help those we regulate meet our requirements on complaints handling? Please give reasons for your answer.

You have indicated that examples of what any guidance could cover are: Identifying complaints; What information to give to clients and when; Communications – including sending acknowledgements, communicating the outcome of a complaint, keeping complainants updated; Accessibility – including more information on and examples of prominence, and the use of clear, plain, appropriate language; Supporting vulnerable clients – including signposting to SRA resources, such as guidance on meeting the needs of vulnerable people; Resolving complaints – including complying with remedies.

Suitable guidance already exists, like this publication from the Legal Ombudsman <https://www.legalombudsman.org.uk/for-legal-service-providers/learning-resources/good-complaints-handling/best-practice-complaint-handling-guide/>. Why not point firms at that rather than reinvent the wheel, especially if firms have to bear that guidance in mind anyway?

22.

4b) What are your views on us combining our new guidance with our existing guidance on publishing complaints procedures? Please give reasons for your answer.

It helps if everything is in one place if you really feel new complaints handling guidance is justified given our response to 4a).

23.

4c) Do you have any suggestions for areas we should include in guidance we develop to help solicitors and firms understand our requirements and how to meet our Standards and Regulations in relation to complaints? If so, please give

details.

Just tell firms to use the Legal Ombudsman's published guidance which covers what is needed.

6. Consultation questions

24.

5a) What are your views on us collecting and publishing timeliness data at firm level?

An absolute waste of time and effort on the part of both the SRA and the firms who would have to collate their internal statistics.

Those firms who already respond in a timely manner will continue to do so and it is doubtful that those who don't would not change their behaviour because of this.

25.

5b) What contextual information would be required to make the information useful to consumers and be fair to solicitors and firms?

How can you contextualise the broad gamut of complaints that individual firms receive? There are some which are relatively easy to resolve quickly (a complaint about an invoice received for preparing a Codicil where the client died before signing it, even though the firm prepared and sent it to the client expeditiously) against a 10 page letter making generalised assertions with very little detail, which rambles on somewhat and raises issues on a Trust file which had been running some 20 years? One obviously requires a lot more time and effort to investigate than the other.

If you are to publish complaints data it would also put things in context if it considered the ratio of complaints to number of matters. For example if a firm receives 100 complaints in a year it is pertinent as to whether they had 1,500 or 15,000 live matters in that year?

26.

5c) What information about complaints would be most helpful to consumers and why?

Third parties sometimes have misconceptions as to what vices they have to complaint to a firm. Perhaps something explaining to those who are not actually clients of firms that our instructions are confidential and that we can't deal with complaints from unauthorised third parties on issues like costs and service would be helpful.

7. Consultation questions

27.

6) Do you agree that introducing a model complaints resolution procedure (MCRP) for the sector would be helpful?

Disagree

Please give reasons for your answer, including anything you think should be taken account of in the development of an MCRP?: If some firms don't already have a procedure perhaps an outline for them to develop into something that works for their organisation might be useful, but a model which firms had to adhere to is not practicable. All complaints are different - see examples provided in previous block of questions. It can't be one size fits all.

28.

7) Do you have any comments on the regulatory impact of our proposals on first-tier complaints?

If firms are already dealing with complaints in a timely manner and publishing complaints information prominently/providing when requested some of the proposals should not have too much of an impact. However the suggestion that clients should have the possibility of making a complaint flagged to them at the end of a matter just seems to be inviting trouble. In our experience unhappy clients make it clear without needing a prompt.

There has been over the years a growing propensity for consumers to make their dissatisfaction known, with the media raising awareness generally around making complaints against many organisations, and people are less 'in awe' of professions than they may have been in the last century.

Perhaps it is symptomatic of people being under economic pressures, but talking to other firms there seems generally to be an uptick in clients making what have transpired to be unjustified complaints in the hope of shaving monies off their bill.

The suggestion of collating information on the timeliness of complaints seems like needless work for everyone, and for very little information that anyone could be bothered to look at.

29.

8) Do you have any further comments you would like to share with us when reviewing our requirements and producing guidance on first-tier complaints?

Why reinvent wheels - just tell firms to follow the Legal Ombudsman's guidance. Do you really need to waste time and effort producing something that in all likelihood would be very similar, and if it weren't have firms confused as to which organisation's guidance to follow?

30.

9) Do you have any comments on our draft equalities impact assessment?

No

Changing our requirements on first-tier complaints consultation

Response ID:167 Data

3. Consultation questions

11.

1a) Do you agree with our proposal to expand 8.3 of our Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs, RFLs and RSLs, which will also apply to firms under section 7.1 (c) of our Code of Conduct for Firms, to include that complaints information must be provided to clients on conclusion of the legal matter?

No. We believe that providing complaints detail at the beginning of the matter and, as per the current Transparency rules, having them on the firm's website is sufficient. These can also be made available upon request. We believe there is a risk that providing complaint information, as a matter of course at the conclusion of all matters may, due to human nature, lead people to over analyse why those details were being provided and encourage unwarranted and unjustified complaints (as they may feel those complaint details were being provided for a reason).

12.

1b) Do you agree with our proposal to expand 8.3 of our Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs, RFLs and RSLs, which will also apply to firms under section 7.1 (c) of our Code of Conduct for Firms, to include that complaints information must be provided to clients upon request?

Yes, we agree and this is something the firm currently does.

13.

1c) Do you agree with our proposal to expand 8.3 of our Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs, RFLs and RSLs, which will also apply to firms under section 7.1 (c) of our Code of Conduct for Firms, to include that complaints information must be provided to clients if a complaint is made during a matter?

Yes. Our complaints procedure and details of the process and escalation points is made available upon request. Our formal complaint acknowledgement letters also detail the same information.

14.

1d) Please add any comments that you have on when complaints information must be provided to clients.

NA

4. Consultation questions

15.

2a) Do you agree with our proposal to expand Rule 2 of our Transparency Rules to state that complaints information published under this rule must be clear and accessible and in a prominent place on a firms' website?

Yes. This is something that the firm currently does.

16.

2b) Please explain the reasons for your answer.

We want our clients to notify us of any issues which has led to them feeling dissatisfied (so that we can take steps to improve our service) and it is therefore essential that this information is easily accessible, clear and transparent.

17.

2c) What are your views on us mirroring the wording we have in our guidance on transparency in price and service about prominence?

We perceived this to be the same originally and implemented as such.

18.

2d) What are your views on us including more information in our guidance on prominence - such as including reference to it not requiring multiple clicks to access or that it should be linked from a homepage?

More guidance would be appreciated to make sure the firm complies with the SRA requirements and removing any potential ambiguity.

19.

2e) What are your views on us including more information in our guidance on how firms or freelance solicitors that do not have a website should provide complaints information? Please give reasons for your answer and tell us what would be helpful to include.

NA as our firm has a website.

5. Consultation questions

20.

3) What are your views on us including the LSB's definition of a complaint as a defined term in our Standards and Regulations Glossary?

A definition of a complaint would be appreciated. As mentioned on the consultation page a single definition would be beneficial to bring consistency across the sector and help firms identify and handle complaints effectively.

21.

4a) What are your views on us producing new guidance to help those we regulate meet our requirements on complaints handling? Please give reasons for your answer.

More guidance would be appreciated to make sure the firm complies with the SRA requirements and removing any potential ambiguity.

22.

4b) What are your views on us combining our new guidance with our existing guidance on publishing complaints procedures? Please give reasons for your answer.

More guidance would be appreciated to make sure the firm complies with the SRA requirements and removing any potential ambiguity.

23.

4c) Do you have any suggestions for areas we should include in guidance we develop to help solicitors and firms understand our requirements and how to meet our Standards and Regulations in relation to complaints? If so, please give details.

We suggest that the guidance includes clear expectations around timeframes for handling complaints. This would support firms in managing complaints within a structured and consistent schedule and provide clients with a timeframe during which they could expect to be contacted/responded to.

Additionally, we suggest including guidance on appropriate remedies and compensation for resolving complaints. While we acknowledge that the Legal Ombudsman provides information in this area, it would be helpful for the SRA to expand on this or offer clarification where necessary, particularly in relation to regulatory expectations.

We would suggest including guidance around handling complaints for vulnerable customers, including; they have been identified as vulnerable, any adjustments have been discussed and adopted where possible (including but not limited to alternative methods of communication and liaising with a representative).

6. Consultation questions

24.

5a) What are your views on us collecting and publishing timeliness data at firm level?

We are concerned that, without sufficient context, the data could be misleading and open to misinterpretation. Additionally, we are mindful that many firms may lack the resources or systems to collect and report this data effectively.

25.

5b) What contextual information would be required to make the information useful to consumers and be fair to solicitors and firms?

To ensure fairness and usefulness, any published complaints data should be accompanied by contextual information such as:

- The size and type of the firm (e.g. volume of clients, areas of law practiced).
- The complexity and nature of the legal matters handled, as some areas naturally attract more complaints.
- If the complainant was a consumer or a commercial client
- Whether the complaint was upheld or resolved, and how quickly.
- Whether the complaint was about service or conduct, as these are materially different. Without this context, raw data could be misleading and may unfairly impact consumer perception and firm reputation.

26.

5c) What information about complaints would be most helpful to consumers and why?

The most helpful information for consumers would be:

- Clear, accessible explanations of the complaints process, including how to raise a concern and what to expect at each stage.
- If the complainant was a consumer or a commercial client.
- Timeframes for response and resolution, so clients know when they can expect updates.
- Whether complaints were resolved internally or escalated to the Legal Ombudsman, which can help demonstrate a firm's commitment to resolution.
- Themes or learning outcomes, where appropriate, to show how firms use complaints to improve service.

However, we believe this information should be presented in a standardised and contextualised format, ideally through tools like the proposed MCRP. This would help consumers make informed decisions without misinterpreting raw data and would also support fairness and consistency across the sector.

7. Consultation questions

27.

6) Do you agree that introducing a model complaints resolution procedure (MCRP) for the sector would be helpful?

Agree

Please give reasons for your answer, including anything you think should be taken account of in the development of an MCRP?:

The inclusion of templates, toolkits, and guidance would reduce ambiguity and support firms in meeting regulatory expectations efficiently. However, we believe the MCRP must be: • Flexible enough to accommodate different firm sizes and practice areas. • Proportionate, avoiding a one-size-fits-all approach that could overburden smaller firms. • Supported by training and engagement, to ensure successful adoption. We welcome the pilot approach and encourage the SRA and LeO to share findings transparently, incorporating feedback from both providers and consumers before any wider rollout.

28.

7) Do you have any comments on the regulatory impact of our proposals on first-tier complaints?

We are concerned that the proposals may increase the administrative burden on firms, particularly smaller ones, without clear evidence of improved outcomes. There is also a risk that firms may become overly cautious or defensive in their handling of complaints, which could hinder open dialogue and early resolution. Any regulatory changes should be accompanied by clear

guidance, templates, and support to help firms comply effectively.

29.

8) Do you have any further comments you would like to share with us when reviewing our requirements and producing guidance on first-tier complaints?

We would welcome:

- Sector-specific examples to illustrate best practice.
 - Templates or model procedures to support consistency.
 - Training or webinars to help firms implement changes.
 - Guidance on handling complaints from vulnerable clients, including communication adjustments and representative involvement. This would help ensure that firms of all sizes can meet expectations while maintaining a client-focused approach.
-

30.

9) Do you have any comments on our draft equalities impact assessment?

We would appreciate any guidance on inclusive communication and reasonable adjustments. This will help ensure that the regulatory framework supports fairness and accessibility for all.

Changing our requirements on first-tier complaints consultation

Response ID:170 Data

3. Consultation questions

11.

1a) Do you agree with our proposal to expand 8.3 of our Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs, RFLs and RSLs, which will also apply to firms under section 7.1 (c) of our Code of Conduct for Firms, to include that complaints information must be provided to clients on conclusion of the legal matter?

No, we do not

12.

1b) Do you agree with our proposal to expand 8.3 of our Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs, RFLs and RSLs, which will also apply to firms under section 7.1 (c) of our Code of Conduct for Firms, to include that complaints information must be provided to clients upon request?

Yes we do

13.

1c) Do you agree with our proposal to expand 8.3 of our Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs, RFLs and RSLs, which will also apply to firms under section 7.1 (c) of our Code of Conduct for Firms, to include that complaints information must be provided to clients if a complaint is made during a matter?

Yes we do

14.

1d) Please add any comments that you have on when complaints information must be provided to clients.

Our legal practice provides services to a significant number of clients who contract with us on a Conditional Fee Agreement basis, which means that they pay for our services and that those fees are retained from the damages they recover. These individuals do not have the benefit of before the event legal expenses insurance, and for the vast majority of these clients, costs are not recoverable from the at fault party. Without our assistance they would be unrepresented and we are, for these clients, their only route to represented access to justice. Experience has shown us that when a payment is retained from compensation, this can already be a trigger for clients to raise an unjustified complaint despite full transparency about fees from before we were retained and throughout. If complaint information has to be sent routinely at the conclusion of every matter, it is likely that this will lead to an increasing number of clients doing this. The provision of complaints information at the point of conclusion may be interpreted by clients as being a prompt to find fault, or a suggestion that something has gone wrong even when the service has been completed satisfactorily. That increase in complaints would impact directly on our ability to act for this cohort of individuals at all, as margins for handling these cases are so low. This could disproportionately impact those who struggle to access justice in any event due to being financially vulnerable; they are the section of society most likely not to have Before the Event Legal Expenses insurance.

As a business, we have in place robust procedures and control reporting to identify actual and potential complaints, which we track and deal with accordingly. The process itself is transparent and dealt with objectively. Given this, we do not consider that there is a need to offer up additional prompts to raise complaints. By way of context, less than 1% of our client population raise complaints concerning our service, and for those that do we monitor their progress daily. We would support the industry as a whole moving towards proactive identification of actual and potential complaints through control reporting, rather than a blanket policy of provision of complaint information at the conclusion of the retainer.

4. Consultation questions

15.

2a) Do you agree with our proposal to expand Rule 2 of our Transparency Rules to state that complaints information published under this rule must be clear and accessible and in a prominent place on a firms' website?

Yes we do

16.

2b) Please explain the reasons for your answer.

We have no reason to object to that

17.

2c) What are your views on us mirroring the wording we have in our guidance on transparency in price and service about prominence?

We have no issues with that

18.

2d) What are your views on us including more information in our guidance on prominence - such as including reference to it not requiring multiple clicks to access or that it should be linked from a homepage?

We have no concerns with that – our complaints information is already accessible from the homepage of our website.

19.

2e) What are your views on us including more information in our guidance on how firms or freelance solicitors that do not have a website should provide complaints information? Please give reasons for your answer and tell us what would be helpful to include.

We have no views as we do not belong to this cohort

5. Consultation questions

20.

3) What are your views on us including the LSB's definition of a complaint as a defined term in our Standards and Regulations Glossary?

While we acknowledge that the LSB's definition of a complaint brings a level of clarity and standardisation across the legal services sector, we have some reservations about its immediate adoption, particularly in relation to our current internal processes.

At present, some of our staff are able to resolve expressions of dissatisfaction as they arise. This approach enables a swift, client-focused response and often prevents issues from escalating unnecessarily into formal complaints. It allows us to address concerns informally but effectively, often to the satisfaction of the client, while maintaining a proportionate and resource-sensitive handling of issues.

The adoption of the LSB's definition could, in practice, require us to treat all expressions of dissatisfaction as complaints from the outset. While this does have positive aspects such as consistency and possibly better oversight it could potentially undermine the autonomy and responsiveness of our case handlers. They may feel restricted in their ability to quickly de-escalate concerns and could be required to formally log and respond to a far higher volume of minor issues. This may lead to delays and increased administrative burdens, making our overall complaint handling less agile and potentially frustrating for clients seeking fast resolution. It could also mean that the more serious and complex complaints do not then get the resourcing that they need, if all expressions of dissatisfaction have to be dealt with in the same way.

Therefore, while we support the spirit of the definition, we would urge caution in adopting it in a way that may unintentionally reduce the effectiveness of early resolution and add unnecessary complexity to complaint handling processes.

21.

4a) What are your views on us producing new guidance to help those we regulate meet our requirements on complaints handling? Please give reasons for your answer.

It is very difficult to provide an informed opinion on this, as we do not know what the proposed guidance is, either in terms of content or format. The content, layout, tone and practical content will all influence how useful the combined guidance will be in practice, for both clients and those managing complaints.

Guidance may be helpful, however should ideally enhance what already works well without duplicating effort or creating conflicting or excessive expectations. Anything overly prescriptive that takes away from the inability (in particular) to resolve matters informally is likely to cause increased overheads and resourcing needs within legal practices, with no discernible benefit. The most useful guidance would support proportionate handling, particularly where an expression of dissatisfaction can be quickly and effectively resolved to the clients' satisfaction without formal escalation.

It is not clear at present what specific failures in complaint handling have been identified by the SRA following their Thematic Review. We would suggest that any guidance provided should be targeted at specific issues identified, rather than a broad brush approach.

22.

4b) What are your views on us combining our new guidance with our existing guidance on publishing complaints procedures? Please give reasons for your answer.

Please see the answer to Question 4a. It is difficult to provide a meaningful response without knowing the content of the proposed guidance.

23.

4c) Do you have any suggestions for areas we should include in guidance we develop to help solicitors and firms understand our requirements and how to meet our Standards and Regulations in relation to complaints? If so, please give details.

As is noted above, guidance should support the ability to resolve complaints in a proportionate manner and should be targeted at specific issues with complaint handling, rather than a broad approach.

6. Consultation questions

24.

5a) What are your views on us collecting and publishing timeliness data at firm level?

We are not necessarily opposed to this in principle, but to provide a properly considered response, we would need to understand the specifics of this requirement. Please also see our answers to questions 5b and 5c. Timeliness is not a reliable measure of the quality of complaint handling at first tier.

25.

5b) What contextual information would be required to make the information useful to consumers and be fair to solicitors and firms?

Please see the below answer to question 5c. We do not consider that timeliness data is of particular use to clients, even when contextualised. It is also not possible to determine, without knowing the specifics of the requirement to provide such timeliness information, that it will be possible to properly contextualise such information so as to be readily understandable by potential or existing clients.

26.

5c) What information about complaints would be most helpful to consumers and why?

We do not consider that timeliness data is particularly helpful to clients in relation to complaints, and in particular is not a reliable measure of the quality of complaint handling at first tier. We consider it would be more useful for clients to understand how many (as a proportion) of the complaints that are escalated to the Legal Ombudsman for second tier handling result in an outcome that differs from that offered at first tier complaint handling stage.

It is also the case that certain areas of law, usually due to the importance of the matter to the client, are more prone to leading to complaint, and clients should be made aware that that is the case. For example, it is highly likely that a much lower percentage of corporate/commercial clients would raise a complaint than a conveyancing client. Different sectors within the regulated legal sector cannot be usefully compared in terms of their complaint profile.

7. Consultation questions

27.

6) Do you agree that introducing a model complaints resolution procedure (MCRP) for the sector would be helpful?

Neutral

Please give reasons for your answer, including anything you think should be taken account of in the development of an MCRP?: In principle, a MCRP could be of assistance. However, as is noted above, any model should support the proportionate resolution of expressions of dissatisfaction as well as provide a framework for the handling of formal complaints. The early resolution of expressions of dissatisfaction is crucial to the solicitor client relationship and should not be discarded in favour of an overly formalised approach for the sake of uniformity. It should also be noted that a process does not of itself drive good quality complaint handling, but rather can be supportive to it.

28.

7) Do you have any comments on the regulatory impact of our proposals on first-tier complaints?

The SRA's purpose is to drive confidence and trust in legal services. We consider that the routine provision of complaint information at the conclusion of every client's instruction may do the opposite of that, as is noted above in relation to question 1d.

We are also aware that the SRA has a particular interest in ensuring that the public have access to legal representation; this is also commented upon in our answer to question 1d, and we are concerned about the risk that potential increases in complaint numbers could impact on our ability to provide assistance to certain potential clients.

If a rigid MCRP is introduced, with no flexibility for proportionate resolution of expressions of dissatisfaction, or with a requirement to use rigid procedural templates, this is likely to add additional administrative requirements and therefore cause backlogs in resolving complaints. That outcome is the opposite of the intention of the suggested changes.

The Codes of Conduct contain an obligation to deal with clients according to their needs, and there is a further risk that a rigid MCRP may unintentionally disadvantage client who are vulnerable, especially where their vulnerabilities relate to communication.

29.

8) Do you have any further comments you would like to share with us when reviewing our requirements and producing guidance on first-tier complaints?

The question above concerning the publishing of statistics around timeliness suggests that that is the focus of the consultation, rather than the substantive quality of complaint handling. Whilst we do not consider that timeliness data is an indicator of the quality of complaint handling, a requirement to publish additional, detailed, complaints data could unintentionally damage trust between solicitor and clients. Data is always open to interpretation, and the publication of complaints data without clear context or differentiation between minor issues and substantive complaints could lead to clients mistrusting the Tier 1 complaints process before it has begun. For example they may consider that the data is indicative of the legal practice providing a poor service overall, rather than having an engaging and collaborative complaints process and culture. This may lead to more clients

either escalating to the Ombudsman, or potentially even bypassing the Ombudsman and approaching the SRA. This would be likely to overload both institutions and not improve resolution rates at Tier 1.

Any changes to process must be considered in line with and informed by the real-world dynamics of complaint handling in legal practice.

The SRA's "usual" approach to regulation is to provide standards that need to be achieved, with some supporting guidance. We would suggest that this approach should be retained in relation to complaint handling, and the SRA should specifically confirm to the regulated community the issues they have identified that are preventing resolution at Tier 1, and set minimum standards of complaint handling in relation to those issues.

Overly formalising process for the sake of it, and putting undue pressure on processes will not raise the standard of the handling of complaints.

As is noted above, we consider that the standards should include a requirement to proactively monitor for potential complaints, and to track issues raised to resolution.

30.

9) Do you have any comments on our draft equalities impact assessment?

As noted above, the Codes of Conduct contain an obligation to deal with clients according to their needs, and there is a further risk that a rigid MCRP may unintentionally disadvantage clients who are vulnerable, especially where their vulnerabilities relate to communication.

3. Consultation questions

11.

1a) Do you agree with our proposal to expand 8.3 of our Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs, RFLs and RSLs, which will also apply to firms under section 7.1 (c) of our Code of Conduct for Firms, to include that complaints information must be provided to clients on conclusion of the legal matter?

Our first observation is that the LSB's Statutory Requirements dated 16 May 2024 Section D. 11. states 'An authorised person must inform each client of the matters in paragraphs 12 and 13: - a) at the time of engagement on a new matter or the next earliest appropriate opportunity; b) at the conclusion of the matter; c) upon request; and d) if a complaint is made during a matter.'

As this statutory requirement already says we **must** provide a copy of the complaint process at the conclusion of the matter, as well as the other requirements, on what basis is the SRA consulting on this, as if the outcome is not predetermined. It would seem if the SRA decides not to expand 8.3 of the Code of Conduct to include provision of the complaints process at the conclusion of the matter it would be in breach of the LSB's Statutory Requirements.

Putting the above to one side, our firm does not agree with this point. We provide services in circumstances where more likely than not our clients are engaging us reluctantly and spending money they do not want to spend. These are (mostly) private individuals we are providing a service to in very contentious, personal and stressful situations. The Legal Ombudsman already deals with around 50% unjustified complaints every year and this expansion would, in our opinion, encourage or prompt people to complain in situations where they might not ordinarily do so. This would also likely trigger complaints where people conflate the outcome of their legal matter, that may not have gone in their favour despite our best efforts, with our service.

If they were not minded to complain in the first place then it follows that they likely hadn't suffered any significant detriment and so this will likely increase the number of minor and unsupported complaints. However the Legal Ombudsman amended their Scheme Rules so they could dismiss complaints where there hadn't been a significant detriment, so these people wouldn't have any recourse if they remained unhappy at the end of the first tier complaint process. But once someone has gone to the time and effort of complaining they are less likely to accept a response that is not entirely in their favour, as people are prideful and don't like to come away with nothing after expending energy on something. So this will likely increase the number of complaints to the LeO and increase time firms spend on insubstantial or complaints.

We already tell clients at the outset how to complain and include a copy of our complaint process on our website. If a client is unhappy with our service they will refer to the client care letter/terms of business or our website, Google how to complain which will lead them to LeO which tells them how to complain or ask us directly how to complain. This rule change seems to take all the burden away from the client to take a proactive approach to their complaint and places even more of a burden on firms. I therefore do not see the fairness or value of expanding the rules to incorporate this change.

It also puts a significant burden on this profession which is not mirrored in others. When you go to the doctor or use the health service you are not asked at the end of your treatment if you would like to complain, the notion is incomprehensible. Similarly this burden is not even matched by other authorised persons, with the BSB only requiring barristers to make sure 'Clients understand how to bring a complaint and complaints are dealt with promptly, fairly, openly and effectively.'

If it is deemed to be a necessary requirement put on firms, in the interests of consumer protection, we would be interested to see if the SRA adopt this themselves and also tell consumers who use your service about your complaint process at the end of handling their matter.

12.

1b) Do you agree with our proposal to expand 8.3 of our Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs, RFLs and RSLs, which will

also apply to firms under section 7.1 (c) of our Code of Conduct for Firms, to include that complaints information must be provided to clients upon request?

Yes, we already do this and it seems a sensible requirement.

13.

1c) Do you agree with our proposal to expand 8.3 of our Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs, RFLs and RSLs, which will also apply to firms under section 7.1 (c) of our Code of Conduct for Firms, to include that complaints information must be provided to clients if a complaint is made during a matter?

Yes, we already do this and it seems a sensible requirement.

14.

1d) Please add any comments that you have on when complaints information must be provided to clients.

It does seem that firms are being put to more and more onerous requirements to compensate for a lack of common sense and proactiveness by members of the public. We believe more value would be added in the SRA working to ensure compliance with its existing rules - noting only 68% of firms currently publish their complaints process on their website.

4. Consultation questions

15.

2a) Do you agree with our proposal to expand Rule 2 of our Transparency Rules to state that complaints information published under this rule must be clear and accessible and in a prominent place on a firms' website?

Yes

16.

2b) Please explain the reasons for your answer.

Consistency helps

17.

2c) What are your views on us mirroring the wording we have in our guidance on transparency in price and service about prominence?

Again, we agree as consistency helps

18.

2d) What are your views on us including more information in our guidance on prominence - such as including reference to it not requiring multiple clicks to access or that it should be linked from a homepage?

I think this would be more helpful, as the more prescriptive the guidance is the easier firms will be able to follow it and you'll be able to enforce it.

19.

2e) What are your views on us including more information in our guidance on how firms or freelance solicitors that do not have a website should provide complaints information? Please give reasons for your answer and tell us what would be helpful to include.

I think the more guidance you provide in any circumstance would only be welcomed, but if they don't have a website and they're required to meet the same standards in other respects (provide complaints process when requested) then I am not sure what else they could be required to do without that requirement becoming too onerous or disproportionate, assuming this relates to a very small section of the profession.

5. Consultation questions

20.

3) What are your views on us including the LSB's definition of a complaint as a defined term in our Standards and Regulations Glossary?

I think most firms will already know the definition as it is the one adopted in the LeO's Scheme Rules, however it wouldn't hurt from a consistency point of view.

21.

4a) What are your views on us producing new guidance to help those we regulate meet our requirements on complaints handling? Please give reasons for your answer.

Any additional guidance would be welcomed, so there is more consistency

22.

4b) What are your views on us combining our new guidance with our existing guidance on publishing complaints procedures? Please give reasons for your answer.

The existing guidance is fit for purpose and it would be helpful to have everything within the same piece of guidance so we do not have to refer to different sources for the same topic.

23.

4c) Do you have any suggestions for areas we should include in guidance we develop to help solicitors and firms understand our requirements and how to meet our Standards and Regulations in relation to complaints? If so, please give details.

It should be as prescriptive as possible to ensure consistency or provide suggested wording or solutions.

6. Consultation questions

24.

5a) What are your views on us collecting and publishing timeliness data at firm level?

We wouldn't have a problem with providing our timeliness data to the SRA however we would have reservations about this being published and especially if it was being published in isolation. We do not feel the timeliness data alone would be of much use to consumers and is arguably one of the less critical factors in regard to first tier complaint handling and what data consumers might want when deciding which individual/firm to instruct. We would agree with your reasons in 2017 as to why other first tier complaints data shouldn't be published and feel the same applies here.

25.

5b) What contextual information would be required to make the information useful to consumers and be fair to solicitors and firms?

I am not sure contextualisation would help in instances where the delay in sending a final response to the complaint happens because of the client - which in our experience is mostly the case. A client will raise a complaint but then say they don't want to deal with it right now and it gets put on hold or we send them a request for clarification or send an initial response and ask if they want to accept that or escalate it within our complaints process, and they don't respond until much later, by which time eight weeks has passed when we resume dealing with it. Our timeliness data works from when the complaint is first received and so instances of delay not caused by us would be reflected. If the SRA asked for further information about complaints that took longer than 8 weeks to deal with we would be happy to provide further information, but that level of nuance is not proportionate and appropriate for large scale published data.

I therefore don't think enough contextualisation could be done to make the data a fair reflection.

26.

5c) What information about complaints would be most helpful to consumers and why?

Only second tier complaint data should be published, because assuming the purpose is for consumers to find out which firm's don't handle complaints well, then all that is relevant are the complaints that the Legal Ombudsman has to adjudicate on, where the firm has failed to identify the failing themselves and offer appropriate redress. With that in mind the Legal Ombudsman's published data is not fair or reflective of that, because an individual/firm could have admitted fault and offered a fair remedy at first tier and throughout the second tier investigation process, but if the client refuses to accept that they can insist on an Ombudsman decision where the complaint is upheld and a remedy awarded and this is the outcome published on the LeO's website. But there is no indication to the consumer that the individual/firm reached the same conclusion themselves; it gives the impression the Ombudsman's adjudication was needed and forced on the firm.

As first tier complaints data is not independently verified by LeO or the SRA then it is unfair to allow firms to self report and publish that data and then for consumers to compare one firm against another using it. Firms can take different approaches and some will be much more honest and accurate than others, but could then be penalised by doing so.

In conclusion, the most useful data would be for the LeO to publish decisions where the firm did not accept their recommendations, as that is independently verified data about which firm's are not able to reach the right outcome themselves. And to publish data about firms whose complaints handling was not reasonable, i.e took longer than eight weeks, didn't signpost to LeO correctly. That would drive up standards and be more informative for consumers.

If the SRA did decide to publish data it should be based on averages and take in to account the number of lawyers employed, the nature of the legal work being done and the make up of the client base (i.e. firms with commercial clients will have less complaints as the bulk of their work will stem from a handful of long standing clients in comparison to a conveyancing firm who will have a much higher turnover of clients).

7. Consultation questions

27.

6) Do you agree that introducing a model complaints resolution procedure (MCRP) for the sector would be helpful?

Neutral

Please give reasons for your answer, including anything you think should be taken account of in the development of an MCRP?: Complaints in the real world are not black and white. Because the LSB's definition of a complaint is so broad that could range from a client on a call saying "I am quite fed up it took you four hours to call me back, it has delayed me getting on with my day" but not expecting you to do anything other than apologise. However, this is as much an expression of dissatisfaction which alleges a detriment as 10 pages letter headed up as a formal complaint setting out multiple instances of when something has allegedly gone wrong. It is hard enough as it is to get clients to follow a simple process (just ask LeO, they have very clear guidance on what info needs to be submitted to them and yet they have an inbox with over 4,000 emails in it, where they have had to ask customers to provide missing information and then deal with the responses, which could have been avoided if the customers had just done as asked the first time around). We therefore think firms need to be allowed the discretion to address complaints as is appropriate for the client. We are open to a MCRP as long as we can be much more rigid in requiring clients to follow it too.

28.

7) Do you have any comments on the regulatory impact of our proposals on first-tier complaints?

No

29.

8) Do you have any further comments you would like to share with us when reviewing our requirements and producing guidance on first-tier complaints?

No

30.

9) Do you have any comments on our draft equalities impact assessment?

No

Changing our requirements on first-tier complaints consultation

Response ID:175 Data

3. Consultation questions

9.

1a) Do you agree with our proposal to expand 8.3 of our Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs, RFLs and RSLs, which will also apply to firms under section 7.1 (c) of our Code of Conduct for Firms, to include that complaints information must be provided to clients on conclusion of the legal matter?

No

10.

1b) Do you agree with our proposal to expand 8.3 of our Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs, RFLs and RSLs, which will also apply to firms under section 7.1 (c) of our Code of Conduct for Firms, to include that complaints information must be provided to clients upon request?

No

11.

1c) Do you agree with our proposal to expand 8.3 of our Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs, RFLs and RSLs, which will also apply to firms under section 7.1 (c) of our Code of Conduct for Firms, to include that complaints information must be provided to clients if a complaint is made during a matter?

No

12.

1d) Please add any comments that you have on when complaints information must be provided to clients.

Complaint information should be provided in the client care letter and on the firm's website. It should clearly state how complaints are handled and by whom. They also needs to be clear guidelines with examples as to the complaints the Legal Ombudsman deals with and the SRA. There should also be examples of what evidence the Legal Ombudsman and the SRA will need in order to view the complaint as meeting their threshold.

4. Consultation questions

13.

2a) Do you agree with our proposal to expand Rule 2 of our Transparency Rules to state that complaints information published under this rule must be clear and accessible and in a prominent place on a firms' website?

Yes

14.

2b) Please explain the reasons for your answer.

The information needs to be in plain English and clear state the procedure and timescale in which in the complaint will be dealt with.

15.

2c) What are your views on us mirroring the wording we have in our guidance on transparency in price and service about prominence?

Good

16.

2d) What are your views on us including more information in our guidance on prominence - such as including reference to it not requiring multiple clicks to access or that it should be linked from a homepage?

Very Good

17.

2e) What are your views on us including more information in our guidance on how firms or freelance solicitors that do not have a website should provide complaints information? Please give reasons for your answer and tell us what would be helpful to include.

Yes this would be very helpful. Everyone has a right to complain about a SRA regulated firm/Solicitor and therefore it is only fair that clients are made aware of how to.

5. Consultation questions

18.

3) What are your views on us including the LSB's definition of a complaint as a defined term in our Standards and Regulations Glossary?

Agreed

19.

4a) What are your views on us producing new guidance to help those we regulate meet our requirements on complaints handling? Please give reasons for your answer.

Yes this is definitely needed. Guidance is needed on dealing with complaints for example when there is court deadlines. When there are court deadlines then maybe complaints should be dealt with more quickly to ensure the court deadline is not missed. There also needs to be guidelines or code of conducts rules on lien and termination of a retainer.

20.

4b) What are your views on us combining our new guidance with our existing guidance on publishing complaints procedures? Please give reasons for your answer.

I disagree. Your existing guideline needs to be improved. You want to reduce the number of complaints you are getting and I think this can be done if more guidance is given which is catered to member of the public i.e. have no legal knowledge. It will also be good if you gave examples of what you would investigate and what you won't investigate.

21.

4c) Do you have any suggestions for areas we should include in guidance we develop to help solicitors and firms understand our requirements and how to meet our Standards and Regulations in relation to complaints? If so, please give details.

Yes, please can you do guidelines on lien and termination of retainers. If there are court deadlines which could potential be missed because a firm refuses to release a file for no specified reason more guidance is needed on this. If a case is at court then a firm should not be allowed to just abandoned a client. If a retainer is terminated then clear guidelines should be given to the client by the firm and the advise should not just be 'find another Solicitor'. It may not be so straightforward and also even if they find a Solicitor are the previous Solicitor going to release the file. The firm should assess and inform the client as to what is left to do on the file. If the case is at court and there is an upcoming hearing they should advise the client on how to adjourn the hearing or at least provide them with a guide.

More guidance is needed and shorter timescales when dealing with termination of a retainer when a case is at court.

6. Consultation questions

22.

5a) What are your views on us collecting and publishing timeliness data at firm level?

Agreed.

23.

5b) What contextual information would be required to make the information useful to consumers and be fair to solicitors and firms?

Report a Solicitor needs to be clear if you don't agree with the decision maker decision what is the next step that can be done.

When providing guidelines for consumers use diagrams and examples. For example if a consumer wants to complain about poor service, you could a graph which says 'potentially what the LeO will deal with and what the SRA will deal with'. Put a cross that the SRA does not deal with poor service and put a tick next to the LeO deals with poor service.

The should also be guidelines to how your complaint will be dealt with.

Before a final decision is made the consumer should get an opportunity to add anything further.

24.

5c) What information about complaints would be most helpful to consumers and why?

What a consumer should do if a complaint/report a Solicitor is urgent as there is no guidance on this. Guidance on what the SRA considers an urgent complaint/report a Solicitor.

There needs to be a clear guideline as to each stage of the complaints process.

7. Consultation questions

25.

6) Do you agree that introducing a model complaints resolution procedure (MCRP) for the sector would be helpful?

Neutral

Please give reasons for your answer, including anything you think should be taken account of in the development of an MCRP?:

26.

7) Do you have any comments on the regulatory impact of our proposals on first-tier complaints?

No

27.

8) Do you have any further comments you would like to share with us when reviewing our requirements and producing guidance on first-tier complaints?

No

28.

9) Do you have any comments on our draft equalities impact assessment?

3. Consultation questions

10.

1a) Do you agree with our proposal to expand 8.3 of our Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs, RFLs and RSLs, which will also apply to firms under section 7.1 (c) of our Code of Conduct for Firms, to include that complaints information must be provided to clients on conclusion of the legal matter?

Upon discussion with members, there is a consensus that there should be no changes in expanding the SRA 8.3 of our Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs, RFLs and RSLs, and the application under section 7.1 (c) of our Code of Conduct for Firms to include that complaints information must be provided to clients on conclusion of the legal matter.

It is acknowledged that there is already the obligation to provide information at the time of engagement is already set out at paragraph 8.3 SRA Code of Conduct for Solicitors and 7.1 SRA Code of Conduct for Firms.

Paragraph 8.3 SRA Code of Conduct for Solicitors states:

You ensure that clients are informed in writing at the time of engagement about: (a) their right to complain to you about your services and your charges; (b) how a complaint can be made and to whom; and (c) any right they have to make a complaint to the Legal Ombudsman and when they can make any such complaint.

Section 7.1 (c) of our Code of Conduct for Firm states:

The following paragraphs in the SRA Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs, RFLs and RSLs apply to you in their entirety as though references to "you" were references to you as a firm...(c) standards which apply when providing services to the public or a section of the public, namely client identification (8.1), complaints handling (8.2 to 8.5), and client information and publicity (8.6 to 8.11).

By signposting clients at the conclusion of a matter, many feel that this risks sending the wrong messages to clients by implying dissatisfaction is anticipated, even where the matter has been handled successful and to the client's satisfaction. Therefore, by routinely issuing complaints information at the end of every matter regardless of whether there has been any issue could inadvertently imply dissatisfaction is expected, potentially undermining otherwise positive client experiences.

We do not believe that firms should be mandated to provide complaints information as a "must" be provided to clients on the conclusion of a matter. Rather than expanding the Code, the SRA could issue guidance encouraging firms to consider providing complaints information at the conclusion of a matter where appropriate. This would promote consistent while respecting the judgment of legal professionals.

Firms should retain the flexibility to provide end of matter complaints information such as in response to client feedback, complex matters or where there are signs of concern. A blanket requirement would remove this professional discretion.

There was a general feeling that this change could unintentionally encourage a rise in unwarranted complaints. For instance, a client who is dissatisfied with the outcome (despite having received a reasonable level of service) may be prompted to lodge a meritless complaint after receiving a firm's outcome letter that highlights the complaints procedure.

An increase in meritless complaints would disproportionately impact small and medium-sized firms, where most of our members operate, by driving up operational costs. These may include increased time and resources spent on responding to complaints, higher professional indemnity insurance premiums, reputational damage, and potential disruption to client relationships. For firms with limited administrative capacity, the cumulative effect could be significant, diverting attention from core legal work and client service

There is no need to extend this requirement to the wider profession through the Code of Conduct. If a firm fails to provide complaints information when requested or upon receiving a complaint, the Legal Ombudsman may award additional

compensation for poor complaints handling, as is currently the case.

The SRA's consultation lacks sufficient evidence to justify the proposed reforms. While it references a thematic review involving a survey of 750 firms and discussions with 25 others, the supporting data has not been disclosed. It would be helpful if the SRA published the full evidence base underpinning its policy proposals in which this can be fully reviewed and considered with the questions posed by this consultation.

Therefore, for the reasons provided above, we do not consider the proposed amendments to paragraph 8.3 of the Code of Conduct (Annex One) to be necessary.

11.

1b) Do you agree with our proposal to expand 8.3 of our Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs, RFLs and RSLs, which will also apply to firms under section 7.1 (c) of our Code of Conduct for Firms, to include that complaints information must be provided to clients upon request?

We support providing complaints information to clients upon request and believe most firms already comply in such cases. As such, we do not consider the proposed changes to paragraph 8.3 of the Code of Conduct (Annex One) necessary, unless the SRA can demonstrate widespread non-compliance.

We reiterate that the SRA's consultation lacks sufficient evidence to justify the proposed reforms. While it references a thematic review involving a survey of 750 firms and discussions with 25 others, the supporting data has not been disclosed. It would be helpful if the SRA published the full evidence base underpinning its policy proposals in which this can be fully reviewed and considered with the questions posed by this consultation

12.

1c) Do you agree with our proposal to expand 8.3 of our Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs, RFLs and RSLs, which will also apply to firms under section 7.1 (c) of our Code of Conduct for Firms, to include that complaints information must be provided to clients if a complaint is made during a matter?

We agree that complaints information should be provided when a formal complaint is raised during the retainer. The Legal Ombudsman already has the authority to award compensation for non-compliance with complaints procedures, including failure to provide this information. However, the consultation lacks supporting data to demonstrate a significant risk of non-compliance or that such awards are being made on this specific basis, calling into question the necessity of the proposed change.

13.

1d) Please add any comments that you have on when complaints information must be provided to clients.

We agree that complaints information should be made available to clients at appropriate stages. Specifically, it should be included at the outset: within the client care letter; terms of business; provided again upon request; and when a formal complaint is received. This approach ensures transparency while maintaining proportionality in regulatory requirements

4. Consultation questions

14.

2a) Do you agree with our proposal to expand Rule 2 of our Transparency Rules to state that complaints information published under this rule must be clear and accessible and in a prominent place on a firms' website?

Yes we agree. This ensures that complaints information is clear, accessible, and prominently displayed on a firm's website supports transparency and helps clients understand their rights and the process for raising concerns. This aligns with good practice and promotes trust in legal services

15.

2b) Please explain the reasons for your answer.

In the Legal Ombudsman's Transparency Research Report 2022, it is noted that clients struggle to find complaints information on legal service providers' website and therefore supports this change. For example under the key findings at paragraph 1.2 on page 3 for example refers to "Research participants often opted to look for links to complaints information within the main body of the home page or within a 'Contact us' tab, in the first instance, with little success" and "In some instances, visibility of complaints information was further obscured by the fact that participants were not always looking for a complaints process but rather a means of making a complaint (contact details of a legal services provider). This will likely have implications for the channel consumers choose to use to make their complaint and their awareness of the time it may take to receive a response, for example, several participants indicated they may use the chat function."

16.

2c) What are your views on us mirroring the wording we have in our guidance on transparency in price and service about prominence?

The existing guidance on transparency in relation to price and service is articulated clearly. We therefore support the proposal to incorporate similar language into Rule 2 of the Transparency Rules. Aligning the rule with established guidance promotes consistency across regulatory instruments, enhances clarity for firms, and supports more effective compliance.

17.

2d) What are your views on us including more information in our guidance on prominence - such as including reference to it not requiring multiple clicks to access or that it should be linked from a homepage?

We would support the SRA including more detailed guidance on the concept of prominence.

Clearer expectations, such as ensuring complaints information is accessible within one or two clicks or is directly linked from a firm's homepage would help firms better understand and meet their obligations. This is particularly important if there is evidence of a knowledge gap or inconsistent implementation across the profession. Providing more support materials and practical examples would enhance clarity and promote consistent compliance with the Transparency Rules

18.

2e) What are your views on us including more information in our guidance on how firms or freelance solicitors that do not have a website should provide complaints information? Please give reasons for your answer and tell us what would be helpful to include.

The consultation, as well as the SRA's October 2023 Transparency Rules report, provides no data to support the need for this proposed change. It can only be presumed in the absence of any data that firms or freelance solicitors without a website are already providing complaints information in writing either by post or email where appropriate. Unless the SRA can demonstrate a significant level of non-compliance or confusion among such practitioners, further guidance appears unnecessary. Should evidence emerge indicating a gap in understanding or practice, proportionate and targeted guidance could then be considered.

Therefore, on this basis, we do not consider additional guidance to be necessary at this time.

5. Consultation questions

19.

3) What are your views on us including the LSB's definition of a complaint as a defined term in our Standards and Regulations Glossary?

The consultation proposes adopting the LSB's definition – "an oral or written expression of dissatisfaction that alleges that the complainant has suffered (or may suffer) financial loss, distress, inconvenience or other detriment."

We do not support the adoption of the LSB's definition in its current form with concerns primarily raised in relation to the unintended consequences.

The definition fails to acknowledge that a complaint must relate specifically to the service provided by the firm. This distinction is

fundamental to ensuring that the scope of complaints remains appropriate and relevant to the regulatory framework. Without this clarification, there is a risk of broadening the definition in a way that could lead to confusion or misapplication.

Under the LSB's definition, we can foresee situations where expressions of dissatisfaction unrelated to the firm's actual service could be misclassified as formal complaints. For example, consider a probate matter where delays arise due to court backlogs or third-party institutions such as banks or HMRC. If a client expresses frustration about the delay and the inconvenience it causes, this could, under a strict reading of the LSB's definition, be treated as a formal complaint even though the delay is entirely outside the firm's control and not reflective of the quality of service provided.

This risks distorting complaint data, placing unnecessary administrative burdens on firms, and undermining the purpose of complaints procedures, which should focus on service-related issues within the firm's remit.

Also, without further definition to key words such as "dissatisfaction" this could lead to further issues. The definition fails to consider whether the dissatisfaction stems from the firm's conduct, whether the client has a specific desired outcome, or whether that outcome is within the firm's ability to deliver. Without these distinctions, the definition risks capturing expressions of dissatisfaction that do not constitute genuine complaints about legal service delivery, leading to inflated complaint figures and unnecessary regulatory burdens.

We do not support the adoption of the LSB's definition in its current form. A key flaw is that it would require any expression of dissatisfaction regardless of its cause or context to be treated as a formal complaint. This is problematic and risks producing unreasonable outcomes.

For instance, under the LSB's definition, a client expressing frustration over delays caused by HM Courts and Tribunals Service (HMCTS) which are entirely outside the firm's control would be classified as having made a complaint. This would be an absurd outcome, as the client's loss, distress, or inconvenience has not arisen from poor service by the firm. Moreover, the client may not have articulated any expectation of resolution or outcome, nor is it clear that the firm could reasonably address the concern.

In such cases, the definition merely identifies someone who is complaining, without any consideration of whether the dissatisfaction relates to the firm's conduct, whether a remedy is sought, or whether the firm is in a position to provide one. This lack of nuance risks distorting complaint data, placing unnecessary administrative burdens on firms, and undermining the purpose of complaints procedures, which should focus on service-related issues within the firm's remit.

It is essential that any definition of a complaint recognises the distinction between informal service issues raised by clients and formal complaints.

Under the LSB's proposed definition, there is a risk that any expression of dissatisfaction—regardless of its nature or context—would be treated as a formal complaint. This would be disproportionate and counterproductive.

Firms should not be penalised for resolving minor concerns or service issues efficiently at the first point of contact. In fact, early resolution is often in the best interests of both the client and the firm, and should be encouraged. Treating every expression of discontent as a formal complaint risks creating unnecessary administrative burdens, distorting complaint data, and discouraging informal resolution practices that are both effective and client-focused.

20.

4a) What are your views on us producing new guidance to help those we regulate meet our requirements on complaints handling? Please give reasons for your answer.

We would support the SRA producing new, consolidated guidance on complaints handling.

A single, authoritative source of guidance would reduce confusion, promote consistency in approach, and support firms in meeting their regulatory obligations efficiently. This is particularly important given the diversity of the legal services market, where firms vary significantly in size, structure, areas of practice, and client base.

Clear guidance would also help ensure that both firms and consumers have a shared understanding of what constitutes a

complaint, how it should be handled, and what outcomes can reasonably be expected. For smaller firms and sole practitioners in particular, accessible and practical guidance would be especially valuable in navigating regulatory expectations without disproportionate administrative burden.

Moreover, consistent application of complaints handling standards across the profession would enhance consumer confidence and improve the quality of first-tier complaint resolution, reducing the need for escalation to the Legal Ombudsman.

21.

4b) What are your views on us combining our new guidance with our existing guidance on publishing complaints procedures? Please give reasons for your answer.

We strongly support the consolidation of new guidance with existing materials on publishing complaints procedures.

If the SRA intends to publish new guidance on complaints handling, it should be integrated with all relevant existing guidance that is to be retained.

Practitioners are already navigating a complex regulatory landscape, and the proliferation of separate documents risks creating confusion, duplication, and inefficiency.

A single, comprehensive guidance document clearly marked as superseding previous versions would significantly improve accessibility and usability for firms. It would also promote consistency in interpretation and application across the profession, helping firms of all sizes to meet their obligations with greater confidence and clarity.

22.

4c) Do you have any suggestions for areas we should include in guidance we develop to help solicitors and firms understand our requirements and how to meet our Standards and Regulations in relation to complaints? If so, please give details.

Yes, we have several suggestions for areas that would benefit from inclusion in the proposed guidance.

The areas outlined in the consultation provide a useful starting point. In particular, we would welcome the inclusion of practical examples illustrating what constitutes prominent placement of complaints information on a website, as well as examples of clear, plain, and appropriate language. These would help firms interpret the requirements consistently and apply them effectively in practice.

In addition, we recommend that the guidance include:

Targeted support for areas of law where first-tier complaints handling appears to be weaker.

If the SRA has evidence that certain practice areas are underperforming in this regard, guidance should be tailored to address those specific challenges. This could include examples of both good and poor practice, explanations of why certain approaches fall short, and case studies that highlight how improvements can be made. This targeted approach would complement general guidance and help raise standards across the board.

Clarification on the distinction between informal service issues and formal complaints.

Firms would benefit from guidance that helps them identify when a client's expression of dissatisfaction constitutes a formal complaint, and when it may be more appropriately resolved informally. This would support proportionate responses and reduce unnecessary administrative burdens.

Guidance for firms without websites.

Although this may be a smaller segment of the profession, clear expectations for how such firms should provide complaints information—e.g. via client care letters or other written communications—would ensure consistency and compliance.

Templates and checklists.

Practical tools such as sample complaints procedures, checklists for compliance, and FAQs would be particularly helpful for smaller firms and sole practitioners.

A single, consolidated guidance document that brings together all relevant material would be the most effective format. This would reduce duplication, improve accessibility, and support firms in navigating their obligations with greater clarity and confidence.

6. Consultation questions

23.

5a) What are your views on us collecting and publishing timeliness data at firm level?

There is a concern about how consumers will evaluate, use or benefit from detailed information on timeliness, even if this were possible. In view of this we note the following:

Sufficiency of Existing Oversight: LeO already investigates complaints and refers firms to the SRA when necessary. This mechanism is functioning and targeted.

Lack of Evidence for Consumer Benefit: The Law Society and others have noted that there is little empirical evidence that publishing firm-level timeliness data would improve consumer outcomes.

Risk of Misinterpretation: Timeliness data can be highly contextual. Complex cases naturally take longer, and raw averages may unfairly penalize firms handling more difficult matters.

Potential Negative Impacts:

Public data could distort consumer perception, especially if not properly contextualized.

It may also discourage firms from taking on complex or vulnerable clients due to fear of reputational damage from longer resolution times.

24.

5b) What contextual information would be required to make the information useful to consumers and be fair to solicitors and firms?

25.

5c) What information about complaints would be most helpful to consumers and why?

7. Consultation questions

26.

6) Do you agree that introducing a model complaints resolution procedure (MCRP) for the sector would be helpful?

Neutral

Please give reasons for your answer, including anything you think should be taken account of in the development of an MCRP?: We have no information on what the model complaints resolution procedure (MCRP) is. This has not been published and therefore it is difficult for us to examine this question.

27.

7) Do you have any comments on the regulatory impact of our proposals on first-tier complaints?

Please see our responses which we have included within this consultation.

28.

8) Do you have any further comments you would like to share with us when reviewing our requirements and producing guidance on first-tier complaints?

29.

9) Do you have any comments on our draft equalities impact assessment?

The following respondents asked to be named but for their responses not to be published:

Buckles Law
Small Firms Network Advisory
Enoch Evans LLP
Hampshire Law Society
HCR Legal LLP
DLG Legal Services

There were also respondents who asked not to be named and for their responses not to be published.