

	CILEx Regulation Limited
Date	14 November 2024
Item	09.00
Title	Strategy (2022-2024) Consumer Strategic Objective Review
Authors	Richard Hood, Interim Director of Governance, Policy and Legal
Purpose	This paper provides the Board with an update on the key activities undertaken in 2024 in relation to the consumer strategic objective.
Recommendation	The Board is invited to NOTE the progress in 2024
Timing	This is a report on activity and achievements.
Impact assessment	Increasing access to high quality information and support, allows consumers to make more informed choices and will have a positive impact on the regulatory objectives, in particular to promote and protect the interests of consumers.
Impact on Regulatory Objectives	The assurance provided by this report has a positive impact in particular on the following regulatory objectives: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Public interest - Consumer interest - Independent, strong, diverse profession.
Implications for resources	CRL's contribution to the research on digital inclusion has been included in the CRL budget.
Impact on consumer empowerment	Increasing access to high quality information and support and allowing consumers to make more informed choices will have a positive impact on consumer empowerment.
Impact on ongoing competence	N/A
Publication status	For publication
Appendices	09.01 CRL's assurance response to LSB that it is meeting the consumer empowerment statement of policy (30 September 2024)

Introduction

1. This paper provides the annual update to the Board on progress made in 2024 in meeting CRL's Consumer empowerment strategic objective which aims to enhance the information available to consumers to improve the accessibility to legal services.
2. The paper is divided into two parts:
 - Part 1 reviews progress in 2024
 - Part 2 provides an update on projects in progress

3. A paper outlining the proposed workstreams for 2025 to deliver the new consumer strategic objective will be presented to the Board after the Corporate Plan 2025 in support of the delivery of the recently approved 2025-2027 Corporate Strategy has been agreed.

Recommendation

4. The Board is asked to NOTE progress in 2024

Part One: Review of progress against current workstreams

5. The consumer regulatory objective applies to all legal regulators. Most of the initiatives require a high degree of collaboration with others, particularly with other legal regulators and are medium to long term projects.
6. The CRL Strategic Objectives 2022-24 commit CRL to enhancing the information available to consumers to improve the accessibility to legal services by CRL working to:
 - Improve the information available to consumers, empowering them to choose good legal representation, facilitating fair and equal access to legal services. We will do this through working collaboratively with stakeholders across the sector, including the regulated community and consumers, whilst making best use of resources: Legal Choices, Single Digital Register, Quality Indicators
 - Increase understanding of consumer protections available in the legal services landscape, identifying gaps and tackling consumer detriment
 - Contribute to the development of new technologies and other innovations which can transform delivery of legal services to the consumer and enhance our understanding of the impact technology may have on the consumer.
7. CRL's progress is comprehensively captured within the consumer empowerment assurance statement provided to the LSB 30 September 2024. This is provided at **Appendix 10.1**. The intention of this paper is not to repeat what is included in the assurance statement but highlights key achievements as well as providing an update on projects that are in progress.
8. Q4 2024/ Q1 2025 CRL undertook an evaluation of CRL's transparency requirements and guidance to take account of the LSB's Statement of policy on empowering consumers. Consideration was given to possible options for change. The decided on best option was consulted on and developed further following consultation feedback. A rule change application was submitted to the LSB and approved in a [Decision Notice](#) 13 September 2024. Implementation of the new transparency requirements commenced in October 2024. The changes mean that all CRL regulated firms must publish price and transparency information across all legal services they provide. These changes put CRL ahead of many of the other regulators in terms of the information firms are required to provide to consumers.

9. During August and September, we collaborated with the SRA and CLC to update the Digital Comparison Tools (DCT) [Voluntary Code](#). The new Code has been published on CRL and Legal Choices website, together with updated information for [firms](#), [consumers](#) and a contact [form](#) to enable DCTs to apply to participate in the Code.
10. We have progressed work to improve the Yoshki smart badge (digital logo) which must be published on the Home Page of all CRL's firms. The new smart badge went live at the beginning of November 2024 and includes enhanced features for consumer protection and information. We contacted firms directly to inform them of the changes. This also provided the opportunity to remind firms to check that their smart badges are correctly installed on their website.

Part Two: Update on projects in progress

First Tier Complaints Handling (FTCH)

11. Noting the indications in the LSB's [consultation](#) on FTCH in November 2023, CRL took the opportunity to improve publication by our firms of complaints procedures within the transparency requirement changes. All CILEX Authorised Entities must now publish their complaints procedures on their website. Online publication requirements have been strengthened to benefit consumers. The requirement to produce a Consumer Information Leaflet including complaints procedure implemented for all firms without a website.
12. The LSB issued a [statement of policy \(SOP\) on First tier complaints handling \(FTCH\)](#) on 16 May 2024 together with new [requirements](#) and [guidance](#). The aim of the SoP is for providers to take a step change in the handling of first tier complaints so that all legal service users (including 'silent sufferers') feel empowered to raise concerns if they are dissatisfied, knowing that these will be taken seriously and used to deliver better services. CRL has commenced work to understand if we have gaps in our regulatory requirements and those of the SoP and to consider possible options. This work includes liaising with sector stakeholders to explore the possibility of a consistent and effective approach.

According to the Legal Ombudsman a substantial number of complainants are either unable, or unwilling, to see the first-tier process through to completion. This raises further questions about whether complainants are confident that the process will be conducted properly and fairly by their legal service provider.

13. The LSB also believes that there is more scope for regulators to encourage a culture of learning from complaints and thereby ultimately improve services for legal service users and the public more widely.

Legal Choices

14. CRL continues, via its role on the Governance and Steering Groups, to support and fund the Legal Choices website, and collaborating with the other legal regulators to move the service forwards. The regulators' current programme of

work, running for seven years, includes a re-design, re-build, and re-launch of the Legal Choices service.

15. There has been direct input from consumers into design and user testing on the new service to maximise usability and ensure consumers are able to find the information they need.
16. Resources aimed at demystifying the experience of using legal services, have been developed. These include more than hundred podcast style videos dealing with housing, employment, immigration and asylum, and going to court. Specific content for potentially vulnerable consumers, such as asylum seekers and people with other immigration issues, has been developed.
17. Work to build the Legal Choices brand externally has continued with a pilot using short engaging videos on Instagram reels and YouTube Shorts. Visitors to the website in the 12 months to 31 August 2024 was 1.1 million.

Regulatory Information Service

18. The Regulatory Information Service (RIS) is being developed as part of Legal Choices project. A single portal is being built for consumers to access information about legal service providers. CRL is actively participating in this work.
19. Between February and May 2024, we participated in the Data Working Group, a collaboration of representatives from all regulators, LeO and some representative bodies. We carried out considerable internal work to supply data information. The work of the group facilitated the discovery phase activities (including functional and non-functional requirements, data requirements, data catalogue and design proposal).
20. The design phase began in August 2024 and will be completed by December 2024. Design outputs will include a thoroughly tested user interface design, a solution design and a fully functioning proof of concept.
21. The recently approved strategy for 2025-2027 includes a new strategic objective *Access to justice and consumer empowerment*. The aim of those objective is to champion fair access to all in the legal services market. CRL will continue to improve the information available to consumers to improve accessibility to legal services so they are able to make informed choices and have confidence in the legal professionals they engage with.
22. By the end of the next strategy we expect to have:
 - a. Through the development of the Legal Choices website and establishing the Regulatory Information Service (RIS) ensured consumers have the information they need to chose good legal representation.
 - b. Have supported CILEX members to make it easier and more cost-effective to start up a law firm ('Law firm in a box'), providing greater choice to consumers within diverse communities.

- c. Consumers have an increased understanding of the consumer protections available in the legal services sector and gaps that exist with the unregulated sector are highlighted.

23. The proposed 2025 workstreams intended to deliver the new access to justice and consumer empowerment objective will be presented to the Board after the 2025 Corporate Plan has been agreed in December. On going activities that we expect to be included in the 2025 Corporate plan are outlined detailed in the Table below.

Build on consumer resources on CRL website	To include information identified under other initiatives below
Cross Sector Consumer Initiatives	
Legal Choices	CRL will continue to participate in Legal Choices Governance Board and Steering Group.
Regulatory Information Service (RIS)	CRL will continue to be a member of the project steering group overseeing the development of the RIS. This includes delivering the underpinning data work that the RIS will require in order to realise its full intended functionality.
Digital Exclusion	CRL is participating in cross-regulator research (BSB, CLC and ICAEW) into digitally excluded consumers of legal services to better understand the types and needs of digital exclusion and how these might be met by the professionals that we regulate. Due to the need to revise methods of participant recruitment, the field work is ongoing and draft report now planned for end of Q1 2025.
Unbundling	Information about unbundling to be added to consumer information resource on CRL website.
First Tier Complaint Handling	The LSB has since published its consultation on First-tier complaints and the SRA has published a series of reports. The proposal is to expand the scope of the evaluation to take account of the emerging proposals from the LSB's first tier complaints consultation and elements from the reports published by the SRA to ensure that any amendments made to the Transparency Rules and Guidance are proportionate and robust.

24. CRL will continue to support the Legal Choices project and participate in the other cross sector initiatives to include Regulatory Information Service, Public Legal Education and other actions arising from the Quality Indicators pilot.

RECOMMENDATION:

25. The Board is asked to **NOTE** the progress in 2024.