

News from the Board

Reflections on our September Board meeting – Anna Bradley

14 September 2023

One of our most important jobs as a Board is to make sure we have the right strategy. At our meeting, we considered feedback on our new proposed strategy for 2023 – 2026.

It was great to see such extensive, rich feedback. Around 17,000 people engaged with the proposals – whether in-person, through polls or in writing. We were particularly pleased that we heard from a broad range of people within the profession and beyond, including those with learning disabilities, their carers, the elderly, and those who want to access legal services in Welsh.

People were generally supportive of our approach, while the feedback was also invaluable in helping us refine our plans. For instance, we heard a range of views on our mission statement, and we've updated this to 'driving confidence and trust in legal services' to reflect the active and positive role that people said they wanted us to play.

We will be publishing our final 2023 – 2026 strategy in the coming weeks, with it coming into effect, alongside our new business plan, in November.

Confidence in solicitors

As we did not have a Board meeting in August, we also reflected on events over the summer. Confidence in the profession went to the heart of two cases where we intervened into firms that received widespread attention – our action against three solicitors involved in immigration services who are accused of falsifying claims, and our decision to intervene into the individual practices of three solicitors at Axiom Ince on the grounds of suspected dishonesty.

Although it wouldn't be for me to comment on cases where there is an ongoing investigation, it is a reminder of the vital role we play in terms of public protection and confidence. The vast majority of solicitors meet high professional standards. Yet trust in those high standards rests on us taking swift and decisive action when there is a clear risk to the public.

CILEX

We received an update on progress in relation to CILEX's proposals to redelegate regulation of their members to us. CILEX are consulting on this,

and we have followed up with our own consultation on the potential changes to our regulatory arrangements that would be required should CILEX decide to make the switch.

There are two key points I would like to emphasise about our approach. Firstly, CILEX proactively approached us about the change. Any decision as to whether to go ahead will be one for CILEX to make. And secondly, our approach is guided by the public interest. Following analysis, we think there could be benefits to legal consumers and the wider public of this change, including more consistent regulation and public protection.

Please do respond to the consultations on this. If CILEX make a decision to switch that will then be subject to approval from the Legal Services Board.

Our performance

We also had our quarterly review of performance. We are challenging the organisation to make sure we are using our resources efficiently so it can have the most beneficial impact. Readers of this blog will know that an area where we as a Board are focused is making sure we deal with investigations effectively and promptly, and particularly making sure we conclude cases that have been open for a long time.

To achieve that it is essential that we have a culture of continuous improvement. In areas like investigations and enforcement we have carried out a significant review and refinement of our processes. Smooth, efficient processes not only will lead to better customer experiences – whether you are a complainant or subject to a complaint – but will also have the wider benefit of having a greater deterrent effect against poor behaviour. Prompt, decisive action is essential if we are to make sure everyone understands the consequences when a solicitor falls well below the expected standards.