

Informed Choice: Quality, Service and Price guidance

The purpose of this guidance is to provide support to CLC Practices in meeting the minimum requirements in relation to quality, service and price transparency contained in the CLC Regulatory Arrangements.

This guidance sets out the required minimum standards but also suggests other things consumers might like to see which would help both them and your practice.

The aim of the new requirements is for consumers to have the information they need, when they need it, to help them make an informed decision about which legal services provider to choose.

You should read this guidance in conjunction with the CLC [Code of Conduct](#), the [Estimates and Terms of Engagement Code](#) and the [Complaints Code](#).

Under the CLC Regulatory Arrangements you must display in a prominent place on your website:

- ✓ **Cost information;**
- ✓ **Service information;**
- ✓ **Regulatory information; and**
- ✓ **Complaints information.**

If you don't have a website, you must provide the information by 'other reasonable means on request' which could include email, post or leaflets available for consumers visiting your office.

Things to consider

- Consumers are more likely to engage with your website and contact you if they can find the information they want quickly and easily.
- Any information you provide should be concise and easy to read. Try to avoid legal jargon, and where this isn't possible consider providing a short definition. For example, 'disbursements' (*these are costs that are payable to third-parties that relate to your matter, for example stamp duty when buying a house*).
- Consumers, especially those that haven't used legal services before, may find it helpful if your website suggests some questions they may want to ask you, or documents they should have with them before contacting you. For example, in a probate matter, they should check if a will was made.



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- If you link to information on other websites you should check the accuracy of the information. We recommend using trusted sources such as [gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk), [Legal Choices](#) or the [Money Advice Service](#).

1. Cost information

You must:

- ✓ **Display cost information on your website, which should be easily accessible and in a prominent place, and by other reasonable means on request.**

‘Cost information’ is defined as:

- a) the total cost of the service or, where not practicable, the average cost or range of costs;
- b) a description of the service offered;
- c) your fee, or where not practicable your average fee or range of fees;
- d) whether your fees are determined as a fixed sum or by reference to hourly rates;
- e) a description and the value of disbursements, including Land Tax. Where the actual cost of a disbursement is not known, a range of the likely cost of that disbursement;
- f) whether VAT is payable on your fees or disbursements and if so in each case the amount of VAT payable;
- g) whether you have referral arrangements with third parties, whether a referral fee is paid and, if so, the fee or average referral fee payable.

How should cost information be displayed?

CLC Practices are able to decide the best way to display cost information. You could provide:

- Examples of fixed fees based on specific values or a range of values of properties.
- An instant estimate generator on your website or via a third party website.

Note: The generator should produce an instant estimate directly to the consumer. A consumer shouldn't have to provide contact details to receive a call-back or email for an estimate.

- Hourly rates of members of staff along with their qualifications and experience, and the indicative timescales for the transaction.

[Templates and examples of displaying cost information](#) can be found on the CLC website.

Estimates should include all relevant disbursements and reflect the final cost based on the information the consumer has given, if any. See the [CLC guidance note on disbursements and profit costs](#) for more information.

Disbursements are likely to be different for each consumer so you may consider displaying examples or average costs of disbursements. You could also direct consumers to additional

information on third-party websites such as the [GOV.UK website SDLT calculator](#) or [Gov.UK Inheritance tax information](#).

Estimates and final costs will be reviewed by the CLC as part of our ongoing monitoring. This should help to reduce the risk of practices only advertising their legal fees and not including all of the relevant disbursements.

It's important to be clear about which services are included in the cost estimate and which are not. For example, whether your fees include electronic ID verification and completing the SDLT application. You could give details about services that you are able to provide at an additional cost and how much it might be.

You should also make it clear that the estimate on the website may differ from clients' individual circumstances and give examples of other disbursements that may be applicable. For example, if the fixed fee on your website is based on a freehold purchase, you should make it clear if you charge more for a leasehold property.

Explaining the factors that may change the final cost may help to avoid misunderstandings and cost related complaints. It might be helpful to explain what circumstances may increase the cost and that they may only be discovered as the matter progresses and therefore might not be known at the outset. The reason for any changes to the cost will need to be clearly explained and agreed by the client.

Consumers should be aware if you enter referral arrangements with third parties and if applicable, the average amount you pay for referrals. We do not expect you to publish specific details of individual referral arrangements on your website.

2. Service information

You **must** provide the following 'service information' on your website and by other reasonable means on request:

- ✓ a description of the services that you provide;
- ✓ key stages of the services;
- ✓ indicative timescales; and
- ✓ the staff mix, their experience and qualifications.

You could include the national average time from instruction to completion of the purchase of a freehold property to demonstrate indicative timescales. You may find it helpful to explain that individual circumstances may change the timescales involved and state how you will keep the client updated about any delays.

Consumers like to know who will be looking after their case. Whilst some are happy for a team of people to work on their case, others prefer dealing with a single fee earner.

You might not be able to say exactly who will carry out the work on your website but you could provide a general description of your team(s) or the individuals, including their legal qualifications and relevant experience.

Many CLC Practices already have a 'meet the team' page on their website that shows the members of staff or fee earners, whether they are qualified, for example, as a Licensed Conveyancer or Solicitor, how long they have been working in conveyancing or probate and their time at the practice.

Other information which consumers may find useful:

- **Information about how you deliver your service**

You may consider providing information about how you deliver your services and what makes you different from your competitors. For example:

- opening hours – do you have late night or weekend opening?
- face to face meetings
- hearing loop
- languages spoken
- on-site or free car parking
- home visits

- out of hours contact
- dedicated fee earner contact
- web portal or online case tracker

- **Your areas of expertise and your typical client**

You may consider including information on your website about your area(s) of expertise. For example, you may carry out lots of first title registrations or mainly deal with leasehold properties, or you may have a lot of experience dealing with complex trusts in probate.

You may also want to tell potential clients if your practice has excellent knowledge and experience of dealing with properties in your local area.

Consumers might like to know about your typical client, such as first time buyers. This will help to show that you have experience in dealing with people in similar situations.

- **Feedback from clients**

Consumer reviews and feedback are now common in every type of service. Many consumers refer to online reviews when they are deciding which provider to instruct and some will not instruct a provider which does not have a rating. Consumers are likely to place greater reliance on reviews made on third party platforms (such a Trustpilot, Feefo and Google Reviews) because they are independently curated.

You should also be asking clients for feedback to help you improve your service and deal proactively with any negative comments. You are more likely to receive feedback during the course of the process than at the very end.

If you ask your clients for feedback to publish on your website, you should consider the need to maintain client confidentiality and relevant data protection legislation.

3. Regulatory information

You must:

- ✓ Show that your practice is regulated by the CLC and include your practice licence number on all communications and your website.
- ✓ Display the CLC secure badge in a prominent place on your website.

We will continue to develop the secure badge landing site to include details about the professional indemnity insurance (PII) arrangements, complaints process and access to the [Legal Ombudsman](#) (LeO).

Showing that your practice is regulated and the benefits this provides to your clients allows you to distinguish your practice from unregulated providers.

Other information which consumers may find useful:

- **Information about your PII arrangement**

4. Complaints and redress information

You must:

- ✓ Provide details about your complaints process and access to the LeO on your website.
- ✓ Let consumers know that they may be able to make an application for a grant out of the [CLC Compensation Fund](#).

Displaying your complaints procedure and other consumer protections on your website in the unlikely event that something goes wrong can reassure consumers. The [Reporting Problems section of the CLC website](#) provides more information about the complaints process.

5. Cost estimate templates

We have put together [cost estimate templates](#) that you can use if you wish. You do not have to use these templates or examples but they may help you to develop your own.

Remember that you will need to tailor the information to give a true reflection of your services.

The templates set out the cost information that we think should be provided but some costs might not be applicable, for example, you might not charge for electronic transfers, or there may be additional costs to include.