

# Consumer Focus Scotland demand rethink on civil justice

✘ A review undertaken by a committee of Scotland's leading civil justice organisations is calling for a radical rethink on how the civil justice system can be reformed to make it more fit for purpose and user-friendly.

The Civil Justice Advisory Group is recommending a series of reforms designed to improve the process of dealing with civil disputes in Scotland. In order to ensure that resources are invested in the most efficient and effective way, the Group is urging the Scottish Government to take a system-wide approach to future reforms and to look at how the different elements of civil justice – including the courts, tribunals, alternative dispute resolution, as well as information and support for those with disputes – can best be structured to ensure those with disputes can access the most appropriate solution for their particular problem and circumstances.

The Group's report on future options for Scotland's civil justice system, *Ensuring effective access to appropriate and affordable dispute resolution*, was launched in Edinburgh yesterday evening.

The Group was originally set up in 2004 and its report "The Civil Justice System in Scotland – a case for review?" played a key role in leading up to the review of the civil courts system led by the Lord Justice Clerk Lord Gill, which published its recommendations in September 2009. The Group was reconvened by Consumer Focus Scotland last year to build on those recommendations.

In today's report the Group, chaired by the Right Honourable Lord Coulsfield, proposes that the focus should be on creating

a civil justice system designed around the people who use it, addressing the various needs that users have at each stage in resolving their disputes, to ensure that these are resolved in the most effective way as early as possible.

Lord Coulsfield says the Group's aim is to make the civil legal process more effective and efficient as well as easier for its users:

"I hope that we have made suggestions which will contribute to the creation of a system which will encourage the resolution of disputes by agreement wherever possible, but also provide for an unintimidating and accessible – and efficient – court procedure where agreement cannot be reached.

"Our intention was, through taking a broader look at the experience of people who need the help of the civil justice system, to make recommendations that will spare those who do not need to go to court from having to do so, and reduce the stress for those who do."

✘ Welcoming the report, Scotland's Minister for Community Safety, Fergus Ewing MSP, says the Group is putting forward an important set of options:

"Scotland's civil justice system must be open to all who need it and has to offer support that is neither too slow nor too intimidating for users.

"I would like to thank the Civil Justice Advisory Group under Lord Coulsfield for their work. They have given us a series of very helpful recommendations for future reform, which we shall now consider as part of our approach to reforming the wider civil justice system."