



Ministry  
of Justice

# Legal Support Advisory Group meeting Monday 18 January 2021

## Public Note of Meeting

### Members present:

Roshnee Patel (MoJ Legal Support Policy – Deputy Chair); Christina Blacklaws (LawTech UK); Lindsey Poole (Advice Services Alliance) Phil Robertson (The Bar Council); Clare Carter (The Access to Justice Foundation); Richard Miller (The Law Society); David Greene (The Law Society); Chris Minnoch (Legal Aid Practitioners’ Group); Hazel Genn (University College London); and Stephen Lodge (Equality and Human Rights Commission).

### Apologies:

Apologies were received from Fiona Rutherford (Chair), Ruth Daniel (Clare Carter attended in Ruth’s place for the Access to Justice Foundation), Malcolm Cree (Phil Robertson Director of Policy attended for the Bar Council), Natalie Byrom (Legal Education Foundation), Andrea Coomber (Justice), and Alexy Buck (MoJ Chief Social Researcher – Scott Mahony attended in Alexy’s place).

### Additional Attendees:

Other attendees: Legal Support Policy Team; Legal Aid Policy Team; Government Legal Department, MoJ Analytical Services, MoJ Digital.

## 1. Welcome & introductions

Roshnee Patel welcomed attendees and introduced Stephen Lodge, from the Equalities and Human Rights Commission (EHRC), who has been invited to join

LSAG. She explained that Fiona Rutherford (the Chair) had sent her apologies and she would be chairing this meeting.

## **2. Update on minutes, and actions, from last meeting**

For the previous minutes, from 18 October meeting, the minutes were agreed with 2 amendments noted.

The actions from the previous meeting were all either completed or agenda items at the meeting.

**Action: MoJ Secretariat to update 18 October 2020 minutes to reflect correct reference to Lawtech UK, and to ensure accurate spelling of Lindsey Poole's name.**

## **3. Legal Support Action Plan – 2 Years on**

MoJ officials provided an update on the Legal Support Action Plan (LSAP).

They explained the original legal support commitments in the LSAP, the projects paused or stopped following the pandemic and the thinking on what next. Some projects were paused because they were reliant on face to face delivery (co-located advice hubs, and the early legal advice pilots) and other projects paused due to the significant contextual changes brought about by the pandemic, which meant the team had to alter their areas of focus. Changes to the approach led to new projects - one project focused on developing analysis on new legal need, and another to deliver a COVID response grant. The MoJ team is beginning to look at which paused projects to restart but this would be dependent on funding.

The co-located hubs project could be resumed, but there is not a clear rationale for restarting the awareness campaign and the innovation fund at this time since the context remains volatile.

MoJ noted that the team is considering when it would be appropriate to reconvene the Evaluation Sub-Committee as most of the planned pilots which were reporting to this group had paused.

MoJ also talked through the legal aid projects which had achieved their LSAP commitments. The team had secured £5m from the cross-Government Shared Outcomes Fund to pilot and evaluate the expansion of legal aid to cover early advice in an area of social welfare law. MoJ explained that several commitments had been completed, such as expanding the scope of legal aid to include separated migrant children in immigration cases

MoJ updated members to explain that the legal aid team is likely to take forward proposals to change eligibility for legal aid for placement and adoption orders as part of the means test review. It remained the team's ambition to expand the scope

of legal aid to cover special guardianship orders in private family law, but further funding discussions were required.

**Action: LSAG members to contact MoJ if they would like to discuss any particular workstream in more detail.**

#### **4. Update on Legal Support Work – Legal Need Dashboard**

MoJ presented about the Legal Need Dashboard.

Officials explained that the Legal Need dashboard is a visual way to present legal need trends and the broad ambition of the dashboard is to help policy officials and advice sector organisations decide where to focus their energy and to make it easier to explain to stakeholders, such as other government departments, where support is needed. MoJ introduced a proof of concept version of the dashboard and talked through its features.

MoJ emphasised the benefits of the dashboard are that it helps to tell a story about legal need, provides evidence and helps to inform decision makers.

**Action: LSAG members will contact MoJ if they would like a more detailed conversation about the Legal Need dashboard.**

#### **5. Update on Early Legal Support Work**

MoJ went updated the group on the early legal support project.

MoJ reminded LSAG members of the last LSAG update, and thanked members for reaching out following that update and providing feedback.

MoJ highlighted the importance of, both, digital interventions and in person legal support solutions, explaining that one will not succeed without the other. The interim LSAG update email included a link to the online signposting tool for housing disrepair, which helps users understand their issue, and if further support is required, signposting them. This was one of the commitments made in the Legal Support Action Plan. If the signposting tool is successful, it could be one of the options incorporated into early legal support suite of digital interventions. This service has been launched in private beta form (limited group of users) and is going through user testing and iteration, based on feedback, for the next three months with an intention to launch in public beta (more widely) in March 2021.

The team have completed thorough engagement with stakeholders, including advice sector organisations, other government departments, and international counterparts to learn lessons and understand the challenges associated with designing an online service around user needs.

MoJ clarified that the team continues to explore different delivery models for the digital interventions. The team is also exploring complementary in person legal support options including trusted intermediaries and co-located hubs.

## 6. Any other business (AOB)

### Spending review

Attendees discussed funding and the spending review several times during the meeting. MoJ explained that the budget for the next financial year is not yet confirmed and that MoJ is still finalising allocations for the next financial year, including across Legal Aid and Legal Support.

The MoJ Legal Support and Legal Aid team had asked HM Treasury for additional funding, above the existing baseline to deliver a more ambitious and longer-term programme but this had not been approved as we had a one-year settlement. Therefore, it will be a case of prioritising spend across the Department for the next financial year via allocations.

**Action: When MoJ has a confirmed budget, MoJ to share an out-of-committee update.**

**Action: MoJ to set up an extraordinary meeting to ensure LSAG has an opportunity to feed views into the next spending review and MoJ's thinking for changes to the LSAP approach.**

### Next LSAG meeting

The provisional date of the next meeting is Wednesday 21 April at 2pm.

Action	Owner(s)	Deadline
MoJ Secretariat to update 18 October 2020 minutes to reflect correct reference to Lawtech UK, and to ensure accurate spelling of Lindsey Poole's name.	MoJ	Next meeting
LSAG members to contact MoJ if they would like to discuss any particular workstream in more detail.	All LSAG members	Next meeting

<p>LSAG members will contact MoJ if they would like a more detailed conversation about the Legal Needs dashboard.</p>	<p>All LSAG members</p>	<p>Next meeting</p>
<p>When MoJ has a confirmed budget, MoJ to share an out-of-committee update.</p>	<p>MoJ</p>	<p>Ahead of next meeting</p>
<p>MoJ to set up an extraordinary meeting to ensure LSAG has an opportunity to feed views into the next spending review and MoJ's thinking for changes to the LSAP approach.</p>	<p>MoJ</p>	<p>Ahead of next meeting</p>