



## Headline intentions for Welfare Benefits services from November 2016

### 25 February 2016

In November 2015 we published a [document](#) setting out our headline intentions for all civil legal aid contracts which we intend to align from April 2018.

Legal aid for Welfare Benefits services is currently provided through two contracts:

- The Standard Civil Contract (Welfare Benefits) 2013 covering the London & South East and the Midlands & East Procurement Areas. This contract runs to 31 March 2018; and
- The Standard Civil Contract (Welfare Benefits) 2014 ('2014 SCC (WB)') covering the North and the South West & Wales Procurement Areas. The 2014 SCC (WB) will end on 31 October 2016.

This document sets out our approach to procuring a new Standard Civil Contract (Welfare Benefits) 2016 ("Contract") which will replace the 2014 SCC (WB).

In **March 2016** there will be an opportunity for organisations to express an interest in delivering Welfare Benefits services under the new Contract. Organisations that express an interest will be invited to submit a tender in **April/May 2016**. Organisations awarded a new Contract following the tender process will be required to provide Welfare Benefits services from 1 November 2016 until the Contract ends in line with all other civil legal aid contracts on 31 March 2018.

#### Tender Process

The tender process will be a single stage process that will assess an organisation's suitability to contract with us, as well as an organisation's ability to meet our minimum service requirements. **All organisations that are assessed as being suitable and as meeting the minimum service requirements will be awarded a Contract.**

It will be a requirement that all providers hold either the Specialist Quality Mark (as audited by the SQM Delivery Partnership) or Lexcel by the contract start date. Organisations wishing to submit a tender should therefore consider applying for these standards now if they do not currently hold them to ensure they meet our requirements by November 2016.

As a minimum we will require organisations to employ a part-time supervisor who works at least 17.5 hours per week and who meets the Welfare Benefits supervisor standard. There will also be a requirement to maintain a supervisor to caseworker ratio of 1:4.

We are considering an amendment to the case involvement standards required to be met by supervisors. This is to take account of the volume of welfare benefits work within the scope of legal aid having reduced with the implementation of the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act.

Organisations will be required to have at least a part time presence within the Procurement Area in which they wish to provide Welfare Benefits services. Further details will be provided in the contract documents which will be published in due course.

Proposed timetable

Opportunity to express interest	March 2016
Tender opportunity opens	April/May 2016
Tender opportunity closes	May/June 2016
Notification of outcome	July 2016
Verification process	August – September 2016
Issue contracts	October 2016
Contract Start Date	1 November 2016