



The Law Society



Legal Aid
Agency

Crime Contract Consultative Group (CCCG) meeting

Minutes

09 February 2021

V1.0

When:	Tuesday 09 February 2021 15:00 – 17:00		
Where:	By Microsoft Teams		
Chair Minutes	David Thomas – LAA Lisa Obadan - LAA		
Attendees	Adrian Vincent – BC Alice Mutasa – TLS Andrew Cosma – MMS Andrew Hatrick – LAA Avrom Sherr – IALS Elaine Annable – LAA Fraser Clubbe – LAA Gail Frankland – LAA Glyn Hardy – LAA Hannah Stevens – LAA Helen Johnson – LAPG	James MacMillan – MoJ James Tennant Jennifer Johnson - LAA Kathryn Grainger - LAA Kathy Hartup Laura Fernley – LAA Matt Doddridge – LAA Mark Troman - LCCSA Melissa Bennett – LAA Nancy Evans Nick Ford – LAA Nick Poulter – LAA	Nick Stocker – LAA Rebecca Booth – LAA Richard Atkinson – TLS Roger Ralph – CILEx Sarah Osondu – LAA Samera Naji – LAA Steph Jones – LAA Stuart Nolan Waleed Shahzad – LAA
Apologies	Carol Storer - LAG Chris Henley – CBA Daniel Bonich – CLSA Elliot Miller – LAA Gerwyn Wise Henry Hills – SAHCA Ian Kelcey – CLC Jelena Lentzos - LAA	Jill Waring - LAA John Heavens - MoJ Jonathan Black – LCCSA Melissa Thompson – LAA Neil Lewis – LAA	Rakesh Bhasin-LCCSA Richard Miller Will Hayden - LAA

Welcome and introductions.

- Minutes** from December meeting were reviewed. A Mutasa referred to a note in the minutes where J McM was going to look again at increase in interim fees and although some email exchanges had taken place, AM would like an update. J McM to get back to A Mutasa by end of the week. Action log updated to capture this action. **#AP1 [Feb]**

Actions were discussed as follows.

Actions from the last meeting and decisions from this meeting			
AP1 [Dec]	N Poulter to bring more comprehensive data showing what things are being found in relation to reject rates of applications.	N Poulter	Closed
	On agenda. Action can be closed.		
AP2 [Dec]	M Troman and A Cosma to send in some examples of attendance notes that confirms that the bail hearing was due to take place or had taken place, for N Poulter to review as a starting point.	M Troman and A Cosma	9 February
	N Poulter confirmed he had yet to receive the examples from M Troman and A Cosma. A Cosma stated that the issue is they do not give any documents that they could send over. M Troman confirmed he will send something through to N Poulter Keep open #AP2 [Feb]		
AP3 [Dec]	E Miller to check if the professional sign-in function in common platform for crown court, is available for the magistrate courts.	E Miller	Closed
	N Ford (covering for E Miller) confirmed that the professional sign-in functionality is being developed in common platform and will be available in the magistrate court. Closed		
AP4 [Dec]	N Lewis to discuss with internal teams to find right place to feed observations made about Marstons	N Lewis	9 February
	N Lewis was unable to join the meeting, so no update provided. D Thomas stated something will be sent round via email after the meeting and will find a suitable contact point. Keep open #AP3 [Feb]		

2. Operational update

N Poulter went through the paper circulated to the group:

2.1 Applications

Processing times are good overall. Turning around 99% of applications within 2 days. Volumes fell during first lockdown but now back to pre-covid levels in relation to applications and they are hitting the 2-day targets with some being completed within a day.

Rejects in this area are roughly around 10%.

2.2 Billing

N Poulter outlined the report, noting that they have had some challenges in relation to CRM 7 claims with turnaround in 15 days and this is down to having to have staff in the office to assess the files. Use of eforms system has increased from 25% to 40%. They have taken further action and expect the target to fall below 15 days soon.

Also noted that in relation to hardship claims, people can put in interim claims on LGFS but not AGFS. These are being dealt with in under 2 days.

N Poulter then went through the main areas in relation to CLAR accelerated measures.

3. New provider training web site and the expansion of web chat

Samera Naji gave the group an update on the new provider training website and crime content which is going to be added to the website this year. S Naji also gave some information on the expansion of the live webchat function.

Training website for Civil providers went live last year with some quick guides added and the Case Management Improvement team will be developing it further this year. Crime content for the website has been designed and is in development stage, with a launch date to be confirmed.

The case management team are working with developers to get the crime content added soon and they are working on the layout of the website to ensure it meets provider expectations. Aim is to improve the old training website and content is managed. S Naji provided a link to the website and encouraged the group to promote it. SN went through the features of the website and all guidance will be in one place.

S Naji went on to discuss the live chat function which will be rolled out to Crime providers in April of this year. A survey sent out to crime providers resulted in 96% in favour of live chat and will use the facility. Providers were asked what they would use live chat and 50% confirmed they would use it for billing queries and 40% responded they will use it for locating guidance.

Staff in LAA are being trained on web chat and the aim of the expansion of live web chat, is to improve communication between the LAA and providers and give them another way to contact the LAA.

Plans going forward, are to hold more feedback sessions with providers, when both web chat and the training website are up and running to gather feedback on issues or any changes users would like to see.

They are also developing some recorded training sessions on areas of work that generate high call volumes and appeals to improve the process.

4. Pre-Sentence Report pilots

James Tennant and Nancy Evans gave a briefing on the PSR pilot which will happen later in the year.

J Tennant went through the slides that was shared with the group and gave an overview of how PSR pilot came about and what it intends to do and the next steps in terms of operation of the pilot.

Due to a significant drop in number of PSR ordered within the courts, a review was commissioned to understand why this was happening. From the recommendations, an alternative delivery model was formulated and intend to roll out this model in 15 pilot sites from mid-March 21.

The model is broken into 3 areas of operations:

- first area is Pre-plea PSR which is probation writing of report before the first hearing,
- second aspect is Cohorts of service users and
- third aspect is improved on the day oral delivery.

Overall aim is to improve and understand the impact of the PSR.

The Implementation of the pilot has 3 stages which includes, engagement, adoption of the model by the pilot sites and evaluation and review.

A Mustafa wanted to know if the slides can be shared with their committees and what materials does J Tennant have that can be shared with their members to make them aware of this pilot.

J Tennant confirmed that the slides are currently confidential to this group as there are in the final stages of negotiations with the judiciary and need judicial sign-off before comms are shared more broadly.

N Evans offered to explain the pilot in more details if anyone in the group required it.

M Troman asked if there have been any conversations with CPS and the impact of the pre-plea PSR requests pilot. J Tennant stated there are working with all different agencies.

A Cosma made some observations about delivery and resources and asked if all the factors have been considered. J Tennant confirmed these factors were being considered. JT stated that the key findings from the pilot will be fed into the modelling of the new organisation for courts and this will look at resourcing.

N Evans briefly highlighted the organisations they have reached out to regarding PSR pilot and they have been engaging with Law society and working closely with them. They want to ensure the message reaches all solicitors and barristers connected to the pilot sites and N Evans stated they were keen to have any insights from the group based on the approach they have currently. D Thomas asked for comments to be sent to N Evans by email. N Evans provided her contact details to the group. **#AP4 [Feb]**

5. LAA Strategy

Fraser Clubbe started by explaining that the paper sets out LAA strategy, and that this is an opportunity to get views from the group. LAA have been engaging with the Civil group as well and acting on their feedback.

F Clubbe went through some points raised by the Civil group including defining users of our service – such as clients, contracted providers, staff and stakeholder groups; as relevant users they need to understand and ensure changes made, reflect the different needs they may have for it to be effective.

The other two points raised were in relation to market sustainability with more emphasis on the importance of this and general improvement to efficiency and effectiveness of ease of use of services.

F Clubbe welcomed thoughts and comments from the group. David T opened this to the group.

A Sherr thanked those drafting the strategy for considering the feedback from the Civil group. A Sherr made an observation about the LAA strategy vision and the LAA providing access to justice. AS mentioned how he liked how they are careful about the users of their services and it is a positive to aim for the final users which is the clients, but that suppliers are the majority users who the LAA interacts with and this is something which LAA may want to think more about.

A Mustasa agreed with A Sherr's comments and queried whether there should be more mention of providers in the document, as the main function of the LAA is administering and managing the legal aid fund with the first contact users being the providers. A Mutasa referenced the slides on the Business plan and how it refers to 'users of our services' but it could be clearer about who that is.

F Clubbe confirmed that the draft being worked on has more information setting out users and they recognise the providers but trying to take a more holistic view of users to make sure they are taking more perspective on board in what they do and plan for the future.

A Sherr referred to the slide mentioning the Public defender service and that it could be made clearer that this is referring to the public defender service rather than the whole system.

F Clubbe thanked the group for reviewing the paper and they can have more time to reflect and come back to them. They are looking to have this published for late March/ early April, but this will be a live product and have a review each year which they will continue to work with for the future.

6. Criminal Legal Aid rejects

N Poulter mentioned that 10% reject rates on Criminal apps was raised at the last meeting and someone had asked if further information could be brought along to this meeting to help providers get things right. Rebecca B will give a run through of what they find when looking through applications.

R Booth went through some slides setting out the main reasons for rejects in relation to Criminal applications and D Thomas asked for RB to circulate the slides **#AP5 [Feb]**

R Booth put some information together to show top 10 rejects and hints and tips to try and prevent these rejects. RB talked through the slides including how they are currently averaging at 10% reject rates at any given month, and although it varies, it is stable at 10%.

The biggest reject reason relates to duplicate applications which stands at 26%. A group has been set up to look at this and why there are a few of them and to look at how to get this down.

R Booth went through what has been put in place to reduce the reject rates. This includes setting up a reject working group from different teams to get ideas and from this, they have come up with:

- Increased checks for caseworkers with high reject rate and this is in addition to any quality control checks, to see why they have a high rate
- Reject buddies for people who are struggling with rejects and how they can go to a dedicated person to discuss rejects
- Set up a multiple reject group, that look at forms that have been rejected back several times and find out the reasons behind this. From this, they have changed how they conduct quality checks. Another idea implemented was if it has been rejected multiple times, then the caseworker has to go to a senior for advice.
- Better use of IT in terms of improved internal communication between teams.
- Also identifying a reject for each month and then implement better working practice on that reject for the whole month.

R Booth then went through the 10 most common rejects and tips to avoid these from a solicitor's point of view.

H Johnson questioned what can be done if they are unable to get a P45 due to a person being in custody for 6 months or more, then at what time can they accept they are no longer working. RB responded that it depends if it is magistrate or crown court. If it is the magistrate court, and you cannot get a P45 with the client in custody, then it should be fine but for the crown court, we will need to evidence request for this at a later stage.

N Poulter asked H Johnson to email him details about this and they will find out the response. **#AP6 [Feb]**

M Troman raised a similar scenario and suggested maybe there should be a change in the requirements for the burden being on the providers to track down P45.

7. Rep Body Queries

D Thomas raised some rep body queries received from M Troman before the meeting. They include:

- MC sending fee / date of Rep Order / date stamping: The LAA portal does not allow applications for indictable only cases to be date stamped. Can a claim for the sending fee be made on Rep Orders granted up to 7 days after the hearing as per similar principal for work necessary prior to date of grant?
Possible for the portal to be amended to get date stamp facilities for indictable offences?

DT states that it is dependent on our digital team. N Poulter to take this away, have a conversation with Digital and look into this. **#AP7 [Feb]**

A Cosma raised a query how someone is eligible for legal aid, is not covered for the entire proceedings. N Poulter responds that they will take that away to get some input in this.

- DSCC use of call prioritisation system: Members complain the DSCC website's system for call prioritisation is very confusing and seems to even confuse call centre staff. Managing partners are complaining they are being called for staff members' duty cases and call operators are not following the order of priority / escalation. This is impacting the ability of some people to rest properly, as the same person is being erroneously selected.

D Thomas DT recommended the right way to escalate this was through complaints made to DSCC, and that LAA monitor the complaints volumes to identify any systemic issues. If there is an inadequate response, then please escalate with D Thomas who will pick it up with the DSCC provider directly via their contract management team.

8. AOB

N Poulter talked about the Process efficiency team (PET) in the Civil Group where providers and subject matter experts from the LAA talk about ways operationally to improve things. Some few ideas that came out from today's meeting, can be usefully discussed in that kind of meeting. N Poulter wondered if this is something that crime providers would like to have and if so, will need to have some conversations about it.

K Grainger is involved in the Civil side and she will prepare something for the next meeting to give some background of what the work of PET is and some of the successes they have had for the last 12-18 months and see if anyone is interested in working with K Grainger to look at some of their processes and see if there are areas for improvement. K Grainger to prepare something and share in advance at next meeting **#AP8 [Feb]**

K Grainger is keen for someone in the group to volunteer or know someone who is willing to work on that level of detail.

D Thomas mentioned that there will shortly be contacting a small number of providers to get input on DSCC user research and how the service works and how it can be improved. If there are any providers that will be interested, then please let DT know.

Actions from this meeting			
AP1 [Feb]	J McM to look at increase in interim fees and J McM to get back to A Mutasa by end of the week.	J MacMillan	6 April
AP2 [Feb]	M Troman and A Cosma to send in some examples of attendance notes for N Poulter to review as a starting point.	M Troman and A Cosma	6 April
AP3 [Feb]	N Lewis to discuss with internal teams to find right place to feed observations made about Marstons. D Thomas says something will be sent round via email after the meeting and will find a suitable contact point.	N Lewis and D Thomas	6 April
AP4 [Feb]	N Evans keen to have any insights from the group based on the approach they have currently on PSR. DT asked for comments to be sent to NE by email.	All	6 April

AP5 [Feb]	D Thomas asked R Booth to circulate slides setting out the main reasons for rejects in relation to Criminal Applications.	R Booth and N Poulter	6 April
AP6 [Feb]	H Johnson to email N Poulter details about a case regarding issues of obtaining a P45. M Troman to send details of a similar scenario to N Poulter	H Johnson/M Troman	6 April
AP7 [Feb]	N Poulter to speak to the Digital team and look into whether it is possible for the portal to be amended to get date stamp facilities for indictable offences	N Poulter	6 April
AP8 [Feb]	K Grainger to prepare a brief outlining the work of the Process efficiency team and share in advance of next meeting.	K Grainger	6 April

The next meeting is on Tuesday 6 April 2021 via Teams