



Ministry  
of Justice

MINUTES

## LEGAL SUPPORT STRATEGY DELIVERY GROUP

Sky Room, 102 Petty France and MS Teams

10:00-12:00 Wednesday 30 July 2025

**Members present:** Cathryn Hannah (Deputy Director, Legal Support and Dispute Resolution, Ministry of Justice—Chair); Ash Patel (Justice Programme, Nuffield Foundation); Chris Minnoch (Legal Aid Practitioners Group); Professor Dame Hazel Genn (University College London Researcher – Items 2&3); Daniel Drillsma-Milgrom (Greater London Authority); Elizabeth Price (Welsh Government); Fiona Rutherford (JUSTICE); Julie Bishop (Law Centres Network); Lindsey Poole (Advice Services Alliance); Liz Curran (Nottingham Trent University); Paul Neave (Welsh Government); Richard Miller (The Law Society); James Sandbach (Legal and Advice Sector Roundtable); Martha de la Roche (Access to Justice Foundation, deputising for Clare Carter); Michele Shambrook (Citizens Advice, deputising for Dame Clare Moriarty); Rose Holmes (Bar Council, deputising for Phil Robertson); Sarah MacFayden (AdviceUK, deputising for Liz Bayram)

**Additional Attendees:** Ministry of Justice Legal Support Policy Team; Ministry of Justice Legal Aid Strategy Team; Jo Wilding (University of Sussex)

**Apologies:** Clare Carter (Access to Justice Foundation); Dame Clare Moriarty (Citizens Advice); Liz Bayram (AdviceUK); Natalie Byrom (Independent Policy Researcher); Phil Robertson (Bar Council); Mr Justice Robin Knowles (Legal and Advice Sector Roundtable); Sarah Stephens (University of Sussex / Online Procedure Rule Committee); Stephen Mayson (University College London Researcher)

### 1. Welcome and Introductions

- 1.1 The Chair welcomed all attendees to the meeting.
- 1.2 There were no declarations of interest.
- 1.3 The Justice Select Committee have launched an inquiry into Access to Justice and were welcoming submissions of written evidence until 30 September.
- 1.4 The Ministry of Justice would shortly be tendering for a literature review, which

would review the current evidence base on the effectiveness of legal support provision and identify where further evidence was needed. Members were invited to share this with interested parties, or submit bids, where appropriate.

1.5 The Chair provided an update on outstanding actions.

**ACTION 1: Members to share any research that should be included as part of the literature review.**

## **2. Update from Service Delivery Task and Finish Group**

- 2.1 The Chair introduced the item. There could be a three-year Ministry of Justice grant from April 2026 to fund organisations to provide legal support, however funding for such a grant remained subject to confirmation. Alongside the grant there would be an independent evaluation and research project to better understand what works for the delivery of free legal support services.
- 2.2 The Chair and Lindsey Poole (Director, Advice Services Alliance) provided an update on the work of the Task and Finish Group. The group's remit was to consider how the grant could focus on which interventions delivered best in which contexts, for whom, and why. From the starting position that legal advice and help services were widely diverse, the group identified potential research questions which the funding could address. These focused on: 1) online service delivery, 2) outreach services, 3) models for accessing expert legal advice and 4) court support. Stephen Mayson (UCL researcher) created a delivery framework template to help categorise services, which considered a number of features including where people were getting support, the timing in the client journey and the timing in the legal process. The Task and Finish Group acknowledged their role was to a) help provide guidance on how to allocate the limited funds whilst b) creating answerable evaluation questions to add to the evidence base. Client journeys were not linear, and services were very diverse, leading to complexities for the evaluation. Input was sought from the Delivery Group on whether the potential research questions were focusing on the right areas.
- 2.3 In discussion, the following points were made:
- The evaluation should include some analysis of reach, particularly for the hardest to reach communities, and the associated institutional trust required for them to access advice.
  - The evaluation should include the link between the quality of advice and the success of advice. The evaluation should also focus on the building blocks for good quality advice e.g. good governance, stable funding, staff training etc. The evaluation could look at commonalities in processes and structures between grant organisations with effective service delivery to help identify inhibitors that prevent advice being as good as it could be.
  - Client outcomes, particularly medium/long-term outcomes, were important and would be measured through piloting the shared outcomes framework that was being co-developed with the sector. This should include routes out of advice e.g. connecting clients to other holistic or community support services.

Additionally, in some instances, advising someone that they did not have a case could be a valuable outcome.

- The grant should include a capability framework for organisations to facilitate organisational development. The team were considering how the role of the grant evaluator could help organisations increase their data maturity over the course of the grant.
- The research questions appeared to assume that online advice increased the breadth of reach, whilst outreach improved reach in hard-to-reach communities. The questions could be rephrased to focus on the target population. It was important to consider the demographics of those that interacted with advice online vs in person.
- The client journey could better reflect those who are unable to get advice, and the research questions could consider client behaviour when they were faced with an issue. It could also be helpful to understand why people dropped out of the advice process, however that was difficult data to collect.
- The client journey model could better distinguish between urgent advice and early intervention, which were separate types of service.
- It would be beneficial to consider whether “self-resolved” was an outcome in the model that should be aligned to more methods of delivery than just online advice.
- The MoJ should consider existing evaluation models including from the Money Advice Service and research conducted with South Yorkshire Refugee Law and Justice.
- Evaluation was expensive, so the research questions would need to be focused on what could realistically be answered in this grant.

- 2.4 The Chair invited members to send further reflections on the research questions to the Task and Finish Group for consideration by the MoJ policy team. The policy team would consider whether it would be helpful to convene a small group to consider the evaluation in more detail (excluding anyone who may tender for it).

**ACTION 2: Members to send any further reflections on the evaluation questions to the Task and Finish Group (via the Deputy Director, Legal Support, CEO Access to Justice Foundation and Director, Advice Services Alliance) by 12 September.**

**ACTION 3: Members to share relevant evaluation models including:**

- **The Programme Head for Justice, Nuffield Foundation to share the Money Advice Service evaluation model**
- **Jo Wilding to share details of the research team working on the South Yorkshire Refugee Law and Justice evaluation**

### **3. Discussion of report on use of interest on lawyers’ client accounts**

- 3.1 The Chair introduced the item and outlined that research conducted by Pye Tait had been commissioned by Ministry of Justice to better understand how law firms handled and used interest on client accounts. Members were asked not to share

the report more widely at this stage but were advised that the intention was to publish it soon.

- 3.2 The Senior Policy Advisor, Legal Support Policy team provided an overview of the key findings:
- Law firms used the interest generated on client account in a variety of ways: 33% remitted the interest to clients; 53% partially or sometimes remitted the interest to client; 23% used the interest to cover costs; and 4% used the interest to help fund 'free' related, pro bono or charitable activities.
  - 92% were not very/not at all reliant on the interest to operate on a sustainable footing. 94% believed that being unable to retain the interest would have little or no impact on their firm.
  - Firms perceived there to be limited administrative burden associated with passing interest back to clients.
  - Although law firms were generally committed to remitting interest to clients, the proportion/amount of interest remitted varied.
  - Despite the rise in the Bank of England Base Rate over recent years, most firms had not changed or were not planning to change, how they used interest on client accounts.
- 3.3 The Chair said that the Ministry of Justice would be holding roundtables for legal aid practitioners in the coming weeks to better understand how they used the interest on client accounts.
- 3.4 In discussion, the following points were made:
- Some members expressed some surprise at the results. Given the interest generated had increased substantially in recent years, they thought it was surprising that the research showed no change in how firms used the interest. Anecdotally, they had heard of firms, particularly legal aid practitioners, which were reliant on the interest generated from client accounts and were concerned that firms were giving an impressionistic response to the survey in this research.
  - The Chair advised that the upcoming roundtables with legal aid firms would help develop a fuller picture of how firms currently use the interest and the impact of an interest on lawyers' client accounts (ILCA) scheme on legal aid firms, which would be considered alongside the quantitative research undertaken by Pye Tait. If it was possible to mitigate the impact of an ILCA scheme on certain types of firms, that could be considered.
  - A concern was raised that if firms with legal aid contracts were exempted from an ILCA scheme, it may encourage firms to get a legal aid contract with no intention of undertaking legal aid work. Data showed that there was already a high proportion of dormant contracts in some areas. Such unintended consequences should be avoided.
  - Firms would want to know how any money collected by an ILCA scheme would be used. The Chair advised that this would be for Ministers to decide.
  - The Law Society had put some factual information about ILCA schemes on their website.
  - Some members expressed that it was positive that the Ministry of Justice was looking at an ILCA scheme. There should be collaboration across the Group about the impact that the additional funding generated could have, which

should include the importance of free advice services, particularly for marginalised communities.

- The Access to Justice Foundation (ATJF) was undertaking a project with the Centre of Socio Legal Studies, funded by Nuffield, which would explore international examples of additional funding. ILCA schemes were a priority part of this work.
- The research showed that not many firms were accounting for pro bono work from the interest on client accounts. Any potential impact from an ILCA scheme on pro bono work should be considered.
- Any nuances of an ILCA scheme should be risk assessed for the impact on the amount of money collected and the impact on law firms.
- An ILCA scheme would need clear governance defining who would manage the funds and how they would be managed.

- 3.5 The Chair said conversations about a potential ILCA scheme were ongoing to understand any potential impacts and possible mitigations. The Group would be kept updated as the work progressed.

#### **4. Legal Need**

- 4.1 The Chair introduced the item, which was being discussed at the request of Group members. The Chair outlined that the key question for discussion was what more could be done to understand legal need in a meaningful and impactful way. The Team Leader in the Legal Support Policy team, outlined that understanding legal need was a complex topic but said that improving understanding of met and unmet legal need would help target policy interventions and improve access to justice. The Team Leader in the Legal Aid Strategy team said that estimating legal need was also of interest to legal aid policy, as it overlapped with demand for legal aid specifically.

- 4.2 In discussion, the following points were made:

- Citizens Advice advised they were working with WPI Economics to assess and forecast detriment in key advice markets and would share the report once available. Citizens Advice would also share research they had undertaken to understand the needs and experiences of marginalised communities. Citizens Advice were considering whether to do an advice needs assessment for England, similar to what was previously done in Wales. A decision should be made on this shortly and the Group would be kept updated.
- Unmet legal need was hard to quantify. A challenge was that data collected by advice organisations was an indicator of met (or partially met) demand rather than unmet need. Discussion of legal need should reflect need that is 'met', 'partially met,' and 'unmet.'
- It was important not to get too fixated on quantifying the scale of legal need as it would be impossible to accurately quantify all legal need. Instead, complementary approaches should be taken. Suggestions included:
  - 1) Mapping multiple indicators of deprivation to highlight geographical areas likely to have higher levels of legal need.

- 2) With funding, it might be possible to interrogate user experience in the Housing Loss Prevention Advice Service to better understand the complexity of legal need.
  - 3) Exploring what data family hubs could provide. They were going to include debt and benefit advice, and it could be beneficial for this to also include specialist legal advice.
  - 4) Judges may be able to note unfounded cases which may not have come to court if the applicant had legal aid or proper specialist legal advice.
  - 5) Advice services and providers could be remunerated for recording information on every enquiry they received, including whether they were able to take on the case.
- Understanding the need for holistic support services alongside legal need would develop a greater understanding of the whole picture, although this was not within the remit of the Group.
  - Citizens Advice data, which was well coded, and Access to Justice Foundation programme data, could be useful resources if the data could be made available to academic researchers.
  - At grant programme level, funders could consider including data on the number of people that services were having to turn away.
  - The decision-making and error rate of public bodies was critical in influencing the extent of legal need. Additionally, changes in government policy could affect legal need.
  - Nuffield Foundation was due to commission research reviewing the state of the civil justice system, including supply and demand.
  - Understanding why people dropped out of the legal process was important when considering legal need.
  - People often did not recognise their issue as having a legal dimension, so defining legal need could be difficult.
  - AdviceUK had undertaken research into the advice sector workforce, which included looking at vacancy rates, which could help give an indication of demand. Planning would begin shortly for the next AdviceUk member survey. Consideration would be given to any questions that could be included on legal need, for example the number of people that organisations have to turn away.
  - It would be helpful to better understand what happened when people could not get help, as well as how many places they had already asked for help before being able to access advice.

4.3 The Chair said indicators of need, such as the volume of referrals, could also be considered as part of the evaluation of any new Ministry of Justice legal support grant.

**ACTION 4: Citizens Advice to share the WPI Economics report on forecasting detriment in key advice markets, once available.**

**ACTION 5: Citizens Advice to share the research done in conjunction with Hello Brave on racial disparities.**

**ACTION 6: Citizens Advice to update the Group on whether they would be conducting an advice needs assessment for England.**

**ACTION 7: AdviceUK to share advice sector research into job vacancy rates, once available.**

**ACTION 8: AdviceUK and Ministry of Justice to discuss whether any questions on legal need could be included in AdviceUK's next member survey.**

**5. AOB**

5.1 A review of the effectiveness of the Group would be conducted shortly.

**Legal Support Strategy Team  
August 2025**