



Ministry
of Justice

MINUTES

LEGAL SUPPORT STRATEGY DELIVERY GROUP

First Women Room, The Law Society, 113 Chancery Lane and MS Teams

10:00-12:00 Wednesday 24 September 2025

Members present: Cathryn Hannah (Deputy Director, Legal Support and Dispute Resolution, Ministry of Justice—Chair); Amanda Finlay (Legal and Advice Sector Roundtable); Ash Patel (Justice Programme, Nuffield Foundation—Items 2-5); Carol Storer (Legal and Advice Sector Roundtable); Chris Minnoch (Legal Aid Practitioners Group); Clare Carter (Access to Justice Foundation); Paul Neave (Welsh Government—Items 3-4); Fiona Rutherford (JUSTICE—Items 2-5); Lindsey Poole (Advice Services Alliance); Liz Bayram (AdviceUK); Liz Curran (Nottingham Trent University); Lucy Dennett (The Law Society); Phil Robertson (Bar Council); Mr Justice Robin Knowles (Legal and Advice Sector Roundtable); Stephen Mayson (University College London Researcher); and Sarah Beardon (University College London Researcher, deputising for Professor Dame Hazel Genn, University College London Research)

Additional Attendees: Ellie Cronin (The Law Society); Ministry of Justice Legal Support Policy Team; Ministry of Justice Legal Aid Strategy Team; Legal Aid Agency, Justice Digital; HMCTS User Inclusion Team; Ministry of Justice Legal Services Regulation Team; Legal Services Board.

Apologies: Dame Clare Moriarty (Citizens Advice); Daniel Drillsma-Milgrom (Greater London Authority); Professor Dame Hazel Genn (University College London Researcher); Julie Bishop (Law Centres Network); Natalie Byrom (Independent Policy Researcher); Sarah Stephens (University of Sussex / Online Procedure Rule Committee)

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 Committee's inquiry into access to justice would be accepting evidence until 30 September 2025.

- 1.4 Subject to the outcome of the allocations process associated with the Spending Review, the Ministry of Justice was developing a new legal support grant from April 2026. The team were considering how to best use the expertise of the Group to assist when designing the evaluation for the potential grant.
- 1.5 The Chair provided an update on outstanding actions.

2. Get Info about Legal Aid

- 2.1 The Legal Aid Strategy team introduced their work exploring how to improve the information available about legal aid on gov.uk and beyond as part of a wider programme to transform the delivery of legal aid following the recent cyber-attack. The team highlighted the key user challenges this work aims to address, including: a) low awareness of legal issues and solutions; b) difficulty finding information about access and eligibility; and c) problems escalating by the time people do find legal aid. They also provided an overview of recent research into the specific challenges faced by Exceptional Case Funding (ECF) clients and the importance of the role played by trusted intermediaries from the advice sector in supporting clients to access legal aid.
- 2.2 In discussion, the following points were made:
 - Some members felt that whilst it was valuable to improve the information for people about legal aid, this could only be successful as part of a wider reform programme to address broader challenges within the system – particularly capacity in the sector.
 - Members would welcome more information about the MoJ's broader plans to transform the delivery of legal aid. The Legal Aid Strategy team would be happy to meet with interested Group members to discuss this wider programme.
 - The Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012 had made the scope of legal aid more complex. The Legal Aid Practitioners Group and the Law Society had previously drafted a poster to publicise legal aid. If the information publicised was too simple, people would arrive at advice and legal support organisations expecting to be entitled to legal aid when they were not and this could cause further issues.
 - It would be helpful for the research to look at the issues trusted intermediaries faced when referring clients to further support e.g. how many ECF applicants then went on to find a lawyer who could provide support.
 - It could be useful for Get Info to focus on housing and possession cases as well as immigration.
 - It was interesting that uptake for ECF for immigration cases was rising in the North of England. This was an example of how the Ministry of Justice could more proactively use data. The Ministry of Justice and LAA should sufficiently understand those likely to seek legal aid so that communications could be proactively targeted, rather than relying on clients being informed and seeking information.
 - Liz Curran had been working on a policy brief on legal aid which would be shared with the group once available.

ACTION 1: The Legal Aid Strategy Team to meet with interested members of the Group, including the Legal Aid Practitioners Group and the Law Society, to discuss legal aid transformation work.

ACTION 2: The Legal Aid Practitioners Group / the Law Society to share example posters publicising legal aid.

ACTION 3: Liz Curran to share her policy brief on legal aid with the group, once available.

3. Advice quality and standards

- 3.1 The Chair introduced the item and thanked the Advice Services Alliance, Citizens Advice and AdviceUK for their engagement and contributions to the paper. The item provided an opportunity to gather information on and clarify the quality assurance landscape across the sector; share best practice; and discuss any issues relating to advice quality and assurance.
- 3.2 Discussion took place in breakout groups, covering the following questions:
- Do you think there are issues with the quality of advice provision that need addressing? If so, what is causing them?
 - What difference does holding a quality mark make to the accuracy of advice giving and to the access of funding?
 - Are there any differences in the quality of advice depending on how it is delivered e.g. whether its given face-to-face, online or via telephone?
 - What would help improve the quality of advice provision, if improvements are needed?
- 3.3 Feedback from the breakout groups included:
- Quality encompassed a number of facets and defining it was important.
 - Quality might mean different things to the client vs the adviser vs the funder.
 - It was difficult to evidence whether there was an issue with quality. Evidence gathered from client surveys may be influenced by the clients' reliance on a service or they may not know whether the advice received was good or bad.
 - Quality should be assessed in the context of the challenges the sector was facing. In some cases, any advice might be better than no advice. Development of the shared outcomes framework should help give a better sense of "good" advice and allow organisations to engage in reflective practice and continuous improvement.
 - Users seeking advice online and from AI tools were at risk of getting poor quality and inaccurate advice. Additional concern was raised about AI summaries appearing at the top of internet search engines, such as Google. These could provide inaccurate information and advice (because they drew from a range of sources and not just verified UK websites), and could drive traffic away from reputable, trusted websites. It would be important to have reputable online front doors / gateways to accurate, quality information, signposting and advice. Further co-ordination was required in this area.

- There were differences in the quality of advice depending on delivery method. For example, trusting relationships may be more easily established face-to-face.
- It was right that different delivery methods placed greater emphasis on either quality or quantity – a balance had to be struck.
- Quality assurance processes helped funders to trust that their funding was being well used.
- Funding frameworks could provide clarity on the elements of quality required by different funders.
- Some services felt more confident referring to other organisations if those organisations had good evidence of their quality assurance.
- Without quality assurance processes or a quality mark, it was not possible to know if advice given was accurate. However, there was tension between collaborative quality assurance based on meaningful engagement and top-down quality assurance which could result in “box-ticking”.
- Research into the impact of holding a quality mark could be beneficial.
- The quality assurance landscape was complex.
- Quality was not necessarily a priority for the sector at this time given the challenges the sector was facing, however things which contributed to quality were a priority e.g. training, case supervision, recruitment and retention. Where quality overlapped with other issues, the barriers to resolution were often funding and resource.

ACTION 4: The Ministry of Justice to consider how it could help better co-ordinate existing online provision of information, signposting and guidance.

4. Effectiveness Review

- 4.1 The Secretariat had conducted an effectiveness review of the Group to ensure that the Group was operating well and fulfilling its purpose. Members had responded to an online survey, which contained a mixture of closed and open questions. The survey achieved a response rate of 40%.
- 4.2 The Secretariat summarised the findings of the review. Responses were generally positive, however responses to the free text questions provided some constructive criticism.
- 4.3 Members were asked to discuss and agree the following recommendations:
- 1) The forward look of items would be circulated with the paper pack for each meeting. Members would be able to suggest items for the forward look during AOB and/or volunteer to contribute to scheduled items.
 - 2) The Group’s workplan would be shared with the forward look as part of the paper pack. The forward look would highlight how items related to the Group’s workplan to ensure items were scheduled strategically.
 - 3) The Chair would give an overview of current Ministry of Justice workstreams as part of the first agenda item.
 - 4) Opportunities for collaboration and further discussion on key areas, outside of Group meetings (such as via task and finish groups, workshops,

or additional meetings) which could report into the main Group meeting, would be provided.

- 5) The January meeting should be extended to three hours to allow an hour workshop with members to develop the forward look of items for 2026 and align these to the workplan, taking into account work that would be happening across the sector in 2026. This could be followed by an opportunity for networking for those interested.

4.4 In discussion, the following points were made:

- Items should be linked to the workplan. It may be beneficial to reflect at the end of each meeting on what progress had been made against the workplan, what was yet to be achieved, and what actions would be taken forward.
- Agendas should better use members' expertise. Items sometimes felt like they were only an opportunity for members to critique the Ministry of Justice's work. The Ministry of Justice encouraged members to suggest items that would best use their experience.
- It would be beneficial to get other stakeholders involved when relevant e.g. frontline experts and other government departments.
- It would be helpful to discuss learning from the approach to the advice sector in Wales.
- The Group should have a session in 2026 on cross-government engagement to understand the Ministry of Justice's ability to influence advice related policy in other government departments.
- The January meeting should further develop the workplan to better focus the Group's efforts and discuss deliverables for 2026.
- The Group should discuss whether it would be helpful to work together to develop a strategy document, which may or may not be published, and if so, what it should cover.
- The Group should consider the interface between legal support and legal aid.

4.5 Summing up, the Chair thanked members for their engagement with the review. Their comments raised during discussion would be considered as part of the implementation of the recommendations.

DECISION: The Group approved the recommendations from the effectiveness review.

5. AOB

5.1 None raised.

**Legal Support Strategy Team
September 2025**