



Ministry
of Justice

LEGAL SUPPORT STRATEGY DELIVERY GROUP

Conference Room 10&11, 102 Petty France and MS Teams

10:00-12:00 Thursday 04 December 2025

Members present: Kirsty Jacobs (Head of Legal Support Policy, Ministry of Justice, deputising for Cathryn Hannah – Chair); Amanda Finlay (Legal and Advice Sector Roundtable); Ash Patel (Justice Programme, Nuffield Foundation); Claire Drifford (Citizens Advice); Fiona Rutherford (JUSTICE); Julie Bishop (Law Centres Network); Lindsey Poole (Advice Services Alliance); Liz Bayram (AdviceUK); Liz Curran (Nottingham Trent University); Paul Neave (Welsh Government); Richard Miller (The Law Society); Mr Justice Robin Knowles (Legal and Advice Sector Roundtable); Stephen Mayson (University College London Researcher)

Additional Attendees: Chris Scutt (London Legal Support Trust); James Sandbach (Legal and Advice Sector Roundtable / Citizens Advice); Ministry of Justice Legal Support Policy Team

Apologies: Cathryn Hannah (Deputy Director, Legal Support and Additional Funding, Ministry of Justice); Chris Minnoch (Legal Aid Practitioners Group); Clare Carter (Access to Justice Foundation); Daniel Drillsma-Milgrom (Greater London Authority); Professor Dame Hazel Genn (University College London Researcher); Natalie Byrom (Independent Policy Researcher); Phil Robertson (Bar Council); Sarah Stephens (University of Sussex / Online Procedure Rule Committee)

1. Welcome and Introductions

- 1.1 The Chair welcomed attendees to the meeting.
- 1.2 There were no declarations of interest.
- 1.3 Four actions had been closed since the September meeting. Links to relevant documents would be shared with members of the Group.
- 1.4 The literature review of available evidence on the effectiveness of legal support service delivery (conducted by ZK Analytics on behalf of the Ministry of Justice (MoJ)) was due to conclude in January 2026. Members had been contacted for their input.

1.5 The allocations process was ongoing so there was no update on future funding beyond March 2026. The Legal Support Policy team recognised that the uncertainty was challenging for grantees and was considering contingency options in case it was too late to put a new grant in place for April 2026 once any future funding was confirmed. An update would be provided to grantees and members of the Group as soon as possible.

1.6 In discussion, the following point was made:

- If funding was to end in March 2026, grantees may need to issue redundancy notices in January 2026. Therefore, the uncertainty was very disruptive to grantees and staff. This was an example of an issue that contributed to workforce challenges.

2. Update on MoJ workstreams and progress against shared workplan

2.1 The Legal Support Policy team provided an update on the work undertaken in 2025. Members would have the opportunity to shape the workplan for 2026 at the January meeting of the Group. The Group remained an important vehicle to facilitate collaboration with the sector.

2.2 The shared workplan had three strands focusing on service delivery, data and evidence, and funding. Key MoJ deliverables in 2025 had included:

- The two legal support grants - Improving Outcomes Through Legal Support Grant (IOTLS) and Online Support and Advice Grant (OSAG) - had been extended for 12 months, to March 2026. Grant evaluations would be published in due course.
- Co-designing a new grant and its evaluation (subject to allocations). The Literature Review would help inform development of a new grant and its evaluation.
- Published the Help Accessing Legal Support report in March 2025.
- A tranche of reports would be published in early 2026.
- Work was ongoing to co-develop an outcomes framework with the sector.
- Initial engagement was taking place on improving cross-government alignment.
- The Legal Support Policy team were working with legal aid policy colleagues on legal aid transformation work.

2.3.1 Cross-government engagement

In discussion, the following points were made:

- Work was in the early stages but it was anticipated a targeted approach would be taken, focusing on the areas where the greatest impact could be achieved. A further update would be provided in due course.
- Members of the Group offered to support engagement where possible.
- The Low Commission had proposed pooling funding across government however there was a risk this could lead to the overall amount of funding reducing. There may be learning from the Low Commission that could inform cross-government engagement.
- Engagement should focus on areas where advice could help support the strategic priorities of other government departments. This should include the

Department of Health and Social Care and the Department for Education. The Department for Education should be engaged in relation to Family Hubs. The London Legal Support Trust and London Citizens Advice would be delivering advice in Family Hubs in 12 boroughs.

- Considering where people present with their issues would help target strategic engagement.
- Work could be done with HMCTS on gov.uk to improve the 'just in time' offer.
- The MoJ should engage with policy teams in other government departments, potentially through the policy impact assessment process, to identify where policies may impact legal need and demand on advice services.
- The Cabinet Office had previously been involved in the Transition Fund.

2.3.2 Other

In discussion, the following points were made:

- If the outcomes framework was piloted through a MoJ grant, it would be important to ensure that it didn't drive perverse incentives.
- Key stakeholders would be updated on legal aid transformation in the new year.

ACTION 1: Members to share any relevant contacts at other government departments with the Legal Support Policy team.

ACTION 2: The Legal Support Policy team to meet with James Sandbach and Amanda Finlay to discuss learnings from the Low Commission.

ACTION 3: Members to provide their views on where to target cross-government engagement.

3. Workforce

3.1 Chris Scutt (London Legal Support Trust), James Sandbach (London Citizens Advice) and Liz Bayram (AdviceUK) presented a paper on workforce challenges on behalf of the Advice Workforce Development Fund (AWDF). The advice workforce was facing challenges including recruitment, retention, training and progression. The AWDF consisted of eight Propel funded projects, each testing and growing new or existing ways of developing the workforce.

Recommendations and solutions identified to date included: resourcing collaborative partnerships; 'Grow your own advice' projects; improving pay and conditions (particularly paying the London Living Wage); strengthening peer support offers; and marketing the sector. Final learning reports on the eight projects would be published in 2026.

3.2 London Citizens Advice were undertaking work to improve the workforce including: the Advising Londoners programme (funded by the Greater London Authority) to increase the size of the workforce; and advice 'First Aid' which provided training to community partners to provide initial support (but not advice). London Citizens Advice was considering creating a training academy for advice.

3.3 AdviceUK was working with its members to address workforce challenges. AdviceUK recognised that government intervention had improved workforce

challenges in other sectors such as social care and teaching and recommended government intervention for the advice sector.

3.4 In discussion, the following points were made:

- Apprenticeships were an important route into advice roles, however the apprenticeship levy was not working well for the sector. Simplifying the levy and making it more flexible (e.g. to pay for salary, supervision costs, and/or cover when an apprentice was on training) would be beneficial. Removal of level 7 apprenticeships for over 22s also impacted the advice workforce as new entrants struggled to see how their careers could progress in the sector.
- The Solicitors Qualifying Exam pass rate was c.50%. It would be important to understand why the pass rate was so low and what factors or interventions helped increase pass rate. There were disparities in pass rates among some characteristics such as ethnic community.
- AdviceUK was working with its members to understand where local networks existed and where AdviceUK could help support new local networks.
- The *Mazur* judgment was affecting people's capability to undertake cases. Senior supervisors were struggling with the additional pressure, and it was having an impact on the sort of advice people felt they could give.
- People move away from careers in legal aid due to the bureaucracy. This had been compounded by the Legal Aid Agency cyber attack earlier in the year.
- Workforce challenges manifested differently in different regions. If learning could be brought together from areas with different challenges (e.g. London and the South West), it might give a better national picture.
- The work in London had been accompanied by funding and was therefore difficult to replicate elsewhere (if funding was not available).
- The market paradigm did not suit legal support and legal aid because there wasn't a marketplace. This created additional workforce challenges.
- There should be pathways for volunteers to enter employment.
- The Group should consider having a focus group on workforce to understand the impact the Group could have.

3.5 Summing up, the Chair said that workforce could be considered as part of the workplan discussion at January's meeting. It could form part of the cross-government engagement plan. A task and finish group might be useful to target work in this area.

ACTION 4: The Advice Workforce Development Fund to share their final report, once available.

4. AOB

4.1 The next meeting was scheduled for 1400-1700 on 29th January. Minister Sackman was due to attend the first part of the meeting. Members were asked to consider their priorities and deliverables for 2026 in advance of the meeting.

Legal Support Strategy Team
December 2025