



Ministry
of Justice

MINUTES

LEGAL SUPPORT STRATEGY DELIVERY GROUP

Conference Room 3, 102 Petty France and MS Teams

10:30-12:30 Thursday 23 April 2026

Members present: Cathryn Hannah (Deputy Director, Legal Support and Additional Funding, Ministry of Justice—Chair); Amanda Finlay (Legal and Advice Sector Roundtable); Ash Patel (Justice Programme, Nuffield Foundation); Chris Minnoch (Legal Aid Practitioners Group); Claire Driffield (Citizens Advice); Fiona Rutherford (JUSTICE); Julie Bishop (Law Centres Network); Lindsey Poole (Advice Services Alliance); Liz Bayram (AdviceUK); Dr Liz Curran (Nottingham Trent University); Phil Robertson (Bar Council); Mr Justice Robin Knowles (Legal and Advice Sector Roundtable); Stephen Mayson (University College London Researcher); Martha de la Roche (deputising for Clare Carter, Access to Justice Foundation); Richard Miller (deputising for Lucy Dennett, The Law Society)

Additional Attendees: Ministry of Justice Legal Support Policy and Analytical Teams

Apologies: Clare Carter (Access to Justice Foundation); Daniel Drillsma-Milgrom (Greater London Authority); Elizabeth Price (Welsh Government); Paul Neave (Welsh Government); Professor Dame Hazel Genn (University College London Researcher); Lucy Dennett OBE (The Law Society); Dr Natalie Byrom (Independent Policy Researcher); Dr 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 MoJ Legal Support Policy team provided an update on their recent and ongoing work:
 - The team had been engaging with other government departments, including the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC), NHS England and Department for Education (DfE), focusing on promoting the co-location of social welfare advice services in a range of settings,

including health justice partnerships. Key progress included ensuring the inclusion of social welfare advice in the [Neighbourhood Health Centre guidance documents for regions and ICBs](#), as well as in DfE's [Best Start Family Hub guidance](#). This created opportunities for the advice sector to engage locally on the co-location of services. The team would continue to engage with DHSC as the Neighbourhood Health programme was implemented.

- The team had secured a place for the Directors responsible for legal support policy to sit on a newly established, DHSC-chaired, cross-Whitehall Neighbourhood Health group.
- The team had been playing a facilitative role by supporting joined up working across MoJ, Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, His Majesty's Courts and Tribunals Service, Judicial Office and the sector on implementation of the Renters Rights Act. The team had also worked with AdviceUK and facilitated discussions with Skills England and Department for Work and Pensions to explore opportunities in the apprenticeships and skills space to help address sector workforce challenges.
- The team was working with the Access to Justice Foundation to shape the objectives, scope and funding parameters of the new legal support grant, which would pilot the outcomes framework and run from October 2026 until March 2029. The procurement for the independent grant evaluator had launched and the bidding period had been extended from 4 May 2026 to 18 May 2026. The latest iteration of the outcomes framework was being tested with stakeholders and an updated version would be shared with the Group. The feedback received to date had been constructive and positive.
- A package of MoJ research that the department had commissioned and delivered over the last couple of years would be published in May and shared with the Group. The Chair said that the evaluation of the new grant would address some evidence gaps surfaced through the literature review, but the Group should discuss at a future meeting what collective action could be taken to address any remaining gaps.

1.4 In discussion, the following points were made:

- The Group appreciated the cross-government work that was being undertaken.
- Funding for Neighbourhood Health Centres and Best Start Family Hubs would be determined at the ICB and local authority level respectively. Networks would make their members aware of the guidance so that engagement could take place locally.
- For health justice partnerships to be successful, ICBs and medical professionals would need to understand the role of advice, the benefits that the co-location of services would bring (e.g. in terms of savings), and trust advice services. A short video may be useful to build these relationships, as well as the sharing of best practice and case studies.
- A discussion on the blockers advice organisations face when trying to engage in partnerships would be welcomed.
- Decision making by other government departments or bodies could impact

legal need.

ACTION 1: The Group to discuss blockers that advice organisations face when trying to engage in partnership working at the May meeting.

2. Vision and Theory of Change

2.1 The Chair and MoJ Legal Support Policy team introduced the item and provided an overview of the draft problem and vision statements, and theory of change for the Group.

2.2 In discussion, the following points were made in relation to the problem statement and vision statement:

- Members felt the draft statements were a good starting point but further refinement was required. Some members felt the problem and vision statements should be more realistic, while some felt they should be more aspirational – a balance would need to be struck. An intermediate step could be used to better link the statements to the work of the Group.
- The statements could make clearer reference to the long-term financial and workforce sustainability of advice organisations. Service delivery was not possible without a viable, sustainable, well-resourced advice sector.
- The overall change that the Group was trying to contribute to should be better articulated. This could include how a more sustainable sector could contribute to reducing poverty or inequality and that reducing poverty had positive impacts for the individual and wider society.
- It was unclear whether the statements were pitched at the policy, strategy or delivery level. The statements could be framed more from a practice perspective.
- The problem statement should make clearer that the issue was people experiencing legal need not being able to resolve their issues. The framing implied that accessing available support was the issue but it was more complex.
- The vision statement could include reference to people in the community better understanding their rights.
- The vision statement could be clearer on the specific changes the Group would like to see from the service delivery, data and evidence, and funding workstreams, and the experience for users.

ACTION 2: The Legal Support Policy team to refine the draft problem and vision statements for further discussion at the May meeting.

2.3.1 In discussion, the following points were made in relation to theory of change in general:

- Some members felt the inputs were insufficient to meet the vision and further consideration should be given to what specifically could be achieved in the absence of any new or additional funding.

- The theory of change should be plausible, actionable, testable, and transparent about assumptions whilst remaining simple and conveying meaning.
- An accompanying narrative or more detail on the theory of change could be included in another document such as the Group's workplan.
- Consideration should be given to how to monitor progress against the outcomes and impacts once the theory of change was finalised.
- The theory of change should be careful to avoid over-claiming of the Group or double-counting work.
- The theory of change should include a context statement or assumption that society is unequal.
- The theory of change included definitions of effective, efficient and sustainable that should be included in the vision statement. The inputs should be linked to those three goals.
- The definition of legal support excluded other aspects of the ecosystem such as legal aid which made articulating dependencies challenging. The theory of change should include how the Group interacts with other aspects of the MoJ's policy areas such as alternative dispute resolution, courts and tribunals, and legal aid.

2.3.2 In discussion, the following points were made about the inputs and activities to be included in the theory of change:

- Strategy, governance and oversight should be included in the inputs. The Group could contribute to this and help dock into other policy work and identify where other stakeholders may have useful levers.
- The inputs should reference the role of trusted intermediaries and signposting.
- Some of the activities may be too vague or ambitious. The level of contribution could be dealt with through assumptions and dependencies.
- JUSTICE were undertaking work on public legal education; work on Artificial Intelligence (AI) and tech and access to justice; and the Justice Insights project.
- The activities mentioned the new legal support grant and would need to articulate what was different from previous grants that would lead to the desired change.
- The quality of support accessed via AI was a concern and co-ordinated action should be taken to address this.
- Policy in Practice was working with local authorities to proactively identify people who might be eligible for benefits and connect them with advice agencies.
- If advice services were co-located in hubs or centres, it may provide an opportunity to feedback issues around decision-making to other public bodies. The Bar Council were considering undertaking research into the impact of poor decision making and were keen to collaborate with other members of the Group. There had been a scheme for tribunals to feedback data to the Department for Work and Pensions on successful appeals.

- The Bar Council was analysing the results of its bi-annual survey which included a free text question on access to justice – the responses would be shared with the Group.
- The Bar Council were updating their access to justice dashboard (which included data on supply) and welcomed the Group's views on what additional data could be overlaid on the dashboard. The Administrative Justice Council was looking at demand and it would be good to co-ordinate the similar workstreams. The World Justice Project was also considering supply and demand more generally and would be publishing an initial report in the next 6 months.
- It would be helpful to have a list of data that other government departments may hold that would be useful for the sector, so that this could be discussed during cross-government engagement. A group should be convened to discuss what data would be useful.
- The Group should share local level activity and best practice, particularly local level work relating to systems change or data practices.

ACTION 3: JUSTICE to share the outputs of their work on public legal education, AI and access to justice, and justice insights, once available.

ACTION 4: Members to contact Phil Robertson (Bar Council) to feed into research on the impact of poor decision-making on the advice sector.

ACTION 5: The Bar Council to share relevant analysis from the access to justice questions in its bi-annual survey, once available.

ACTION 6: Fiona Rutherford (JUSTICE) to meet with Phil Robertson (Bar Council) to discuss work on supply and demand and engage the Access to Justice Council to align workstreams where appropriate.

ACTION 7: Fiona Rutherford (JUSTICE) to convene a meeting of interested members to discuss what data other government departments may hold that would be useful to the advice sector.

2.3.3 In discussion, the following points were made about the outputs, outcomes and impacts included in the theory of change:

- The outputs of the cross-government activity needed to be more specific.
- The outcome of high quality and appropriate support required further definition, including what organisations would need to deliver that support and what types of organisations they should be.
- The impacts could coalesce around one or two parts of the vision to better highlight what contributions the activities could make to the end goal articulated in the vision.

ACTION 8: The Legal Support Policy Team to refine the theory of change for discussion at the May meeting.

3. Access to Justice Funding

- 3.1 The Access to Justice Foundation was the nominated recipient of undistributed damages for opt out collective actions in the Competition Tribunal. The Department for Business and Trade were conducting a 10-year review of the regime as a whole, which would include a consultation. The Access to Justice Foundation encouraged Group members to respond to the consultation reiterating the importance of funding access to justice causes.

4. AOB

- 4.1 Further information on the response to the Interest on Lawyers' Client Accounts consultation would be shared with the Group in due course.

**Legal Support Strategy Team
April 2026**