

**Crime Contract Consultative Group (CCCG) Meeting
Tuesday 20 January 2026
Minutes**

When	Tuesday 20 January 2026
Where	Via Teams
Chair	Mark Newby
Minutes	Eloise Worrall
Present	<p>Alice Mutasa – TLS Andrew Cosma – MMA Avrom Sherr – IALS Casey Jenkins - MKLAW David Phillips - LAA Elaine Annable – LAA Fadi Daoud – LCCSA Glyn Hardy – LAA James MacMillan –Moj Jason Lartey – L&C Katy Hanson - WLAW Matt Doddridge – LAA Neil Lewis – LAA Nick Ford – LAA Nick Poulter – LAA</p>
Apologies	<p>Adrian Vincent – BC Amy Shaw – LAA Anna Bevilacqua - LAA Arron Dolan – CBA Carol Storer – LAPG Chris Minnoch - LAPG Chandni Brown – CilEx Daniel Bonich – CLSA Dave Scothern - SAH Edward Jones - LCCSA Elliot Miller – LAA</p>

Emma Prise – LAA Fleur McQuade - LAA Gerwyn Wise – GCLAW Harry Slade - LAA Helen Johnson - LAPG Henry Hills – SAHCA Janet Land – LAA Jerome Lucey – LAA Jill Waring – LAA Kathryn Grainger – LAA Kate Pasfield – LAPG Kath Burdett – LAA Martin Secrett – BC Melissa Thompson – LAA Rakesh Bhasin – LAPG Rebecca Booth – LAA Richard Miller – TLS Richard Owen – TLS A2J Cttee Sean Wardale - LAA Stuart Nolan – TLS Will Hayden – LAA
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M Newby welcomed attendees to the meeting

1. Introductions, minutes, and actions from previous meeting.

Minutes and actions were agreed from the last meeting.

JMc provided an update on the review of the Litigators’ Graduated Fee Scheme (LGFS), mentioning the recent SI for crime lower fees and plans to lay an SI soon for LGFS changes, including introducing a fixed ratio of 65:75:100 between guilty plea, cracked trial, and trial basic fees as well as uplifts in basic fees for lower-paying offences.

AM asked about broader LGFS reform, referencing previous subgroup work and the need for fundamental changes; JMc confirmed wider reform is paused but may be revisited in late spring or early summer.

NP addressed the feasibility of narrowing dates between assessments and payments for LGFS and enabling earlier CRM7 payments, explaining technical and resource challenges, manual workarounds, and prioritization issues. AC suggested excluding SMP firms from early payments, but NP clarified ongoing digital difficulties and manual processes.

NP discussed the process for submitting prison law escape cases, noting a pilot showed electronic files took twice as long to assess as paper, and current high error rates require full assessments. He stated that moving to electronic submission is the ultimate aim but must be done carefully to avoid worsening cash flow and operational delays.

AM and MW raised concerns about the burden on providers to produce physical files and questioned why prison law is treated differently from other areas; NP explained focus was to digitise high volume processes first but reaffirmed the goal to eventually accept electronic files for prison law work..

2. Operational update - Nick Poulter.

NP reported that legal aid applications are being processed rapidly, often within the same day, and the 48-hour KPI is being met even during high intake periods. There has been a significant increase in application volumes each January for the past two years, with a possible further 10-12% rise this year, totalling a 33% increase over two years. The reason for this trend is unknown.

Graduated fee claims (AGFS and LGFS) are assessed within three days or less; CRM4s and 5s within two days; CRM7s are back down to four days after a holiday backlog.

CRM7 appeals, which had reached a 205-day turnaround due to the cyber outage, are now down to eight days.

Prison law (46-day turnaround) and contempt cases (longer, but low volume) remain areas of concern, with plans to improve these.

Internal management information is still difficult to gather due to ongoing system issues, despite external-facing systems appearing normal.

Additional staff are being trained to help with backlogs, especially in contempt and 18A cases

3. Introduction to Transformation – Hannah Payne.

HP introduced herself as Head of Transformation at the Legal Aid Agency and explained the purpose of the transformation initiative: to modernize and improve the delivery of legal aid, reduce administrative burdens, address system security and flexibility, and respond to challenges highlighted by the recent cyber attack.

Five strategic outcomes were outlined: easier access to legal aid, market sustainability, better measurement of legal aid impact, increased operational efficiency (for both LAA and providers), and more flexible/secure technology.

There is increased urgency and investment for digital transformation, with a focus on replacing riskier legacy systems and meeting ministerial priorities (e.g., inquests for legal aid).

The initial focus will be on civil legal aid, as its systems are riskier and more fragile than those on the crime side, and because crime apply has already modernized the crime application front end.

User research with providers is resuming to inform system design, and providers are being invited to participate in this process.

AM asked for the slides and raised concerns about the delayed implementation of means test changes, which HP and JMc agreed to follow up on and report back at the next meeting.

HP emphasized the need to prioritise changes due to limited capacity and system fragility, but expects faster progress due to additional investment.

HP outlined the importance of ensuring transformation progress was a two-way process between the LAA and the profession and the group was invited to provide feedback on how best to stay engaged and updated on transformation progress.

AS suggested involving the court service and prosecution in the transformation work, especially to make it easier to access information they hold, which could help with processes like peer review.

HP responded by clarifying if AS meant easier access to information from those bodies, confirmed understanding, and said she would follow up to ensure she understood the details.

APJAN01 – HP & JMc to report back at the next meeting with an update on the status of means test changes for legal aid, following Alice's request for information on this topic.

4. Rep body ongoing topics & Queries

AC raised two main issues: First, he highlighted problems with interim payments under the litigator LGFS scheme, noting that only one claim can be made after PTPH and another after the trial starts, which is problematic due to long delays between plea and trial. He suggested allowing a second interim claim if the page count increases significantly before trial.

Second, he discussed the financial strain caused by high expert disbursement fees in Magistrates' Court cases, which often exceed the legal fees and must be paid upfront, causing cash flow issues for practitioners. He emphasized the urgency of addressing this, especially as more serious cases remain in the Magistrates' Court.

AM echoed AC concerns about interim payments and disbursements, stressing that the issue will become even more urgent if proposals like Lammy and Leveson are implemented, as more serious cases will be heard in the Magistrates' Court, leading to longer waits and more upfront payments for experts. She stated that ideally, there should be an interim claim for work in progress and that disbursements and expert reports should be claimable once paid, since the LAA approves these payments. She warned the situation is already at crisis point and will worsen as bigger cases move to the Magistrates' Court.

MN added that the same problem with interim payments and disbursements exists in prison law and appeals, where providers incur significant costs (such as transcript fees for Court of Appeal cases) but cannot get repayment until the case is finally resolved. He gave an example of paying nearly £6,000 for transcripts in a modern slavery case and emphasized that providers cannot continue to sustain these upfront payments without timely reimbursement. He called for urgent action to address interim payments across Magistrates' Court, Crown Court, and Court of Appeal cases

JL raised two issues: first, he asked if the LAA had spoken to the NPCC about new guidance regarding requests for digital evidence, noting that they are now told to make these requests under the CPIA rather than section 21 of PACE. Second, he questioned the source of this guidance, as phone evidence requests are common in their case

FD highlighted that the CPS is increasingly placing material into unused evidence, which requires significant review and preparation by defence but is not counted in the page count for claims, making the administrative burden prohibitive. He requested this issue be addressed, as important material is often hidden in unused evidence.

FD also discussed the financial impact on firms acting as the LAA's "bank," paying for disbursements upfront and only being reimbursed much later, which results in a loss of value due to inflation. He suggested either interim payments or an uplift to account for this loss.

FD mentioned a recent trend where paralegals are being asked to obtain three estimates for expert reports, which he feels is becoming excessive and should be reviewed

JL supported FD point about the administrative burden of reviewing unused material, noting agreement and that it is a recurring issue.

JL mentioned that firms are effectively acting as the LAA's bank, paying for disbursements upfront and being reimbursed later at a reduced value due to inflation.

JL asked if there was any update on the reduction of duty solicitor hours from 50 to 40, referencing previous discussions about this change.

JMc clarified that interim payments are not provided for Magistrates' Court cases under the current remuneration regulations.

He confirmed that interim payments under the LGFS are allowed in three scenarios: after a not guilty plea, at the start of a trial expected to last 10 days or more, and when there is a retrial with a new litigator.

JMc stated that only one interim payment claim is currently permitted, but acknowledged this could be reviewed if current circumstances make it problematic.

He invited LAA colleagues to add further or more helpful information if available.

AC requested that changes to interim payments be made quickly due to trials now being listed three or four years in the future, emphasizing the urgency as practitioners are carrying the cash for extended periods.

He noted that while he is not criticizing anyone, the slow pace of change is problematic and urgent action is needed because staff still need to be paid even if payments are delayed.

AC suggested that if a new SI is being introduced, it should include provisions for additional interim payments, such as allowing a second claim if a certain number of pages are served between the first and second claim, stating that the system can accommodate this change.

He emphasized that there are no software issues preventing this and urged for a practical solution NL said he would look into whether there is a systems issue that would need updating to enable a second interim payment in the same LGFS case, alongside the regulatory review James is conducting.

Note: NP later clarified that, as set out in the Crown Court Fee Guidance, a re-determination request is able to be submitted for a further interim payment post PTPH, referencing the specific guidance at Paragraph 1.17A(6), on page 15 of 131. It was limited to a further two interim payment requests in July 2023. For example, should additional evidence have been served pre-trial.

NL acknowledged the broader concern about interim payments for disbursements in crime lower cases, Magistrates' Court cases, and prison law, and agreed with AM who mentioned that interim payments had arisen in April 2025 as part of discussions with the LAA relating to reducing business overheads. NL stated that the LAA had considered the issue and had responded that it was not possible to take forward the changes requested at that time in part, due to limited resources available to implement digital change and that the cyber incident will not have improved that situation. He agreed to take this concern away provide an update at the next meeting.

GH responded to JL question about the potential shift in duty solicitor requirements from 50 to 40 hours, stating that it is still under consideration and they hope to provide an update as soon as possible.

GH confirmed that this is currently being looked at

NF clarified that, generally, if a quote for an expert is within the rates in the regulations and the number of hours are reasonable, the LAA will adopt a flexible approach. We did issue some comms. The exception is for VHCC cases, where three quotes are required as a norm due to the size and level of expertise involved.

He added that if it is not a VHCC case, there should be more flexibility, and invited FD to email him and NP with specific examples.

MN requested that the issue of interim payments, especially in the Magistrates' Court, be brought back as an action item for the next meeting to ensure an update and ongoing monitoring, aiming to see progress rather than repeated delays.

NL agreed to this, confirming that an update on interim payments would be provided at the next meeting.

APJAN03 – NL to provide an update on interim payments at the next meeting.

AC stated that they claim every supplemental because they believe they should when they've incurred mileage and parking expenses. He mentioned having received emails about the bulk upload being available for the next submissions and asked if anyone knows when they will be able to submit supplementals and request account managers to delete and resubmit claims, as these are building up quickly.

EA replied that they do not know when the bulk upload functionality will occur but will ask the question for Andrew and come back with an answer

AOB

Nothing was raised under this section

End of meeting.

The next meeting is Tuesday 10 March 2026