Ministry of Justice

MINUTES

LEGAL SUPPORT STRATEGY DELIVERY GROUP

CMS, Cannon Street, and MS Teams

10:00-12:00 Wednesday 16th September 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); Clare Carter (Access to Justice Foundation); Claire Driffield (Citizens Advice); Lindsey Poole (Advice Services Alliance); Liz Bayram (AdviceUK); Dr Liz Curran (Nottingham Trent University); Phil Robertson (Bar Council); Dr Sarah Stephens (University of Sussex / Online Procedure Rule Committee); Ellen Lefley (JUSTICE, deputising for Fiona Rutherford); Mary Towers (The Law Society, deputising for Lucy Dennett); Esther McConnell (Legal and Advice Sector Roundtable, deputising for Mr Justice Robin Knowles); Rebecca Wilkinson (Legal and Advice Sector Roundtable, deputising for Mr Justice Robin Knowles)

Additional Attendees: Lisa Wintersteiger (AdviceNow); Martha de la Roche (Access to Justice Foundation); Clare MacDonald (Director, Legal Aid and Legal Support, Ministry of Justice- 10:00-11:00); Farah Ziaulla (Director, Legal Aid and Legal Support, Ministry of Justice- 10:00-11:00); Ministry of Justice Legal Support Policy and Analysis Teams; Ministry of Justice Legal Services Policy Team; Ministry of Justice Dispute Resolution Analysis Team; HMCTS Futures Team; Legal Aid Agency Transformation Team; HMCTS User Inclusion Team

Apologies: Daniel Drillsma-Milgrom (Greater London Authority); Professor Dame Hazel Genn (University College London Researcher); Fiona Rutherford (JUSTICE); Julie Bishop (Law Centres Network); Lucy Dennett (The Law Society); Dr Natalie Byrom (Independent Policy Researcher); Paul Neave (Welsh Government); Mr Justice Robin Knowles (Legal and Advice Sector Roundtable); Stephanie Smith (Welsh Government); Professor Stephen Mayson (University College London Researcher)

1. Welcome and Introductions

1.1 The Chair welcomed all attendees to the meeting.

1.2 The were no declarations of interest.

1.3 The Chair provided an update on outstanding actions. AP1 and AP3 from 28 July 2026 were closed. Phil Robertson confirmed that AP6 from 23 April 2026 could also be closed.

1.4 The Chair provided an update on MoJ work:

- The new Legal Support Grant 26-29 would launch on 01 October. The Access to Justice Foundation had run a competitive process to select the grantees. The reporting processes and materials were being refined. Ipsos were also preparing for the next Evaluation Advisory Group meeting, where they would present their intended evaluation approach.
- The London Neighbourhood Health and social welfare advice roundtable took place on 18 August. It was a successful event and attendees were bought into the importance of social welfare advice and health justice partnerships in improving outcomes for individuals and addressing wider determinants of health.
- A response to the Interest on Lawyers' Client Accounts Consultation would be published in due course.

2. Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Legal Support

2.1 Cris Coxon, MoJ, introduced the item and summarised the current position in relation to AI and legal support. Members had shared some initial information on their views on AI which would be shared with the group after the meeting.

2.2 The Lawtech policy team said that bids were being assessed for the latest round of funding. A further update would be provided in due course.

2.3 Claire Driffield provided an update on Citizens Advice's approach to AI, which included a zero tolerance approach to risk. National Citizens Advice had worked in collaboration with local offices to develop its guiding principles for AI adoption. They key component was always having a "human in the loop". Claire Driffield provided an overview of some of the tools Citizens Advice had developed.

2.4 Martha de la Roche provided an overview of the Access to Justice Foundation's work on innovation and technology, including AI. Although there had been an increase in frontline funding of digital tools, this was uncoordinated and learning was not shared. This had led to duplication across the sector. The Justice and Innovation Group, which was now under the stewardship of SmartJustice, provided an opportunity to share learnings. There was a risk of creating a two-tier system if investment was focused on the private sector rather than the not-for-profit part of the sector. Businesses aimed at meeting unmet legal need could find natural allies in the advice sector. Sector use of AI was focused on service efficiencies rather than using AI to deliver services. Further work would be required to identify and overcome the barriers to accessing funding for the advice sector to develop or adopt AI.

2.5.1 In discussion, the following points were made:

- Members were generally supportive of using AI to achieve administrative efficiencies, triage or undertake initial assessments, or for initial drafts of letters, so long as there was sufficient oversight from an adviser.
- There were opportunities and tensions in defining what AI could do independently and what required greater human involvement, particularly whether small language models required less oversight. Training AI on internal, quality-assured information was key to creating trust in the system.
- AI provided the opportunity to deliver support outside of usual office hours.

- LawFairy had developed deterministic logic systems for immigration and housing that would be made available to the third sector for free. Existing solutions should be used to solve problems or improve efficiency where possible and appropriate.
- AI shouldn't detract from other digital improvements that could be made, including linking trusted sources more effectively. There needed to be a way to easily show which sources were trusted sources.
- There needed to be regulatory certainty for both professionals and litigants in person. The Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency had set up a commission on the regulation of AI in healthcare. Consideration should be given to replicating this for justice.
- There may be emerging threats to the rule of law posed by AI which would need to be mitigated.

2.5.2 Funding

- Accessibility of funding for AI innovation and stewardship was an issue.
- LawtechUK should consider how to make its programme more accessible to the third sector. One of the objectives for phase III of LawtechUK was to support the development and adoption of technology which would increase access to legal services and aim to reduce unmet legal need.
- There remained a question around whether organisations should develop their own solutions or buy solutions. The sector should be clearer about why funders should invest.
- Some members felt funding would be better spent on strategic leadership rather than developing new business to consumer tools.
- It may be possible to make an invest to save case for AI tools. For example, the judiciary would be interested in diverting cases from tribunals where appropriate.

2.5.3 Coordination and development

- Organisations across the sector would be looking to adopt similar AI tools. There should be ambition to share successful tools across the sector whilst recognising / compensating for the resource invested by the developer.
- A hub could be created for developers to share their knowledge, learnings and methodologies. LawtechUK was suggested as a possible organisation to host or support such a hub.
- In its 21st Century Justice report, the Law Society had suggested that the government set up a publicly accessible AI Knowledge Hub and a publicly available legal triage tool.
- The Justice and Innovation Group could help improve coordination across the sector.

2.5.4 General purpose LLMs

- The advice sector was being impacted by citizens use of LLMs when seeking information and solutions.
- JUSTICE's recent research showed people were turning to general purpose chatbots with a combination of emotional, practical and legal needs.
- Nuffield was looking at the development of bespoke public facing tools, however they have a long lead in time and it was unclear whether the public

would use such tools over general use LLMs which were only becoming more prevalent.
- Advice organisations were seeing a significant decrease in web traffic, possibly as a result of Google AI overviews.
- Advicenow was trying to open a conversation with google to advocate for the justice sector. The sector would need to be better coordinated to engage successfully with big tech companies. For example, by improving internal signposting protocols across major providers. Engagement may require government to act as a convener.

2.5.5 Workforce

- AI adoption would require culture change and upskilling the workforce. This was difficult for the advice sector as it was experiencing capacity and funding constraints.
- Consideration should be given to how the adoption of AI could affect the workforce, including adviser wellbeing.
- AI adoption could undermine an adviser's sense of self as an expert.
- Public use of AI could increase the volume of material for advisers to deal with. Additionally, increased efficiency through the use of AI could lead to an increased number of cases per adviser which could take an emotional toll.
- Some AI tools had an advisory function and a performance management function – it was therefore important for advisers to be involved in their development.
- AI could also impact the structure of the workforce with the potential loss of more junior roles and future pipeline issues.
- A further workforce consideration was that a significant proportion of the third sector workforce was volunteers rather than employees. This could impact AI adoption.
- The advice sector may wish to collaborate with higher education institutions, who would need to consider how to prepare the future workforce for the adoption of AI.

ACTION 1: Legal Support Strategy to share members' AI returns with the Group via email.

ACTION 2: Clare Carter to convene a meeting of interested parties to discuss identifying and accessing funding for AI development for the advice sector.

ACTION 3: Claire Driffield to inform LSSDG of whether Citizens Advice had plans to share its AI methodologies with others.

ACTION 4: Lisa Wintersteiger to convene a meeting of interested parties to discuss engagement with "big tech".

3. AOB

3.1 None raised.

Legal Support Strategy Team
September 2026