

LEGAL SERVICES COMMITTEE FOR WALES

Internet briefing note on the meeting held on 26th July 2005

Members Present: Roger Chater
John Williams
Fran Targett
Tom Jones (Chair)
Lee Phillips

In Attendance: Steve Whitehouse

Apologies for Absence: Roy Morgan, Margaret Griffiths, Bob Chapman

Torfaen Trading Standards- PIB Project, Steve Whitehouse

Steve Whitehouse reported that the Connect 2 U project had been first thought of in a Partnership meeting in 2002. A joint bid had been submitted for PIB funding by Trading Standards and CAB to offer advice through video links, in line with the needs identified for Torfaen through the CLS Partnership, to overcome local access issues.

Five pieces of video equipment have been installed with links to the CAB and the various council offices and libraries. All systems had been tested and staff had been trained to be able to operate it. Backdrops had been made with logos for each venue and the launch date had been 4th May 2005. There had been delays in getting the project started as Steve had been off work for some time. Marketing had been done through radio and local papers. Posters and leaflets had been produced and supplied to voluntary organisations and an explanatory leaflet for consumers.

Users of the service had mainly been for CAB, initially there had been 3 to 4 per day, but this had now changed to 3 to 4 per week. The staff in the outlets will now spend one day per week, asking people whether they had any issues, where they would benefit from using the service. A video link questionnaire was available for clients to complete to evaluate the service provided.

A discussion followed regarding the problems faced by the service, its locations and some possible solutions to keeping the profile of the project raised publicly. It was noted that the project end date was September 2006.

Community Legal Service in Wales.

Members of the Wales Office of the Legal Service Commission continue to attend the Social Justice & Regeneration Committee. It is a cross cutting committee made up of senior officers across Welsh Assembly Government departments. The Committee was regularly updated with the aim of identifying cross cutting issues and to highlight the work of the LSC in Wales. The last meeting had been beneficial and resulted with engagement with officers afterwards.

Objective One bid

Ian Cooling had been successful in developing an Objective One bid alongside the WCVA to run for 2/3 years on training volunteer advice workers. £3,146,783 had been secured, however the launch and start up date were yet to be arranged.

Consultation papers

It was noted that the Advice Services Strategy for Wales and the Legal Services Commission Strategy for the CLS in England and Wales were out for consultation. It was proposed that there would be a CLAC and a CLAN pilot in Wales within the next year.

Western Mail Law Awards

The Wales Office of the Legal Services Commission was sponsoring a category in the Western Mail Law Awards, which are taking place on the 17th November. Bob Chapman would be a judge and Tom Jones would present the award on behalf of the Commission. The LSC was hoping for nominations across Wales.

A-D Ratings

The report was received and changes to the ratings noted. The Committee expressed its thanks for the support from LSC staff in this round of meetings.

Roger reported that work undertaken to compare Blaenau Gwent and Merthyr Tydfil had proven to be very useful in identifying expected take up of services in Blaenau Gwent.

It was noted that Powys Benefits were undertaking a home-visiting scheme. It was thought that it would be useful to see if other home-visiting schemes were effective and to compare them to Powys Benefits.

Causes of Action – In the research, young people 21+ were identified as being at the most vulnerable time in their lives, and needed to build confidence to access the services. It was noted that Pascoe Pleasance and/or Vicky Kemp were prepared to come to a National Forum meeting to speak in Wales about Causes of Action.

LSC Strategy for the CLS and the Advice Strategy for Wales

Advice Services Strategy for Wales - Consultation events had taken place in Blackwood, Llandudno and Carmarthen. There had been a variety of people attending from policy, strategy and frontline staff. The consultation finished on 12th August and results would be presented to the National Forum Task Group on the 5th September and the full National Forum on the 13th September.

The meeting agreed that as National Forum members they had responded to the strategy and felt therefore it would be duplication to respond officially as the LSCfW. The LSCfW should be added to the membership list of the National Forum in the Strategy.

The Committee noted that funding had been obtained from the Welsh Assembly Government for a six-month secondment to begin the implementation of the Strategy.

LSC Strategy for the CLS - The meeting felt there was a huge concern that the Welsh Language version of the strategy was later than the English. The meeting felt that Welsh Language responses therefore may come in later than the official consultation end date of 13th October and may not be taken into account.

It was explained that the ASSfW and the LSC strategy for the CLS would be pulled together to make a LSC Strategy for the CLS in Wales. LSCfW members would like to see the consultation document.

The Committee endorsed the view that both, the Advice Services Strategy for Wales, and the CLS Strategy for England and Wales should form the basis for the Wales Policy Paper.

The Committee noted that the CLS Strategy would be consulted upon in Wales as a part of the National Forum meeting, taking place on 13th September, with the aim of including all key stakeholders in Wales. In addition Citizens Advice were holding two consultation events in Wales.

The Committee were asked if they wished to respond to the Strategy. Each member provided some initial feedback. There was some sympathy with the key principles of the document. Specific feedback included:

When urban-based contracts were to be let, they must be enabled for outreach into rural areas.

CLACs need to demonstrate its ability to work with telephone services and other advice providers. There is an issue about reinventing the wheel, particularly where CLSPs are good.

It separates out the purchaser and the provider. In terms of contracting decisions this would work but not in respect of planning. It excludes organisations that undertake social policy work and the conflict of interest with including providers could be managed to allow their input.

Strategic action to address need and active learning was welcomed.

The strategy is urban centred and does not fit with the geography of Wales. Urban within England will have a different meaning to that in Wales due to population, transport and geography.

The CLACs promote competition, however in Wales the culture is based on co-operation and not competition.
