

The Wales Committee for the Community Legal Service (CLS) Providers Meeting
Minutes of the Meeting held on Friday 6th June 2008
in Studio 2, Galeri, Caernarfon

Present: Tom Jones - Commissioner for Wales, LSC (Chair)
 Lynne Schofield – Financial Inclusion Unit, Welsh Assembly Government
 Fran Targett – Independent Advice Providers Forum
 Catrin Williams, CAF/CASS Cymru
 Paul Newell - Head of Civil Policy, Legal Services Commission
 Gareth Moss – SOLACE Wales
 Howard Lloyd – HMCS
 Graham Benfield – Wales Council for Voluntary Action

Cemlyn Williams – CAB Gwynedd & Ynys Mon
 Julie Burton – Julie Burton Law (Bangor)
 David Rudd – Walker Smith Way (Wrexham)
 Gwynedd Millington – CAB Conwy District
 Magwen Lloyd Williams – SNAP Cymru
 Janet Loudon – Shelter Cymru
 Kay Powell – The Law Society

Legal Services Commission Wales Staff:

Tiana Williams - Wales Policy Manager
 Emma Rouse – Policy Developer
 Tracy Scott – Secretariat
 Nic Johanson – Wales Contracting Manager

1.	<p>Introductions, Apologies and Welcome</p> <p>Tom welcomed everyone to the meeting and explained that its purpose was to enable service providers to engage on an annual basis with the Wales Committee for the Community Legal Service (CLS).</p>	
2.	<p>Update/discussion</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Civil Legal Aid – The Next Five Years • Making Legal Rights a Reality in Wales <p>Paul Newell provided an overview on the plans for civil legal aid over the next five years. It was noted that there was a fixed budget within which to deliver advice services and make civil legal aid more accessible. The LSC would continue to explore opportunities to work in partnership and jointly commission services through Community Legal Advice Centres (CLACs) or Networks (CLANs). Several CLACs were already up and running in England. There would be a move to a competitive market for the majority of legal advice services</p>	

however, following negotiations with the Law Society, an agreement had been reached whereby this would not take place for civil or family work before 2013. The LSC was currently going through a period of transformation in improving efficiency and reducing costs through e-business and reducing administration.

Tiana Williams provided an update on the progress made since the publication of Making Legal Rights a Reality in Wales, the Legal Services Commission's and Welsh Assembly Government's (WAG) policy framework for the development of the CLS in Wales.

The proposals outlined an approach for procuring jointly funded citizen focused advice services on a regional basis in Wales, ranging from generalist advice to specialist advice and representation. Wherever possible, services would be jointly commissioned with local authorities and WAG. Eight regional procurement areas had been identified:

- Neath Port Talbot and Swansea
- Carmarthenshire and Pembrokeshire
- Bridgend, Cardiff and Vale of Glamorgan
- Blaenau Gwent, Caerphilly, Monmouthshire, Newport and Torfaen
- Ceredigion and Powys
- Merthyr Tydfil and Rhondda Cynon Taff
- Anglesey, Gwynedd and Conwy
- Denbighshire, Flintshire and Wrexham

There had been meetings with local authorities to explore the proposals for regional working. The most developed discussions had taken place with Bridgend, Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan. An open meeting had been held in February for providers and stakeholders. The LSC and WAG had jointly funded a secondee to draft a needs analysis and service specification. A draft specification was anticipated in August and an open meeting was scheduled for September. Discussions were continuing in North West Wales, and an open meeting had been held earlier in the year in Neath Port Talbot with a meeting to be held with Swansea Council before planning the next steps.

Julie Burton commented that she dealt with many social welfare cases and was concerned about a partnership with local authorities. She was concerned that the local authority would not want to commission her to take action against them. Paul Newell confirmed that the services would have to be independent which would allow any failures of the system to be tackled. It was noted that whilst the LSC could provide figures on how much is spent and for specific types of advice, it could not give reasons as to why it had been spent the way in which it had. Strategic action was therefore required to get to the root causes of problems and to achieve better, integrated services for clients, where providers of services are specialists in their field.

Fran Targett commented that there was a need to ensure services are better, not just better integrated.

Paul Newell confirmed there was a need to know what resources were available.

	<p>Only 85% of the new matter starts issued by the LSC had been used up. Not for profit organisations (NFPs) had been provided with additional hours, but it had not been specific in which category of law these should be used. The biggest challenge being faced was how the transition to the commissioning of services was made.</p> <p>Paul Newell reported that discussions were ongoing with the Solicitors Regulatory Authority (SRA) to explore whether consortia bids could be made for future contracts. The present position meant that there were implications on what solicitors were allowed to do and the LSC was not accepting consortia bids at the present time.</p> <p>Fran Targett commented that as the current unified contract for civil legal aid providers expires in March 2010, providers would need to know the position before that time. Current procurement law meant that providers were being driven to single contracts. Paul Newell agreed that any issues would need to be resolved before then to enable CLACs and CLANs to move forward.</p> <p>Fran Targett queried whether the CLAN that was being set up in Cornwall would be used as a model to be replicated in Wales. Tiana Williams confirmed that what was done in Wales would probably be very different, although lessons would be learnt from all other Community Legal Advice Services that had been established or in development. Paul Newell commented that no two plans would be the same as it would be dependant upon the geography and existing supplier base. The aim was to have larger suppliers and less of them, but this would take time to achieve. He also confirmed that formalised referral would form part of the contract.</p> <p>Gareth Moss confirmed that Bridgend Council were engaging as there were gaps in provision and they were keen to address these.</p> <p>Julie Burton commented that the situation was not an attractive one for those choosing a career in legal aid work. Tom Jones confirmed that one hundred and fifty new training grants were now available to organisations committed to legal aid work. The grant would help to support them in recruiting and training the next generation of legal aid lawyers.</p> <p>Graham Benfield questioned whether all advice services would be commissioned. Paul Newell confirmed that this was entirely a matter for the local authorities.</p>	
<p>3.</p>	<p>Lunch Break</p>	
<p>4.</p>	<p>Update/discussion:</p>	

	<p>Welsh Assembly Government's Financial Inclusion Strategy</p> <p>Lynne Schofield provided an update on the Welsh Assembly Government's work on producing a Financial Inclusion Strategy for Wales. The Minister for Social Justice and Local Government had asked officials to devise a strategy focusing on five core themes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to mainstream financial services; • Financial capability/literacy; • Accessible financial and debt advice; • Income maximisation; • Affordable credit loans <p>The key actions included a rollout of free-to-use ATMs by high street banks, extra help for pensioners with council tax payments and the implementation of a Child Trust Fund Welsh premium. There was to be an integrated approach to income maximisation to ensure people took up the benefits to which they were entitled, the co-ordination of comprehensive advice services, the introduction of financial literacy education in schools and the establishment of a Welsh Unit for Financial Education. There would be support for the further development and diversification of credit unions, along with influencing UK Government policy on financial inclusion and over-indebtedness. A Welsh Financial Inclusion Steering Group was in the process of being set up in order to oversee the implementation of the Strategy across the Assembly Government, public and third sectors and other agencies.</p> <p>Cemlyn Williams queried whether it was possible to promote access to credit unions through schools. Lynne Schofield confirmed that the Wales Co-operative Centre could help with this, but that it would have to be on a local level. It was also confirmed that there was money available from the Welsh Assembly Government to do this.</p>	
<p>5</p>	<p>Update/discussion</p> <p>Community Legal Advice (CLA)</p> <p>Nic Johanson gave an update on Community Legal Advice (CLA), the national helpline and website provided by the Legal Services Commission. CLA was a gateway to obtaining the right information and advice at the right time. The website contained links to other advice providers and contained a search facility for local solicitors or advice services. Free information leaflets could be downloaded on a wide range of topics. There was also a legal aid eligibility calculator. For those entitled to legal aid, advice could be given over the telephone for problems with benefits and tax credits, employment, education, housing and debt. Lines were open from 9am to 6.30pm Monday to Friday and calls cost 4p per minute from a landline, and calls from a mobile would usually cost more. From the end of March 2008, an online appointment making system would be piloted in three areas: Cornwall, the North East and Wales. The role out for South Wales was 21st July and the role out for North Wales would be the</p>	

	<p>28th July. The system would offer and book callers an appointment with a face-to-face advisor in their area.</p> <p>Julie Burton questioned whether people had to send in proof of their income in order to get advice. Nic Johanson was unsure of the procedure and agreed to clarify the position.</p> <p>A discussion took place around existing contracts that currently do not enable advice to be provided over the telephone, which providers felt would put them at an unfair disadvantage over CLA. It was also questioned whether solicitors should be able to claim for advising clients over the telephone that there was no claim to answer, as it appeared through the CLA triage system that this was being taken into account. Julie Burton queried whether the service offered by CLA was on a fixed fee basis. Nic Johanson confirmed that it was a different contract.</p> <p>Paul Newell confirmed that the contracts were managed centrally and agreed to take the questions away in order to get the answers.</p> <p>Nic Johanson reported that there were figures for national usage of the service along with figures for Wales. There were however no figures to show any regional variations. Tom Jones commented that rural areas were not necessarily using the service more and a lot depended on how actively it was being marketed.</p>	
6	Break	
7	<p>Discussion:</p> <p>Provider Engagement</p> <p>Fran Targett indicated that the purpose of this item was to obtain a clear understanding of the value of provider engagement meetings. Provider representatives were now included as Committee representatives, and Provider Reference Groups and various Policy stakeholder groups across Civil Policy had been established.</p> <p>Kay Powell suggested that providers still needed to have a role and that there was also a need to bring more people in. Paul Newell commented that the consultation event held for the Vale of Glamorgan, Bridgend and Cardiff provided a useful mechanism for engagement and was well attended by a large number of providers.</p> <p>Following discussions, it was agreed that the position would be reviewed in another six months time.</p>	
	Close of Meeting	

	Tom thanked everyone for their attendance at the meeting.	
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