

Legal Help New Matter Starts 2010-11

New Matter Starts Allocation for Civil Legal Aid (29th January 2010)

In Summer 2009, the Legal Services Commission published draft procurement plans that set out the New Matter Starts (NMS) available for Social Welfare Law (SWL) and Family services in each of the 134 procurement areas in England and Wales for the 2010/11 financial year.

As a result of our decision to extend the current civil contract by six months, we committed to review and update the procurement plans to ensure that decisions were taken on the most accurate and up-to-date information. We have undertaken this review and are now in a position to confirm the NMS available for civil legal aid services for the 2010/11 financial year. We expect spend to be over £200m and to cover over a million acts of assistance in this period.

Last year, in response to the economic downturn, we increased the number of cases funded of initial civil advice and assistance in areas like debt and housing to over 1 million – a record amount. The LSC also allocated cases in areas where clients had previously found services hard to access.

In the current economic climate, it is more important than ever that those most at risk of social and economic disadvantage are able to access early legal advice.

However, as with all public bodies, we have a clear responsibility to work within a fixed budget and provide value for taxpayers' money. We remain committed to using these resources to help as many people as possible to access legal advice.

Procurement Plans

We will continue to target resources to the areas of highest priority need, but this must be balanced with maintaining access to services in areas where demand levels are already high.

For this reason, we have revised our approach to the allocation of NMS to procurement areas from October 2010. However, we still aim to fund a million cases of initial civil advice and assistance in 2009/10.

In the areas where spending has been lower than predicted by indicators of need, we will increase spending by allocating 10% more than this year's usage. We believe that will benefit those most in need.

In those areas where spending has been above what indicators of need would suggest is necessary, we will make allocations broadly in line with the level of usage this year. Although less than last year's allocations, this should enable those areas to continue at much the same level as at present if providers use their allocations in full. In addition, we will continue to make adjustments through individual schedules to cope with fluctuations in demand and emerging trends as these arise.

This approach represents the national position. As discussed with representative bodies, there will be local variations to individual plans to ensure enough matter starts are made available to maintain viable contracts.

We intend to start to publish plans from 29 January 2010.

Provider Schedules April-October 2010

For those organisations that currently hold civil legal aid contracts, we will shortly be issuing NMS allocations for the period April-October 2010, i.e until the new contract starts. Those allocations will, on average, be the same as current usage rates, although of course allocations will vary from provider to provider. This should allow the same level of service as is currently available.

Dates for SWL and Family tender rounds

In our [announcement](#) of 21st October 2009, we indicated that civil bid rounds for all non-Immigration work would start in the week beginning 8th February.

A fuller timetable will be published on our website today. We are now planning to stagger the launch of tender processes for other civil work with tender rounds for Family and Social Welfare Law starting in the week beginning 22nd February and remaining open for seven weeks. We will notify organisations that do not pass pre-qualification or essential criteria before notifying providers of the outcome of the selection process - with notification and contract offers being made in June, following assessment of selection criteria.

The tender round for Mental Health work has been advertised and will start on 10th February and for Low Volume Categories in early March. These tender rounds will also be open for seven weeks.

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