

# Legal Services Commission

## Complex Crime Unit: January 2009

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Welcome to the first edition of the Complex Crime Unit newsletter. The purpose of this newsletter is to update you regarding any changes to work in the Office and to provide you with what we hope is useful information on our audit processes.

We would be very grateful if you would please circulate this leaflet around all of your legal aid fee-earners. We hope to provide this information regularly and would greatly appreciate any comments you have on its usefulness to you.

### Who's who at the CCU

- Head of Complex Crime Unit - Nigel Field. Responsible for the overall management of all four offices in London, Liverpool, Leeds and Birmingham.
- Operations Manager - Robert Heard. Responsible for project management within the Unit, provision of management information, and ensuring consistency of approach to all VHCC work carried out across all four offices.
- Regional Manager - Martine Dunn. Responsible for any HR matters, training and recruitment for the Liverpool and Leeds Unit.
- Snr Legal Advisor - Francesca Weisman - & Jnr Legal Advisor - Helen Rutherford. Responsible for providing legal advice for contract managers and assisting contract managers in understanding cases from a defence practitioner's perspective.
- Senior Contract Managers – London Unit : 2. Birmingham Unit :1 Liverpool Unit: 2, Leeds Unit – 1.
- Contract Managers – London Unit – 10, Birmingham Unit – 3, Liverpool Unit – 7.
- Contract Support Team (CST) – 14 across all sites.

### Settlement Dates 2009

The settlement runs for the first 3 months of 2009 are as follows:-

**Friday 2<sup>nd</sup> January 2009**  
**Friday 16<sup>th</sup> January 2009**  
**Friday 6<sup>th</sup> February 2009**  
**Friday 20<sup>th</sup> February 2009**  
**Friday 6<sup>th</sup> March 2009**  
**Friday 20<sup>th</sup> March 2009**

Payment should be received in your account by the following Thursday.

### Important hourly rates information

You may or may not already be aware that from 13th November 2008 there was a change in hourly rates of pay for VHCCs panel cases. The new rates are payable for all work carried out subsequent to the above date. For further information on the new rates and how they may potentially impact upon your auditing process please click on the following:  
[http://www.legalservices.gov.uk/criminal/contracting/rates\\_of\\_pav.asp](http://www.legalservices.gov.uk/criminal/contracting/rates_of_pav.asp)

### Adding/removing panel litigators

VHCC Panel members are reminded that you must notify the Complex Crime Unit whenever changes are made to your team of litigators. You may add and remove as many litigators as you wish during the Panel contract period, provided that after any changes made there is still one grade A litigator with VHCC experience **and** at least 50% of your litigators have experience of VHCCs. This includes the experienced grade A litigator.

If you intend to add or remove a litigator, you should contact your contract manager with details, giving if possible the reasons for removal. If you are adding an inexperienced litigator, you must confirm with your contract manager that the balance of experience in your team is not affected. If you are adding a litigator with VHCC experience, you must provide supporting evidence of their experience for the Unit to make an assessment.

Please refer to section 1 on page 3 of the Panel application form for further information on the definition of "experience"  
[http://www.legalservices.gov.uk/docs/cds\\_main/vhcc\\_panel\\_app\\_form.doc](http://www.legalservices.gov.uk/docs/cds_main/vhcc_panel_app_form.doc). For additions to the defence team the Qualifying Period is defined as 3 years prior to the addition of the litigator to the team.

## VAT

If counsel are VAT registered, we need to know their VAT number. If clerks provide us with this information, it will go some way to reducing late payments.

Stand-in counsel should provide Barrister Acceptance forms (pre-panel cases only) –which include VAT numbers – before or when they submit their claims. Fee-notes alone will not suffice.

The recent changes in VAT will affect some payments. For stage work, VAT levels will be determined by the stage end date. For stages ending on the 30<sup>th</sup> November 2008 or before, there will be no change. However, where stages end on or after 1<sup>st</sup> December 2008, the new rate of 15% will be applied.

## CST top tips (pre-electronic spreadsheet claims)

Claims for work undertaken in VHCCs are submitted in a variety of formats to the unit and, occasionally, can be unwieldy and time consuming to process. In a bid to ensure as much consistency as possible between claims from our suppliers, and improve the efficiency of the auditing process, we thought it would be a good idea to take the opportunity to suggest some useful tips regarding the submission of bills to the Unit.

### General Tips:

- Please attempt to avoid handwritten claims, it is not always completely clear what is being claimed.
- Please be consistent in terms of time-recording. If times are being recorded in decimals, please try to stick to this format throughout the claim. Likewise, if times are being recorded in terms of hours and minutes, or purely minutes, or units, please try to stick to this format throughout the claim in order to avoid any confusion.
- All disbursements claimed for items £10 or over must be evidenced. Please provide copies of supporting invoices, receipts, vouchers, a bank statement or grants of prior authority if claiming for large disbursements. Please also attach these to the attendance note for the relevant task number and, if possible, provide a schedule of disbursements if many are being claimed.

## New Electronic Stage 0 and task lists

Further to the implementation of the new VHCC contracting scheme, implemented from 14<sup>th</sup> January 2008, there have been some corresponding changes to the way these cases will be billed and audited. After a pilot scheme was successfully carried out, the changes were recently rolled out nationwide and affect all cases where the grant of representation is on or after 14<sup>th</sup> January 2008.

The principal change to the current audit procedure is the introduction of electronic billing forms designed to replace the traditional task list, with the aim of improving the efficiency of the current auditing process. These spreadsheets will be provided upon the contracting of a qualifying case. Upon submitting future pre-contract bills you will be required to enter all work being claimed onto appropriate areas of the spreadsheet. Upon submitting future Stage bills you will be required to produce a reconciled task list (showing the agreed hours at each grade against the hours claimed at each grade). In each case, these electronic documents will be supported by the submission of the relevant attendance notes or work-logs (as is currently the case).

Detailed guidance is currently available to assist practitioners when using the new forms – please contact your Contract Manager for details. Similarly, if you have any queries that are not address by the guidance, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Meanwhile, here are some pointers that may assist:

Complete all relevant aspects of the form.

- Bills for solicitor advocates must be submitted alongside the instructing solicitors bill, on the appropriate worksheet.
- Bills for junior and leading junior counsel must be submitted together.
- Ensure that all data entered is in a decimalised form (i.e. 1 hour 30 minutes equals 1.5 hours).
- Once the data has been entered, the reconciliation sheet and VHCC5 may not reflect the payment being claimed. This is quite usual, as they are dependant on the information inputted by the auditors. No attempt should be made to over-write the figures on these forms.

If your bill includes work that both pre-dates and post-dates 13<sup>th</sup> November 2008, please inform your Contract Manager as separate spreadsheets will be required in order to take into account the change in rates, which occurred on 13<sup>th</sup> November

## E-mail us your thoughts

We hope you have found this newsletter flyer informative however if you have any suggestions on what you wish the newsletter to cover in future additions please e-mail us at [ccu@legalservices.gov.uk](mailto:ccu@legalservices.gov.uk) . We regret that we cannot accept general queries not related to the newsletter via this address.