

## **Final fixed fee scheme for police station work**

The LSC has announced the future shape of police station criminal defence services, after consulting with criminal defence solicitors and representative groups.

Changes to police station arrangements are part of a package of legal aid reforms that are designed to benefit clients by ensuring that they receive the high quality legal advice they are entitled to, benefit criminal defence service providers by allowing them to plan their business with greater confidence and benefit taxpayers by ensuring that public funds are spent in the most cost effective way.

The LSC will be introducing fixed fees to control legal aid costs for representing clients in police stations. These fees will be based on a 'swings and roundabouts' basis – some cases will take less time to complete and some more. Over a period of time these should balance out.

However, the LSC has always recognised that exceptional cases do occur, so where a case reaches a threshold set at three times the average case cost, the LSC will pay providers at hourly rates for work undertaken beyond this threshold.

As with fees for magistrates' court work, the LSC has identified the opportunity for savings through greater efficiency in a number of urban areas. However, overall the fees will benefit the majority of firms who undertake police station work.

The LSC will also be modifying a small number of duty solicitor schemes, mainly in rural areas. This reflects the fact that in a number of areas there are clear advantages in altering schemes to better reflect police and court work flows e.g. Cheshire constabulary have moved from a large number of small facilities to three purpose built custody units. The new schemes now reflect the way in which police carry out work on the ground. The LSC has decided not to go ahead at present with larger schemes which in present circumstances would tend only to raise costs.

The LSC is also launching a further consultation on how best to construct police station duty rotas from October 2007 until the introduction of best value tendering in October 2008. The consultation can be found on the LSC's website ([www.legalservices.gov.uk](http://www.legalservices.gov.uk)).

In order to assess the likely relationship between a minimum contract threshold and the services being delivered, the LSC will delay any decision on the introduction of a minimum contract size. This will allow us to take on board consultation views on slot allocation and to have finalised the future scheme.

Derek Hill, Director of the Criminal Defence Service, said: "The Legal Services Commission is introducing these reforms to ensure the sustainable future of criminal and civil legal aid services in England and Wales.

"The reforms will produce improved services for clients, better value for taxpayers and more certainty for criminal defence solicitors. The LSC believes that these are important steps to take in order to help service providers make the transition to best value tendering, based on quality, capacity and price in October 2008.

"I encourage interested parties with views on how best to construct police station duty rotas from October 2007 to respond to our consultation on duty solicitor slot allocation which is being launched today."