

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE CRIMINAL CONTRACT CONSULTATIVE GROUP:
24 September 2003**

Present: Tim Colliou (Legal Services Commission), Richard Collins (Legal Services Commission), Katherine Pears (Legal Services Commission); Greg Lewis (Law Society), Rodney Warren (Law Society), Steve Wedd (CLSA).

Apologies: Shaun Murphy (LAPG)

Proposed Changes to General Criminal Contract

1. The planned date for the implementation of changes was 5 January 2004. It was hoped that an announcement could be made by the end of October. It was likely that the proposals on Very High Cost Criminal Cases would be implemented. The Commission was concerned that they are not meeting their targets in contracting VHCC. Many cases are reported too late to be contracted. There is speculation that firms are referring cases late deliberately to avoid contracting. The Commission's VHCC unit has now been instructed to accept all cases no matter how late they are referred, unless the trial has actually commenced. There will also be stronger sanctions against firms who refer late. The Commission will be writing to practitioners warning against late reporting.
2. The Society felt that part of the problem was that practitioners think the VHCC Unit is like the Serious Fraud Panel and that cases will be taken off them if they are reported. There are also problems in defining when a case amounts to serious fraud. The Commission agreed to send an information sheet to practitioners about the role of the VHCC unit.
3. The proposed changes to Recovery of Defence Costs Orders were also likely to be implemented, but a decision still needed to be reached on whether to make the scheme voluntary or compulsory on judges.
4. The other proposed changes on the restriction of police station advice, post charge advice and assistance, court duty work and early first hearings were still being considered by ministers.
5. The Commission acknowledged that the proposed changes to duty and own solicitor work in the police station had proved unpopular with consultees

Any Other Business

- 13 An issue was raised regarding the North West London duty solicitor scheme, and the possibility of more flexibility being introduced into the scheme. The Commission confirmed that this question would be passed to John Sirodcar.
- 14 Concerns were raised that in the Manchester region, certain firms were being 'targeted' by the Commission's regional office. It was suggested that this may simply be due to the high value of work, which may have caused the firm concerned to appear on the 'risk criteria' list.
- 15 It was announced that a paper was to be issued soon by LCCSA, regarding police station agencies.

Date of Next Meeting: Tuesday 14 October, at 3.00pm at the Legal Services Commission.