

Report to ACL LAG following LAA Civil Contract Consultative Group meeting on 23/11/17 at The Law Society

Our Chairman accompanied by committee member Bob Baker attended at the above meeting. Points to note arising from the meeting: -

Data Visualisation Tool (DVT)

There was a presentation about the Legal Aid Statistics, and in particular the new DVT which is essentially a 'build your own graph or table' tool using the Legal Aid statistics compiled by the independent statistics team which is independent of the LAA. The DVT allows greater flexibility and choice on how the statistics can be viewed, rather than being restricted to the tables and charts which were previously given in the quarterly statistics bulletins. A copy of the presentation is attached and includes contact details for the Legal Aid Statistics Team.

The DVT can be found on the Tableau Public page [here](#). For anyone interested in delving deeper into the data that makes up the statistical information that is published on the [Legal Aid Statistics Pages](#). (Tableau Public is an external free site, and thus there is a slight delay in reloading the DVT pages).

The statistics themselves are published every quarter with the fourth release (January-March) published in June being a bumper edition that includes more 'niche area' statistics. The index to the data statistic tables details what is and is not covered and why. The new bulletin that accompanies the quarterly releases is now much less detailed than before and includes 3 icons shortcutting to the DVT, User Guide and the actual statistic tables:



Data visualisation:
Click for tool allowing user-defined charts and tables.



User Guide:
Click for document giving definitions and explanations.



Tables:
Click for tables of figures.

We are amazed by the material that can be discovered behind the data published and clearly shows the massive drop off in cases after the introduction of LASPO. The tool enables the user to bare down the data to obtain information specific to requirements.

Tender update

Tenders for the 2018 standard civil contracts have all been received and are being "cleansed" currently before notifications are sent out next year. Extension letters are being sent out in relation to the existing contracts to extend them until 31 August 2018 (except the 2015 contract which is being terminated a month early) to align their end dates for all areas to start under the single 2018 contract on 01 September 2018. This will be the first time since 2010 that all civil face-to-face services are under a single contract.

Due to the length of time the 2010 (Family Mediation) and 2013 (Family, Housing and Immigration) contracts have been running they cannot be automatically extended by the LAA, and offer letters for extension from 31 March 2018 to 31 August 2018 must be made to these providers. Consequently, all providers under these contracts **must** complete and return their acceptances slips **by 06 December 2017** (scan and email is acceptable). **Providers who fail to do this will be deemed not to have accepted the extension and their contracts will end on 31 March 2018 with no new contract beginning for another 6 months.**

New providers are required for housing possession court duty solicitor contracts in Milton Keynes, Blackpool and Preston. A new provider for housing and debt in Buckingham is required. The current providers in these areas are withdrawing on 30 November 2017.

Lambeth County Court Closure

Being the busiest housing possession court in the jurisdiction, the confusion caused since the planned closure of Lambeth County Court (with court staff being told the day before planned closure on 22 September that the court was not in fact closing until the end of that month), and subsequent remaining question of where the housing possession lists would be heard, and other cases transferred to, this has had a significant impact on legal aid providers in the area. A letter to court users sent the day after the CCCG meeting confirmed that Lambeth County Court will now close on 22 December 2017 and cases (including housing possession cases) will be moving to Clerkenwell and Shoreditch County Court. An event for professional court users to ask questions is being held at 6pm Tuesday 5 December at Clerkenwell and Shoreditch County Court.

Contact with Customer Care at the LAA

The LAA have engaged The Behavioural Insights Team to carry out research as to the experiences of contact with Customer Care. We were impressed with the presentation given by a member of this organisation. Volunteers will be sought to provide their experience of using the facility during December/early January. A separate communication will be coming out about this in due course and it is hoped that members of our group will actively put themselves forward to provide their experiences good or bad to assist in this research.

CCMS update

CCMS is to be amended this coming weekend as to Merits and users should find the new screens helpful on this issue. The changes all stem from feedback from providers, in particular the LAPG survey carried out earlier this year which LAG members were invited to participate in, so it is worth making your views known about how things are working or not as the case may be.

There is more importantly for our group a review of the billing processes and a meeting is expected to discuss this the week commencing 27 November, focussing mainly on the LAPG survey results about problems with the billing processes. We anticipate an invite to this meeting and further details will be published on this progress.

Exceptional Case Funding

This remains an area of LAA business that is still subject to long delays across the process of ECF. It is vital that if there is real and valid urgency in the need for ECF that this is stated in full on the first part of the CCMS or paper application form. It is no good to just say "please see attached papers for reasons of urgency" or words to this effect. The triage process takes place every day and only really urgent cases receive attention if it appears on the face of the papers to be a genuine urgency. Some guidance may be issued in due course to assist providers to identify true and valid urgency to assist to speed up such cases.

The Volume of immigration cases under ECF has substantially increased recently and the other types of work covered by ECF – e.g. inquests and family – remain at about the same levels as before.

LAA recoupments

It was reported that there are still problems for some providers arising from the recoupment of costs process and is an area to be watched to avoid long periods of non-payment by the LAA pending the recoupments being satisfied in the balancing account process.