

**Advice Sector Panel Meeting – 2nd October 2018**

**JUSTICE**

**Minutes**

<b>Attendees</b>	<b>Organisation</b>
Lindsey Poole	Chair, Advice Services Alliance
Karen Ashton	Central England Law Centres
Chilli Reid	Advice UK
Rachel Russell	Advice Services Alliance (observer)
Dawn Draper	Advice Services Alliance (observer)
Heidi Bancroft	Secretary to the AJC, JUSTICE
<b>Apologies</b>	<b>Organisation</b>
Michael Reed	Free Representation Unit
Jo Hickman	Public Law Project
Ken Butler	Disability Rights
John Edwards	Age UK
Mathew Cunningham	Shelter
James Kenrick	Youth Access
Claire Blades	Citizens Advice

**1. Welcome and Introductions**

LP welcomed attendees to the first meeting of the Advice Sector Panel.

**2. Background to the Administrative Justice Council**

HB gave some background on the Administrative Justice Council (AJC). There was a discussion on the role the Advice Panel could play, and how it linked into the work of the other panels. CR stated that although they were a small panel they could provide an abundance of resources. CR stated that balance was important and that there should be enough influence in the smaller panels to promote change.

**3. Terms of reference for the group**

HB agreed to draft a terms of reference for the panel. KA stressed that there was a need to have a unique perspective for this panel. She thought there was a missing legal aid practitioner perspective. There was a discussion about where the Legal Aid Practitioners Group (LAPG) may fit in the Council. They agreed that would be happy for the LAPG to be added to their panel. The group discussed the need to get the scope right from the beginning.

The group discussed whether they should focus on interests in the sector and ensuring that all client groups were represented in the process. It was decided that they would be an advisory group but it may be something they needed to be discussed at a later stage.

**Action** – HB to draft a terms of reference and circulate to the panel for comments.

#### **4. Membership**

LP informed the panel that the relevant members from the full Council had been invited to join the panel. She suggested widening the membership and had come up with an initial list of other potential organisations to invite.

There was a discussion about which areas should be covered in the membership. The panel identified the following areas: disability; immigration; mental health; social security; debt; housing; care (including young people); education and schools. KA suggested that it would be beneficial to have someone with administrative justice experience, working with local authorities, as it was entirely different from central government.

It was agreed that some organisations may not need to be on the panel but could attend if there was a particular topic. HB informed the panel that as the AJC was UK wide body, they should consider widening the membership to cover Northern Ireland, Wales and Scotland. LP mentioned that travel expenses could cause a problem with this, however HB added that they had could provide conference calling to make it easier for people to participate.

**Action** – a) CR to send details of schools and education advice contact to HB, b) Panel to send further recommendations to HB.

#### **5. Relationship to the AJC, Steering Group and other panels (and how to organise to get the maximum input)**

The panel discussed how they could link with the other panels. LP mentioned that the Academic Panel might be useful for providing them with research. KA thought that the panels should cross-over and that the Advice Sector Panel could provide evidence to the other panels on poor government decision-making.

#### **6. Feedback on issues for the Steering Group (Flagging issues)**

The panel discussed issues to feed back to the Steering Group:

- a) DWP funding that had recently awarded to the Citizens Advice (CA) to assist people with their universal credit claims. LP was interested to find out how the CA being involved would help in terms of the DWP decision-making process. She was also concerned that it wouldn't have a wide coverage. CR informed the panel that AdviceUK had major concerns that the decision to award CITA £39 million came as a complete surprise and has implications for the rest of the sector that will not be receiving DWP funding.
- b) On-line SSSCS1 form – HB informed the panel that Diane Sechi from the Pro Bono Panel had met HMCTS to discuss the roll-out of the online form, which had now been rolled out nationally. There hadn't been much uptake in using the new online form and they had discussed what the reasons for this could be. Diane had asked whether the panel could provide information, from front-line agencies, on their experience of assisting people to fill out the form. The panel raised the issue of lack of resources to help people fill out the form, ongoing help that users need and that filling out the form was not an advice free zone.
- c) Insufficient professionals and the lack of public law specialists was a huge barrier to access. Cases that had been taken out of scope for legal aid, and for the areas that were in scope,

remuneration was so low that that for many private practices it wasn't sustainable. They often applied for local authority funding which was harder to access.

- d) Inefficiencies in local government authorities. There were a few local authorities who were receptive to changing the way they operate and learning best practice from other local authorities.
- e) Local ombudsman taking on individual cases and giving systemic remedies. Repetitiveness in courts should spark better decision making and that courts could give local government ombudsman individual cases to investigate and provide a systemic remedy.

## **7. Website Content**

HB gave an update on the AJC website. It was currently being developed and a first version should be ready shortly. Each panel would have their own page and she welcomed suggestions on the content for their page. Once HB receives the website template, she would present it to the panels for consideration.

**Action** – HB to circulate the first version of the website.

## **8. Date of next meeting**

The next meeting will take place on the 4th of December 2018.

Heidi Bancroft  
Secretary to the AJC