

AJC Advice Sector Panel Meeting

2pm – 4pm, 3 December 2019

Millbank Tower, Westminster, London

MINUTES

Attendees:

Lindsey Poole (Advice Services Alliance)	Claire Blades (Citizens Advice)
Rebecca Wilkie (Access to Justice Fdn)	Lisa Wintersteiger (Law for Life)
Andrew Medlock (PHSO)	Abi Adams (Oxford University) (by phone)
Karen Kirk (JustRight Scotland)	Chris Minnoch (Legal Aid Practitioners Group)
David Hawkes (AdviceUK)	Alex Walters (JUSTICE) for agenda item 4 (b).
Eileen Pereira (Support Through Court)	Diane Sechi (Simmons & Simmons)
Sally Hunt (AJC and JUSTICE)	Heidi Bancroft (AJC)
Emily Potts (JUSTICE)	

Apologies:

Chilli Reid (AdviceUK)	Karen Ashton (Law Centres Federation)
Sara Lomri (PLP)	Kari Gerstheimer (Mencap)

1. Minutes from last meeting

Lindsey Poole (LP) welcomed attendees and specifically those who were new to the Panel – Karen Kirk from JustRight Scotland and David Hawke from AdviceUK who was standing in for Chilli Reid.

The Minutes from the last meeting in September were approved with no comments.

Heidi Bancroft (HB) went through the action points from the previous meeting.

2. Update from the Chair

LP reported on a meeting she had had with Linda Mulcahy, Professor of Socio-Legal Studies and Christopher Hodges (Professor of Justice Systems, and member of the AJC Academic Panel). Chris had just published a book on administrative justice procedures with recommendations on how this area of law could be improved. He was very interested in the work of the Panel, including the possibility of providing research.

The £36 million given to DWP in the last spending round had been discussed at our previous meeting. It would not be received by the Department until early next year, and it had yet to be decided what it would be used for. The DWP had also shown some interest in joining the AJC.

Actions: Members to contact LP if they wanted to be put in touch with Chris or Nuffield.

3. Ombudsman and Tribunals Familiarisation Workshop Update

HB provided feedback from this recent AJC Academic Panel event. The aim was to open conversations between the two sectors, increase understanding of respective work, and identify ways in which they could work together.

4. DWP lesson learning project

a. Update from Pro Bono Economics Unit

LP had spoken to the Chief Economist at the Pro Bono Economics Unit regarding the DWP lesson learning project and its outcomes. They had access to Government sources of data, but more data may be needed from the panel. He had also shown some interest in the polluter pays mechanism. He would provide a proposal by late February.

b. Benefits Reform Working Party update – Alex Walters, JUSTICE

Alex Walters (AW) gave some background on the joint JUSTICE/AJC Benefits Reform Working Party. It would look at benefits holistically on an end to end basis. A background paper would be drafted in January and there would be a call for members to join the working party with the view of commencing at the end of February. They were looking for a Chair with an interest, expertise and passion for this area. Members interested in joining the working party or recommendations for members or chair to be sent to HB.

c. Funding: Esmée Fairbairn Foundation; Joseph Rowntree Foundation, Standard Life

HB asked members to send her any contacts in the above organisations as they would be approached for funding for the working party.

Actions: 1) LP to report back on Pro Bono Economist's proposal; 2) Members with any insight into NAO project on benefits to contact HB; 3) DH to provide NAO contact name to LP/HB; 4) Recommendations of members or Chair for Benefits Working Party to be sent to HB; and 4) LW, LP and AK to forward contact details to HB for respective organisations.

5. Social Security Appeal Settlement Offers – Lisa Wintersteiger, Law For Life

Lisa Wintersteiger (LW) gave a brief background to this project – Law for Life had been made aware that DWP were making telephone contact with appellants once they had appealed an unsuccessful mandatory reconsideration. LW urged members to complete the survey: <https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/SFVXXKZ>.

Andrew Medlock (AM) thought that this would be of interest to the Parliamentary and Health Ombudsman.

HB would engage with Sarah Nason, a member of the AJC Academic Panel, who had led a mapping administrative justice project in Wales to discuss signposting the public to specific complaints pathways, which could be a useful tool for advisers.

Action: LW will forward details of the survey outcomes to AM, and report back to the Panel with requests for any further assistance she may require; and HB to engage with Sarah Nason.

6. Update on PHSO draft Complaints Standards Framework (Andrew Medlock, PHSO)

Andrew Medlock (AM) provided a brief background to the Framework: - PHSO were working with partners to strengthen frontline complaints handling and produce a unified vision of what good complaints handling looked like. The initial focus was on the NHS, but they had now initiated discussions as to how this could be applied across public services.

7. JustRight Scotland (Karen Kirk)

Karen Kirk (KK) introduced the work of JustRight Scotland, which was set up in 2017 by a group of human rights lawyers with the aim of creating a new collaborative social justice model. KK gave an overview of some of the projects which can be found on their website:

<https://www.justrightscotland.org.uk/>.

8. Update on Stakeholder Engagement Survey Report (Diane Sechi)

Diane Sechi (DS) confirmed the written report had been drafted and would be circulated to members of the academic and advice sector panels for comments.

Actions: Members to contact DS with suggestions on how to frame the responses to her open question; and DS to provide report to HB when finalised.

9. BAME organisations

LP explained that she was still keen to invite BAME organisations onto the Panel. HB provided a shortlist of three organisations and asked for further recommendations to be sent to her. DH suggested SH/HB speak to Chilli Reed of AdviceUK for recommendations.

Action: SH/HB to contact Chilli Reid.

10. AOB

EP explained that Support Through Court were going through a period of restructuring, with a reduction in court services in some areas.

AK reported that Z2K had increased their capacity to deal with disability tribunals. Panel members to contact Lucy Isaac for more information.

Action: Members to contact Lucy Isaac if they required assistance.