

The Governance Project

Briefing No. 1 – June 2008

The Governance Project is a new two year project developed jointly by Law Centres Federation (London) and AdviceUK (London). It aims to improve the skills and knowledge of trustees and not-for-profit company directors and to help them function well in a regulatory, policy and funding environment that is increasingly challenging. The project is funded by the Big Lottery

Whilst recognising that there is a large amount of training and published material available for Trustees and Management Committees in the not-for-profit sector, much of it is very general in nature. However, AdviceUK and Law Centres Federation have both been approached by their members for something more relevant to the day to day issues that Trustees of organisations providing legal advice services must contend with.

One strand of the project is to keep Trustees informed of the latest development in the advice sector, how those issues are likely to impact on their agencies and how to mitigate or avoid any potential disadvantages. To this end the Governance Project will be producing a series of briefing papers for trustees on governance related policy issues that affect advice agencies and Law Centres. The briefings will be produced and circulated by e-mail and made available on the Law Centres Federation and AdviceUK websites

In our first briefing we examine the Legal Services Commission's flagship policies on Integrated Social Welfare Law Services, commonly known as CLACs (Community Legal Advice Centres) and CLANs (Community Legal Advice Networks). The attached briefing, while originally prepared for The Law Centres Federation, is equally relevant to other independent advice agencies across the sector.



CLACs & CLANS

The Legal Services Commission is introducing a variety of new delivery models for legal advice and assistance, the most common of which are CLACs and CLANS.

These are referred to generically as 'Community Legal Advice Centres' or, 'Integrated Social Welfare Law Services' (ISWL).¹

The Legal Services Commission (LSC) state that Community Legal Advice Centres (CLACs) and Community Legal Advice Networks (CLANs) aim to:

- Enable people to protect their fundamental rights and sort out legal disputes
- tackle disadvantage and promote social inclusion
- Deliver legal advice services to local communities according to local needs and priorities
- Provide quality integrated legal advice services ranging from basic information to representation in court, which offer value for money and are supported by co-ordinated funding.

The LSC indicate their preference for partnership models in relation to:

- A CLAC - a single legal entity (although some services may be sub-contracted)
From a central office, along with outreach.
- A CLAN - a group of providers coming together and signing up to provide a shared services.

Each Centre and Network will provide as a minimum advice and representation in:

- Community care
- Debt
- Employment
- Family
- Housing
- Welfare benefits
- Any public law relating to these categories.

Immigration is not included as there are plans to issue regional and national contracts for immigration and asylum.

¹ The LSC's information on CLACs and CLANs is available at:
http://www.legalservices.gov.uk/civil/community_legal_advice_centres_and_networks.asp

The timetable

Several CLAC tenders have been completed and a preferred bidder identified

Location	Preferred bidder	Timescale
Derby	New Derby integrated Citizens Advice and Law Centre ²	
Gateshead	Gateshead CAB & 3 private practice solicitors firms	Opened 24 May 2007
Leicester	A4E & Howells Solicitors ³	
Portsmouth	NHAT and CAB	Due to start April 2008.
Hull	A4E	Due to start May 08

Statement on the Community Legal Advice Network in Cornwall

Cornwall County Council would like to inform all interested parties of a significant development in proposals for a Community Legal Advice Network (CLAN) in Cornwall.

Local service providers will be aware that extensive work has been undertaken to ensure that the development of a CLAN and the adopted approach was right for Cornwall. Interested parties have had the opportunity to shape the way the CLAN was being developed and have been involved at all possible stages.

A 'Stakeholder Event' was held in January 2008 which brought together advice providers from across the County to discuss the implementation of the CLAN. Draft versions of the service specification and the needs analysis were issued at this event. Feedback from this event and collated feedback on the documentation highlighted the threat service providers felt they would be under should they be exposed to an open tender process at this time. They believed that the sustainability of many vital advice services in Cornwall could be in potential jeopardy.

Based largely on that feedback, and taking into account the current major task of re-structuring Cornwall's local government landscape, (in which the voluntary sector has a significant interest), Cornwall County Council has

² See <http://www.citizensadviceandlawcentre.org/merger.html> for details of how this merger is operating

³ See <http://www.leicester.gov.uk/your-council--services/advice-and-benefits/legal-advice/community-legal> for tender documentation

decided to withdraw for the joint commissioning venture with the Legal Service Commission.

Building an integrated advice network is still high on the Council's agenda and it believes that there is still a need for such a mechanism in Cornwall. Moving forward, the Council wishes to emphasize its desire to work with all advice providers in the County to create and deliver a more seamless service to clients who are seeking advice and help.

It is our view that we need time to build such a network and encourage providers into a new dynamic way of delivering advice. Whilst there may be re-engagement with the Legal Service Commission in the future, it can only happen once this network has had time to develop and the threat to local providers has been dramatically reduced. It is therefore in everyone's best interests for the Council's co-ordinator to work with local advice providers to develop and build on the current level of advice provision and to ensure that a strong network is developed.

Should you have any queries regarding this statement please contact:

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