

Legal and Advice Sector Forum

Subgroup Overview

Ways of deploy and accessing services

Key points addressed

- The group started to map the needs of the sector over the immediate, mid and longer term.
- Existing resources were explored and mapped to the identified needs where possible. Barriers to use were also explored.
- New resources identified predominantly offerings of pro bono support which did not directly map against the needs of the sector at this time.

Access issues

- Local communities are strengthening their links in order to direct people in need to the right resources. We know people are getting through to services because numbers of those accessing centralised online information are increasing.
- There are clients that are not able to access services because of their vulnerabilities.
- The immediate priority is for frontline organisations to meet the increase in demand they are seeing for their services. Looking at new partnerships, including pro bono, will be explored when there is a more understanding of need.

Next Steps

- Continue to map the needs, experiences and concerns of the sector and to match these with any existing identified resources with input from frontline organisations.
- Organisations interested in then contributing resources can use this to identify areas of need and gaps in provision.
- The group will look at updating the MPs Guide to include information on points of access.
- Additional pro bono resources will be fed into the resources group for reference when the frontline is able to explore its use

Sustainability

Key points addressed

- The bulk of the immediate sustainability concerns are being felt by frontline services, with legal aid services being particularly challenged.
- Several emergency funding initiatives have been established; they are currently looking at emergency frontline funding but will move to address more longstanding sector sustainability issues.
- There is a lack of understanding around the sustainability challenges faced by the sector, there is a risk new funding initiatives may prop up organisations that were already unsustainable.

Next Steps

- Draw up a short, medium, and long-term matrix identifying needs and pre-existing information.
- Agree a how the group may best facilitate the sharing that information with the sector and other external colleagues who might have insights and examples on how to address some of our common issues and concerns.

Policy

Key points addressed

- While the announcement of a £750 million package to help support charities it is disappointing that there has been limited acknowledgement of the important role the legal and advice sectors play.
- Legal Aid practitioners are urgently in need of government clarification on operational issues and the support which will be offered to ensure the continuation of services.
- The legal and advice sectors have valuable insights into the issues faced by isolated and vulnerable groups and what is needed by way of support.

Next Steps

- Create a shared record of the different strands of policy work within the subgroup and the wider sector. This will include information on wider policy making opportunities and activities.
- Identify and prioritise key challenges and create a plan to address strategic issues and feed in priority points to the next Forum meeting.