**Meeting of Consultative Panel – 8th November, 2016**

**FLAC offices, 13 Lower Dorset Street, Dublin 1**

**Attendance:**

The following attended the meeting:

Mr John McDaid, Chief Executive, Chair of the Panel

Ms Sinead Harrison, Women’s Aid

Ms Shirley Coulter, Council of the Bar of Ireland

Mr Ciaran Finlay, FLAC

Ms Joan O’Mahony, Law Society and O’Mahony’s Solicitors

Ms Polly Phillimore, Director, Mediation Services

Ms Susan Shanahan, Citizens Information Board

Mr Noel Gorman, Legal Aid Board, Secretary

**Apologies:**

Mr Niall Murphy, Director of Civil Legal Aid

Andrea McDermott, AMEN

Katie McDermott, AIM Family Services

Freda McKittrick, Barnardos

Niamh Farrell, AMEN

Catherine Cosgrave, Immigrant Council

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|  | Item for discussion | Person responsible | Discussions | Actions/Decisions |
| 1 | Minutes of meeting of 12th July and matters arising | CEO  Secretary | Matters arising from the previous minutes were discussed.  There were three suggested changes to the draft minutes circulated from the previous Panel meeting in July. Subject to those changes the minutes were agreed and will be posted to the Board’s website. | Secretary |
| 2 | Service Delivery update | CEO | Mr McDaid informed the Panel that the Boards new website had gone live. It is expected that an on-line application will be available in the near future.  Mr Finlay said that the new website was an excellent, user friendly site.  The Panel was informed of an announcement by the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality regarding the appointment of a new Legal Aid Board with a term of office to end on 1st November 2021. Mr McDaid confirmed in a response to Ms O’Mahony that in keeping with Government policy, the appointments to the new Board were dealt with through the Public Appointments Service.  Mr McDaid informed the Panel that the number of people waiting for civil legal aid has decreased from 2,300 in January 2016 to 2,000 in October. Although it is encouraging to see a decrease in the numbers waiting it had been anticipated that this figure would have been lower. However the demand for legal services overall is 5% higher than at the same period last year.  The pilot private practitioner scheme for child care cases in the District Court continues in Dublin, Wexford and Donegal. However, whilst approval to establish the scheme on a permanent nationwide basis is in place the decision to proceed is delayed for budgetary reasons.  Concerns were expressed regarding the facilities in Chancery Street. Ms O’Mahony highlighted issues such as the lack of wifi and access / designated location for solicitors in court. Although the Courts Service is aware of these problems the matters need to be addressed as a matter of urgency. Mr McDaid confirmed that the Board’s Health and Safety Officer will shortly assess the facilities in Chancery Street.  Ms Harrison enquired if the Board would continue to have a solicitor on site in Dolphin House for matters relating to domestic violence. Mr McDaid said that this is no longer the case, however as required a legal aid certificate would issue to solicitors who are on the Private Practitioner panel. |  |
| 3 | Interagency scheme to assist persons facing repossession proceedings |  | Mr McDaid confirmed the launch in October of Abhaile, the Mortgage Arrears Resolution Service and that 283 vouchers had issued for legal advice to date.  Ms Shanahan said that duty solicitors were dealt with differently in court and that there was little harmony in the process around the country. Mr Finlay highlighted the fact that there is no duty solicitor currently based in Mayo (the duty solicitors covering Mayo are based in Sligo and Galway).  Ms O’Mahony suggested arranging a forum with the President of the Circuit Court to discuss matters arising in relation to a duty solicitor providing advice in court.  Ms Shanahan suggested undertaking case studies that could potentially feed into an arranged forum with the President of the Circuit Court.    Mr McDaid said that there are 33 solicitors currently on the panel. A further training course will take place for solicitors who are interested in joining the panel.  Ms O’Mahony suggested that solicitors in specific areas of the country should be invited to attend training in order to increase the range of representation in court. |  |
| 4 | Co-locating law centres and family mediation offices. | Mr McDaid | It was confirmed that the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality officially opened the Legal Aid Board’s first co-located law centre and family mediation office at Jervis House on 10th October. The co-location will give people the option to consider a facilitated negotiation between the parties themselves rather than an adversarial court process.  Ms Phillimore provided an overview of mediation services. It was noted that Tallaght, Dundalk and Kilkenny are under consideration as possible co- locations for law centre and mediation services in the future.  Ms Shanahan enquired if co-location was Board policy. Mr McDaid replied that co-location would be considered when property opportunities arose and where it made business, financial and operational sense but costs would need to be taken into consideration.  Ms Coulter asked if there were statistics available on the Boards’ website regarding the length of time that people are waiting for mediation services. Ms Phillimore said that statistics were not regularly updated on the website at that time. | Ms Coulter and Ms Phillimore to discuss the potential for advertising for mediation services. |
| 5 | International Protection Act 2015 / anticipating the ‘single procedure’ |  | Mr McDaid provided an overview of the single application procedure which will come into effect on 31st December 2016. The Government has provided extra funding to the Board for the administration of the single procedure.  Ms Shanahan said that pilot information sessions were organised by the Taskforce on Transitional Supports for persons granted status in direct provision.  Following the pilot sessions the Dept. of Justice and Equality requested that Citizens Information take the lead on rolling out further sessions on a national basis.  According to Mr Finlay tenders were invited for new direct provision centres recently. | . |
| 6 | Law Society – current issues |  | It is expected that the Mediation Bill will be brought to Cabinet early in the new year. Both solicitors and barristers will be obliged to consider using mediation to resolve disputes under this Bill.  Ms O’Mahony circulated details of a seminar hosted by South Dublin Collaborative Lawyers & Mediators on the Voice of the Child which is due to take place on 11th November 2016. | Ms O’Mahony and Ms Coulter to discuss. |
| 7 | Tour de Table |  | The possibility of a staff mobility partnership with the Citizens Information Board was discussed. Ms Shanahan said that there may be scope for the availability of interview rooms at certain times in CIC offices.  Ms Shanahan confirmed that Citizens Information would be undertaking an estate management strategy which would include an audit of premises and lease expiry dates.  Citizens Information Phone Service (CIPS) have a process of job swops and accredited training is offered by the Citizens Information Board.  FLAC’s 10th Annual Dave Ellis Lecture is due will take place on 7th December.  Women’s Aid will be launching 16 Days of Action - Opposing Violence against Women from 25th November to 10th December.  The Safe Ireland Summit 2016 will take place on 14-15 November.  The Voluntary Assistance Scheme of the Bar of Ireland is holding an Advocacy Training workshop on 24th November which is aimed at assisting charities.  The Professional Regulatory and Disciplinary Association (PRDBA) is due to host a Regulation of Social Workers event on 12th November. | Mr McDaid and Ms Shanahan to discuss exchanging lease expiry dates  Ms Shanahan to forward details to the Secretary  Ms Coulter to email details of both events to the Secretary |
| 8 | AOB |  | Mr McDaid informed the Panel that the Board’s Annual Report 2015 was cleared by the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality and that the report would be officially launched shortly. |  |
| 9 | Date of next meeting |  | The Panel’s next meeting will take place in the Board’s offices in Jervis House on Wednesday,8th March @ 11 am. |  |