

Eighth Progress Report of the Litigants in Person Reference Group

(Meeting 8th June 2021)

Introduction

At its inaugural meeting on 12th February 2019, it was agreed that a Progress Report summarising key decisions and activities of the Reference Group should be published following each meeting. This is the eighth of those reports and relates to the meeting held on 8th June 2021.

1. Seventh Progress Report

This was considered by the RG and, subject to minor amendment, approved and is to be added to the RG's website as soon as possible.

2. External Engagement

Shadow Family Justice Board

The Chair confirmed that she had attended the last Shadow Family Justice Board meeting on 17th May 2021 to provide an update on the work of the RG. Lady Chief Justice Keegan stated that she was keen to maintain engagement with the Group

Meeting with the Law Society

The meeting with the Law Society had not yet taken place. This will be followed up with the Law Society.

Consultation on Pro Bono Costs Orders

It was noted that a consultation on the introduction of Pro Bono Cost Orders would commence shortly and the RG will be copied into the relevant documentation.

NICTS Digital Strategy Consultation

The NICTS Digital Strategy Consultation document has not yet been launched. It was confirmed that it would be shared with the RG when available.

3. Modernisation Programme

Event to gather wider feedback on Modernisation Programme

The Chair confirmed that she had spoken with Law Centre NI about the possibility of hosting a webinar for the RG. The purpose of any such webinar would be to gather the views of litigants in person beyond the RG on the proposed Modernisation Programme and other current developments. The Law Centre is agreeable in principle subject to the RG providing more detail on the proposed format of any such event. It was agreed that further consideration of this and planning will be taken forward by a sub-group of the RG.

4. Future Training Events

Proposed webinar on recent changes in GB, to more effectively facilitate the participation of vulnerable witnesses in proceedings

It was agreed that it would be worth pursuing further an earlier proposal for a webinar here (based on a webinar that had already taken place in GB with Judge Barry Cotter) on recent changes designed to better facilitate the participation of vulnerable witnesses in court proceedings. It was agreed that the RG should aim to hold this in Spring 2022 if possible.

5. Website (Litigant Voice)

The RG expressed thanks for the work done to date by Ulster University (UU) concerning the new website and selected the new logo. The logo will be incorporated into the new website, which should go live very shortly.

It was agreed that expressions of interest should be invited through the website from personal litigants who would be interested in joining the RG when vacancies arise.

6. Website (UU Family Court Information)

The research team at UU have also developed a website as part of ongoing work on understanding how litigants in person participate in family court hearings. The website is live and includes links to relevant forms, a video on the alternatives to court proceedings, a jargon buster and details of how to get involved with the UU research project. Work is also ongoing on developing a 'pathfinder' to assist litigants

in person going through the justice system. The URL for the website is www.ulster.ac.uk/familycourtinfo and feedback is welcome