

Ninth Progress Report of the Litigants in Person Reference Group (Meeting 12th October 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 ninth of those reports and relates to the meeting held on 12th October 2021.

1. Eighth 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

The NICTS Digital Strategy Consultation

On 28th April 2021, the Chair had forwarded detailed written comments on digitisation to NICTS on behalf of the RG, following the RG's earlier discussions with NICTS (<https://www.litigant-voice.co.uk/>). At that time the Draft Digital Strategy Consultation was still pending. This has now been published. It was agreed that if RG members had any further comments to make (in addition to those of 28th April 2021) in response to the consultation, these should be sent to the Chair by 22nd October 2021.

Meeting with the Law Society

The meeting with the Law Society has not yet taken place. It was agreed that the Law Society representative would endeavour to move this forward on behalf of the RG.

3. Courts' Modernisation Programme

Recent developments on the Modernisation Programme

It was noted that the Civil Justice Modernisation Delivery Plan and the Early Resolution Action Plan has now been published (July 2021). An overview of the Plans and the steps underway to implement them was provided. DoJ confirmed that the Plans had been framed with litigants in person in mind. Current steps being taken include commissioning 3-D tours of courts to help preparation for court attendances, developing a parenting agreement template and information videos designed to demystify the legal process.

In response to a request from the DoJ, the RG confirmed that it would be very willing to review and provide feedback on some of the proposed new support tools and materials whilst in development. It was agreed that a subgroup of the RG would be formed to take this work forward.

Engagement with the Modernisation Team

It was noted that Karen Ward has been appointed as the new Chief Modernisation Officer for NICTS. It was agreed that it would be beneficial for the RG to meet her as early as possible in order to continue the discussions with NICTS, already commenced with Peter Luney.

The Chair was asked to issue an invitation to Ms Ward on behalf of the RG, to come along to the next meeting in January 2022.

4. Website (Litigant Voice)

It was noted that the Litigant Voice website is live and various documents have been transferred to it from the DOJ website. It was also noted that a link to the new website has been placed on the DOJ webpage.

In relation to the work being undertaken by the research team at UU, it was confirmed that work is ongoing on the pathfinder (an interactive tool to guide people to the information they need). Feedback from the RG would be beneficial when the is pathfinder is ready.

It was re-iterated that expressions of interest should continue to be invited through the website, from litigants in person interested in joining the RG when vacancies arise.