

## **Third Progress Report of the Litigants in Person Reference Group (Meeting 10<sup>th</sup> September 2019)**

### Introduction

At its inaugural meeting on 12<sup>th</sup> 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 third of those reports and relates to the meeting held on 10<sup>th</sup> September 2019

#### 1. Second Progress Report

The draft second Progress Report was considered by the Reference Group and subject to a small number of minor amendments, it was agreed that the Progress Report should be published as soon as possible on the NICTS website together with the Summary Report on the Laganside Courts' visit and the Summary Report on Digital Tools

#### 2. Reference Group LiP membership

- It was noted that, following the nomination of Mr Justice McAlinden to the Reference Group, another LiP member has joined the Group in order to ensure that the balance between LiP members and others is maintained.
- It was noted that a number of Reference Group members have been unable to attend meetings for a variety of reasons. It was agreed that as part of the review of the Reference Group's Terms of Reference (which is due to take place at the end of the Group's first year of operation) membership will be considered together with attendance and arrangements for meetings generally.

#### 3. Courts "Walk Through" follow-up

It was confirmed that the Laganside "Walk Through" report was forwarded to NICTS in July 2019. NICTS has confirmed that there are a number of suggestions in the report which might be progressed in the short term

(e.g. improvements to court signage) and that NICTS and DoJ will consider how these might be taken forward.

The remaining suggestions will be considered in the context of the wider NICTS review on Estates and ICT strategies. That review will then be the subject of consultation with interested parties and groups including the Reference Group. It was stressed to NICTS that Reference Group members would welcome the opportunity to engage constructively with NICTS at the point where any new suggestions for improvements or changes are at a *formative* stage.

NICTS is keen to get feedback on the courts outside Belfast. A “walk through” of Dungannon courthouse will take place on 4<sup>th</sup> October, followed by a summary report of observations to NICTS.

#### 4. Update and follow up on Digital Tools Summary Report

The summary report on potential use of digital tools to improve access to information and support for LiPs was forwarded to NICTS at the beginning of September 2019.

#### 5. Training

At the Reference Group meeting held on 21<sup>st</sup> May 2019 there had been an agreement, that the Reference Group would host a two day training event on Coping with Distressed Clients, targeted mainly at lawyers and other legal advisers. It was agreed to aim for dates early in the New Year so that there is sufficient time to plan and advertise the event widely in order to maximise attendance. Day 1 will be a workshop (previously run in GB) and Day 2, it is proposed, will involve a series of meetings/smaller group discussions with key stakeholders. Further consideration will be given to how best to use Day 2.

#### 6. Promoting understanding of the role of McKenzie Friends

There was a preliminary discussion on this item. However, it was recognised by all that this is a complex and wide-ranging subject requiring detailed consideration. It was therefore agreed that a sub-group will be convened as soon as possible to consider the issue and how the Reference Group might best take it forward, focussing in particular on those aspects that impact most directly on LiPs. The sub-group will report back to the next quarterly meeting of the Reference Group.

Mr Justice McAlinden (who is also the new Chair of the Shadow Civil Justice Council) suggested that it is important that the views of the Reference Group on this and other issues, are shared with the Council. To this end he would be suggesting at the next meeting of the Shadow Justice Council that representatives of the Reference Group are invited to attend to provide an input on some issues of common concern. This suggestion was enthusiastically welcomed by all present.