**Meeting of Consultative Panel – 11th July, 2017**

**The Citizens Information Board, 43 Townsend Street, Dublin 2**

Attendance:

The following attended the meeting:

Mr John McDaid, Chief Executive, Chair of the Panel

Ms Susan Shanahan, Citizens Information Board

Ms Laura Shehan, Women’s Aid

Ms Shirley Coulter, Council of the Bar of Ireland

Ms Catherine Hickey, FLAC

Ms Miriam Lyne, Barnardos

Ms Polly Phillimore, Director, Mediation Services

Ms Annmarie O’Connor, MABS

Mr Noel Gorman, Legal Aid Board, Secretary

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|  | Item for discussion | Person responsible | Discussions | Actions/Decisions |
| 1 | Minutes of meeting of 8th March and matters arising | CEO  Secretary | Matters arising from the previous minutes were discussed.  There were no suggested changes to the draft minutes circulated from the previous Panel meeting in March. Minutes were agreed and will be posted to the Board’s website. | Secretary |
| 2 | Service Delivery update | CEO | Mr McDaid confirmed that demand for legal services in the first six months of the year is similar to the same period in 2016. The number of persons on the application record awaiting services stands at 2,200 on 1st July and is of some concern to the Board. The number waiting for this service was 1,900 on 1st January 2017.  There have been fewer applications for legal services in connection with international protection; 742 to date this year compared to 937 for the same period in 2016.  The Panel was informed that referrals under the Private Practitioners Scheme will continue but that referrals will be dependent on available funds.  The Board presented its proposals to the Minister on a range of civil matters, including the cost of client contributions and increasing the financial threshold (which has not changed since 2006) in order to qualify for civil legal aid.  It had been anticipated that the Department would introduce regulations regarding the Voice of the Child in family law proceedings but at this point the provisions have not come into effect by regulation. It is hoped that the regulations will add clarity in defining the role of an expert who represents the voice of a child, together with the fees that will be paid to experts for providing this service.  Ms Phillimore said that Judge Horgan has agreed to accept mediators to represent the voice of the child in Dolphin House.  The Board has identified the Kilkenny office to trial innovations and service delivery. It is hoped that this project will bring fresh thinking, on matters such as extended opening hours, engagement with clients and staff swops with other Government organisations.  Ms Shanahan welcomed this development and would like feedback as the model is developed.  Ms Phillimore informed the Panel that the groundwork for a model of this type was undertaken in Ballymun some years ago. However, following a brief discussion Ms Hickey said that the co-location of a number of organisations in Ballymun didn’t proceed for a number of reasons.  Mr McDaid confirmed that the Department flagged the intention of the Minister to take the draft Criminal Legal Aid Bill back to Government at the earliest possible opportunity. |  |
| 3 | Interagency scheme to assist persons facing repossession proceedings |  | Mr McDaid provided an overview of the qualifying criteria to access the Abhaile scheme and a summary of the training provided by the Legal Aid Board to date.  Ms Coulter said that barristers are providing assistance in repossession matters under the Voluntary Assistance Scheme and queried the appropriateness of using VAS in circumstances where a scheme was already in place. On that point Ms O’Connor said that MABS do not make referrals under the scheme.  Ms O’Connor confirmed that the Abhaile scheme has been operational for a year and is due to be reviewed soon. Ms Shanahan said that the scheme is due to be reviewed in 2018.  Whilst there is no specific date to review the Abhaile scheme Mr McDaid informed the Panel that he would like to hear from parties involved about where they think money might be better directed and where gaps currently exist in the administration of the scheme.  In a response to a question from Ms Hickey about available statistics  Ms O’Connor confirmed that since the commencement of the scheme 6,472 vouchers were issued, 4,672 in relation to PPR homes, S115a or appeals and 196 in scheme cases.  Mr McDaid confirmed that since the beginning of the year 1,300 vouchers had been received, there were 281 duty solicitor attendances, 199 PIA review certificates granted and 17 PIA review certificates refused.  Ms Shanahan informed members that there is a strategy around supporting this scheme through panels of qualified and regulated financial and legal professionals. In this regard Ms O’Connor reiterated the point that the duty solicitor and the MABS court mentor are very important to the overall working of the scheme.  Mr McDaid asked the Panel members to inform the Legal Aid Board of any issues relating to the services provided by the duty solicitor. | Ms Coulter to write to Mr McDaid |
| 4 | Mediation Bill |  | Ms Phillimore provided an overview of the Mediation Bill which went to special committee stage last week. The core aspects in the Bill will facilitate the settlement of civil disputes by mediation. The Bill caters for setting out the principles and specific arrangements for mediation to include the recognition of a body as the Mediation Council of Ireland. Some aspects such as how mediation will be administered and delivered are yet to be determined. |  |
| 5 | International Protection Act 2015 / update on the introduction of the ‘single procedure’ |  | Mr McDaid provided an overview of the Act which commenced on 31st December 2016 and confirmed that the number of applications for legal services in connection with international protection is lower than at the same stage last year. |  |
| 6 | The Citizen’s Information Board – current issues |  | Ms Shanahan provided an update on the Insolvency Service of Ireland’s consultative forum which monitors the arrangements which relate to personal insolvency provided for through the Personal Insolvency Act. |  |
| 7 | Tour de Table |  | Ms Lyne provided an overview of the General Scheme of the Child Care (Amendment) Bill 2017 to replace a provision in the Child Care Act which will outline extensive provisions relating to Guardians ad litem. Barnardos is expected to tender for this Scheme which will define the role of a Guardian.  Ms Shanahan informed the Panel about a Guide to Brexit page on the Citizens Information Board website which provides linkages and current developments on Brexit in relation to changes to rights and entitlements that are likely to affect both Irish and UK citizens.  Ms Sheehan said that McCann Solicitors (through PILA) will be providing lunch time and evening training sessions for Women’s Aid.  Ms O’Connor informed the Panel that MABS is involved with the National Safeguarding Committee which is running a national public awareness campaign to improve the safeguarding of adults who may be vulnerable.  \*MABS expressed a concern in relation to the accommodation cost of €8,000 which is the maximum amount per annum allowable for the purposes of assessing disposable income for civil legal aid. This figure is considered low in terms of accommodation costs in Dublin.  Ms Hickey provided an overview of the Joint Programme on access of Roma and Traveller Women to Justice (JUSTROM) in Ireland. Stakeholders involved in this programme include the Dept. of Justice and Equality, the Legal Aid Board, Pavee Point, FLAC and Roma and Traveller community representatives.  Mr McDaid confirmed that a representative from the Legal Aid Board attended an Awareness Raising and Empowerment meeting in June as part of the JUSTROM programme. | \*Ms O’Connor to forward further information to Mr McDaid.  \*Ms Shanahan to consult with the Social Policy Unit in Citizen’s Information and revert to Mr McDaid. |
| 8 | AOB |  | No other business matters arose. |  |
| 9 | Date of next meeting |  | The next meeting of the Panel will take place on Tuesday, 14th November @11am in MABS National Development, Commercial House, Westend Commercial Village, Blanchardstown, Dublin 15.. |  |