**Meeting of Consultative Panel – 4th November, 2015**

**Women’s Aid, 5 Wilton Place, Dublin 2**

**Attendance:**

The following attended the meeting:

Mr John McDaid, Chief Executive, Chair of the Panel

Mr Niall Murphy, Director of Civil Legal Aid

Ms Sinead Harrison, Women’s Aid

Ms Shirley Coulter, Bar Council

Mr Joseph O’Sullivan, Bar Council

Ms Freda McKittrick, Barnardos

Ms Ann Marie O’Connor, MABS

Ms Noeline Blackwell, FLAC

Mr Ciaran Finlay, FLAC

Ms Polly Phillimore, Director, Mediation Services

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

Ms Eileen Fitzgerald, Citizens Information Board

Mr Noel Gorman, Legal Aid Board, Secretary

**Apologies:**

Ms Catherine Cosgrove, Immigrant Council

Niamh Farrell, AMEN

Katie McDermott, AIM Family Services

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|  | Item for discussion | Person responsible | Discussions | Actions/Decisions |
| 1 | Minutes of meeting of 1st July and matters arising | CEO  Secretary | Each member introduced themselves following which Mr McDaid reiterated the purpose of the Board’s Consultative Panel which is to inform stakeholders of the Board’s business and issues of concern to it and also particularly to receive feedback in relation to the Board’s services. Matters arising from the previous minutes were discussed.  Mr McDaid confirmed that he had yet to receive a proposal on the single procedure from Mr O’Dwyer. | Mr O’Sullivan to follow this up with Mr O’Dwyer |
| 2 | Service Delivery update | CEO | Mr McDaid noted that the International Protection Bill was due to go to Cabinet within the next week and that the single procedure was a key aspect of the draft legislation.  Proposals were being drafted in relation to client contributions which will be brought by the Chief Executive to the Board before Christmas. It is expected that this matter would be raised with the Department of Justice and Equality in 2016.  Mr Murphy provided an update on the Board’s website. It was confirmed that the tender process for the design of the website was recently completed and it was hoped that the new website would go live within the next 3 to 6 months. Testing for completing an online application for Civil Legal Aid is due to take place in a live environment in December.  Mr McDaid confirmed that the number of applications for Civil Legal Aid this year is marginally ahead of applications at the same time last year. There are currently about 2,600 persons waiting for a first consultation or substantive legal service compared to 5,000 in January 2014.  Mr McDaid confirmed that the Minister for Justice and Equality has secured additional funding of €1.6 million for the Legal Aid Board which will allow the Board increase its own staffing resources and make additional use of private solicitors to deal with applicants seeking legal services for either a judicial separation or a divorce. Mr Murphy thanked Women’s Aid and FLAC for their letters of support which assisted the Board in seeking additional funding.  On the Asylum side Mr McDaid noted that applications to ORAC continue to be significantly higher than the numbers applying to the Board for services. He noted that anecdotally it was suggested that a number of people are registering with ORAC but not meaningfully engaging with the asylum process. A significant number of these may be subject to the Dublin III Regulation and in particular may be transferred to the UK.  The Board will be liaising closely with the Department in relation to any implications for, or expectations of, the Board in terms of any changes in international protection patterns.  A discussion took place about the proposed move of the Dublin District Family Law Court from Dolphin House to Chancery Street (Bridewell) The Board will be making a submission about this move to the Courts Service in due course Some concerns were expressed about this move.  There was a general consensus that an appropriate level of training should be considered for staff or others who provide services in child care matters to parents with an intellectual disability. It was noted that there is a high percentage of respondent parents who have an intellectual disability. | .  Ms Fitzgerald and Ms McKittrick to discuss further |
| 3 | Women’s Aid – issues of concern |  | Ms Harrison provided a comprehensive overview of the work of Women’s Aid in which there were 13,655 contacts made for direct services in 2014. The majority of these contacts were to the National Freephone Helpline which provides support and information to women who experience domestic violence. This service is provided to people in their own language, in some cases via three way conversations with the person seeking assistance and a translator who is based in the UK. There is also a text service available for the hard of hearing.  Ms Harrison highlighted the lack of timely and affordable representation by the Board. She was aware of 2 refusals for waivers of contributions in recent weeks. The waiting times experienced for legal representation has a detrimental and negative impact on those who experience domestic violence. | Ms Harrison to confirm the name of the translation provider to Mr Murphy  Ms Harrison to provide a copy of Women’s Aid Election Manifesto for circulation to the Panel members |
| 4 | Guardians ad litem in public law child care matters |  | Ms McKittrick confirmed that Barnardos was making a submission to the Department of Children and Youth Affairs in response to the consultation paper on reforming the Guardian Ad Litem Arrangements in proceedings under the Child Care Act 1991. It was also noted that the final date for receiving submissions had been extended by one week. Ms McKittrick stated that a framework is required in order to ensure that guardians ad litem are Garda vetted and trained in child protection. |  |
| 5 | Childcare– Private Practitioner Scheme |  | Mr Murphy noted that the Board is piloting the use of private solicitors in child care matters. The pilot is operating in Counties Donegal, Wexford and Dublin. The Board has also established an internal group looking at the whole area of child care with a view to seeing how the Board can increase its effectiveness in this area. | . |
| 6 | Regulation of Lobbying Act 2015 |  | Mr McDaid provided an overview of the Act and the obligations that fall to people who lobby a public representative or public body. It was agreed that the members of the Board’s External Consultative Panel who attend this forum should register with the Standards in Public Office Commission. Relevant groups, such as this Panel, must meet certain transparency criteria in order to be regarded as a “relevant body” (as defined by the Act) and to avail of the exemption set out in section 5(5)(n) of the Act. This would entail publishing information on the Board’s website, such as the names of members, terms of reference, agenda and agreed minutes of each meeting. |  |
| 7 | Improving engagement |  | Mr McDaid said that improving engagement would remain an agenda item for future meetings as the Board valued feedback on current concerns and issues affecting stakeholders. |  |
| 8 | Tour de Table |  | Ms Blackwell confirmed that FLAC is working on a report which will analyse the impact of Civil Legal Aid on its stakeholders. This report may be circulated to LAB before publication.  Ms O’Mahony confirmed that the Law Society would be hosting a conference on 27th November in which an update would be provided on the National Strategy for Violence Against Women.  Ms O’Connor provided a comprehensive overview of the issues and concerns affecting people who are in debt. She noted that they are piloting an onsite presence in certain courthouses on days on which repossession cases are listed for hearing. They are working with the Insolvency Service of Ireland and the Citizens Information Board on this.  Ms Blackwell stated that insolvency solutions are very complex, particularly in relation to matrimony and for guarantors. Ms Blackwell highlighted the need that summons served on debtors should identify the support services that are available.  Mr McDaid noted the intention that the Assisted Decision Making (Capacity) Bill would be enacted before the end of the year. |  |
| 9 | AOB |  | It was noted that Mr Finlay would be representing FLAC at future Panel meetings. Mr McDaid thanked Ms Blackwell for her input to the Panel in recent years. |  |
| 10 | Date of next meeting |  | The Panel’s next meeting will take place in March 2016. Ms Coulter proposed that the next meeting might be held in the Bar Council offices. |  |