

Limerick Pilot Project
Stakeholder Consultation Meeting 5th March 2020
Note of Issues Raised

1. Children

The overall theme that emerged, one could contend, was the issue of children which was raised on many occasions during the consultation. Many stakeholders from a variety of perspectives spoke of the importance of children in any pilot project which was focused on alternative dispute resolution. Stakeholders raised the possibility of having child friendly areas or 'child safe spaces' as well as access to a psychologist to ascertain the voice of the child. It was noted that notwithstanding the enactment of legislation around this area, the voice of the child is still being lost during dispute resolution. Another stakeholder made the point that it is not absolutely necessary to have a psychologist and that someone who listens, perhaps in that 'safe space' may provide the service equally well. The importance of resourcing this area of service delivery was emphasised. It was also noted within this context that defining 'family' may be important for service users as some service users get confused by the term 'family dispute resolution' and they not being part of conventional family unit.

2. Domestic Violence

One stakeholder group asked where domestic violence fitted into the overall picture of a dispute resolution centre. While both the Board and Courts Service pointed out that this was not a mediation project, the issue of formalising facilities for domestic violence services was brought up. NGO groups offering services to both the victim and perpetrator of domestic violence expressed enthusiasm for the project. On this point, Adapt Domestic Violence Services Limerick noted they could facilitate meeting users if research was needed to improve this aspect of service delivery.

3. Referrals to appropriate services

Many of the NGOs present noted the importance of referrals to the appropriate services as part of the user experience and some cited the success that referring to a particular service has brought. A structure whereby information can be shared about the appropriate referral was cited as being very important aspect of the project. Another NGO stakeholder noted facilities for support workers to attend court with a service user would also be important. A number of NGOs, while noting their excitement of the prospect of having all services 'under one roof' noted that their finances were under pressure as things stand and asked that this might be looked at in terms of securing additional resources for any additional demand the project generated.

4. The practitioner view

Some strong points were raised by practitioners with regard to the project. One practitioner stated that the fees for the Legal Aid Boards Private Practitioner District Court Scheme were unsustainable and that this project, if requiring yet more work by the solicitor, may make

them even less economical. She further noted the restrictions on the services of Counsel. The practitioner noted that experienced solicitors had already left the local panel owing to these issues. While the Board noted it was a requirement for the Minister for Justice and Equality and the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform to approve any changes to fees the Legal Aid Board might wish to make, they would examine the possibility of making a special case for this project.

Another practitioner queried the location of civil law if family law was to be located exclusively in Merchants Quay. She wished to make the point that it would prove logistically difficult to move between two locations to attend court if civil law was moved to another location. The Courts Service stated no definitive decisions made been made in this regard but noted the practitioners concerns.

It was further noted that there could be improvements with regard waiting areas for practitioners, that the bar room was often full and that this presented logistical difficulties for the practitioner in trying to undertake court related work.

5. Training

A number of stakeholders raised the importance of training. It was noted by the Board that training would be provided on mediation for any interested stakeholders. One stakeholder group stated the importance of shared training events to allow the exchange of information as regards the services available to users. Training on Trauma Informed Care was raised as being possibly an important aspect of the project. On this point it was noted that an aspiration was that Limerick would be set up as a trauma sensitive city and this feeds into the Limerick Project.