

COMMUNITY LEGAL SERVICE

1 SUMMARY

- 1.1. The report appraises Members of the new Community Legal Service which is to be introduced on 3 April 2000.
- 1.2 The report also summarises the role local authorities will be expected to play in the near future in order to promote the Community Legal Service in their area.

2 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 On 1 April, the Legal Aid Board will be replaced by the Legal Services Commission. The new body will be given the responsibility to develop, maintain and co-ordinate the new Community Legal Service. The new service seeks to provide:-
 - A network of quality suppliers which should include the range of advice providers.
 - Support by co-ordinated funding.
 - A service based on need.
- 2.2 A number of seminars have been organised regionally and locally in order to promote the new service. Officers from Castle Point Borough Council and Rochford met with CAB representatives from the two Council areas and the Regional Planning and Partnership Manager of the Legal Aid Board Eastern Region. His task is to promote the new concept throughout the region.
- 2.3 During the current year, six pilot sites were set up at:-

Kirklees
Liverpool
Norwich
Nottingham
Southwark
Cornwall

In addition, four associate pioneer authorities have been given statistics to try elements of the project. These are:-

Harlow
Tendring
Peterborough

Luton.

- 2.4 The introduction of the Community Legal Service was contained within the Government manifesto. There will, therefore, be a drive to try to encompass as much of the country as possible within the new regime. Local authority participation is entirely voluntary. It is anticipated, however, over the next few years when authorities carry out best value reviews on how they fund advice giving services, they will be expected to have given serious consideration to embracing the scheme.

It is envisaged that, within this area, the main providers of advice will be the local CAB's. At present, the Castle Point and Rochford CAB's have been awarded the Legal Aid franchise for their areas.

3 THE SCHEME

- 3.1 The scheme is intended to forge partnerships between funders, providers and consumers. These will be called Community Legal Service Partnerships (CLSP's). It is anticipated that local authorities will be the prime movers in setting up partnerships and carrying out the majority of the preliminary work required.

- 3.2 The CLSP's will have a steering committee which will:-

- Map need (ie., find out what people actually need)
- Map supply
- Gap analysis (ie., identify need, identify supply, identify "unmet need")
- Draw up a co-ordinated approach to funding – make funding decisions which meet the identified need.

As part of this work it will be necessary to build a referral network system of quality suppliers of advice and publish a directory of these advice providers. The objective is that agencies can concentrate on what they do best and refer to other agencies which they know can be relied upon.

- 3.3 Advice will generally be of three types, which are:-

- Basic level of information, including passive and active information.
- Generalist advice, eg., CAB's which will cover a whole range of advice topics.
- Specialist advice, eg., that given by solicitors.

- 3.4. The providers of advice within the CLSP will be required to be Quality Marked. This is an ongoing quality assessment scheme which will be

carried out by the Legal Services Commission. The target is that the majority of advice giving agencies will be quality marked within two years.

- 3.5. It has been stated that there is no additional funding available for this new service. Specialist legal advice will be funded by the Legal Services Commission. This replaces the current Legal Aid Scheme.
- 3.6. With regard to funding the other advice providers such as the CAB's, it is expected that local authorities will continue to be the main funding agency. It is, however, anticipated that, if the various funders within an area work in partnership with all relevant information regarding need available, there will be a greater rationale of funding decisions.
- 3.7. The Legal Services Commission intends to formally launch on 3 April by opening a website which will provide information on services available throughout the country.
- 3.8. In April it is anticipated that draft guidance will be issued based upon the experiences of the six pilot authorities.
- 3.9. The final guidance document is due to be published in July.

4. CONCLUSIONS

- 4.1. If the scheme is successful, it will provide a nationwide service where users can be sure that the quality of advice is of a national standard.
- 4.2. If the partnerships can provide funders with the information which clearly shows the benefits derived from the grants given, it should rationalise funding decisions.
- 4.3. There is no doubt that additional resources, particularly staff time, would be required to set up the partnership and carry out the various mapping exercises. This is always difficult for authorities with limited staff resources such as Rochford. It is for this reason that, if the Council does wish to become involved, it will need to give serious consideration to working in partnership with Castle Point Borough Council.
- 4.4. The Regional Planning and Partnership Manager indicated at the meeting that he may be in a position to provide "pump priming" funding to start the partnership and also be able to give a degree of help in providing data and analysis required to set up the CSLP.

6 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

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- 6.1. Should Members wish to set up a partnership, there will be both staffing and financial costs. The staffing resource required in the preliminary stages could be significant. It is not possible at the present time to quantify these costs without additional research.

7 RECOMMENDATION

- 7.1 It is proposed that the Sub-Committee **RECOMMENDS**:
- (1) That following publication of the draft guidance, officers investigate the proposal further in collaboration with Castle Point Borough Council and report back to this Sub Committee.
 - (2) When the above report is submitted the Regional Planning and Partnership Manager of the Legal Services Commission be invited to give a presentation on the subject. CD(F&ES)

Roger Crofts

Corporate Director (Finance & External Services)

Background Papers:

None.

For further information please contact Roger Crofts (01702) 546366