

Bristol Pro Bono group
Minutes from meeting on 14 January 2020

- Welcomes – names
- Abi Jones, Burges Salmon (chair) **(AJ)**
 - Miriam Bishop, Bevan Brittan (vice chair) **(MB)**
 - Dave Miller (Avon and Bristol Law Centre) **(DM)**
 - Jeremy Thompson, Support Through Court **(JT)**
 - Valerie Robertson, Law Society **(VR)**
 - Amanda Crutchley, University of Law **(AC)**
 - Sarah Philimore, St John's Chambers **(SP)**
 - Rachel Wood, UWE **(RW)**
 - Michael Hayles, Burges Salmon **(MH)**
 - Peter Morris, Quartet **(PM)**
 - Zak Coles, CMS CMNO **(ZC)**
 - Mark Calverley, Bevan Brittan **(MC)**
 - Beth Kirkland, Law for Life **(BK)**
 - Victoria Channing, Simmons & Simmons **(VC)**
 - Rachel Loble, Simmons & Simmons **(RL)**
 - Chloe O'Brien, Simmons & Simmons **(CO'B)**
 - Daniel Preddy, DAC Beachcroft **(DP)**

Apologies:

- Deborah Sheldon, TLT
- Lucy Burrows, BPP
- Sue Evans, Citizens' Advice Bureau
- Paul Bryson, Support Through Court
- Conor O'Carroll-Lolait, Irwin Mitchell
- Ali Cloak, Royds Withy King

1 Introduction and update on mapping exercise (and GDPR)

AJ gave an update on the mapping exercise. She has now had a reply from most members of the group (although not all) and has created a table showing the information. The hard copy was passed around, but AJ confirmed that the electronic copy would follow. At the moment this is a static list, but the idea is that it will be online in the future, so it can be circulated.

AC queried who replied and whose projects are currently on there? AJ confirmed just members of group at the moment.

AJ confirmed that she had sought informal advice from Risk teams at two different firms who confirmed the GDPR position as follows. On the basis that the information about the projects themselves does not contain any individuals' personal data, GDPR is not triggered. Providing the Law Centre with a list of names and contact details for each of the projects does, however. Abi will send a standard email confirming the GDPR position and asking members to confirm their permission to release contact information to the Law Centre and potentially other members.

(A) Abi to circulate by email

2 Presentation by Beth Kirkland from Law for Life

BK is Head of Legal Information and Pro Bono at Law for Life; she gave a Powerpoint presentation on the work of Law for Life.

This work includes creating training resources and assistance for people who are dealing with legal issues but cannot afford legal representation. These include the website: <https://www.advicenow.org.uk> and training programmes as well as standalone projects and pieces of research. There are also guides available

for purchase from the website. BK provided samples of the guides for attendees to review during the meeting.

The organisation is conscious that it is a “sticking plaster” and should be a supplement to paid advice. The intended use for the guides includes as preparation for someone’s first meeting with a legal representative, or students who take on matters. The guides are given to assist in giving practical advice. They are also often given to a litigant in person i.e. by the other side.

Many guides are given away for free as there is an income threshold for payment and most individuals requesting the guide do not meet the requirement for payment.

BK was happy to pass her slides to Abi for circulation to the group.

MC queried how many other organisations provide similar resources? BK explained that Law for Life tries to do a lot of signposting in an effort not to duplicate work. It is also distinguishable from other organisations by the detail of information it gives and the structure of that information.

AJ queried who drafted the materials. BK explained that Law for Life does not currently employ any practising solicitors but they have teams who do the bulk of the research, after the research has been done the next stage is liaison with solicitors / judges who review the research for accuracy of the law. It is then passed to a panel of end users and peer review to a panel of end users.

MC queried whether there are there any plans to expand the topics being covered e.g. property? Are there any demands which are currently not being met? BK explained that the organisation tends to bid for where there is need and is currently trying to expand (e.g. probate). However, there is a long “wish list” and need to find volunteers and funding.

(A) BK to provide a copy of her presentation for circulation.

3 Presentation by Peter Morris of Bristol City Funds

PM is a former Managing Partner of Burges Salmon and Consultant of Bristol City Funds, a collaboration with Bristol City Council, Quartet and Bristol & Bath regional capital. The aim is to give encouragement to projects which are addressing major issues in the City / region (as identified in One City Plan).

The funding available is a mix of grant and commercial investment (and is available in sums from £50k to £1m). There are four key priorities: the No Child Goes Hungry programme, economic inclusion, environmental transformation and community initiatives.

City Funds will be looking for skills and expertise and are hoping to set up pro bono service for projects, which is where we could help. The idea is that this would be a “managed legal service”. Quartet is assisting 40 – 50 projects at any time and they were originally were just thinking pro bono for those. However, now the thinking is that they could work to facilitate pro bono generally across communities / projects – matching the demand to the need.

This raises questions over who is the ultimate “client” and a strict vetting process would be required to figure out how to match the demand to the need.

MB gave the example of how Land Aid deal with this – they ask firms to offer a certain number of hours per year and give an idea of the areas in which they can assist. Then when requests come in, they match them to firms to help them meet their hour offering / target.

There was a general discussion regarding how this could be achieved and the key issues for lawyers:

DM advised that this was also something Bristol Pro Bono have been discussing. It would be good if the resources could be replicated and shared, once an infrastructure is in place.

MC liked the internet idea, but as long as there are also with intermediaries.

ZC queried whether it would be possible to have something which is almost like 'a Tinder style' website, i.e. matching demand and need? It was agreed that this would be a good idea in the long term but this is likely to be a little way off. MB confirmed that filter and support seem like the key issues.

(A) Following the release of the report at the end of February 2020, PM will provide a copy of this to members of Bristol Pro Bono that would like it if he is permitted to do so.

4 Round table discussion – Objectives for the Bristol Pro Bono group for 2020

DM confirmed that Bristol and Bath Legal Tech (tech hub) has noted that "Access to Justice" is one of their objectives this year.

MB raised the question: if we were to talk more generally, what are the firms' objectives in attending Pro Bono Bristol and what are they hoping to get from the group in 2020?

MH said that he has found the different talks very useful as well as the mapping exercise.

SP emphasised the issue with lack of visibility of pro bono help, even for people involved in pro bono and the role technology and social media needs to have in resolving this.

It was generally agreed that a key objective for 2020 should be to raise the profile of the group and social media. AC confirmed there is a Bristol Pro Bono Twitter account, and there is also a LinkedIn account. These should be aligned and reinvigorated. **One or more volunteers are needed to run these accounts.**

DM highlighted that a key objective is to offer more – to get different kinds of lawyers involved and different kinds of law. For example a key area for Bristol Law Centre at the moment is child immigration advice, they have a specialist in dealing with children. (Dealing with vulnerable adults is all very well and difficult enough, but dealing with vulnerable children is a real skill). There is a crisis in capacity especially in the South West. Bristol Law Centre is looking for funding to expand e.g. Kids in Need of Defence (KIND) – trains non-immigration lawyers to provide advice under supervision. This could be open to any lawyers, but would particularly good for people who want to get involved in pro bono but need training in areas outside of their general practice.

RL, CO'B and VC from Simmons & Simmons would be very keen to assist with a KIND programme, they have seen the operation of a similar scheme in Northern Ireland and it was very successful.

5 Presentation by Valerie Robertson (Law Society) on the Pro Bono Charter

VR is the Pro Bono and Public Legal Education Policy Advisor for the Law Society.

The Charter currently has 76 signatures and is in the process of being reconsidered and redrafted.

VR said they are looking for opinions on what firms want the charter to be and what assistance firms need from the Law Society in their pro bono work (for example they currently offer a 3 month free membership to LawWorks on signing the Charter, but is this sufficient?).

VR flagged up that there could be funding available for Bristol pro bono work from the Access to Justice Foundation (when pro bono cost orders are made, the money from that is donated to the Access to Justice Foundation). Students can be used as well – it is a good idea to get as much free help as possible and to run pilots before throwing money at plans and / or applying for funding.

VR said that the new Pro Bono manual (to be updated following new SRA rules) should also be a good resource for firms and will include the Pro Bono Protocol and well as guidance on insurance etc.

VR is impressed with what the Bristol Pro Bono group is trying to do and would be happy to come back at any time. If anyone wants to contact her with queries feel free. She consents to having her email address passed around.

(A) AJ to circulate VR contact information to members.

6 Dave Miller – Funding for Bristol Law Centre

Jane Emmanuel has previously played a key role in this group and was supported by an admin role, which also funded by Bristol Law Centre. Finances are tight for the Law Centre and whilst it wants to help the group move forward, it needs to find a way to cover these costs.

He is asking if firms can give a modest donation to assist with this and he will follow up with different firms individually. MH confirmed that he believed Burges Salmon had committed to making a donation and other firms indicated similarly.

7 AOB

ZC made the suggestion of the group adopting one or more initiatives to meet the increasing need to address homelessness in Bristol. It was agreed that this was an important issue and one that members would like to support. DM confirmed that the Bristol Law Centre runs a service for housing law and delaying eviction. IT also has a link with the charity 1625 Independent People. Importantly, there are varying needs e.g. the needs of the homeless sector compared to the need for wider advice around the homelessness issues.

MB agreed that there are certain issues which might help prevent homelessness e.g. welfare benefits advice, but then there is the broader issue of getting into the spaces were homeless people might be to provide other general advice.

It was agreed that the best approach might be to contact some of the charities / community groups in Bristol that deal with homelessness and associated issues to see if they might require legal assistance and if so, in what respect. For example, they may have more of a need for pro bono real estate or commercial advice in relation to the way they run as businesses, rather than be lacking pro bono advice for individuals.

VC referred to the Collaborative Plan for Pro Bono in the UK, which is organising pro bono days across the UK. The idea is that each fee earner commits to 25 hours per year, which is quite ambitious, but Simmons is trying to meet this. They also want to develop a mentoring scheme for people at firms where there is not a lot of "buy-in" for pro bono projects, but they are trying to increase this.

(A) Miriam to draft and circulate minutes from today's meeting.

Date of next meeting: Tuesday 28 April 2020 at 5.30 at TLT's office: 1 Redcliff St, Redcliffe, Bristol BS1 6TP