



**Bristol Pro Bono group**  
**Minutes from meeting on 26 January 2021**

- Attendees -**
- Victoria Channing, Simmons & Simmons (chair) (VC)
  - Miriam Bishop, Bevan Brittan (vice chair) (MB)
  - Zoe Hunt, Bevan Brittan (minute taker) (ZH)
  - Sarah Phillimore, St Johns Chambers, (SP)
  - Jeremy Thompson, Support Through Court (JT)
  - Amanda Crutchley, University of Law in Bristol (AC)
  - Rachel Wood, UWE (RW)
  - Omar Madhloom, University of Bristol (OM)
  - Katie-Jane Rees, Foot Anstey (KR)
  - Caroline Loving, Clyde and Co (CL)
  - Georgina Hartwell, Osborne Clarke (GH)
  - Daniel Preddy, DAC Beachcroft (DP)
  - Claudia Kasinou, Osborne Clarke (CK)
  - Lucy Burrows, BPP (LB)
  - Clare Johnson, Lawworks (CJ)

**Apologies:**

David Hobbs  
Mark Calverley

**Minutes:**

**1. Welcome new members:**

VC welcomed the group's new members:

- David Hobbs – new designated pro-bono partner from Bevan Brittan who will be taking over from Mark Calverley although Mark will still maintain his pro-bono position on the board
- Zoe Hunt – trainee from Bevan Brittan and minute taker.
- Georgina Hartwell - Osborne Clarke
- Claudia Kasinou – trainee at Osborne Clarke

A contact from VWV is seeking a new pro-bono representative so hopefully we will also have a new joiner from them soon too.

**2. Not for profit requests for assistance**

- **Trigger: picked up by DAC**
- **Back up: Law Works not-for-profit programme**

VC confirmed that a 'not-for-profit' request for assistance from Trigger was picked up from DAC for which she thanked them for. There are also new instructions coming through the group via the group website which is good. VC asked for people to send any not-for-profit groups our way and if we can't accommodate them, she reminded us that law works are operating a not-for-profit programme and can make an application for them.

**3. New event? Volunteering at law centres – shattering myths**

- Proposed by Helen Read and Coralie McKeivor
- Is there a need for further volunteers?
- Bevan Brittan looking to formalise clinic work



VC confirmed she had been in contact with Helen Read at the Law Society and Coralie McKeivor about possibly organising a new follow-up event to the event during pro bono week last year.

CJ confirmed happy to help.

VC said that she understood that some firms were keen to formalise some sort of arrangement with law centre or other pro bono clinics. Asked MB to talk through Bevan Brittan's journey.

MB confirmed that Bevan Brittan were at the start of the journey. Their employment law team have been volunteering with Avon and Bristol Law Centre for some time but been relatively discreet. Something they run with themselves and having been picking up a session every couple of months. Generally speaking, that is the only individual pro bono work Bevan Brittan have done but they are conscious that the Birmingham office have helped with the law centre and Leeds have a connection with CAB. Although in the initial stages, it is the will of the firm to give more individual pro bono volunteering work and have had helpful discussions with VC about what Simmons have been doing. There is an understanding that David is going back to the Bevan Brittan board and the risk team to see how we can take this further forward either at law centres or other places. Overall – at the beginning of the journey but keen to progress.

#### **4. Sharing of pro bono activity**

VC said that there is a feeling among firms that there is the will to participate in clinics and provide advice to vulnerable individuals but there is confusion as to how that works logistically and who holds the insurance, who supervises, training if no specialism, how to gain that specialism without taking up a lot of time and how to do rotas etc. All these questions that come up that put a firm off. Interested to know if other firms are also suffering with this. Proposal that we have a session open to firms and pro bono representatives or individuals who want to start advising at clinics to talk them through logistically how to get involved, whether via law works clinic or a local pro bono centre. Needs to be demand from clinics and also the will from the fee paying law firm sector to take up that work. VC puts that to the floor to see if this is an issue we need to address or desire for a wider conversation?

CJ says that is a great topic to cover but she has a concern that every pro bono clinic largely operates differently and that might be why there is confusion. Definitely ground work in terms of confusion and regulations associated with this and supervision requirements. Some common areas but clinic models differ, especially in Bristol. Law works can do the matchmaking and connect firms and clinics. There will always be the need, the scope now is much broader because work is happening online. Can do some support in terms of myth busting and would help to have that hand in hand with some of the clinics within the region to say 'actually in our service we do it this way'. More than happy to help in that sense. Confirms she has guidance and it might tie in nicely with firms looking a broader pro bono policy and package that they want to put together. Not just clinics, also upskilling. Outlining all of those bits and pieces. Happy to talk more generally if there are specific problems.

VC thanks and says that is very helpful. She is right that we are all coming to this with different levels of experience. About understanding where the need is locally and what clinics are understaffed and then to ascertain where there is capacity and desire within firms to fill those gaps. That forms the basis of an information exchange and mentoring workshop. Asks if everyone online is from a firm who is looking to engage more in this area but doesn't know where to start?

CL confirms that she doesn't think Clyde and Co's Bristol office does very much pro bono itself and she is interested in finding out more about how they can get involved locally and, in particular, working with another firm. Her firm is also in the early stages.

MB thinks her Birmingham colleagues have a joint working relationship with other firms in the area that provide advice to that same clinic.

LB – works at both Bristol and Birmingham and works in the collaboration that MB speaks about so can speak about that as has some contacts around that if we want to know how the collaboration works and have some connections.



VC confirms we need to ascertain what the need is. Asks JT how they are operating.

JT says that they would never say no to extra people but are pretty much able to keep the rota running for the family scheme which runs once a fortnight. Pre-pandemic they were in the early stages of setting up a housing scheme but nothing has gone forward with that, partly because enquiries have been put on hold and partly because there is not the same flow of clients whilst working from home and not being able to have clients just walk in.

VC says that it may be a plan to help them with setting up a new clinic that has a sufficient client base which can be something that is essentially 'owned' by Bristol pro bono group.

CJ confirms that is definitely a plan B option. They need to scope out current opportunities in clinics which will differ. Another option is to start an entirely new service which is along the lines of what happened in Birmingham. In Cardiff they have support firms for providing homelessness advice. There are a couple of different options and may be about to have an event to outline what opportunities there are to get involved in and the appetite to do that. Something a bit bigger and longer term.

VC agrees. 6 months ago they were concerned about homelessness that kept coming up. If that is something she has experience in and they can, for example, set up a homelessness specific service that focuses on housing issues than that would perhaps be something that they can look at implementing. Sure there are lots of other services which would also appreciate the additional support.

CJ states that the Cardiff lawyers care clinic has gone online. That came back because brought in volunteers across firms and they have facilitated and supported training specific to the areas of law the firms identified that the service users needed. It may be different in Wales as the rules are slightly different but they could help with that and could provide some confidence and comfort that they are addressing the matter appropriately and that can all be done online. The service came as a bit of a package.

## **5. Updating referral page of website**

VC discussed the referral page on the website. The website has a page on the different programmes that are available within Bristol and the wider South West area that the group is alive to that offer pro bono support. Some are offered by universities, some by law centres etc. It needs updating and refining so it is fit for purpose.

1. Needs to signpost clients to the appropriate sources of information and advice
2. Needs to signpost lawyers to certain advice services that need additional support

VC asked if we could have trainees who would look at that website and contact different members of the pro bono group and make sure that the resources are up to date. This would form some relatively firm foundations in assessing legal need within the wider Bristol network and perhaps creating a roadmap in assisting individuals in advice via law clinics or other providers of pro bono services. Without that starting point, we are operating a bit in the dark so it is a necessary task.

Asks EF to gather a task force to do this work and will help her with the technical side. It is about applying a logical legal brain to the information and figuring out the gaps and essentially organising it.

ZH and DS both offer to help and EF confirms she will put her email in the chat for people to contact her.

VC asked if there was anyone online with a burning inspired idea about an event we might participate in as a follow up to our Bristol pro bono group in pro bono week? If not, it may be something we keep on the back burner as we progress through the first quarter of the year. Updating the referral page of the website might throw up some ideas as we become more familiar with the landscape.

## **6. Updates on different pro bono activities firms have been involved in**

VC said that as we don't have a speaker today, it was now an opportunity for anyone who has participated in pro bono to give us an idea of what they have been doing so we can become familiar with each other's practices.



SP had a fascinating interview with Stuart Harrison about Legal Tech which was really good. It was an in depth look into technology and how it can assist or hinder. She doesn't know when the report is coming out but thinks fairly soon.

JT has been in touch with a lady who was helping him. He thinks they were looking at having a single portal whereby the advisors could book sessions themselves and clinics could book sessions also in the same place.

SP said that would be amazing. For her, that is the biggest barrier, harnessing the energy of volunteering and connecting them with the clients.

VC confirmed she had also spoken with Stuart Harrison, he hadn't quite appreciated the different actors within the pro bono community more broadly and was surprised we have such an intricate network so it was an interesting information exchange.

VC also updated that they have a webinar with a group of pro bono lawyers from Australia soon. They are ahead of the UK with the provision of pro bono services in terms of communicating within their pro bono network but they are trialling a new pro bono management system. It is designed to make managing pro bono cases easier and less time intensive so that those who put their hands up to become a pro bono coordinator find it less onerous and are actually focusing on the things that matter i.e. giving advice instead of faffing with rotas. VC will report back once she has met with them.

VC asked how universities are doing.

AC – students are anxious about when they are coming back. It is an unsettling time and they have a lot of clients who have dropped off so haven't had the flow of interest for support they normally have and are looking at why. It has been a quiet few weeks.

LB said that they have experienced that with some clinics with the client drop off. Their family clinic has gone quiet but employment and housing clinic has a huge waiting list so a lot of clients on those but generally the change of the lockdown hasn't affected BPP provision that much just because everything was already run online anyway and they have been delivering online since September. A drop off in some areas and an increased demand in others.

CJ – across the wider network it is definitely peaks and troughs. A couple of services are saying they have capacity and others are saying that they need more volunteers. Mostly they are saying that there is a missing gap of clients which they are conscious of because they don't think it is because the problems have gone away. May be about access or marketing as there is no place now for people to walk in. It is difficult to market and say that these services are still running.

LB – for pro bono week they have a speaker for an organisation in Birmingham talking about this and the gap between providing the pro bono services during lockdown and the problem of reaching those communities that are the most vulnerable. There were some really interesting ideas. The speaker worked for a community group and they had paid to buy some tablets and were engaging with some local religious and community groups in the areas which then made contact with the volunteers and vulnerable families who weren't reaching out themselves either through lack of trust or know how. Volunteers were dialling in and setting up the calls and then a lawyer from the clinic was at the other end and helping to take the call. There were interesting comments about the barriers that they have faced and how they overcame these by utilising groups which had the trust of the individuals they were trying to reach. It is a big problem about getting access to these people who now can't pop into a court or library. This may be a good discussion point the group could talk about and how to plug that gap.

VC has recently moved near to St Pauls advice centre and rang them for a chat. They are struggling because they don't know who to refer client to as doors are all shut there are huge language barriers so they can't guarantee that an organisation can convey the information needed because they have no translators so they are at a loss as to what to do. They have the trust of local communities and it is heart breaking because



people knock on a daily basis and it is certainly a widespread issue. It may be a case of bringing different contacts together and finding out what the key issues are and who they refer their clients to. Need to identify groups and advice centres which will be different for each city.

CJ – as a starting point, they run monthly information exchanges which are online and every quarter they are running EDR accessibility focus topics so last year a third of them were about accessible services for individuals who don't have English as a first language or the mental capacity to make those initial movements. Link for it is here - [LawWorks Clinics Network InfoExchange Session on developing accessible services | LawWorks](#)

VC asks ZH and CJ to take this forward and maybe do some research around this point.

JT puts up a link which gives a spreadsheet of charities in Bristol and their current services  
<https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1p03V0Gsr3UALkf4SnzxkLVGy-sqBEvcLVwjVPqz9zj8/edit#gid=0>

## 7. AOB

VC asks if there is anything else anyone wants to share. No further comments.

VC raises a final issue which was raised within Simmons. Rachel at Simmons volunteers with immigration charities and is keen to get involved with low level immigration work that doesn't require additional qualifications. We have been talking with the law centre about how to start a pilot scheme. Rachel will be the first guinea pig, working with new immigration lawyers and Bristol Law Centre. If there is anyone who knows of clients who are struggling to find assistants in low level, heavily administrative works then please let VC know. They will start small to make sure it works and then hopefully build it up because understand that there are a few of these outstanding applications floating around Bristol. Don't think anyone is processing or advising on them and so it would be something new.

<https://www.acfa.org.uk> is the advice network in Bristol discussed earlier – link provided in the group chat.

## 8. New chair: maternity leave

VW announced that she is expecting a baby mid-April which means she will be on maternity leave mid-late March but is waiting for it to be confirmed. She anticipates having to hand over to the chair at least for the initial few months and is looking for a volunteer during the next year.

Congratulations given by all.

Next session confirmed for **9 March at 17:30**. Unless anyone else wants to propose a speaker, VC has had an interesting discussion with a barrister who runs urban lawyers and is keen to talk. He is looking to revolutionise the approach to race and ethnicity within certain cities around the UK.

**Call finished at 18:30.**