

Minutes: 28 July 2020

Attendance:

- Abi Jones, Simmons & Simmons (chair) **(AJ)**
- Miriam Bishop, Bevan Brittan (vice chair) **(MB)**
- Jeremy Thompson, Support Through Court **(JT)**
- Amanda Crutchley, University of Law **(AC)**
- Sarah Philimore, St John's Chambers **(SP)**
- Rachel Wood, UWE **(RW)**
- Mark Calverley, Bevan Brittan **(MC)**
- Victoria Channing, Simmons & Simmons **(VC)**
- Rachel Lobley, Simmons & Simmons **(RL)**
- Daniel Preddy, DAC Beachcroft **(DP)**
- Sarah Farrelly, TrustLaw **(SF)**

Apologies:

- Dave Miller (Avon and Bristol Law Centre)
- Jane Emmanuel (Avon and Bristol Law Centre)
- Conor O' Carroll- Lolait (Irwin Mitchell)

1. Introduction

AJ welcomed everyone to the meeting.

2. Roundtable update on members' approach to pro bono / capacity during the pandemic;

JT – Support Through Court are still not meeting face to face, hopefully will open phased by appointment only in August; ever increasing demand for remote hearings and helpline.

AJ – are there a lot of volunteers on the national helpline?

JT – yes, about 100 (1/2 a day a week each), capacity to take 10 calls at a time, always looking for more volunteers and hoping to increase the call capacity soon.

RW – UWE has spent the summer trying to figure out how to run the courses generally and pro bono has been put to one side temporarily. However, UWE will be running clinic as part of a module for 3rd years for the first time, so have also focussed on getting that set up. The start of term has been pushed back (possibly opening on Pro Bono Week). Some things have been scaled down, but hoping to still have a good offering including volunteering across Bristol.

AJ – which module will the clinic be a part of?

RW – “Lawyering in Practice” – only 30 students for now, but this will increase. There is a lot of focus on what being a lawyer is and how it works for students at the moment; there is a waiting list for this module and for the volunteering, it has been very popular.

AC – there has been a lot of training from LawWorks nationally about how to run pro bono (including dealing with safeguarding when people are working from home) and looking at remote delivery and regulation. Pro bono has been pared down over the summer and it has been run this by telephone in a limited way. University is hoping to run a scheme called “free legal answers” where clients will email to LawWorks with query and solicitors can sign up and look at pool of queries and see what is of interest to them. LawWorks are trying to provide solicitors to also engage in their “secondary specialisms” training. The University is

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currently at double the number of applicants this year to usual, but there might be deferrals and drop off (esp EU / international students).

AJ – free legal answers does sound interesting, maybe something AC could feed back on to the group.

VC – had been due to start advising at the Bristol Law Centre, that is now up and running and Employment and Disputes clinic now, there is still demand (would encourage others to get in contact with Bristol Law Centre). S&S have been working on the BPB website as well (see later item). Have also been discussing with LandAid how to address the issue with homelessness during Covid and how to accommodate homeless people once they have been moved on from hotels (and those who are currently at the airports). LandAid will be looking at legal advice on finding alternative accommodation for homeless people – convert or make use of existing buildings (student / hotels), there are a lot of hurdles but it is very interesting.

DP – Beachcroft have also had some involvement with LandAid; they have set up a pro bono panel, consisting of lots of different types of professional who deal with property matters and are matching them to projects. Beachcroft is currently working on a specific project in Manchester.

VC – has said to the CEO of LandAid that she will circulate opportunities to the BPBG – if people are interested, then let VC know.

S&S are also due to deliver training to the In House Pro Bono Group in London on how to deliver advice at clinics. This is designed for people who have had the secondary specialism training but are lacking the practical know-how on how to advise a lay person. If anyone is interested in joining the training VC can circulate the appointment after the call.

DP – as noted, Beachcroft has been working with LandAid. Have also had a large cohort do the LawWorks training and people are now helping on the Employment and Civil Lit helplines. They have also been picking up individual bits of pro bono via LawWorks (minor disputes etc). The firm has an immigration law team within the employment law team and have been talking to Sue Evans at CAB about providing secondary support on enquiries.

DP had a query come through in the last couple of days for CICA claim and wondered if anyone had additional expertise that they could assist with?

AC – they deal with a lot of these, might be able to assist.

MC – business as usual, there has been the normal run of pro bono requests from various sources (individuals or organisations) and our employment team is still volunteering at the Law Centre. We have a broader offering in Birmingham which has been done by phone for the last couple of months.

SP – pro bono work has currently ground to a halt as much of it is traditionally face to face. They are trying to get calls instead of visits, although wondering if once things are better, then maybe remote clinics are better in the future (especially CJC).

Connor O'Carroll-Lolait (via AJ) – are looking to pick up University of Law clinics again asap and they have recently set a pro bono target for staff at Irwin Mitchell.

MC – BB doesn't have a target per se, but we have recently been seeing in tenders that we are asked to put in approximate targets for pro bono hours and charitable donations (and they asked for an update 2 months later against those targets). For firms that do tendering, there might be targets imposed in order to meet those tender targets.

3. Presentation by Sarah Farrelly, Senior Legal Manager of TrustLaw (Europe, Middle East and North Africa)

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AJ – welcomed Sarah to the group.

Sarah – TrustLaw presentation (see slides).

Thompson Reuters Foundation – sits in the non-profit arm of the organisation. TrustLaw sit within the foundation (conferences are free to attend, so can sign up for these).

It is entirely free to be a part of TrustLaw (for lawyers as well as “clients”) and they have over 5,000 members globally (each is one firm). Will partner organisations with firms (also work alongside LawWorks) and projects go to law firms on a weekly basis by email alert. All the potential projects have been pro-scoped (taking calls and scoping out the legal needs), it should be neatly drafted, explain the jurisdiction and the work that needs to be done.

TrustLaw also works on large pro bono research projects – they can work alongside other firms, in-house teams and clients. These can be really exciting as they often deal with completely novel and unexplored areas of law, so are a chance to set firms out as experts (particularly on large international charity Finance projects).

TrustLaw sends all the offers from firms and the non-profit will choose which firm they want to work with. They have seen really nice relationships over the years, including with in-house teams. TrustLaw is free to join and joining is a straightforward process: there are no requirements to undertake a minimum number of projects or anything else, it is very flexible and firms can pick up as much work as they need. If want to join and then have a lunch and learn in a few months’ time and discuss need / projects that is fine too.

Presentation showcases a couple of projects.

MC – how many of the projects are UK-based and how many are international?

SF – UK is the largest in Europe, probably about 2,000 non-profit members in the UK – one of the largest and very big presence in Bristol.

VC – S&S has taken on a lot of pro bono from TrustLaw – it really is a great way to get involved with locally based pro bono e.g. they recently worked for the Sofa Project in Bristol.

DP – was this via the mailing list?

VC – yes, S&S receive the list each Monday and VC goes through this and pings out emails with projects that people might be interested in – taking on about 3 projects each week (globally). SF and team are excellent at brokering the relationship. Also, the precis are great and the projects have been well scoped.

SF – yes, we try and address who to help and how to help, so narrow the scope of what needs doing, also if there is additional work that needs doing and the original firm doesn’t have knowledge and / or capacity for it can always be passed back to TrustLaw and they will pick this up and pass on to another firm.

AJ – could you send the links for the resources / key areas to the group?

SF – of course and please send on to anyone, either firms or non-profits.

VC – not sure if SF is planning to sit through the rest of the meeting, but it might be good to touch on Pro Bono Week while she is here. VC went to an event in Dublin last year with non-profits and SF ran an excellent session and wondered if they would be interested in doing something similar in Bristol, especially since we are relatively new group?

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8. UK Pro Bono Week 2020: 2 to 6 November 2020

SF – sure, it's the kind of event we run a lot of. We invite both not-for-profit groups and law firms and then split up people into areas and look at the Legal Health Check – an overview guidance of the issues that come up the most often for non-profits. Tables pair up with lawyers from the firm / firms who would give overview information (questions gathered in advance) but it is made clear that it would be guidance / information not legal advice – as follow up they can get more legal advice through TrustLaw. It is always a really nice way of highlighting the immediate benefits of pro bono advice to organisations and everyone enjoys the networking element as well; they also did a presentation on the “day in the life” of a non-profit. TrustLaw runs these workshops daily and people like it. Let SF know if there is interest.

AJ – is this something that TrustLaw would set up or would it come from firms?

SF – generally this is an organic process. TrustLaw don't have a huge capacity but love working with clearing houses and law firms, would want to rely on firms to bring people into the room but happy to share the resources and facilitate.

AJ – if SF is happy, she will send on details so that people can get in touch with SF about TrustLaw.

4. Update on 2020 initiatives:

(a) Immigration: Kids in Need of Defence (KIND) (Dave Miller)

Dave (via Abi) – working on plans for support from S&S and hoping to recruit a new child specialist in the next month or so.

VC – think funding and Covid have stalled everything but good to see it starting up.

RL – S&S has been talking to Jane E and their immigration lawyer, Sian and they have been dealing with specific applications for migrants. They are dealing with this on a trial basis atm. The Law Centre will send queries when they have them (especially where there is no legal aid), but excited about progress.

AJ – is this linked to second specialism training?

RL – it is more ad hoc; Sian has identified areas where non-immigration lawyers can pick things up.

(b) Homelessness organisation: One City Group and Housing Advocacy Support project (Dave Miller)

Dave (via Abi) – there has been no further progress on this yet. Abi is also in touch with Bristol Soup Run and there are no opportunities for this at the moment, although they are working with LandAid and Bristol City Council on homelessness matters

(c) Profile raising: Update on progress of logo and website

AJ – update on the Logo – this have been decided. People will see that it has been used on the agenda! They have kept the colours black and white, as these work well on all kinds of formats and avoids looking like affiliation with any particular firm.

Ross at S&S is working on the website and AJ will send something when they have it.

5. Additional initiatives / opportunities

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(a) Update on Lawyers Against Poverty: Refugee Legal Confidence Workshops (Rachel Lobley)

RL – not much update, rescheduling meeting with Bristol Refugee Rights, probably will have to wait until things can happen again in person (as remote methods are not really appropriate to the client group).

(b) ‘AskingBristol’ experiment (see opportunities sent with Agenda)

AJ – preliminary information from Peter Morris (experimental phase).

MC – this was something that was presented at the CE group meeting i.e. the overall experiment approach (queries re whether there is a crossover with this group) but there weren't any more specific details given about how it was intended to work at that stage.

AJ – the idea is that this is an initial experiment to connect “asks” with “offers” – pro bono, spaces, services, cash donations etc. Peter was getting in touch to see if BPB would be interested in getting involved as a “super connector” i.e. matching opportunities with advice.

VC – is the idea that they would be a sort of clearing house for these?

AJ – believe so, but the coordination would be on their side.

MB – when Peter Morris discussed this at the previous meeting, it seemed that the idea is that would be able to present an offering of firms to the non-profit.

VC – who are the pro bono recipients intended to be, social enterprises, charities etc...?

MC – there will be all sorts; the idea is that move away from just legal “pro bono” i.e. providing any need with demand and those who have the opportunity to provide assistance. The issue is that there might end up being a myriad of these, but it might work better if there is one thing that people need. The danger is that organisations will just contact all forums that they can find and there will end up being duplication.

VC – “pro bono” in the purest sense of the word is legal advice and when firms are reporting, they need to specify how many legal advice hours have been delivered, so there is a natural delineation. If it is legal then ideally it would be funnelled through BPB and anything else would go via CE Group.

MC – Peter also mentioned a dichotomy between pro bono for individuals and pro bono for organisations, which could be a risk.

VC – could we use an online forum for these so that there is some control (Slack channel)?

It was generally agreed in discussion that it is important for there to be a delineation between the two groups and some level of control over the referrals.

6. Update by Bristol Law Centre, including re: financial support (Dave Miller / Jane Emmanuel)

AJ – no further information on this.

7. Update from Bristol Law Society Community Engagement Group (Mark Calverley)

MC – the main points above, but there was also an update on the progress of Feeding Bristol and a presentation by John Manley.

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(a) Potential Trustee training (see opportunity sent with Agenda) (VC)

MC – this was discussed and there was a follow up email; with a suggestion that more needed to be done

8 Pro Bono Week

AJ – Law Society has confirmed that they will be doing everything online. As already discussed, there is the possibility of a TrustLaw event.

9. Appointment of Chair / Vice Chair for 2020 / 2021

AJ – conscious that the new appointments should be made before the next meeting. She feels it is time for her to step down, it has been a year and she is getting concerned that she is not able to give it the time that is needed.

MB – happy to stay as Vice Chair, but also do not feel that have the time to dedicate to being Chair.

VC – as the only member of the group who is already working on pro bono matters full time, then feel like might be best placed to take on the role, if everyone else is happy.

Everyone agreed to take forward VC as Chair and MB as Vice Chair, but to put it to the whole group by email for their input before confirming.

10. AOB / Next meeting

AOB - none.

Date of next meeting – 8 September 2020.