

Legal Services Department

44 Drumsheugh Gardens
Edinburgh EH3 7SW

Hays DX ED555250 EDINBURGH 30
Legal Post LP2 EDINBURGH 7

Telephone (0131) 226 7061
Fax (0131) 220 4879
Web www.slab.org.uk



To: All civil legal aid practitioners

Direct dial number: see below

Your ref:

*Please quote the department above and our
reference: 07/2005*

4 July 2005

Dear Sir/ Madam

CIVIL LEGAL AID APPLICATIONS

I am writing to give you an update on the progress we are making in processing civil applications following the successful introduction of our new paperless civil computer system, and to advise of some changes in our arrangements. This is further to my letter of 10 June 2005.

1. PROGRESS IN PROCESSING CASES

We are processing cases on our new system, and are still in a transitional phase. Over the past weeks, a major task has been transferring case records from our old computer system to the new one. Now, over 130,000 records have had to be transferred, and it has taken time to convert this information to the standards required by our new system.

During the transitional period to the new system, there have been changes to our normal timescales for dealing with cases. We previously advised that for a short period, the initial processing of cases will take longer.

I am pleased to report that we are making good progress in dealing with cases in our normal timescales. We are dealing with special urgency SU4 applications, sanction requests, transfers and stage reports in our normal way on a day to day basis.

When the system was first introduced, we were not processing cases in our usual timescales, so we have built up a number of applications and correspondence awaiting consideration. However, the registration of new applications is now working at predicted levels, and we are reducing the number of outstanding applications. We will further reduce the number over the next two to three weeks.

Over the next few weeks, if you need a decision on any aspect of a civil legal aid application as a matter of urgency, please contact us by telephone on any of the following numbers:

- 0131 240 2067
- 0131 240 2068
- 0131 240 2169
- 0131 240 1995
- 0131 240 2096
- 0131 240 2030
- 0131 240 2071
- 0131 240 2175

Alternatively you can send a **fax to 0131 220 4879**. Please note this is the only fax number that should be used for faxing special urgency applications that need a decision with 48 hours and correspondence.

2. IMPROVEMENTS TO CIVIL APPLICATIONS AS A RESULT OF THE NEW SYSTEM

We expect that over the next weeks you will begin to recognise the many benefits our new computer system brings. It enables us to process applications faster and gives us better control of the very large number of documents we deal with. Changes to our letters will make them more informative for both applicants and solicitors, and the better handling and monitoring of applications will help us deliver a better service.

After we have reduced the number of outstanding applications, cases will begin to be processed more quickly than under the previous system.

There are also some benefits of the new system that help reduce bureaucracy that we are now able to introduce.

Currently solicitors making a CIV/SOL application must also send us a Notice to Opponent form (CIV/INTDOC). Information on opponents is provided in the CIV/SOL form. Our new system allows us to take these details from the solicitor's application form and issue a letter to the opponent providing the equivalent information to the Notice to Opponent form.

With immediate effect, you do NOT require to submit a Notice to Opponent form with a CIV/SOL.

We will be introducing revised versions of civil legal aid forms in September. We will be making changes to existing forms in response to comments received from practitioners and from consultation with legal profession organisations. As well as listening to your feedback, we have been looking at ways to improve the usability of our forms and to improve our processes for considering applications, made possible by our new system. We will also be introducing some new forms and producing updated guidance to help you complete the new forms.

We will keep you informed on when and how the changeover to new forms will take place. We will automatically supply starter packs and tell you when new forms can be ordered.

Yours faithfully



Tom Murray
Director of Legal Services and Applications