The Scottish Legal Aid Board

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Statement

3 August 2010

Best Value Review of Accounts Assessment

Over the last year or two, the Board has had a programme of 'Best Value Reviews', designed to look at all aspects of legal aid business over a period of time to ensure that services are being delivered in the interests of the taxpayer. As previously indicated in our Corporate Plan, this programme will continue with a review of accounts assessment processes. The accounts assessment process provides the Board with a key assurance that the c.£160m of expenditure from the Scottish Legal Aid Fund is spent appropriately.

The Review will seek to ensure that the accounts assessment process supports achievement of best value in the Scottish Legal Aid Fund, whilst at the same time seeking to optimise the resources consumed in delivering the process. The Review will also examine the extent to which the burden on the profession of accounts preparation, submission and agreement can be reduced subject to providing sufficient information to support effective assessment of accounts.

We will review the accounts assessment processes for each account type in detail. This is with a view to identifying improvements in our processes that will ensure resource is most focussed on the areas where most value is added and, that while maintaining our assurance over the appropriateness of payments, will identify opportunities to streamline or eliminate unnecessary bureaucracy. This will include reducing where necessary the number of interactions between the Board and the profession.

The Review will also examine the scope for further simplification and streamlining through changes to feeing arrangements, for example, the use of fixed or block fees etc. Any consequential changes to feeing arrangements would be a matter for the Scottish Government.

In addition to the Board's routine checking of individual accounts, where the account is unable to provide independent verification, the Board undertakes a range of supplementary post-payment checks, particularly with third parties such as the Courts, the Police and

Prisons. We will examine the range of checks that we undertake both to consider if they continue to be necessary and to establish whether they continue to provide the assurance sought. We will also consider whether there are any improvements that could be made to our independent verification.

The Review will also provide an appropriate platform for consideration of the accounts assessment Key Performance Indicators.

Through the Legal aid Handbook, we have recently sought to ensure that the range of accounts assessment guidance available to the profession is complete, and that it mirrors the guidance used by the Board's assessment officers, this review will seek to identify any remaining gaps in the range of guidance as well as looking for improvements that could be made in existing guidance.

The Review comes at a time when the Board is seeking, as it did in its application processes, to make a smooth transition from paper to online processes. As a result, any changes to processes or procedures are likely to be introduced through the Legal Aid Online system.

Although the Review will be managed internally, we intend to engage with solicitors, advocates and law accountants in conducting the Review. We will establish an external reference group drawn from the range of stakeholder groups to assist us with this work.

The Review will be led by Andrew Menzies, Director of Corporate Services and Accounts.

Ends

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