

**Civil Legal Assistance Department**

44 Drumsheugh Gardens  
Edinburgh EH3 7SW

DX ED555250 EDINBURGH 30  
*Legal Post* LP2 EDINBURGH 7

Telephone (0131) 226 7061  
Fax (0131) 225 5195



SENIOR PARTNER  
ALL CIVIL LEGAL ASSISTANCE FIRMS

22 December 2008

**CIVIL SIMPLIFICATION UPDATE**

The first stage of the Civil Simplification project takes place in February 2009. This mail shot gives details of the timetable for these changes.

**The mail shot covers:**

- **new civil application forms**
- **stage reporting**
- **civil online systems, and**
- **proposals for road shows for the profession**

**New civil forms**

After a broad-ranging consultation with civil legal aid practitioners we have now amended our civil legal aid forms and we will be issuing them soon. The main changes are:

- having different application forms to cover family and non-family cases
- reducing the size of the forms
- including a section on the civil application form to let you tell us about any special urgency work that has been done in terms of regulation 18(1)(a)
- on the same form to apply for our approval for any special urgency work to be done in terms of regulation 18(1)(b), and
- having the client's financial mandate, where specially urgent work has been done or is to be done, as part of the initial application form.

We are also bringing in new sanction application forms that include templates for certain experts. This will make it easier and quicker for you to get sanction to employ experts, and you will need to give us very little information. The templates are similar to the advice and assistance templates that are very popular with the profession.

On all the new forms, we have removed any requests for unnecessary information. We have been piloting the use of the new forms and the feedback has been very positive, with those involved finding them straightforward and clear to use.

## **Stage reporting**

We are also looking at stage reporting and you will no longer have to send us reports in many cases since we will be focusing more on long-running and high-cost cases and those cases where there have been significant changes to the issues involved. You should report any changes that might impact on the grant of civil legal aid to us without us having to tell you that it is time to provide a report on progress in the case.

## **Online systems**

Our new civil Legal Aid Online option will be available from February 2009. Legal Aid Online has become very popular for advice and assistance cases, and we expect the new system for civil legal aid applications to reflect this. The benefits of civil Legal Aid Online will include:

- quick form filling - the use of pick lists and automatic filling in of information you have already given us eliminates duplication of effort
- fewer errors and delays – as an electronic form can't be sent if there is incomplete or incorrect information
- your administrative staff are able to fill in and send us forms.

## **Road shows**

We will be holding a series of road shows in February 2009 explaining the changes in the civil system as a result of civil legal aid simplification and demonstrating the new online services. We will tell you the dates, times and venues for these road shows in early February 2009.

## **Tapering in financial eligibility**

At the legal aid conference on 7 November the Cabinet Secretary for Justice announced that the upper eligibility limit for civil legal aid would be lifted to £25,000 from April 2009, alongside the introduction of a tapered system of contributions.

The proposed changes will maintain the two existing eligibility scales for income and capital with a tapered system of contributions for applicants who have disposable incomes between £10,306 and £25,000. This will mean that those with higher earnings will pay a higher rate of contribution towards any grant of civil legal aid. We will provide more information on the changes before April next year.

Yours faithfully,



Catriona A Whyte  
Head of Legal Services (Applications)