

Title: The Criminal Legal Aid Review: Remuneration for pre-charge engagement IA No: MoJ073/2020 RPC Reference No: Lead department or agency: Ministry of Justice (MoJ) Other departments or agencies: Legal Aid Agency (LAA)	Impact Assessment (IA)			
	Date: 26 November 2020			
	Stage: Consultation			
	Source of intervention: Domestic			
	Type of measure: Secondary legislation			
Contact for enquiries: criminallegalaidreview@justice.gov.uk				
RPC Opinion: RPC Opinion Status N/A				

Summary: Intervention and Options

Cost of Preferred (or more likely) Option (in 2019 prices)			
Total Net Present Social Value	Business Net Present Value	Net cost to business per year	Business Impact Target Status
N/A	N/A	N/A	Not a regulatory provision

What is the problem under consideration? Why is government action or intervention necessary?

Early and meaningful engagement between the prosecution team and the defence is crucial to improve the disclosure process and ensure efficient case progression. In 2018, the Attorney General's Office (AGO) published its review of the efficiency and effectiveness of disclosure in the criminal justice system which found that a lack of pre-charge discussion between investigators/prosecutors and those representing the suspect hamper early resolution of evidential issues. In October 2020, the AGO published new guidance on pre-charge engagement which can take place any time after the first Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 ('PACE') interview and before any suspect has been formally charged.

In June 2019, in collaboration with the professional representative bodies, the Ministry of Justice agreed to accelerate certain areas of the Criminal Legal Aid Review, one of which was remuneration for pre-charge engagement. A key objective of the review is to ensure the fee schemes support just, efficient, and effective case progression which is consistent with the desired outcomes of pre-charge engagement. Work associated with pre-charge engagement, as outlined by the AGO guidance, is not currently remunerated separately under the police station fee schemes. The consultation this IA supports sets out proposals to introduce new remuneration arrangements.

What are the policy objectives of the action or intervention and the intended effects?

The policy objectives are to ensure fees in the areas set out above reflect, and pay for, the work done by solicitor firms and promote efficient and effective case progression. This discrete area represents another step towards the wider Criminal Legal Aid Review programme which will look at the structural reform of the whole criminal legal aid system to improve its transparency, efficiency, sustainability and outcomes while ensuring value for money for the taxpayer.

What policy options have been considered, including any alternatives to regulation? Please justify preferred option (further details in Evidence Base)

The following options are considered in this Impact Assessment (IA):

- **Option 0** – Do nothing: Retain the existing police station legal aid fee structure.
- **Option 1** – Pre-charge engagement: For all police station cases requiring pre-charge engagement, pay an hourly rate based on the current Police Station Advice and Assistance hourly rates.

Will the policy be reviewed? It will/will not be reviewed. If applicable, set review date: Month/Year

Does implementation go beyond minimum EU requirements?	Yes / No / N/A			
Is this measure likely to impact on international trade and investment?	Yes / No			
Are any of these organisations in scope?	Micro Yes/No	Small Yes/No	Medium Yes/No	Large Yes/No
What is the CO ₂ equivalent change in greenhouse gas emissions? (Million tonnes CO ₂ equivalent)	Traded:		Non-traded:	

I have read the Impact Assessment and I am satisfied that, given the available evidence, it represents a reasonable view of the likely costs, benefits and impact of the leading options.

Signed by the responsible Minister:



Date:

26/11/2020

Summary: Analysis & Evidence

Policy Option 1

Description: Pre-charge engagement

FULL ECONOMIC ASSESSMENT

Price Base Year 21/22	PV Base Year	Time Period Years	Net Benefit (Present Value (PV)) (£m)		
			Low: N/A	High: N/A	Best Estimate: N/A

COSTS	Total Transition (Constant Price) Years		Average Annual (excl. Transition) (Constant Price)	Total Cost (Present Value)
Low				
High				
Best Estimate		£50k	£0.3m - £1.8m	N/A

Description and scale of key monetised costs by 'main affected groups'

- There would be an additional steady state annual cost to the Legal Aid fund of £0.3m - £1.8m (Option 1).
- There would be an additional administration cost to the Legal Aid Agency (LAA) as a result of this option; but this is anticipated to be minimal. The LAA would need to process an increased level of claims, anticipated to rise by 5,000 to 16,000 claims per year but this is not likely to significantly increase the administration costs to the LAA.
- There would also be a one-off cost to the LAA of implementing the necessary IT, training, and guidance changes required. This is envisaged to be around £50k.

Other key non-monetised costs by 'main affected groups'

There would be an impact on providers, in terms of submitting and justifying claims, but this is expected to be small.

BENEFITS (£m)	Total Transition (Constant Price) Years		Average Annual (excl. Transition) (Constant Price)	Total Benefit (Present Value)
Low		Optional	Optional	Optional
High		Optional	Optional	Optional
Best Estimate			£0.3m - £1.8m	

Description and scale of key monetised benefits by 'main affected groups'

- Criminal legal aid solicitors would be expected to receive an additional £0.3m - £1.8m per year in steady state.

Other key non-monetised benefits by 'main affected groups'

The Attorney General's Office outlines a number of potential benefits that may arise from pre-charge engagement:

- Suspects who maintain their innocence will be aided by early identification of lines of inquiry which may lead to evidence or material that points away from the suspect or points towards another suspect.
- Pre-charge engagement can help inform a prosecutor's charging decision. It might avoid a case being charged that would otherwise be stopped later in proceedings, when further information becomes available.
- The issues in dispute may be narrowed, so that unnecessary inquiries are not pursued, and if a case is charged and proceeds to trial, it can be managed more efficiently.
- Early resolution of a case may reduce anxiety and uncertainty for suspects and complainants.
- The cost of the matter to the criminal justice system may be reduced, including potentially avoiding or mitigating the cost of criminal proceedings.

Key assumptions/sensitivities/risks	Discount rate (%)
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The key assumptions/sensitivities/risks for the preferred option (Option 1) are presented below. For a full description please refer to section F of this IA.

- It is assumed that pre-charge engagement would take place in 1% to 3% of police station attendance cases.
- Average time spent on pre-charge engagement would be around 1 to 2 hour(s) per case.
- Pre-charge engagement would be remunerated using the current Police Station Advice and Assistance hourly rates.

The pre-charge engagement take-up and average time spent assumptions are tested in the Sensitivity Analysis section.

BUSINESS ASSESSMENT (Option 1)

Direct impact on business (Equivalent Annual) £m:			Score for Business Impact Target (qualifying provisions only) £m:
Costs: N/A	Benefits: N/A	Net: N/A	
			N/A

Evidence Base

A. Background

1. In December 2018, the Ministry of Justice announced a comprehensive review of the criminal legal aid system including all fee schemes and the wider market. The then government recognised that the nature of the criminal justice system had changed in recent years and these changes needed to be reflected in the design of the legal aid system. While the number of cases coming through the system had reduced, the cases had become more complex and time consuming for all involved in the criminal justice process, including police, prosecutors, defence practitioners and the courts. Looking forward, the landscape of the criminal justice system will continue to evolve as part of the Government's focus on law and order, including plans to recruit an additional 20,000 police officers. Against this backdrop, it is important we do what is necessary to ensure there is an efficient and effective criminal legal aid system that is sustainable for the long term.
2. The aims of the Criminal Legal Aid Review are:
 - a) To reform the criminal legal aid fee schemes so that they:
 - fairly reflect, and pay for, work done;
 - support the sustainability of the market, including recruitment, retention, and career progression within the professions and a diverse workforce;
 - support just, efficient, and effective case progression, limit perverse incentives, and ensure value for money for the taxpayer;
 - are consistent with and, where appropriate, enable wider reforms;
 - are simple and place proportionate administrative burdens on providers, the Legal Aid Agency (LAA), and other government departments and agencies;
 - ensure cases are dealt with by practitioners with the right skills and experience.
 - b) To reform the wider criminal legal aid market to ensure that the provider market:
 - responds flexibly to changes in the wider system, pursues working practices and structures that drive efficient and effective case progression, and delivers value for money for the taxpayer;
 - operates to ensure that legal aid services are delivered by practitioners with the right skills and experience;
 - operates to ensure the right level of legal aid provision and to encourage a diverse workforce.
3. To support these outcomes, a robust and wide-ranging evidence base is required. To that end we have engaged widely with front line practitioners and agreed to share data extensively between the professional representative bodies, the LAA and the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) to build a detailed picture of the criminal legal aid system.

4. In June 2019, in collaboration with professional representative bodies including the Law Society, the Bar Council, the Young Barristers' Committee and the Criminal Bar Association, we agreed to bring forward consideration of the following areas:
 - how litigators and advocates are paid for work on unused material
 - how advocates are paid for work on paper-heavy cases
 - how advocates are paid for cracked trials in the Crown Court
 - how litigators are paid for work on sending cases to the Crown Court
 - how litigators are paid for pre-charge engagement
5. We ran a consultation on proposals for the first four areas above between 28 February 2020 and 17 June 2020, receiving 498 responses online and conducted 7 face to face roundtables with practitioners across England and Wales. We published our response on 21 August 2020¹, announcing we were taking forward proposals which represented additional funding of between £35m and £51m for criminal legal aid.
6. The fifth area (pre-charge engagement) was subject to a separate consultation on amending Disclosure guidelines² undertaken by the Attorney General's Office (AGO). Revised guidelines have now been published and will come into force at the end of the year. The consultation document which this Impact Assessment (IA) accompanies sets out proposals to introduce new remuneration arrangements for work associated with pre-charge engagement, as outlined in the AGO guidelines.
7. In 2018, the AGO published its review of the efficiency and effectiveness of disclosure in the criminal justice system. The review found that early and meaningful engagement between the prosecution team and the defence is crucial to improve the disclosure process and that a lack of pre-charge discussion between investigators/prosecutors and those representing the suspect hamper early resolution of evidential issues, particularly where there is a large quantity of digital material. The review recommended that the AGO's Disclosure guidelines should include guidance on pre-charge engagement and that the Ministry of Justice should review how such work is remunerated.
8. The AGO have now published their revised disclosure guidelines which include pre-charge engagement guidance at Annex B of the Attorney General's Guidelines on Disclosure³. In summary, this guidance sets out the following key features of pre-charge engagement:
 - a. It is a voluntary process of engagement between the parties to an investigation;
 - b. It can take place any time after the first Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 ('PACE') interview and before any suspect has been formally charged;
 - c. It can be initiated by an investigator, a prosecutor, the suspect's representative or an unrepresented suspect;

¹ For further detail please see: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/910942/clar-consultation-govt-response.pdf

² These guidelines are issued by the Attorney General for investigators, prosecutors and defence practitioners on the application of the disclosure regime contained in the Criminal Procedure and Investigations Act 1996 (CPIA).

³ For further detail please see: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/consultation-on-revisions-to-the-attorney-generals-guidelines-on-disclosure-and-the-cpia-code-of-practice>

- d. Information on pre-charge engagement should be provided to the suspect or their representative either before or after interview;
 - e. It may take place face to face or via correspondence, and does not need to be a formal process;
 - f. A full written, signed record of the pre-charge engagement discussions should be made.
9. Paragraph 10 of the AGO's guidance outlines a number of potential benefits that may arise from pre-charge engagement:
- g. Suspects who maintain their innocence will be aided by early identification of lines of inquiry which may lead to evidence or material that points away from the suspect or points towards another suspect.
 - h. Pre-charge engagement can help inform a prosecutor's charging decision. It might avoid a case being charged that would otherwise be stopped later in proceedings, when further information becomes available.
 - i. The issues in dispute may be narrowed, so that unnecessary inquiries are not pursued, and if a case is charged and proceeds to trial, it can be managed more efficiently.
 - j. Early resolution of a case may reduce anxiety and uncertainty for suspects and complainants.
 - h. The cost of the matter to the criminal justice system may be reduced, including potentially avoiding or mitigating the cost of criminal proceedings.
10. The AGO Review of Disclosure practices highlighted that disclosure should, where possible, be carried out at the earliest stage possible to aid effective and efficient case progression, which is also a key objective of the Criminal Legal Aid Review. The amended Disclosure guidelines seek to promote this through pre-charge engagement. We recognise that this is new work and not currently remunerated separately through the existing fee schemes.

B. Rationale and Policy Objectives

11. The conventional economic rationales for government intervention are based on efficiency and equity arguments. The government may consider intervening if there are failures in the way markets operate (e.g. monopolies overcharging consumers) or failures with existing government interventions (e.g. waste generated by misdirected rules). The new interventions should avoid creating a further set of disproportionate costs and distortions. The government may also intervene for equity (fairness) and re-distributional reasons (e.g. to reallocate goods and services to more deprived groups in society).
12. The principal rationale behind the options assessed in this IA is efficiency but also include equity arguments. To ensure that solicitors are able to undertake pre-charge engagement work and are fairly remunerated for it, we need to introduce payments to support pre-charge engagement. The associated policy objectives are to better achieve value for money for the taxpayer by supporting just, efficient, and effective case progression.

13. For more information about the policy objectives, including the rationale for them, please refer to the consultation document that this IA accompanies.

C. Affected Stakeholder Groups, Organisations and Sectors

14. The options assessed in this IA will directly affect the following groups:

- Legal aid service providers; namely criminal legal aid solicitors
- Future legal aid clients
- The Legal Aid Agency

D. Description of Options Considered

15. To meet the above policy objectives the following options are considered in this IA.

- **Option 0 – Do nothing:** Retain the existing police station legal aid fee structure.
- **Option 1 – Pre-charge engagement:** For all police station cases requiring pre-charge engagement, pay an hourly rate at the Police Station Advice and Assistance hourly rates. The fee would be paid in addition to the police station fee.

16. Option 1 is preferred as it best meets the policy objectives.

Option 0

17. The provisions for the current fee scheme are established in regulations. Under this option, the scheme would remain unchanged. However, this option would not address the objectives of the CLAR, as outlined above.

Option 1

18. Under this option litigators would be paid an hourly rate for advice and assistance associated with pre-charge engagement, as outlined in the Attorney General's Disclosure guidelines. The rate would be set at the current Police Station Advice and Assistance hourly rates⁴ (£51.28 in London, £47.45 outside London) with an upper limit of £273.75, beyond which providers would be required to apply to the LAA for an extension.

E. Cost and Benefit Analysis

19. This IA follows the procedures and criteria set out in the IA Guidance and is consistent with the HM Treasury Green Book.

20. This IA identifies impacts on individuals, groups and businesses in England and Wales, with the aim of understanding what the overall impact to society would be from implementing the options considered. IAs place a strong emphasis on valuing the costs and benefits in monetary terms (including estimating the value of goods and services that are not traded). However, there are important aspects that cannot sensibly be monetised which might include how the policy impacts differently on particular groups of society or changes in equity and fairness.

⁴ The hourly rates and the upper limit in this section exclude VAT.

21. The costs and benefits of each option are usually compared to the 'do nothing' option, to demonstrate the potential impacts of reform. In this case the 'do nothing' option is making no changes to the police station fee scheme. This 'do nothing' option is a useful baseline for comparison purposes as it demonstrates where additional expenditure is targeted.
22. The ongoing costs and benefits in this IA are presented on a steady state annual basis and are in nominal prices (2021-22) assuming an implementation date of April 2021. One-off costs are assumed to be incurred in the financial year 2020-21 and are also presented in nominal prices. No optimism bias is applied to any costs or benefits as the steady state range presented attempts to capture the uncertainty in the underlying modelling.
23. This IA uses legal aid billing data (for 2019-20) and operational input to cost the impact of the policies described above⁵.
24. The expenditure estimates in this IA have been rounded: estimates below £50,000 have been rounded to the nearest £10,000, estimates above £50,000 have been rounded to the nearest £100,000. The volume of cases has been rounded to the nearest 1,000. Consequently, some totals may not agree due to rounding.
25. Any fee scheme is assumed to amount to a transfer between the LAA and legal aid providers and, as such, has not been included in the net present value (NPV).

Methodology

26. As remuneration for pre-charge engagement is not currently available, the impacts for Option 1 are based on assumptions informed by operational input that pre-charge engagement would only take place in a small proportion of cases. Given the uncertainty in this area, it is assumed that this engagement could take place in 1% to 3% of police station attendance cases, which is equivalent to 5,000 to 16,000 cases per annum.
27. The modelling of costs is also based on high-level assumptions about the likely time spent on pre-charge activities, as outlined in the AGO guidelines. These assumptions have also been informed by operational input. Remuneration rates are based on police station advice and assistance hourly rates which vary by location (see table 2 below).
28. For an explanation of the assumptions and risks underpinning the costs and benefits of implementing Option 1, please refer to section F of this IA.

Option 1: Pre-Charge Engagement

Cost of Option 1

Criminal legal aid Solicitors

29. For Option 1, there would be a non-monetised cost for legal aid providers from completing and submitting claims for assessment. These costs are assumed to be negligible.

⁵ Note, Option 1 has been costed so that it reflects 2019-20 police station attendance case volumes.

Future legal aid clients

30. Legal Aid Clients would bear no cost as a result of this policy. Police station representation is available (non-means tested) to everyone subject to a merits test being satisfied. This will not change under the proposed Option 1.

The LAA

31. Under Option 1, the increase in annual cost to the Legal Aid fund is expected to be £0.3m - £1.8m per annum, once in steady state. This assumes that pre-charge engagement would take place in 1% to 3% of police station attendance cases and take on average 1 to 2 hour(s)⁶. There would also be additional LAA administration costs as a result of this option, but these are anticipated to be minimal.

32. The LAA would need to process an increased level of claims, anticipated to rise by 5,000 to 16,000 claims per year but this is not expected to significantly increase the administration costs to the LAA. There would be one-off costs to the LAA of around £50k to cover the IT changes required for the new remuneration arrangements.

Benefits of Option 1

Criminal legal aid solicitors

33. Under Option 1, solicitor providers are expected to receive £0.3m to £1.8m in additional annual funding in steady state.

Wider benefits

34. A number of wider potential non-monetised benefits may arise from pre-charge engagement. These are benefits that may arise to the Criminal Prosecution Service, the Police, Legal aid clients, complainants and the justice system as a whole⁷:

- Suspects who maintain their innocence will be aided by early identification of lines of inquiry which may lead to evidence or material that points away from the suspect or points towards another suspect.
- Pre-charge engagement can help inform a prosecutor's charging decision. It might avoid a case being charged that would otherwise be stopped later in proceedings, when further information becomes available.
- The issues in dispute may be narrowed, so that unnecessary inquiries are not pursued, and if a case is charged and proceeds to trial, it can be managed more efficiently.
- Early resolution of a case may reduce anxiety and uncertainty for suspects and complainants.
- The cost of the matter to the criminal justice system may be reduced, including potentially avoiding or mitigating the cost of criminal proceedings.

⁶ The low end of the steady state range assumes 1% of legal aid police station attendance cases could require pre-charge engagement and take on average 1 hour whereas the high end represents 3% of legal aid police station cases could require pre-charge engagement and take on average 2 hours. For further detail, please refer to section F of this IA.

⁷ For further detail please see: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/consultation-on-revisions-to-the-attorney-generals-guidelines-on-disclosure-and-the-cpia-code-of-practice>

Net Impact

35. Table 1 below shows the overall impact of Option 1.

36. Under Option 1 it is estimated that solicitors would benefit from between £0.3m and £1.8m per annum, once in steady state. There would be additional administration costs to the LAA as a result of this option; but these are anticipated to be minimal.

Table 1: Annual steady state additional spend, £m

Option	Solicitor providers
Option 1: Pre-charge engagement	£0.3m to £1.8m

37. The one-off implementation costs would be £50k and would cover any IT changes.

F. Assumptions, Risks & Sensitivity Analysis

Assumptions and risks of Option 1

38. The main assumptions and risks associated with Option 1 are explored in Table 2 below:

Table 2: Assumptions and risks with Option 1

Area	Assumptions	Risks
Pre-charge case volumes (workload)	It is assumed that 1% to 3% of legal aid police station attendance cases could require pre-charge engagement. This is based on operational input and legal aid police station workload data for 2019/20.	The proportion of cases requiring pre-charge engagement is uncertain and therefore could be higher than expected.
Time spent on pre-charge engagement	Average time spent on pre-charge engagement is estimated at 1 to 2 hours, based on operational input.	The time spent on pre-charge engagement is likely to vary depending on case complexity and therefore could be higher or lower.
Steady state cost / benefit range	The low end of the steady state range assumes 1% of legal aid police station attendance cases could require pre-charge engagement and take on average 1 hour whereas the high end represents 3% of legal aid police station cases could require pre-charge engagement and take on average 2 hours.	As described above the proportion of cases that could require pre-charge engagement and the average time spent could vary and this is analysed further in the Sensitivity Analysis section.
London / National split of cases	The London / National split is based on the legal aid police station advice workload, in 2019/20.	The London / National split of legal aid police station advice workload has been relatively stable in recent years.

Sensitivity Analysis

39. We have presented the impacts of Option 1 costing more than the primary estimates, to try and capture a reasonable range of uncertainty in the modelled cost estimates.

40. All estimates in this IA have assumed recent case volumes and mix are indicative of future cases although volumes and mix would change year on year for a number of different reasons. We recognise Covid-19 has had a significant impact on criminal legal aid in the short term, but it is not possible to reliably predict whether there would be long-term impacts on case volumes and mix. The scenarios captured below should account for a reasonable range of uncertainty contained in the modelled cost estimates.

Table 3: Steady state additional costs per annum, Sensitivity Analysis

Option	Sensitivity	Primary Estimated Cost per annum (£m)	Sensitivity Cost per annum (£m)
Option 1	Take-up of pre-charge engagement ranges 1% to 5% instead of 1% to 3%.	£0.3m to £1.8m	£0.3m to £3.0m
Option 1	Average time spent on pre-charge engagement ranges 1 to 3 hour(s) instead of 1 to 2 hour(s)	£0.3m to £1.8m	£0.3m to £2.7m
Option 1	Take-up of pre-charge engagement ranges 1% to 5% instead of 1% to 3% and average time spent on pre-charge engagement ranges 1 to 3 hour(s) instead of 1 to 2 hour(s)	£0.3m to £1.8m	£0.3m to £4.6m

41. The sensitivity analysis shows that if the proportion of police station attendance cases requiring pre-charge engagement was 1% to 5%, compared to 1% to 3% as per Option 1, the high-end cost estimate would increase to £3m. In a similar way, if the average time spent on pre-charge engagement was 1 to 3 hour(s), compared to 1 to 2 hour(s) as per Option 1, the high-end cost estimate would increase to £2.7m. If both scenarios materialised i.e. take-up of pre-charge engagement was 1% to 5% and the average time spent on the engagement was 1 to 3 hour(s), the high-end cost impact would be £4.6m.

H. Wider Impacts

Equalities

42. The consultation document gives further details on the equalities impacts.

Families

43. We have no evidence to suggest that families would be disproportionately adversely affected by the proposal.

Foreign trade impacts

44. We do not envisage any foreign trade impacts.

Better Regulation

45. This proposal is out of scope of the Small Business Enterprise and Employment Act 2015 and the Ministry of Justice's Business Impact Target.

Welsh Language Impact Assessment

46. We are not proposing to restrict the criminal legal aid market, nor treat them differently in Wales than we do in England. We do not consider these proposals would have an impact on legal services through the medium of Welsh.

I. Monitoring and Evaluation

47. The MoJ would proactively monitor the impact of the scheme, in terms of costs, and behavioural changes, from the point of implementation.