



## London Legal Support Trust London Specialist Advice Forum meeting – Meeting notes

Thursday 27 March 2025, 2-4pm  
Chair: Victoria Marks, ATLEU

This document contains notes from the March 2025 London Specialist Advice Forum meeting. The recording of the meeting is available [here](#).

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### 1. Welcome and opening remarks by the Chair

Victoria Marks (ATLEU) opened the meeting by welcoming all attendees and introducing herself as the chair. She extended a special welcome to the guest speakers and reminded participants to update their Zoom display names to include their organisation for clarity.

She also informed attendees that the meeting was being recorded and that the recording would be shared with forum members and made available on the London Legal Support Trust (LLST) website after the meeting.

### 2. Funder update: Funding strategic litigation - Olamide Raheem, Portfolio Manager, Impact on Urban Health

- Impact on Urban Health (IoUH) is the philanthropic arm of the Guy's and St. Thomas' Foundation, which works to understand and address the drivers of health inequalities in cities.
- IoUH's core principles:
  - Place-based approach – focused on Lambeth and Southwark, ensuring all initiatives contribute to positive change in these communities
  - Race equity – taking an anti-racist approach is integral to IoUH's aims given the role race plays in the nature and persistence of health inequity
  - People-centred approach – seeing people as the experts of their own lives and valuing lived experience alongside quantitative evidence
  - Collaboration – working with stakeholders across sectors to effect change
  - Climate justice – understanding how climate justice impacts health equity and building more of it into IoUH's interventions

## **2.1 IoUH's work and focus areas**

- IoUH funds and collaborates with partners who are delivering projects, research, and services that address the root causes of health inequity in urban areas. The partners help IoUH to better understand the links between poverty, racism, and poor health. Collectively, IoUH and its partners build capacity in communities and raise voices through collaborative programmes of work.
- Their work is currently structured around four main programmes:
  - Children's health and food – ensuring all children have access to nutritious and affordable food
  - Children's mental health – promoting equitable support for behavioral difficulties and mental wellbeing
  - Health effects of air pollution – addressing the disproportionate impact of poor air quality on children, older people, and those with pre-existing medical conditions
  - Financial foundations for adult health – ensuring Black and minoritised communities have equitable access to resources that enable good health

## **2.2 Strategic litigation as a lever for change**

- IoUH began considering funding strategic litigation approximately two and a half years ago, recognising its potential to elevate their existing programmes by supporting communities to take the lead in tackling the structural inequalities that drive health inequality.
- Health effect of air pollution programme:
  - Collaboration with lobby, campaign, and advocacy groups such as the Ella Roberta Family Foundation, Mums for Lungs, and Live & Breathe.
  - There is a growing opportunity to use strategic litigation as a lever for change – this was highlighted particularly following the coroner's findings about high levels of air pollution contributing to the death of nine-year-old Ella Adoo-Kissi-Debrah.
  - The legal landscape points towards a potential duty of care being inferred on government institutions to prevent air pollution above permitted levels – this could potentially lead to class action.

- Within the programme, there is a focus on amplifying the voices of those who are most impacted by air pollution and are the least likely to have contributed to the activities that lead to air pollution.
- The team are supporting partners to galvanise and build a clean air movement in Lambeth and Southwark.
- The group is still in its infancy but recent workshops that they have had suggest that partners are interested in how they can use the law as a lever of social change.
- Children’s mental health programme:
  - Exploring ways to tackle structural inequalities that cause trauma and stress to children and their families, including the use of strategic litigation as an accessible tool for communities to come together meaningfully to challenge social protection policies that work to push families in urban areas from health equity.
- Financial foundations for adult health programme:
  - Exploring the potential for strategic litigation, particularly in the area of housing, for example to challenge private landlords who are exploiting the ambiguity in the law, and the effect of housing policy and practice which are impacting racial and migration status inequalities.
  - There is also a lot of movement locally around damp and mould concerns and complaints that are addressed at housing associations and at local authority level.

### 2.3 Systemic Justice partnership

- Partnership with [Systemic Justice](#), a Black-led organisation that works on community-driven litigation for racial, social, and economic justice.
- Systemic Justice partners with and supports communities in their fight for social justice. Their vision is of a society where organisations, movements and collectives leverage the courts through strategic litigation and community-led campaigns against racial, social, and economic justice.
- Their approach to justice is fundamentally intersectional, so it recognises how an individual's social or political identity, and personal characteristics, overlap and combine, manifesting in different modes of discrimination and oppression.
- Systemic Justice is driven by the individuals and groups who are most exposed to structural inequalities and whose work against systemic harms of injustice is ongoing.
- Their approach is non-extractive of communities and aims to resource and build knowledge, thereby strengthening the power of community embedded actors to have their rights met.
- IoUH is working with them to explore how strategic litigation can be used as a lever for change.
- The first year of funding contributed to Systemic Justice’s development of resources, which is called the [Community Toolkit for Change](#). This includes:
  - Illustrative guides for how communities can leverage courts for change
  - A glossary providing shared understanding for legal terminology.
- Research has identified a number of barriers for voluntary sector organisations in using the law as a tool for social change, including:
  - Low levels of legal knowledge
  - Limited understanding of a legal basis on which to take legal action

- Lack of financial resources
- Systemic Justice has delivered introductory training sessions and workshops on strategic litigation to IoUH's partners and to a wider ecosystem in Lambeth and Southwark.
- Now in its second year of funding, IoUH continues to fund Systemic Justice's work.
- Systemic Justice will be providing case development support for community-driven litigation projects. Specifically, this will involve them working together with IoUH's children's mental health team and SEND (Special Educational Needs Disabilities) partners like Global Child and Maternal Health whose [Black Child SEND](#) report sheds light on the experiences of Black and mixed heritage children with special education needs and or disabilities in South London. The report identified a critical gap in support for these children and calls for greater commitment to cross-agency working a focus on practitioners' cultural competency as well as investment in parental mental health rights and entitlements.
- Systemic Justice has begun supporting a group of parents and organisations in deepening their knowledge and action on this issue.
- The funding is focused primarily on pre-litigation work with the intention to assess over the next few months whether there is appetite from these parents and groups to adopt strategic litigation as an approach.
- Systemic Justice's learnings and calls to action:
  - There is a need to build trust with historically marginalised communities before engaging before the work around strategic litigation and identifying cases can start.
  - Communities need significant support to understand strategic litigation as an approach and how it can support their causes – workshops on this are useful but not enough.
  - Communities need support to organise collectively to prepare for strategic litigation.
  - Communities know the systemic problems that they want to tackle and the solutions to these problems - but the data and evidence that sits within communities is often not documented in a formalised fashion, so communities need support in becoming litigation-ready.
  - Communities need resources – the space, finances, networks – to be able to further their cases.
- The resourcing of pre-litigation work is very important. It is not just a matter of what the outcome might be – whether or not the organisation identifies a golden case, for example, but the process of going through strategic litigation as a strategy. It is an important journey of learning to strategise, collaborate, articulate their aims and missions, and identify who their allies are and what particular targets they might want to approach when it comes to filing cases.
- IoUH is hoping to extend strategic litigation work to their other two programmes, to be used as an additional tool alongside their traditional approach to effecting change which is policy influencing.

## 2.4 Q&A session

*Question: Can you elaborate on the funding model for strategic litigation? Are you funding both the pre-litigation stage and the litigation itself, or are you looking at mixed funding models and if so, what are they?*

*Answer: We are new to this and, from the outset, our funding to Systemic Justice has been set up as a grant to support the development of knowledge within communities, as a starting point. While we are open to funding actual legal action, we assess this on a case-by-case basis. Regular check-ins with our legal team help us manage potential risks, especially since we also work with businesses and councils, which could sometimes be the targets of legal cases.*

*Question: Our organisation has worked on temporary accommodation issues, and while we have achieved some policy changes and mobilised communities for campaigning, we struggle with the resources and capacity to pursue litigation.*

*Answer: From what we have heard, some funders are more interested in supporting legal action once a case reaches court. While identifying funders willing to take on that risk can be challenging, they do exist (e.g. organisations like Foundation for International Law for the Environment). It is a matter of finding those funders who are set up to support that stage of the process.*

### **3. Agency update: New LGBTQ+ clinic, supervisory work and legal apprenticeships - Eddie Coppinger, CEO, University House – Legal Advice Centre**

#### **3.1 New LGBTQ+ clinic**

- As part of their family law work, University House (UH) has trained 60 commercial lawyers to advise on LGBTQ+ issues including domestic abuse (e.g. applications for non-molestation and occupation orders), same-sex adoption, child arrangement orders, divorce and separation, home rights, and injunctions under the Protection from Harassment Act.
- Non-molestation orders apply to individuals connected to the client (e.g. former partners and family members) whereas the Protection from Harassment Act is used against non-connected individuals who can be identified – and allows individuals to sue for damages.
- During the recent far-right riots, one of the legal avenues that was actively being considered against several far-right websites was action under the Protection from Harassment Act, with the aim of bankrupting those sites.
- The leading case in this area is Law Society v Kordowski. Kordowski created a website called “Solicitors from Hell”, where he encouraged members of the public to post horror stories about their experiences with solicitors. The Law Society successfully obtained an injunction against him.
- The LGBTQ+ clinic is pan-London, accepts referrals at any time from anyone, and is not means-tested. A [leaflet](#) with details on how to make referrals is available and will be circulated.
- The clinic operates on a pro bono basis, and pro bono work is taken very seriously. UH has provided training and supervision to a number of commercial law solicitors to carry out this work. Pro bono support allows the organisation to “box well above its weight”, enabling them to handle approximately 1,000 complex cases per year. The organisation works with 32 major law firms based

in London, as well as in-house legal teams from companies like HSBC, JPMorgan, and Vodafone.

- Access to pro bono opportunities used to be influenced by geographic location (e.g. proximity to big law firms near Liverpool Street). However, since the pandemic, a lot of pro bono work is done remotely, which means that organisations have the potential to develop a pro bono practice regardless of location.
- Attendees were encouraged to get in touch to continue the conversation.

### 3.2 Supervision

- UH has run access to justice projects outside of London, especially in places like Cornwall, Devon, Dorset, for a number of years. These projects involve providing training, support, and remote supervision.
- Recently, the City Bridge Foundation has provided UH with funding to duplicate this work in London. They are looking to support at least eight grassroots advice organisations in London with training and a mixture of both direct and remote supervision.
- Any attendees already working with grassroots organisations were encouraged to get in touch as UH may be able to provide additional support to complement the support already given.

### 3.3 Legal apprenticeships

- Upcoming legal apprenticeship intake (including solicitor, CILEX, and paralegal routes) will begin mid-September, with onboarding in mid-August. Organisations should prepare now to secure funding and places for staff.
- UH offers briefing materials (some of these can be found on the Advice Workforce Development Fund [website](#)) on apprenticeships and with funding from LLST, Eddie is also available to provide ad hoc advice and support on legal apprenticeships. Attendees were encouraged to get in touch if they would like to receive the materials or engage on this topic.
- Individuals can qualify as solicitors through the SQE1 and SQE2 exams without doing an apprenticeship, by funding it themselves and arranging their own qualifying work experience.
- The [Social Welfare Solicitors Qualification Fund](#) is available to help cover exam costs – Eddie noted it was underspent in the last round and encouraged organisations to consider this source of support.
- Law students are increasingly aware of the need for qualifying work experience, which they can gain through volunteering and pro bono work. Organisations that are looking to increase their engagement with students were encouraged to consider this as it has value for both students and the organisations themselves.

### 3.4 Q&A session

*Question: Are we expecting any changes from Skills England about apprenticeships? Also, is there any update on the plan to develop a Level 6 apprenticeship scheme?*

*Answer: The current SQE1 and SQE2 pathway to become a solicitor is a Level 7 qualification. There is a proposal (though not yet confirmed) that the apprenticeship levy may no longer be used to fund Level 7 qualifications. The rationale for this is unclear. Alternatives, such as the CILEX apprenticeship, may therefore need to be considered. The CILEX apprenticeship is a Level 6 qualification and will continue to be eligible for apprenticeship levy funding. In addition to the funding benefits, the CILEX route is also appealing because of the high failure rates associated with the SQE1 and SQE2 exams. CILEX lawyers are regulated professionals who can carry out most of the same work as solicitors and are common in high street law firms. There is significant merit in the sector exploring this pathway further.*

#### **4. Presentation: Findings of the “Mapping Funding for Social Welfare Advice in London” report - Shreya Gautam, Research & Evidence Manager, London Funders**

*The presentation slides are available [here](#).*

- London Funders, in partnership with the Greater London Authority (GLA) and 360Giving, undertook [research](#) in 2023 to map current funding for social welfare advice in London.
- The aims of the project were to provide an up-to-date picture of the funding currently going into social welfare advice in London and to provide a platform for funders and the sector to consider how best to tackle the gap between demand, provision, and future capacity in London.

##### **4.1 Phases of the mapping and methodology**

- Literature review
- Quantitative analysis from 360Giving (an analysis of data shared by grantmakers who publish open data using the 360Giving Data Standard)
- Qualitative interviews with 21 funders and some advice providers
- Survey with local authorities
- Deep dives on issues identified in data and interviews

##### **4.2 360Giving quantitative analysis – key findings**

- Mapping of 334 advice providers with a total turnover of £280m in 2022 – 23.
- Most organisations were small, with a turnover of under £1 million.
- 58% operate in a single borough or multiple boroughs, 25% London -wide and the remaining are multi -regional or national
- Around 40% of income in the cohort is from government sources.
- The largest funders were the National Lottery Community Fund, City Bridge Foundation, Trust for London and the Henry Smith Charity
- 20 of the largest funders were responsible for 77% of the amount of known grant funding received by advice providers.
- Many of these advice providers received small, short-term, project-based grants.



- Major charities and Law Centres received the highest average funding.
- Significant overlap in funders supporting the same organisations – opportunity for better collaboration.

### 4.3 Qualitative interviews, surveys and deep dives – key findings (funder perspective)

- Challenges identified:
  - Current funding cannot meet the rising demand for social welfare advice, exacerbated by crises like the cost-of-living
  - Funding pots are shrinking, and local authority funding has been cut over the past few years  
Specialist advice gaps in housing, immigration, benefits, and debt.
- Needs highlighted:
  - Long-term, unrestricted grants – allowing flexibility to better address complex, interconnected issues rather than being constrained by rigid, project-based funding
  - Investing in systemic change – recognising the intersectionality of advice needs (e.g. immigration, health, and debt) and addressing underlying issues rather than applying short-term fixes
  - Investing in the workforce – tackling recruitment and retention issues and supporting staff well-being.
  - Evolving advice ecosystem (many individuals are receiving advice from non-traditional providers and community groups) – including informal and community groups in the broader advice ecosystem, through training and partnerships

### 4.4 Recommendations and opportunities

- Invest across London’s advice sector
- Provide multi-year, flexible funding
- Invest in the sector’s advocacy work
- Improve the data on advice funding in order to influence funder decisions
- Invest more in staff wellbeing
- Keep social welfare advice central to wider conversations about social justice
- Greater funder collaboration, especially given overlapping grantees and shared goals
- Support for emerging models such as community lawyering (e.g. Sistren Legal Collective provides advice alongside training local community groups to provide advice)
- Balance between funding frontline delivery and systems change efforts to avoid gaps in service provision

### 4.5 Q&A session

*Question: Have funders considered how to bring more resources into the advice sector? Has there been any thought about a wider ask in London for funding for the advice sector? Should the history of the sector be revisited to understand what is missing today? 30-40 years ago, the advice landscape in London was very different – there were many local community organisations providing advice and it was all joined up. One of the reasons this has changed is because the advice sector has become far*



*more regulated and because of all the different funding streams. None of the challenges facing the sector can be properly addressed unless there is a way to bring in more resources and make advice services more local as they used to be.*

*Answer: Many funders have smaller endowments than before. Some have tried embedding advice work into other funding streams – for example, Paul Hamlyn Foundation is funding community lawyering through its migration fund, and City Bridge Foundation is supporting advice through their infrastructure fund. However, the funding available is still far below what is needed to meet the current demand. There is an interest in plugging some of the gaps caused by cuts in local authority funding, but we are yet to see funders actually move towards that. There is a shift towards providing core, unrestricted grants (e.g. from City Bridge Foundation, National Lottery), but this remains limited.*

*Further comment from an attendee: The sector itself has been discussing and developing ideas for a coordinated, London-wide advice strategy. However, it will only be effective if funders are also involved in shaping and supporting this approach.*

*Further comment from LLST: The sustainability of the advice sector is under threat due to ongoing funding cuts and increased demand. Advice funders are exploring creative funding routes – including legal insurance, apprenticeship levies, and client accounts. For example, the Access to Justice Foundation has been active in this space. Trusts and foundations are doing what they can but are at full capacity. Dan Hopewell from Bromley by Bow Centre has done a significant piece of work mapping advice services in London. This showed the impact of the model in Tower Hamlets where every GP practice includes a social welfare advisor – a promising initiative that we are promoting and working towards. However, with the dissolution of NHS England, the future of health funding is also uncertain. Meanwhile, we need to strengthen our structures and systems, continue to push for funding, and be ready when that funding, hopefully, becomes available.*

*Answer: I agree that it is really important that we start thinking seriously about alternative sources of funding. What we are hearing from funders is that they themselves are under pressure, and often reliant on their boards and trustees to release more funding. So while exploring new funding sources is key, I also think we need to be lobbying some of the existing funders to step in – especially if we agree that this is a crisis.*

*Question: Is there any appetite among funders to lead a public ask for more support for London's advice services, based on their longstanding role and expertise?*

*Answer: Among the funders we have spoken to, there is appetite to invest in communities and explore and fund initiatives such as embedding advice provision in GP practices. But as far as I am aware, there has not been any coordinated public funding ask.*

*Further comment from LLST: Alongside Propel, London Funders has set up the "Collaboration Circle" to make it easier for funders to pool resources – particularly for core funding. We are also in the process of making future arrangements for Propel and we are hoping that advice will continue to be a significant part of the initiative. London Funders is constantly trying to bring new funders on board, including corporate philanthropists like Bloomberg. In addition, events like the London Legal Walk continue*

*to raise funds from city law firms and chambers. Under the proposed London-wide advice strategy, one key strand will focus on how to better market the advice sector. This would help make it a more attractive area for investing.*

*Answer: There are some early conversations taking place around the idea of blended finance and exploring alternative sources of financing for the sector, particularly in light of the growing recognition that grantmaking is not able to keep up with the demand. If you are interested in being involved or learning more, do get in touch with London Funders.*

## **5. Discussion: Impact of NI contribution increases on advice sector - Nezhahat Cihan, CEO, London Legal Support Trust**

### **5.1 Overview of changes**

- From 6th April 2025, the employer's National Insurance contribution rate will rise from 13.8% to 15%, marking an increase of 1.2%. The secondary threshold, above which employers become liable for contributions, will be lowered from £9,100 to £5,000. This means that any wages above £5,000 will be subject to the increased rate of 15%. These changes represent a significant increase in costs for employers.
- The maximum Employment Allowance for organisations has increased from £5,000 to £10,500, and the previous restriction preventing organisations with a National Insurance liability of more than £100,000 from claiming this allowance has been removed. This is a positive development that could benefit smaller organisations in particular.

### **5.2 Advocacy efforts**

- NCVO has written an [open letter](#) to the Chancellor requesting exemptions for the charity and voluntary sectors. In their [response](#) to NCVO, the Chancellor acknowledged the value of the sector but reiterated why the decision has been made and cannot be changed.
- Advice UK has also written an [open letter](#) to the Chancellor, arguing for an exemption for the advice sector and citing that their "Advice Saves" campaign found that nearly two-thirds of participating organisations anticipated service cuts due to rising costs and limited funding.

### **5.3 Impact on the advice sector**

- These changes will impose a significant financial strain on organisations. Many organisations have multi-year grants that do not include contingency for such cost increases and are operating with low or non-existent reserves, making it difficult to absorb these additional costs while trying to address growing demand

for vital services. The changes will also impact staff wellbeing which is a key concern given the already existing workforce crisis within the sector.

- The floor was opened to discussion. Attendees were asked to share the impact these changes might have on their organisations and staff wellbeing.
- Contributions from attendees:
  - A representative from an organisation shared that they had decided not to provide pay increases this year due to the increased costs associated with National Insurance contributions. They expressed concerns about staff retention and well-being, especially given the additional pressures of the cost-of-living crisis. They pointed out that recruiting staff had already been a challenge, and the impact of these increases would make it even harder to recruit and retain staff in vital service areas.
  - Another attendee highlighted that while their organisation had decided to offer a 1.5% pay increase, staff had expressed concerns that this was insufficient given the rising cost of living, effectively leading to a pay cut. They mentioned that trustees were looking for additional funding to address the gap and hoped to explore further pay increases later in the year, depending on available funds.
  - A third attendee shared that their organisation had implemented a small cost of living increase in response to the staffing crisis. Their organisation is quite small, and their financial situation is not as dire as they thought it would be. They had looked into the changes regarding the Employment Allowance and found that it would not make a significant difference to them.

#### **5.4 Funders' perspective**

- While funders were generally unable to increase multi-year funding allocations, some are showing flexibility in how funds could be spent. Funders are open to reallocating budgets to cover National Insurance contributions, although this varies by funder.
- Organisations were encouraged to discuss these challenges with their funders and explore possibilities for adjusting the budget allocations.

#### **6. AOB**

- Attendees were reminded of the [Advice Workforce Development Fund](#), which has been a collaborative effort across the sector over the last two years. Now in its third year, the learning emerging from the workforce interventions will be the focus of an upcoming conference on 25 June. The conference will:
  - Share learning and insights from the Advice Workforce Development Fund so far
  - Provide a space for further discussion around cross-cutting issues raised at the forum, such as workforce sustainability and a London-wide advice strategy
- The event will be delivered in partnership with the Advising Londoners project, which is a GLA-funded partnership between London Citizens Advice, and LLST's Centres of Excellence.

- Attendees were encouraged to save the date and participate in the conference as a valuable opportunity to shape the future of the advice sector and learn from peers.

## 7. Closing remarks and next steps

The meeting concluded with closing remarks and a feedback poll. Attendees were invited to participate in an anonymous poll to suggest topics for future forum meetings, ensuring that discussions remain sector-led and responsive to members' needs.

The next forum meeting is scheduled for **Wednesday 4 June at 2-4pm**, with further details to be shared soon.

## 8. Links and resources from the meeting

- Systemic Justice's [Community Toolkit for Change](#)
- [Case studies](#) on SEND support for Black and mixed heritage children and families
- LGBTQ+ clinic [leaflet](#)
- [Briefings](#) on SQE apprenticeships
- Social Welfare Solicitors Qualification Fund [webpage](#)
- London Funders' [presentation slides](#)
- London Funders' "Mapping Funding for Social Welfare Advice in London" [report](#)
- [NCVO letter](#) to the Chancellor on the impact of increased employer National Insurance Contributions for charities
- Chancellor's [response to NCVO letter](#)
- [AdviceUK letter](#) to the Chancellor on the impact of increased employer National Insurance Contributions for charities
- Advice Workforce Development Fund [website](#)