

Terms of Reference: LSAF Steering Group

1. Background and context

The London Specialist Advice Forum (“LSAF” or “the Forum”) was established in 2020 in response to discussions with advice agencies from the London Legal Support Trust’s (LLST) [Centres of Excellence \(COEx\) programme](#). These agencies highlighted the need for a dedicated space to share ideas, collaborate, and discuss solutions to emerging challenges in the specialist free legal advice sector.

The LSAF, an initiative founded by LLST and funded by City Bridge Foundation, is a network of frontline specialist free legal advice agencies across the capital. It provides a space for agencies to share best practices, resources, and opportunities; discuss sector developments and challenges; and identify emerging needs and solutions.

By facilitating knowledge exchange, peer support, and collaboration, the Forum aims to strengthen the sector’s sustainability, efficiency, and resilience – helping agencies ensure fair access to justice for all.

To ensure the Forum remains reflective of and responsive to the needs and priorities of those it serves, a Steering Group comprising representatives from the sector was established to help guide its development.

2. Purpose

The purpose of the Steering Group is to ensure the Forum is sector-led, relevant, and impactful. It plays a key role in overseeing the direction and governance of the LSAF by providing both strategic and practical guidance to support the Forum’s work.

3. Membership

The Steering Group is made up of individuals from across the specialist free legal advice sector, including advice agencies, membership and network organisations, and others. To maintain effective governance, the group is to have a minimum of five and a maximum of nine members, ensuring a broad range of perspectives while remaining small enough for focused discussion and efficient decision-making. LLST supports the group but is not formally considered a member.

The group’s membership should reflect the diversity of the sector, including representation from a variety of organisations (such as Law Centres, Citizens Advice, larger organisations, smaller

community groups, legal aid contract holders, and non-legal aid contract holders) and expertise across specialist advice areas, including welfare benefits, immigration and asylum, and housing. While this represents the ideal composition, it may not always be possible to cover every type of organisation or area of expertise at all times.

The recruitment of new members follows a hybrid process to ensure transparency, inclusivity, and sector engagement. LLST, in consultation with the Steering Group, identifies any gaps in representation or expertise and may directly invite suitable candidates to submit an application. Simultaneously, an open application process is publicly shared, allowing any interested individuals from the sector to apply.

All applications, including those from invited candidates, are reviewed by LLST and the Steering Group, which leads the selection and appointment of new members. Members are selected based on enthusiasm, commitment, and capacity to support the Forum's aims, alongside knowledge and experience of the sector. The overall balance of the Steering Group is also considered to ensure it reflects the diversity of the sector.

Members serve fixed terms of two years, with the option to renew once, allowing for a maximum of four consecutive years. After completing their maximum term, members are required to step down but may reapply after a break of at least one year, subject to the group's needs and the standard recruitment and selection process. This ensures fresh perspectives, broad representation, and sustained engagement over time.

4. Roles and responsibilities

Steering Group members are expected to actively participate in both Steering Group and LSAF meetings, contributing their sector knowledge and experience to support and guide the ongoing development of the Forum.

Members should aim to attend most meetings, notifying LLST in advance if they are unable to attend. If a member cannot attend a Steering Group meeting, they are encouraged to provide feedback via email or Teams call with LLST. If they miss a Forum meeting, they should review meeting notes and/or recordings (where available).

If a member misses more than half of the Steering Group and Forum meetings within a 12-month period, they risk forfeiting their place on the Steering Group. LLST and the wider group may review their membership, taking into account overall engagement, communication with LLST, and reasons for absence, and may ask them to step down to ensure continued active participation and accountability.

In addition to meeting attendance, Steering Group members are expected to remain engaged between meetings – for example, by responding to emails, reviewing circulated documents, and contributing to discussions or decisions as needed.

Steering Group members are responsible for:

- Actively participating in Steering Group and Forum meetings.
- Taking turns to chair Steering Group meetings on a rotating basis, ensuring shared leadership.
- Suggesting topics, speakers, and chairs for Forum meetings, as well as broader strategic developments for the Forum.
- Providing insight from their experience in and knowledge of the sector, including on emerging issues, trends, and challenges.
- Identifying topics that may be useful for policy work and ensuring a balanced focus between legal aid and non-legal aid content.
- Sharing key learnings and potential policy recommendations from Forum discussions with the wider sector and relevant stakeholders.
- Periodically reviewing the Forum’s remit and objectives, along with progress towards achieving them.

LLST is responsible for:

- Providing strategic direction and secretariat support to the Steering Group and wider Forum.
- Organising and facilitating meetings, including arranging Teams/Zoom links, venues, and catering as needed.
- Circulating meeting invitations, agendas, and notes in a timely manner (within three weeks of meetings).
- Uploading Forum meeting notes and recordings (where available) to the LSAF webpage on the LLST website.
- Maintaining and updating membership data.
- Coordinating the schedule of rotating Steering Group chairs.
- Approaching and confirming Forum speakers and chairs ahead of each Forum meeting.

5. Meetings

The frequency, format, and content of Steering Group meetings are agreed collectively by the group and LLST.

The Steering Group meets at least quarterly, with additional meetings scheduled as needed. Meetings typically last an hour and may be held online, in person, or in a hybrid format, depending on members' preferences and availability.

Each meeting agenda includes discussion of the most recent LSAF meeting and planning for the next, as well as any additional items such as governance matters, the establishment of subgroups, or the development of potential pilot projects. All Steering Group members are encouraged to suggest agenda items and given an opportunity to do so in advance of each meeting.

6. Decision-making

A minimum of three Steering Group members must be present for meetings to be quorate.

The Steering Group seeks to reach decisions by consensus wherever possible. Where consensus cannot be achieved, decisions are made by a simple majority, taking into account the votes of members present as well as any views or votes shared in advance by members unable to attend. In the event of a tied vote, LLST has the final say to ensure decisions can be taken.

Any conflict of interest must be declared at the start of any meeting where decisions are being made, and individuals are expected to remove themselves from that discussion and the decision-making process if there is a conflict.

7. Remuneration

To recognise the time and contribution of Steering Group members, LLST reimburses the organisations they represent for attendance at Steering Group meetings. Reimbursement is provided only for meetings attended and paid as a flat fee of £300 per meeting. Organisations may submit a single annual invoice to LLST for the meetings their representatives have attended.

8. Review and amendments

These Terms of Reference are reviewed annually by LLST, with input from and approval by the Steering Group.

Approved by LLST and the Steering Group on 8 October 2025.

Next review due on 8 October 2026.

For any queries or further information regarding the Steering Group, please contact Lukia at lukia@llst.org.uk.