

Terms of Reference: London Specialist Advice Forum

1. Background and context

The London Specialist Advice Forum (“LSAF” or “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.

Initially set up for the benefit of LLST’s Centres of Excellence, the Forum has since expanded to include a broader range of agencies – including other LLST beneficiaries and additional specialist advice providers across London and the South East.

With funding from the City Bridge Foundation, LLST has been able to support the establishment and ongoing development of this sector-led initiative. LLST has strong partnerships with many specialist advice providers in London and the South East, who help shape the Forum’s direction and focus on local needs and solutions. Additionally, LLST utilises its well-established connections within the legal and funding sectors to help share Forum learning about emerging issues and needs across the free legal advice sector.

2. Purpose

The LSAF is a network of frontline specialist free legal advice agencies across the capital. It provides a space for agencies to share best practice, 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.

3. Objectives

- **Provide a dedicated space for specialist free legal advice agencies to convene**, enabling them to share and discuss current issues, sector developments, funding options, projects, and collaboration opportunities.
- **Enhance communication** within the advice sector through regular Forum meetings, subgroup meetings, and digital communications.

- **Promote sustainability and efficiency** by encouraging the exchange of best practices, resources, and learning from within and beyond the sector.
- **Support sector resilience** by providing a safe space to air and discuss issues and challenges, offer mutual support, and benefit from each other's experience and knowledge.
- **Shape sector development and projects** by identifying emerging issues, themes, and patterns within the advice sector, and using this knowledge to inform the wider sector, funders, and key policy stakeholders, as well as to guide pilot projects undertaken by LLST or others where relevant.

4. Governance and structure

The LSAF is coordinated and supported by LLST, which acts as secretariat and provides strategic oversight to ensure the Forum's effectiveness and alignment with its aims.

While LLST facilitates the running of the Forum, the LSAF Steering Group, comprising representatives from across the specialist free legal advice sector, ensures the Forum remains reflective of and responsive to the needs and priorities of the sector. The group plays a key role in overseeing the direction and governance of the LSAF, providing both strategic and practical guidance to ensure that the Forum is sector-led, relevant, and impactful.

Steering Group members are selected through an open and transparent process, designed to ensure a balanced and diverse membership that reflects the breadth of the sector. Members serve fixed terms of two years, with the option to renew once, allowing for continuity alongside opportunities for fresh perspectives.

More detailed information about LLST's and the Steering Group's roles and responsibilities, as well as the Steering Group's recruitment and selection process is available in the LSAF Steering Group Terms of Reference.

Subgroups

Alongside the Forum, LLST also facilitates a number of sector-led subgroups, providing space for more focused discussion and peer support around specific themes. Each subgroup has a sector lead with relevant expertise, develops its own Terms of Reference, and contributes to the wider aims of the LSAF.

5. Membership

The LSAF aims to reflect the diversity of the advice sector and to include a wide range of perspectives and expertise across its membership.

The Forum is open to agencies, advisers, caseworkers, and lawyers providing free social welfare legal advice. The Forum welcomes anyone committed to strengthening and sustaining free legal advice services and ensuring fair access to justice for all. This includes grantmaking organisations funding (or interested in funding) free legal advice services, membership bodies, academics, and students.

Membership is not restricted to organisations based in London, though the Forum focuses on issues and developments in this region.

To join the Forum and be added to the mailing list to receive meeting invitations and other Forum-related updates, individuals should complete the form on the dedicated [LSAF webpage](#) or contact LLST directly.

6. Meetings and other methods of communication

The frequency, format, and content of LSAF meetings are determined by the Steering Group and LLST and informed by ongoing engagement and feedback from Forum members.

The Forum meets at least quarterly, with additional meetings scheduled as needed. Meetings typically last two hours and may be held online, in person, or in a hybrid format.

Each Forum meeting is chaired by a different representative from an advice agency, helping to maintain the sector-led nature of the Forum and encouraging broad participation and shared ownership.

Meeting agendas and priorities are shaped by the Steering Group in collaboration with LLST and respond to the needs and interests of the wider sector. This includes regular communication with Forum members, post-meeting feedback, and an annual survey to ensure the Forum continues to reflect sector priorities.

Members receive invitations to meetings and other Forum-related updates on a regular basis. If identified as a need by the Steering Group or Forum members, a dedicated platform may be established to support ongoing communication between meetings.

7. Monitoring and evaluation

The effectiveness of the LSAF is monitored on an ongoing basis by LLST. This includes reviewing attendance, engagement, and feedback from Forum members to assess whether the Forum is achieving its objectives and meeting the needs of the sector.

Monitoring insights are shared with the Steering Group annually, and any changes to the Forum's format, structure, or content arising from this evaluation are discussed with the Steering Group for their input and approval.

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 Forum, please contact Lukia at lukia@llst.org.uk.