**Friday 2 May 2025**

## Meeting Opening: Welcome and Apologies

The Chair formally opened the meeting, welcoming members, observers and new Council participants. The minutes from both the January Council meeting and the annual strategy meeting were approved.

## Updates on Council's Current Work

### Solicitors Act Working Group

Council considered the draft interim report and consultation questions produced by the Solicitors Act Working Group. The report examines whether reform is needed to modernise the Solicitors Act 1974, including the distinction between contentious and non-contentious business, the operation of solicitor-client billing, the role of the Legal Ombudsman, and the interaction between the Act and modern funding arrangements.

Members welcomed the significant progress made by the Working Group and discussed the importance of clearly articulating the policy objectives behind the proposed reforms. It was agreed that further refinement would take place before publication of the consultation.

### Digital Inclusion (Futures Group)

Council considered a revised report on digital inclusion and access to justice. Members discussed the need to move beyond concepts of digital exclusion and towards a broader focus on inclusion, ensuring that court users remain at the centre of service design and reform.

The Council discussed potential future work to understand user journeys through the justice system and identify opportunities to improve support and accessibility. The report was approved for publication and further scoping work will be undertaken to explore future areas of study.

### Litigation Funding

Council received an update on the Litigation Funding Working Group. Members were informed that the final report had been substantially completed following extensive consultation and stakeholder engagement. Discussion focused on balancing consumer protection with the need to maintain effective funding mechanisms within the civil justice system.

### Costs

Council received an update on the Costs Working Group and ongoing engagement with stakeholders. Members noted that work remains ongoing and that progress will continue over the coming months.

### Missing High Court Judgments (Data Group)

Council heard an update on work examining the availability of judgments through public databases. The Working Group is exploring possible reasons for gaps in publication and considering how greater public access to judgments can be achieved. Members discussed the wider importance of ensuring judgments remain accessible while recognising the practical and technological issues involved.

## Updates on Other Work

### HMCTS

Council received an update on HMCTS activity, including court performance, mediation services and ongoing digitalisation projects. Members discussed the continued development of digital services, including work on a new digital possession service and improvements to existing online civil justice platforms.

There was discussion about court performance, settlement rates, possession claims and user experience. Members emphasised the importance of understanding regional variation in performance and ensuring that communication with court users remains effective and accessible.

**Ministry of Justice**

Council heard an update on current Ministry of Justice policy work, including civil justice reform, mediation, costs, enforcement and legal support initiatives. Members discussed ongoing consideration of recommendations arising from previous CJC reports and the broader challenge of securing legislative opportunities for reform.

**Legal Aid**

Council discussed developments within the legal aid sector, including challenges around access to legal aid services and opportunities presented by emerging technologies. Members considered the importance of modernising legal support systems while preserving access to advice for those who need it.

**CPRC**

Council received an update on recent developments within the Civil Procedure Rule Committee, including work relating to small claims paper determinations. Members discussed the potential benefits of retaining and developing procedures that enable appropriate claims to be determined efficiently.

**National Forum**

Council received an update on preparations for the 2025 National Forum, scheduled for November. Members discussed potential themes, speakers and workshop topics. The Forum is expected to focus on access to justice, technology, collaboration and innovation, while ensuring discussions remain relevant to practical challenges facing court users and the wider justice system.

**Future Work**

Council discussed future work priorities and noted the importance of balancing new projects against existing commitments. Members highlighted the growing significance of artificial intelligence within the justice system and agreed that further work in this area should be prioritised. Discussion focused on developing a clear scope for future work and ensuring that any guidance produced complements activity being undertaken elsewhere in the legal sector.

**Other Business**

Council received updates on recruitment activity and recent developments within the Online Procedure Rule Committee. Members noted ongoing work relating to inclusion and future digital justice reforms.