Friday 31 January 2025

Meeting Opening

The Chair opened the Council's annual strategy meeting, which was convened to review the Council's priorities, consider future projects and assess whether the Council's standing groups remained fit for purpose. Members discussed the importance of selecting projects where the Council could have the greatest impact on the civil justice system and considered potential future work following the conclusion of a number of major workstreams.

Future Work

Use of Artificial Intelligence

Council discussed the increasing use of artificial intelligence across the justice system and agreed that there was value in taking forward work in this area. Discussion focused on the need for guidance covering both legal professionals and court users, as well as the implications of AI for dispute resolution processes more broadly. Members considered developments internationally and the importance of ensuring a coherent approach within the civil justice system.

Accessibility and Inclusion

Council discussed wider issues relating to access to justice for people with disabilities and considered how accessibility concerns interact with both digital and non-digital aspects of the court system. Members discussed whether there may be value in ensuring that issues relating to inclusion and accessibility continue to inform the Council's broader work on access to justice.

Alternative Dispute Resolution

Council considered proposals relating to the impact of the Supreme Court's decision in Churchill. Members agreed that it was too early to undertake substantive work in this area but noted that future developments in mediation and dispute resolution could merit further consideration once additional evidence becomes available.

Legal Support and Advice

Council discussed proposals concerning collaboration across the legal support and advice sector. Members recognised the importance of improving communication and information sharing between organisations and agreed that further scoping work would be beneficial in understanding the existing landscape before considering any future project.

Civil Enforcement

Council discussed possible future work arising from its earlier enforcement report. Members considered how further work could support the modernisation and digitalisation of enforcement processes and agreed that additional scoping would be undertaken before returning to Council with proposals.

Civil Justice in the Magistrates' Courts

Council discussed the significant volume of civil work undertaken in the magistrates' courts and noted that this area has received relatively limited attention. Members agreed that there was merit in exploring how the system operates in practice and whether there are opportunities to improve transparency and understanding. The Council agreed to take this work forward once capacity became available following completion of existing projects.

Experts

Council discussed issues relating to the use of expert evidence, including expert fees, the quality of reports and emerging technological developments. Members agreed that there may be value in a future workstream examining these issues and considering whether reform is required.

Standing Groups

Council reviewed the role of its standing groups and agreed that the Executive Committee, Futures Group and Data Group all continued to perform important functions. Members discussed how the Data and Futures Groups could work more closely together, particularly in areas where technology and data increasingly overlap.

Monitoring Recommendations

Council discussed how it can better track the impact of recommendations contained in its reports. Members agreed that a more structured approach to reviewing progress would help improve oversight of the Council's work and ensure recommendations continue to receive appropriate consideration after publication.

National Forum

Council reviewed feedback from the 2024 National Forum and agreed that the event should continue in 2025. Members discussed attendance, format and future speakers, and agreed that planning for the next Forum should begin promptly. The Council also confirmed arrangements for chairing the event.

Meetings Outside London

Following a successful meeting in Cardiff in 2024, Council agreed to continue holding meetings outside London and confirmed that its July 2025 meeting would take place in Manchester.