

# Citizens Advice witness service

Partners update – First edition



## Contents

<b>1. Introduction to the Citizens Advice witness service</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>2. Scope of the service</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>3. What witnesses can expect</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>4. Structure of the service - roles and responsibilities</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>5. Performance and quality</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>6. Transition</b>	<b>8</b>
Approach	
Staff	
Volunteers	
Data sharing and data security	
Testing	
<b>7. Future service</b>	<b>10</b>
Summary of changes on 1 April	
How we plan to develop the service	
<b>8. Branding</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>9. Publicity materials</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>10. Next steps</b>	<b>11</b>

## 1. Introduction to the Citizens Advice witness service

Dear partners

On 1 April, delivery of the Witness service in courts across England and Wales will transfer to Citizens Advice from Victim Support. At Citizens Advice, we know the right support can turn a daunting situation into an empowering one. For 75 years we have equipped people with the skills and confidence they need to get through difficult situations. Last year over 660,000 people sought online advice from Citizens Advice on navigating the legal system, and close to 20,000 searched for help with young people's rights in court.

Citizens Advice has a strong history supporting staff and volunteers to deliver high quality, impartial advice. We are delighted to be bringing this experience and expertise to this vital civic service. Delivering the Witness service will enable us to extend our reach by offering the practical and emotional support people need to deal with the impact and experience of being a witness in court.

Our highest priority is to make sure the transition from Victim Support to Citizens Advice is as smooth as possible from a witness point of view. We are working closely with Victim Support and the Ministry of Justice to achieve this. Many Victim Support staff will have the right to transfer to Citizens Advice on 1 April and we hope that all Witness service volunteers will also join us. The experience and expertise of existing staff and volunteers and the relationships they have built will be invaluable for Citizens Advice as we develop plans to improve the witness experience.

Our intention is that the Witness service will continue largely unchanged in the near term, since that is the most effective way to achieve a successful transition. But there will be some essential changes such as contact details and management structure that all partners working with witnesses and victims will need to know about. It is not practical for us to meet all of you individually before 1 April but we want to make sure you have the information you need about the new service and the changes it brings, so that we can all prepare effectively.

In the longer term, we would like to work in collaboration with partners to improve the witness experience. Our aim is to alleviate stressful waiting times for witnesses; improve witnesses' understanding of the court process and people involved; and ensure that witnesses feel valued and respected while they undertake the vital civic role of giving evidence in court. We are already engaging with a range of stakeholders to develop strategies to do this.

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to thank our colleagues at the Ministry of Justice and Victim Support for their help and support with both the creation of this pack and the transition preparation as a whole. We hope that this partner readiness pack will provide the information you need – updates will be available once details are finalised.

Kind regards



Gillian Guy  
Chief Executive, Citizens Advice

## **2. Scope of the Witness service**

From 1 April 2015, Citizens Advice will be delivering the court-based Witness service at every Criminal Court in England and Wales.

It will be known as the Citizens Advice witness service.

Using fully trained volunteers and experienced paid staff, it will provide free practical, emotional support and information to witnesses who are called to give evidence in criminal courts. The service will aid all witnesses and help them to give their best evidence throughout the duration of their contribution to a trial.

Any witness giving evidence in a criminal court in England and Wales will be able to get support from the Witness service, along with witnesses' families and supporters.

The service will receive referrals from:

- witness care units
- the Crown Prosecution Service
- other prosecuting bodies
- the police
- defence solicitors.

Witnesses will also be able to self-refer in advance via a national telephone number and an online form available on our website – these will be provided in the next update.

### **Out of scope services**

Enhanced and additional witness services that are currently funded locally will not transfer to Citizens Advice as part of this scheme.

### 3. What witnesses can expect

#### **Before the day of the trial or hearing, staff and volunteers will:**

- contact witnesses who have been referred to the service
- undertake a needs assessment of witnesses
- explain the role of the service and the support it can offer
- offer a pre-trial visit to every witness referred to them to take place more than 10 days in advance of the trial
- conduct pre-trial visits where the offer is taken up.

#### **On the day of the trial or hearing, staff and volunteers will:**

- provide emotional and practical support to every witness who wishes to receive it
- undertake a needs assessment of each witness receiving support
- provide a visible presence in court buildings at all times when the court is open
- offer information and support to witnesses
- offer pre-court familiarisation to every witness who attends court, which should take the form of a visit to a court room if possible
- provide explanations about court proceedings to witnesses
- facilitate witnesses receiving regular updates on the progress of their trial, either by informing witnesses of the administrative progress of their trial, or by requesting updates from the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS), defence solicitors or HM Courts and Tribunals Service (HMCTS) where appropriate
- accompany the witness in the court room, if the witness has requested it
- support witnesses where Special Measures are required by the witness and by the court
- refer the witness to other locally and nationally commissioned services if the Witness service identifies that the witness has ongoing needs.

#### **Supporting vulnerable and intimidated witnesses**

Additional support will be provided to vulnerable and intimidated witnesses including:

- accompanying the witness in the TV link room (if Special Measures have been granted, and if requested by the witness)
- providing age appropriate explanations about court proceedings for young witnesses, taking into account their individual needs
- providing enhanced pre-trial visits
- providing a Young Witness Pack to young witnesses and support them in understanding it if necessary.

#### **After the trial or hearing, staff and volunteers will:**

- provide practical and emotional support after the trial has finished while the witness is in the court building
- facilitate the witness receiving an explanation about the outcome of the trial or an update on proceedings from the appropriate person if necessary
- refer the witness to other locally and nationally commissioned services if the Witness service identifies that the witness has ongoing needs.

## **Engagement with partners**

We will engage with Criminal Justice System agencies and the defence at each court in order to provide the most effective support for witnesses.

We will take a proactive role in Court User Group and equivalent local oversight bodies where invited by the Judiciary, senior HMCTS staff, prosecution or defence where necessary to support effective services for witnesses.

We will work with other appropriate service providers to ensure co-ordinated service delivery and a holistic approach to supporting service users.

## **4. Structure of the service – roles and responsibilities**

The Citizens Advice witness service will be entirely focused on enabling witnesses to give their best evidence in court.

The transition and implementation of the Witness service is being managed by a project team within Citizens Advice, working closely with Victim Support, partner organisations and the Ministry of Justice.

We have recruited a dedicated Management Team to provide leadership and oversight for the service.

This team will be responsible for all aspects of service delivery, including:

- service planning and development
- performance, quality and contract management
- training development, management and delivery
- relationship management
- forecasting and reporting.

The service will be led by the recently appointed Head of Witness Service, who will be in post by April 1 and report to Sue Wigley, Director of Operations at Citizens Advice. We will provide more information about this appointment in the next update after Victim Support staff and Witness service volunteers have been notified. The Head will provide leadership for the service, including building relationships with the Ministry of Justice and Criminal Justice System (CJS) stakeholders, and will be a member of the Citizens Advice Senior Delivery Team.

The Head of Witness Service will be supported by seven key roles:

**Five Regional Delivery Managers** (North, Central, Wales, South, and London) will lead the Regional Delivery Team, managing staff, developing a Regional delivery plan, and undertaking a proactive role with key CJS stakeholders and developing relationships to improve the witness journey.

A **Contract Manager** and **Contract Coordinator** will monitor contract performance; supporting the Regional Delivery Managers (RDMs) to address underperformance, coordinate other Citizens Advice input into the service and use data to spot trends and support service improvement.

The Regional Delivery Managers will be supported by:

**Senior Service Delivery Managers (SSDMs)**, covering all Police Force Areas will ensure the Regional delivery plan is implemented, support the staff delivering the service in Courts (Service Delivery Managers) and manage key relationships in their Police Force Area.

**Service Delivery Managers (SDMs)**, based within courts as per existing arrangements will ensure the service is effectively delivered on a daily basis. They will recruit, manage and develop volunteers who support witnesses and be the key point of contact for Court staff and referral agencies.

**Service Delivery Assistants (SDAs)**, based within courts as per existing arrangements will provide support to SDMs and SSDMs and volunteers.

Fully trained volunteers will provide pre-trial and on-the-day witness support, including needs assessment, court room support, Barrister liaison, Special Measures and wraparound service signposting.

### **Geographical coverage (by Police Force Area)**

#### **North**

Merseyside, Cheshire, Cumbria, Lancashire, Greater Manchester  
West Yorkshire, North Yorkshire, South Yorkshire, Humber  
Cleveland, Durham, Northumbria.

#### **Central**

Nottingham, Derbyshire, Northamptonshire, Leicestershire, Lincolnshire,  
Warwickshire, Staffordshire, West Midlands, West Mercia  
Norfolk, Suffolk, Cambridgeshire, Bedfordshire.

#### **London**

Metropolitan police and City of London Police  
Hertfordshire, Thames Valley, Essex.

#### **Wales**

North Wales, Dyfed Powys, Gwent, South Wales.

#### **South**

Avon and Somerset, Dorset, Gloucester, Wiltshire, Devon & Cornwall  
Hampshire, Kent, Surrey, Sussex.

## 5. Performance and quality

Citizens Advice is the sector leader for the development and management of robust quality frameworks. Our reputable bureaux Membership Agreement is heavily focused on client care, and through our Membership Standards and Quality team, we are the only advice provider that assesses the quality of advice given to clients. We actively contribute to developing quality frameworks for a range of funders.

We want to bring the same focus on quality to the Witness service.

To achieve this, we are creating a bespoke quality framework which will form a central part of operating processes in the future. This will document the required standards for delivering the service according to the Witness Charter, best practice, the Authority's specification and witness needs.

Working closely with our subject matter experts, Supporting Justice, we will measure performance across a range of indicators to improve the consistency of the Witness service whilst allowing for local differences. We will create an audit process to complement self-assessment at court level, enabling us to risk assess the service at each location and identify and swiftly address performance issues.

We will also introduce regional peer support networks to enable us to effectively share and embed best practice.

Furthermore, through our network of bureaux, digital advice services and national phone lines, Citizens Advice is able to help millions of people every year to solve their problems. The data we collect is unique. It enables us to identify trends and spot new and emerging problems. The information we gather informs our policy and campaigns work allowing us to improve the lives of the people we speak to everyday. After April, we will use this experience to campaign for witnesses, working to improve witnesses' experience of going to court and the wider justice system.

## 6. Transition

### Approach

Since 2012, Citizens Advice has successfully transferred in several new services from the public sector, including the Consumer Direct helpline and Consumer Futures. These have involved the TUPE transfer of staff and we are using the experiences gained from these to inform our approach to this transition.

We are focused on transitioning the Witness service safely and ensuring that witnesses are able to receive the service they need on 1 April. To do this we are minimising any changes to the service at this point so that staff, volunteers and partner organisations can continue to deliver the service effectively. We fully recognise that it is an unsettling time for Witness service staff and volunteers and we have been working hard in partnership with Victim Support to support them through the changes.

Throughout transition we're also looking to the future of the service too, working with key strategic partners across operational and policy areas to build the relationships which will be so instrumental in the future development of the Witness service.



## **Staff**

Existing Witness service staff will be transferring to Citizens Advice under TUPE legislation on 1 April and our plan is to keep these staff to their existing locations following transfer wherever possible. In some areas there may be some gaps in staffing due to vacancies or where currently the Witness service does not make up 100 per cent of the role (and therefore staff may not be liable to transfer). We are currently working through the best options for each of these locations to ensure we have the necessary coverage at transfer.

From April, the Regional Delivery Managers will be looking at the capacity and demand across the service and working to match these up.

## **Volunteers**

We really want existing volunteers to stay with the Witness service and continue to perform their current duties after April. Following a round of country-wide roadshows which took place as part of the TUPE process, members of the Citizens Advice Executive and Senior Delivery Team were able to meet and engage with Victim Support staff. The roadshows have been a real success; giving us an opportunity to answer questions about the transfer, operational changes and the future for volunteers. Anecdotal feedback is that volunteers are keen to stay with the Witness service and we have also been talking to the National volunteer advocate.

We are very encouraged by this and will continue working closely with Victim Support to support the volunteers through the change in service provider. It is of course down to the individual volunteers to decide if they wish to continue their work with us, but we are very optimistic that most will decide to.

Witness service volunteers and our Citizens Advice Bureaux volunteers will remain as two distinct groups, delivering different services (although we have found some volunteers who work for both). We also hope that Witness service volunteers will take the opportunity to volunteer for other roles in the Citizens Advice service.

## **Data sharing and security**

We are putting in place data sharing agreements and protocols to replicate those already in place between Victim Support and partner organisations. We are also putting in place a data-sharing agreement with Victim Support to enable the transfer of transitional cases to us. We are, along with Victim Support, working with the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) to ensure that Data Protection Act (DPA) requirements around client consent are met for this transitional activity.

We are currently in the process of setting up all the (Criminal Justice Secure email) CJSM accounts required for the service and the new CJSM addresses will be shared in the next version of this pack.

We are putting in place new secure and simple email, document, spreadsheet and reporting applications for the Witness service to manage referrals and other day to day business needs. New email addresses and phone numbers will be provided to partners.

## **Testing**

Prior to go-live we will be testing the new equipment, systems and processes which will be in use from the 1 April. We may require some help from partners to enable us to test end-to-end cases and will be in touch where we'd like your support with this.

## 7. Future service

### **Changes you will see in the first month**

Our first priority is to make sure the service transfers safely and that witnesses receive the support they need from 1 April without disruption. That will be our focus and therefore we will be restricting immediate changes to those which we need to make to meet the new requirements set out by the funder.

### **How we plan to develop the service**

Obviously there will be operational changes – including the new national and regional management structure outlined on page 6.

The changes you will see in the first month will include:

- new senior contacts regionally
- a clear escalation route for you to raise local and regional concerns.
- new telephone numbers for contacting the witness service locally
- new email addresses (both CJSM and individual staff email contacts)
- new data collection forms
- new publicity material on display in courts
- a new website.

The second edition of this pack will supply further details.

### **Longer term changes**

We clearly set out in our bid to the Ministry of Justice (MOJ) the types of changes we think could strengthen the Witness service that we would like to explore. Some examples include:

- strengthening links between Citizens Advice Bureaux (CAB) and the Witness service locally
- opportunities around video links from CAB premises
- new volunteer roles
- new access channels – webchat, new website and virtual court tours
- review support for vulnerable and intimidated witnesses
- improve provision for defence witnesses.

Until we fully understand the service and have formed effective working relationships with key stakeholders, we are not proposing to make any significant changes.

We are clear that we will need the input and expertise of the fully trained Witness service staff and volunteers and major stakeholders to help us shape the service into the future.

We are also mindful that the court-based Witness service is a small piece of the witness journey through the Criminal Justice process and that there is significant change across the landscape. Therefore we need to make sure change to the Witness service is aligned with the direction of travel of stakeholders.

We are committed to co-designing the future of the Witness service with you. We will use the new regional structures to bring opportunities for you to contribute to development and improvement.

We have a strong track record in co-designing services with our bureau network, users, partners and funders. We will use this expertise and work together to test and pilot new initiatives and ensure they work before they are rolled out more widely.

## 8. Branding

The service will be known as the Citizens Advice witness service and will come under the Citizens Advice brand. However in this instance, branding will talk of the Witness service first and foremost.

## 9. Publicity materials

We will be producing leaflets and posters promoting the service for witnesses and outlining what they can expect from the service. In addition there will be a complaints leaflet and posters about confidentiality. These will be available in Courts (where appropriate) and across our bureau network.

We are aware of the sensitivities around publicising the service in Courts and will adhere to existing practice and guidelines. We will also ensure that the branding promotes the Witness service rather than Citizens Advice in Courts but to help manage people's expectations we will inform clients they can get advice on these and all other issues at their local Citizens Advice or online.

Materials will include a tag line 'help for witnesses in court'. This is to distinguish the service from other non-court based witness services.

You may have existing materials that, over time, will need updating. We will be providing boilerplate text and brand guidelines in the second edition of this pack that you can use in printed materials and on your website.

## 10. Next steps

We have a busy and exciting month ahead getting ready for go-live on 1 April.

We will issue an updated pack in the last two weeks of March to provide you with the operational information you need for the start of the service.

This will include:

- an update on transition activities
- contact details for the teams you'll be working with
- text, links and branding you can use to signpost to the Citizens Advice witness service.

In the meantime, if you have any questions regarding this pack then please get in touch with the project team through [witnessservice@citizensadvice.org.uk](mailto:witnessservice@citizensadvice.org.uk)

We look forward to working with you.

## **Our aims**

- Provide the advice people need for the problems they face.
- Improve the policies and practices that affect people's lives.

## **Our principles**

The Citizens Advice service provides free, independent, confidential and impartial advice to everyone on their rights and responsibilities. We value diversity, promote equality and challenge discrimination.

3rd Floor North  
200 Aldersgate  
London EC1A 4HD  
Tel: 03000 231 231

[www.citizensadvice.org.uk](http://www.citizensadvice.org.uk)

Citizens Advice is an operating name of  
The National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux.

Registered charity number 279057  
Published March 2015