

Annexe 3 – Letter dated 10 June 2016 from Dr Elizabeth Gibby, Deputy Director, MoJ, A2J Strategy and Specialist Policy, to the ‘pilot’ DFJs

Many of you will have heard at the President’s recent Conference, HHJ Margaret de Haas’s motivating session on settlement conferences and the President’s subsequent call for you all to consider settlement conferences in your respective areas.

The Ministry of Justice (MoJ) has been in discussion with the President on how best to achieve and support his vision of a wider roll out of settlement conferences and I am pleased to announce that we have agreed to implement a plan of phased pilots, supported by the collection of quantitative data and qualitative research. This work will be supported by expert social researchers from MoJ Analytical Services.

In addition to Cheshire, and Merseyside and Devon, where settlement conferences are already underway, the President has agreed that three further DFJ areas; Central London, South East Wales and Avon, Somerset and Gloucestershire should be included in the first phase of the pilot. These areas have been carefully identified by analysts to ensure the findings of the research are reflective of a range of court and judicial experience. This will strengthen the ability of the findings to inform whether, and how, a phased roll-out can be most effectively implemented and ensure all DFJ areas are prepared. We are very grateful to HHJ Robin Tolson QC, HHJ Stephen Wildblood QC and HHJ Isabel Parry for their agreement to participate at this stage, and for the ongoing contributions of HHJ Margaret de Haas and HHJ Miranda Robertshaw.

Findings from the study will be shared on an ongoing basis throughout the research with an advisory group, to include the President and representatives from MoJ, Cafcass and local authorities. This will follow a similar approach to that adopted for the revised PLO research. This will enable lessons learnt, challenges and areas of good practice to be shared with the judiciary and other stakeholders throughout the pilot so the model and delivery of settlement conferences are continually improved and the potential benefits are maximised.

Our pilot and research proposal assumes continued roll out of settlement conferences to other areas, subject to the emerging findings from the first phase, which will be considered by the advisory group and MoJ Ministers. We plan to review early findings in August to inform whether, and how, the next phase of the pilot should be rolled out.

We anticipate that, following the President’s Conference, many of you will be keen to join the pilot and start settlement conferences as soon as possible. We therefore ask that if you wish to trial settlement conferences in your area, you contact natalie.corbett@justice.gsi.gov.uk copying your email at the same time to alex.clark@judiciary.gsi.gov.uk in the President’s office. We will then include you in our roll out plans and will be in touch to discuss at what point we will be able to facilitate the extension of the pilot of settlement conferences to your area.

I understand that the phased approach to trial settlement conferences will be frustrating for some, but, as the President has acknowledged in agreeing to this approach, it is important that we undertake thorough research to explore how the implementation of settlement conferences can best be supported and effective. My team and I very much look forward to engaging with you in the very near future on this work. In the meantime if you have any further questions or comments, please do not hesitate to contact me.