

Civil news: change to family legal advice via the CLA helpline

Callers to the Civil Legal Advice (CLA) helpline with family issues will no longer be referred to specialist telephone advice from 1 September 2021. Instead, they will be offered alternative support arrangements by being signposted to their nearest face-to-face family providers.

Other areas of telephone advice provided by the CLA in England and Wales will be unaffected by this change. These include education, discrimination, debt, and housing work.

How will the new family process work?

Operators will carry out an initial 'means and merits' assessment for the client. This will provide an early, initial case determination.

If the issue is in scope, and clients are financially eligible, they can then be signposted to their 3 closest providers. If not, they will continue to be signposted elsewhere for possible help.

This is a change from the current referral process for specialist telephone legal advice on family issues. However, these changes do not affect access to family advice. Clients who qualify for legal aid can continue to get face to face help from family practitioners with legal aid contracts, including over the telephone.

Why is this happening now?

The CLA is introducing these changes to replace the current referral arrangements for specialist telephone advice in the family category of law.

It adapts the process to the reality that more than 90% of family cases billed under CLA are only reaching the determination stage.

At the moment, the service is not delivering substantive legal advice in most cases. Instead the service is mostly being used to determine scope and financial eligibility for legal aid.

Amendments to Standard Civil Contract 2018

Changes have been made to the Standard Civil Contract 2018, which we consulted on with representative bodies. Contract amendments will apply from 1 September 2021 to:

- support the referral of clients from the CLA operator service to a face to face family provider
- require face to face providers to carry out full scope and eligibility assessments of the client's issue

- give face to face providers the option of using remote methods of communication where the client has been referred to them by the CLA operator service

Details of the contract amendments can be found on the Standard Civil Contract 2018 page on GOV.UK.

Further information

[Standard Civil Contract 2018](#) – to download table of amendments, general specification and family category specific