MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE SOCIETY’S LAW TECH GROUP HELD ON 12 MAY 2022 AT 11AM IN PERSON AND BY VIDEOCONFERENCE

PRESENT: Kerry McCloy (Chair), Phillip Armstrong, Ruaidhrí Austin, Angela Brady, Tracy Ann Collins, Amira Graham, Anna Gray, Aine Hughes, Jane Hollway, Amy Jackson, Catherine McQuade and Ciarán O’Kelly

APOLOGIES: Ian McFarland, Jamie Donnelly

IN ATTENDANCE: Jamie Warnock (Head of Policy and Engagement), Brian Carson (Head of Non-Contentious Business) and Damien McCann (Policy & Research Intern)

1. Welcomes and Apologies:

Ian McFarland’s and Jamie Donnelly’s apologies were noted.

2. Previous Meeting’s Minutes

The Committee wished to make a number of minor amendments to the previous meeting’s minutes. Labelling the Courts as “reluctant” to adopt e-bundles was believed to be unfair and this reference was removed. An additional reference to e-bundles was also agreed. Subject to these amendments, the minutes were approved.

The Group then discussed the relative willingness for Courts to adopt e-bundles, the High Court appears be making an effort, however County Courts seem to be more lethargic. It may be the case that the Chancery and High Court are being upgraded first and then technology is filtering down through the lower courts. Anna Gray noted that she understands that the judiciary’s IT infrastructure upgrading is at an advanced stage.

The Chair noted that it would be useful to hear from those who conducted the e-bundle pilots.

3. Updated Terms of Reference:

Updated Terms of Reference, based on the recommendations from the previous meeting were presented to the Group and were agreed.

4. CPD Events:

The Group agreed CPD is a strategic priority and Autumn is tentatively agreed as the timeframe for the first event.
A two-pronged approach to CPD is discussed. The first fork would focus on increasing the capabilities of those with low tech take up – e.g. in cybersecurity. Activity planned for cyber week in September would provide a good opportunity in this area.

The second fork would look to deliver CPD on more advanced topics – e.g. an introduction to e-discovery. The Chair noted that Member Services have been in touch with Matt McKee, of Grant Thornton, who is involved with the judiciary in developing a new practice direction on e-discovery. Matt has agreed to share information on this new direction when it is available for this Group to provide views. The Chair noted that it is hoped that the Group will have an opportunity to review and comment on the new practice direction.

Action: The Group agreed to invite Matt to a future meeting.

The possibility of including Law Tech CPD at the Young Solicitor Conference, scheduled for the end of the year, was discussed. This would be both beneficial for younger members and provide a sounding board for future events. Ruaidhrí Austin agreed to keep the Group informed.

Ruaidhrí also raised information dissemination as potential strategic priority, suggesting the Society should start with a yearly report which should progress to twice year. The Group agreed this and that a greater web presence would be established as a starting point.

Action: Law Tech Group web page to be established.

5. QUB Research:

Professor Ciarán O'Kelly briefed the Committee on the research venture soon to be undertaken by himself and his co-academics. Though it is at an early stage, he explains that a gap analysis on law tech pick-up will be conducted, consisting of around 20 – 30 structured solicitor interviews. This will assess inter alia: where they are and where they feel they are ahead in or behind on in terms of technology. The results of this should be in by the end of the Summer.

This parallels a project underway at the National University of Ireland Galway, they are planning a seminar for the end of Autumn which will include lawyers from both the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland.

Of special interest to this research is hearing from those solicitors who are using technology but would not consider themselves tech adoptees and also those who are not using technology and the reasons behind this. It was suggested that hearing from some of the tech providers (of e.g. case management systems) may be beneficial.

The Group agreed on the importance of this research and wish to support however they can, including participating themselves and encouraging the participation of other solicitors.
6. **A.O.B.**

Jamie Warnock informed the Group of a conversation he had with Invest NI that ties into both CPD and the cost prohibition question. Invest NI is able to assist with upskilling and innovation programmes or provide grants and it may be desirable to bring this to the profession’s attention in the future.

Anna Gray remarks that lawyers prefer bespoke products to commercially available, off-the-shelf solutions. On the market currently are case management packages that are advertised equally to law firms and call-centres alike. It would be useful therefore for the Law Society to produce a list of approved providers of law tech. The Chair concurs.

**APPROVED ……………………..**