Association of **Lawyers for Children**

Promoting justice for children and young people

PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

ALC WELCOMES LSC'S ADDITIONAL TENDER ROUND

The Association of Lawyers for Children (ALC) welcomes this afternoon's announcement by the Legal Services Commission (LSC) that it will hold a fresh tender round for family law providers, leading to contracts effective from 1st April 2012.

We hope this will go some way to resolving the extraordinary situation which has occurred in the current tender round for family contracts to run between February 2012 and November 2013 which has left around 70 providers around the country without a contract to continue providing services to children and families after the end of this month, despite this tender round having been non-competitive.

We understand that these 70 providers failed to secure contracts because of "technical errors" in their tenders.

One of the providers who failed to secure a contract for this reason was the National Youth Advocacy Service (NYAS). They are understood to have been "failed" because, according to the electronic tendering system used by the LSC, the tender documentation uploaded through the internet portal did not include their address. Even if this was correct, it is a deeply worrying reason for not renewing their contract, NYAS is a nationally-known and respected provider of services, involved in the most difficult of children's cases, and regarded as an essential resource for the family justice system.

A big question mark continues to hang over the integrity of the tendering platform used by the LSC. Many of those who failed to secure contracts, including NYAS, are adamant that they correctly uploaded fully completed tenders, and that the problem lies with that tendering platform. This is the second time in 18 months that this platform has been used by the LSC. On both occasions providers have failed to secure contracts because it is alleged that incomplete tender documents have been uploaded. On both occasions providers have complained that the system advised them that their tender documents had been successfully transmitted. We hope that the LSC will now work with the providers affected and family representative bodies to ensure that these difficulties are properly addressed and eliminated, before the LSC embarks upon a new tender round for the 2013 family and other civil contracts. If this situation continues unresolved, more public money will be wasted – money which could be better spent on preserving access to family justice, and the integrity of the supplier base necessary for the effective delivery of family justice.

23rd January 2012

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For Further Information contact ALC office on 020 8224 7071 or Barbara Hopkin on 07970 620156 or bh@hmbsolicitors.co.uk

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Notes for Editors

1. The ALC is a national association of lawyers working primarily in the area of public child care law. It has over 1200 members, mainly lawyers who act for children, parents, other adult parties, or local authorities, as well as other legal practitioners and academics. It also has associate members such as Children's Guardians, social workers and other professionals such as medical staff. Its Executive Committee members are drawn from a wide range of experienced practitioners practising in different areas of England and Wales, including London, Birmingham, Manchester and Leeds, as well as in shire counties and small rural areas. Several leading members are specialists who have over 20 years experience in child law, including local government legal services, and several hold judicial office.

2. The Association exists to promote access to justice for children and young people within the legal system in England and Wales. Within that framework, its aim is to develop and improve the practice of lawyers in meeting the needs of children who become involved in legal processes by promoting standards of best practice and interdisciplinary training.

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