

Minutes for CLLS Land Law Committee meeting on 16 July 2025 at 12.30pm in person at Hogan Lovells and via Teams

Attendees: Jackie Newstead (Chair), David Hawkins (Vice Chair), Warren Gordon (Secretary), Nick Barnes, Caroline DeLaney, Tom Goldsmith, Matt Hootton, Simon Kenley, Paul Kenny, Omer Maroof, Henry Moss, John Nevin and Anton Newton,

Apologies: Andy Bruce, Chris Cartwright, Adrian Footer, Nick Harris, Alison Hardy, Kevin Hart (from the CLLS), Katherine Lang, Franc Pena, Julian Pollock, Laura Uberoi, Sarah Walker, Alex Watt, Patrick Williams and Emma Willoughby.

1 Welcomes: The Committee was delighted to welcome Henry Moss from Ashurst to the Committee and looked forward to Henry's contributions to the Committee's meetings and projects.

The Committee was also delighted to welcome Mike Harlow, Deputy Chief Executive and Deputy Chief Land Registrar at HM Land Registry and thanked Mike for taking the time to discuss the Committee's questions about Land Registry matters.

2 Approval of Minutes for May 2025 Committee meeting – The Minutes are approved and are now on the CLLS website - see [Minutes for May 2025 CLLS Land Law Committee meeting](#).

3 Discussion with Mike Harlow from HM Land Registry

Introduction and overview

Mike gave an introduction and overview.

The dominance in volume of residential work is not affecting overall customer services. HM Land Registry ("HMLR") appreciates the complexity and variety of different parts of the property market and that digitalisation can only be part of the solution.

Mike was delighted to have the opportunity today to listen to the views of people working day to day in the market.

HMLR's first priority is that it has made significant progress in reducing the age of the oldest cases. For those applications that can be processed (which are not being held up by other pending applications), by the end of the last financial year the time to process them was down to under 12 months. HMLR continue to focus on the age of the oldest cases and the process time keeps coming down.

The rate of fall is getting faster – this is in part due to having more people trained and working. For about 12 months HMLR has been the right size in terms of numbers and capabilities but since many people are new to HMLR, it does take time to have people ready especially to deal with more complex cases. The quality of output from HMLR is also improving. It also becomes easier as submitted applications are more recent, with reduced administration.

HMLR is increasing its focus on how the service can be improved further. Reducing process times further with the aspiration to reduce further the current 12 months' process time.

Mike is keen to look at what speed does the conveyancer need, based on its client's and its own needs, regardless of the application type. Another goal is to reduce complexities and simple errors, in part through using the validation tools on Portal and Business Gateway.

HMLR has been letting conveyancers know the percentage of their applications that have “avoidable requisitions”, indicating where the firms can improve matters.

HMLR is also looking at more widely adopting Qualified Electronic Signatures (“QES”) (where no witness is needed and it is more secure). This is an example of making the process simpler. Automating provides greater resilience to spikes in HMLR workload.

The meeting then moved onto a discussion of the questions raised by the Committee.

The Committee's questions and issues raised

The delays in processing applications, which Committee members consider are not improving

On some occasions there are still delays for complex applications, for which expediting is required.

Mike would like to know whether the delays encountered by Committee members are caused by a chain (or “string”) of preceding applications.

Even if expediting is used, it does not overcome the problem of other pending applications. But if matters are urgent or there have been long delays, firms should not hesitate to use expediting which will assist to some extent.

Acknowledging that there will be long delays for certain applications, one solution to reducing the delays is to have dedicated resourcing for those applications, having the input of specialist HMLR teams to deal with a string of pending applications.

There is an HMLR resource already available for this, “Managed services”, which can be used for unusual situations for which the Portal is not really suitable. Using Managed services ensures that customers deal with the same HMLR staff.

Looking forward, another route may be for the parties to a transaction to reach out to HMLR well before completion (say, at exchange), but also to speak to firms who have submitted prior applications, on the basis that expediting cannot overcome delays caused by prior applications.

The possibility of a separate Land Registry service for more complex real estate transactions perhaps for a higher fee

The Committee currently still experiences material delays and it has told HMLR previously that they would be happy to have a larger Land Registry fee, in order to subsidise greater resourcing/a dedicated unit to bring down the waiting times for commercial deals.

HMLR understand that desire and want to plan for a simpler fee structure and a separation between commoditisation/ digitalisation of services versus more complex, high value transactions.

Managed services will provide that more dedicated service and customers can choose that for an increased fee.

Can a fee on an application be debited at the time that the application is made rather than when the application is completed?

Committee firms are encountering problems with their account teams when there are delays in the Land Registry fee being debited, often after the bill has been rendered to the client. The Committee said that it would be preferable for HMLR to debit the fee when the application is first submitted.

Mike said that HMLR do debit the fee when the application is submitted, although there may be a subsequent debit or credit if the original fee was not correct.

Mike will speak to HMLR's Finance team.

Requisitions are raised a long time (sometimes years) after the application was submitted when relevant fee earners may have left the firm making it much more difficult and costly to deal with the requisition

And

The requisitions being raised by the Land Registry are increasing and are increasingly fussy. Is there a KPI for spotting issues? This goes to the issue of how dealing with requisitions is addressed in Land Registry staff training and all of this is exacerbated by the delays in processing applications and raising requisitions

Mike said that over the last three years, 10% fewer requisitions have been raised. This is expected to improve further.

The Committee's view was that some requisitions are unusual, perhaps even fussy.

Mike said that HMLR internal guidance is interpreted by staff in different ways. New HMLR joiners tend to be more stringent to the letter of the guidance. However, that guidance must reflect the right level of risk judgment and newer recruits must be supported by more experienced people. So, if a requisition is challenged by the customer, it is escalated to more senior HMLR staff.

The Committee noted that the issue of fussy requisitions compounds the delays with prior applications.

HMLR has provided firms with their avoidable requisition statistics (these are requisitions relating to mistakes by the firm in making the application) which vary a lot between firms. Commercial firms tend to have lower avoidable requisition rates, but the rates can vary from 1% to 25%, if not more.

Requisition rates overall can go up to 60% (where not avoidable requisitions).

HMLR's aspiration is to reduce these rates in advance, digitally or by the Managed services resource. HMLR's vision is to integrate its services into a firm's casework software, to help with the information required to pre-populate and validate HMLR applications.

First registrations is an example of a service heading to a default Managed service.

The approach to making changes to documents should be the same between wet-ink and electronic documents

The Committee asked what proportion of requisitions is document execution related. Mike said that there are statistics available.

QES is an answer to such requisitions and there are no Practice Guide 82 requirements for QES.

Mixed signatures may be used for QES.

QES will be promoted by HMLR as an acceptable e-signature, rather than it just being a pilot scheme.

HMLR will need to get the lenders on board. HMLR will need to check the QES put forward before it is used, but if accepted it will avoid the frequent requisitions on e-signing execution.

PG82 will be updated to promote the use of QES.

There is a need for more helpful identifying information about applications on the daylist

The Committee noted that sometimes only the reference number is given (at other times more information is available), but there is no consistency. The address and firm name would be helpful.

Mike said that this information can be obtained through Application enquiry and Show details.

The position, however, is not always consistent.

Errors in result of a search of the index map, for example, including neighbouring properties and there being missing titles

SIM results occasionally pick up wrong title numbers and there is an inconsistent approach to search results. This is not a regular problem.

Mike said that the ultimate answer would be to have a guaranteed MapSearch, but that is not currently available.

There are no Land Registry telephone lines on Fridays

Mike was pleased to confirm that this will be reintroduced in September 2025.

Please can the details of any update to a practice guide be included on the webpage for the practice guide itself, and the update details should include a more accurate summary of what has changed.

A link to the update is now included in the Practice Guide itself.

It was accepted that some of the update descriptions are a little too general.

If a title is cancelled, how are historic entries from that title obtained?

Mike confirmed that if a title is closed, historic entries can still be obtained.

The Committee again thanked Mike for joining the meeting and providing such helpful information and the Committee hoped that discussions can be continued in a year's time.

4 AOB – The **proposed ban on upwards only commercial rent reviews** in Schedule 31 to the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill will be discussed at the September Committee meeting. The 2nd reading of the Bill in the House of Commons will take place in September.

5 Length of meeting: 1 hour 30 minutes

6 Dates for remaining 2025 meetings, at 12.30pm and hybrid in person/virtual – 17 September and 19 November.