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**Bulletin from the APPG on Legal Aid
18th edition – May 2019**

Welcome to the 18th bulletin from the APPG on Legal Aid. This edition has a little of everything to keep you up-to-date in the world of legal aid and is divided into the following sections:

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1. Events

APPG on Legal Aid Meetings on Public Legal Education and the Criminal Legal Aid review – Monday 10 June 16.00-18.00 and Wednesday 12 June 2019 -10.00-11.30

The APPG on Legal Aid will be co-hosting a panel discussion with the APPG on Pro Bono and Public Legal Education on the MOJ's PIR proposals regarding public legal awareness on **Monday, 10 June 2019 from 16.00 – 18.00**. Chaired by Alex Chalk MP, speakers will be confirmed shortly but include Carol Storer, the interim Director of Legal Action Group, and Owen Bowcott (The Guardian's legal affairs correspondent) and looks set to be an interesting and informative discussion on what messages we need to be putting out to the public concerning the availability of legal aid post the LASPO reforms. The meeting will also discuss the public's perception of legal aid and its representation in the media.

The APPG will also be hosting a meeting on the Criminal Legal Aid Review on **Wednesday, 12 June from 10.00 – 11.30**. Chaired by Karen Buck MP, Speakers will include:

- Jelena Lentzos, Head of Criminal Legal Aid Policy and Sustainable Markets at the Ministry of Justice, who heads up the Review
- Richard Atkins QC, Chair of The Bar Council
- Simon Davis, Vice-President of The Law Society
- Greg Powell, immediate past President of the London Criminal Courts Solicitor Association
- A junior criminal barrister

To book your place for the Criminal Legal Aid review meeting, [please click here](#).

If you are not a member of the Group and would like to attend either meeting, or if you would

like us to feed your views into the debate, please contact our [Head of Parliamentary Affairs, Rohini Teather](#).

‘Take Your MP to work’ Campaign – A celebration of 70 years of Legal Aid!

You may have seen the [excellent pieces in The Guardian](#) over Christmas highlighting the importance of legal aid. This included an article where Nigel Evans MP described how his experiences of the criminal justice system and spending his life’s savings on legal fees had changed his views on the legal aid cuts. [Once he saw the rough end of austerity justice, he realised LASPO had gone too far.](#)

We are looking for MPs to take some time out of their busy weeks to shadow a young legal aid lawyer in a local law centre or legal aid firm to see first hand some of the difficulties experienced with the current system.

This will be an inclusive, cross-country, cross-party campaign and a continuation of our work with YLAL and [More United](#). We also hope that it will be an interesting and informative day for both the MPs taking part and the young lawyers. Bambos Charalambous MP and Bob Neill MP have already taken part in versions of the campaign which ran earlier this year and we hope that they will share their experiences with us in the coming months.

We plan to run this campaign throughout June and to host an event in Westminster publicising the findings in July. This will form part of our celebrations of 70 years of legal aid and we hope that as many MPs as possible across England and Wales will be able to spare a few hours to join us.

For further information about the event, please contact [Rohini Teather](#).

Legal Aid Lawyer of the Year awards – 10 July 2019!

It’s nearly that time of year again and Team LALY has received a bumper crop of nominations for this year’s awards. Thank you to everyone who took the time to prepare or contribute to a nomination for their legal aid hero(es). Thank you also to everyone who contributed to the crowdfunding initiative for the Legal Aid Newcomer award. It is absolutely brilliant to be able to recognise the work that is being carried out across the sector and to applaud and encourage the young lawyers just entering it.

The judges met on 20 May and LAPG will shortly announce the finalists. Tickets are on sale for the awards ceremony on **10 July 2019** in London. This is always an uplifting and inspiring evening celebrating the incredible and life-changing work of legal aid lawyers.

Parliamentarians please contact [Rohini Teather](#) for further details or to get involved.

2. APPG+ Training Events

Disrepair Training for MPs and their caseworker, Monday 17 June 2019 (10.30am-4.30pm, Richmond House) – with Giles Peaker and Catherine O'Donnell

We will be offering training on housing and disrepair law, on 17 June 2019, in collaboration with Legal Action Group and the House of Commons Library. The session has been sponsored by Trust for London and put together using frequently asked caseworker queries. The training will be led by the brilliant Catherine O'Donnell (Barrister, Garden Court Chambers) Giles Peaker (Partner at Anthony Gold Solicitors and the writer of the Nearly Legal blog), who quite literally wrote the book on disrepair (the newly-published sixth edition of "Housing Conditions tenants' rights").

The session is specifically designed to address typical constituent problems and is free for caseworkers to attend. To book, please click [here](#).

For more information on the training courses that we run for MPs and caseworkers, please contact Ro Teather at rohini.teather@lapg.co.uk.

3. Legal Aid News

In the News

A new Minister for Legal Aid

On 9 May 2019 it was announced that Lucy Frazer QC MP would be the new Solicitor General.

The new Parliamentary Under Secretary of State with responsibility for legal aid is Paul Maynard MP. He was previously Government Whip (Lord Commissioner of HM Treasury) and was Parliamentary Under Secretary of State at the Department for Transport from July 2016 to January 2018. He was elected Conservative MP for Blackpool North and Cleveleys in May 2010. Before entering Parliament he worked as a political adviser and speechwriter.



We would like to take this opportunity to thank Lucy and her team for engaging with us over

the past year and we look forward to welcoming Paul to one of our events and working with him in the near future.

[Philip Alston's report on extreme poverty and human rights for the UN's Human Right's Council is now available online.](#)

The report doesn't pull its punches, and discusses the damage that has been done to the UK's social safety net pointing to the fact that although the UK has the world's fifth largest economy, 1/5 of its population (14 million people) live in poverty, and 1.5 million of them experienced destitution in 2017. Close to 40% of children are predicted to be living in poverty by 2021. The section entitled "Decimating Legal Aid" is included below:

"Legal aid has been dramatically reduced in England and Wales since 2012. The LASPO Act (Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act) made most housing, family and benefits cases ineligible for aid; ratcheted up eligibility criteria; and replaced many face-to-face advice services with telephone lines. Consequently, the number of civil legal aid cases declined by a staggering 82 per cent between 2010–2011 and 2017–2018.⁴⁵ As a result, many poor people are unable to effectively claim and enforce their rights, have lost access to critical support, and some have even reportedly lost custody of their children. Lack of access to legal aid also exacerbates extreme poverty, since justiciable problems that could have been resolved with legal representation go unaddressed."

A spotlight to be shone on child protection in family courts

More than 120 MPs led by Louise Haig MP have written to the government asking for an inquiry into how family courts in England and Wales treat victims of domestic violence following reports that at least four children have been killed by a parent in the last five years after the family courts granted direct contact between them and a violent father. The BBC's Victoria Derbyshire show carried out an investigation into the family court and child contact orders. Speakers included Jess Philips MP and Jenny Beck (Partner Beck Fitzgerald and Co-Chair of LAPG) If you missed the program you can [catch up on BBC iPlayer](#).

This led to an announcement by Ministers yesterday (21 May) that a panel of experts will review how the family courts protect children and parents in cases of domestic abuse and other serious offences

The three-month project aims to ensure that the family court works first and foremost in the explicit interests of the child, such as their safety, health and well-being. The MOJ-chaired panel will consist of a range of experts including senior members of the judiciary, leading academics and charities.

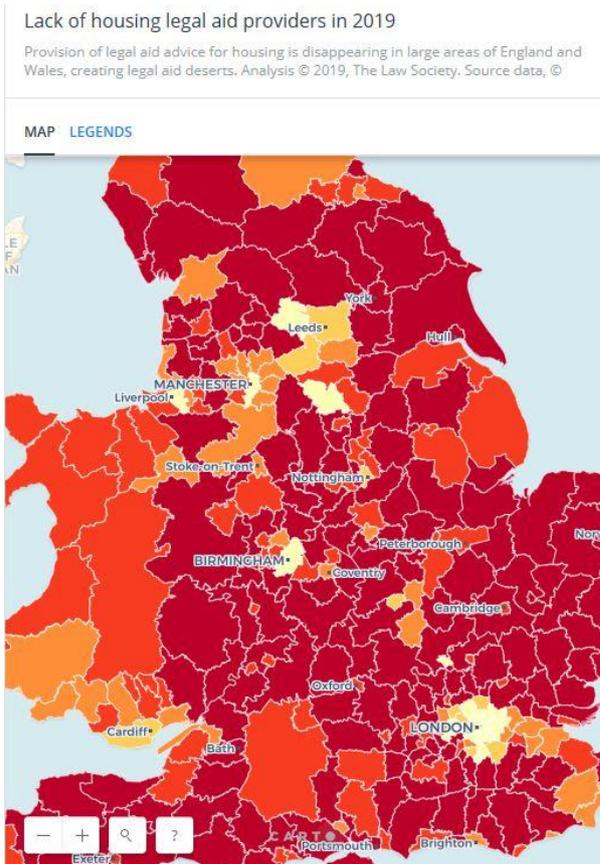
A public call for evidence will also be launched imminently and will look to those with direct involvement to share their experiences.

The move follows responses received through the government's domestic abuse consultation

in which concerns were raised around the family courts' response to potential harm to children and victims. In addition to calls for better protections for children, some claim that domestic abusers are using the court system to re-traumatise their victims.

The Law [Society exposes 'catastrophic' housing advice deserts](#)

Over half of the population of England and Wales is living in a local authority that has one or no housing legal aid provider, the Law Society revealed recently, producing another [shocking infographic](#) that highlights 'catastrophic' legal aid advice deserts.



According to the Society's interactive map, 184 out of 348 local authorities have no housing provider; 81 have one provider. A further 29 local authorities have two providers, 17 have three, and 37 have more than three.

Those living in the south west are hit worst, with 92% of the region living in a local authority with one or no provider, followed by the East of England (91%), the south east (82%), and the East Midlands (79%).

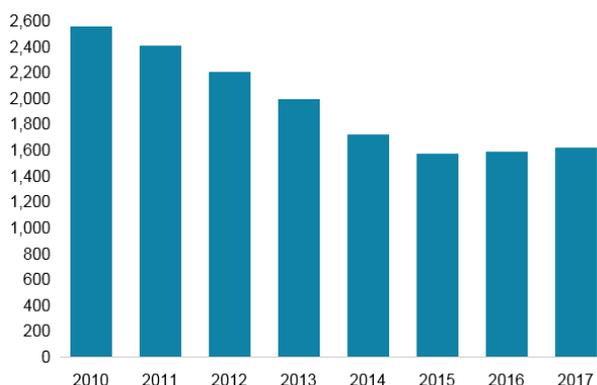
Suffolk has no provider. In Cornwall, one firm covers a population of over 500,000 spread over 1,300 square miles.

A few more statistics...

On 15 April the BBC published a piece by its Reality Check team called “Who gets Legal Aid?” It has some useful background information on legal aid (who is entitled to it and details of when the means test will apply) but it’s the figures that are particularly eye-opening especially when you consider that LASPO was intended to save about £350m per annum. Below is an MOJ table showing the total spend on legal aid from 2010-2017.

Spending on legal aid - England and Wales

£m adjusted for inflation - financial years



Source: Ministry of Justice

BBC

To [read the article in full, please click here.](#)

Legal aid reforms have been an abject failure

Legal aid is a tough sell. As it is easily linked to front-page splashes about taxpayer money being used to help criminals, many find it difficult to appreciate that legal aid could become a lifeline for any one of us, at any time, says Vice-Chair of the APPG on Legal Aid, Andy Slaughter to The Times last week.

Yet, it is in everyone’s interests to know whether such life-changing decisions made by the Home Office, for example, are made lawfully. In a fair and democratic society, actions of the state cannot go unchecked, as the Windrush scandal has made clear. [To read the article in full, please click here.](#)

Advising Londoners Research Project: Call for Evidence

The Advice Services Alliance has been commissioned by the Greater London Authority to conduct an evaluation of the provision of social welfare advice across London. As part of this research they are asking for practical examples and ideas of smart and effective ways of delivering advice to Londoners.

They would like submissions of evidence from advice providers who operate services in London (voluntary, private, public, pro bono, academic and those who give advice as part of other services). The APPG on Legal Aid will be making this survey available to MPs and their caseworkers through the House of Commons Library. Please keep an eye out for the survey

which should be hitting your inboxes shortly. We would be exceedingly grateful if you or your staff could spend five minutes answering a few short questions about casework in London.

4. Justice Questions in May 2019

[Grant Shapps](#) MP (Welwyn Hatfield) asked the Secretary of State for Justice, what steps he is taking to ensure that single mothers receive adequate support and advice in the family courts division.

[Lord Beecham](#) asked Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the impact of legal aid fees for housing cases not being increased for 20 years on the number of solicitors' firms providing advice and representation; for what reason they has been no increase in such fees; whether they intend to increase those fees; and if not, why not.

[Yasmin Qureshi](#) (Bolton South East) asked the Secretary of State for Justice:

- (pursuant to the Answer of 29 March 2019 to Question 235313 on Courts: Telephone Services) if he will publish a list of (a) every helpline operated by his Department and (b) the prefix of each such helpline.

- what is the average time spent by callers on each of helplines run by his Department.

[Andrew Rosindell MP](#) (Romford) asked the Secretary of State for Justice, what assessment he has made of trends in the level of former UK citizens that are able to access to the Legal Aid Scheme.

[Ben Lake MP](#) (Ceredigion) asked the Secretary of State for Justice, what steps he is taking to ensure that acquitted defendants in criminal cases who were deemed ineligible for legal aid are able to recover costs to cover their legal fees.

[Dr Matthew Offord MP](#) (Hendon) asked the Secretary of State for Justice, if he will make it his policy to establish separate legal aid funds for (a) increasing access to justice for people in civil, criminal and legal aid cases and (b) political and human rights cases.

You can read all of the questions and answers [here](#).

Rohini Teather

Head of Parliamentary Affairs

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About the APPG on Legal Aid

The All-Party Parliamentary Group on Legal Aid aims to promote parliamentary and public understanding of the importance of the role of publicly funded legal services. It is chaired by Karen Buck MP. Secretariat support is provided jointly by the Legal Aid Practitioners Group (LAPG) together with Young Legal Aid Lawyers (YLAL) with funding from The Legal Education Foundation.

For more information contact:

rohini.teather@lapg.co.uk

About the APPG Plus Project

LAPG and the APPG on Legal Aid have been funded by The Legal Education Foundation to engage with MPs and councillors and their caseworkers to ensure that there is a good understanding of what is left in legal aid in the wake of LASPO, and to offer constructive advice, resources and training on how busy MPs and their caseworkers can engage better with lawyers and advice charities in the legal aid sector. In doing so, we aim to assess current access to justice issues facing the public and to help inform future decision making at a policy level.

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