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# The All-Party Parliamentary Group on Legal Aid

**Bulletin | 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition | October 2017**

## **Legal Aid News and Events**

### **APPG Meetings and Invitations – Dates for your Diaries**

#### **Joint Meeting of the APPGs on Legal Aid and Pro Bono & Public Legal Education**

***"Grenfell Tower: Fire and Housing Safety Issues in Social Housing"***  
**9-10am on Wednesday, 25<sup>th</sup> October 2017, Committee Room 5, Palace of Westminster**

The APPGs on Legal Aid and Pro Bono & Public Legal Education will host a joint meeting to discuss the Grenfell Tower disaster and its aftermath including implications for legal rights and access to advice for survivors and tower blocks with similar safety issues. The meeting will be led by APPG on Legal Aid Chair, Karen Buck MP, who has been instrumental in pushing for greater powers for tenants to hold landlords to account, and in exposing the need for a better social housing policy. Other speakers will include Giles Peaker (Partner, Anthony Gold Solicitors) and Justin Bates (Barrister, Arden Chambers).

[Book your place here](#) (please note that this is not a public meeting - the following password will be required to book a place: L3g4l4id)

#### **Drinks Reception for MPs and their caseworkers**

***"Casework and Your Constituents"***

**5-7pm on Wednesday, 1<sup>st</sup> November 2017, Attlee Suite of Portcullis House**

We are hosting an event to bring together a range of organisations that provide useful resources for busy caseworkers and to publicise a training programme that we have put together for MPs and their casework staff. Canapés and wine will be provided.

The event and training programme are the culmination of months of research and hours spent with busy MPs and their caseworkers as part of the APPG Plus project. Caseworkers identified that they routinely encounter a number of difficult areas of law and welcomed additional training in these areas. The programme will therefore provide constituency MPs and their caseworkers with training in the following areas and, where possible, tailor training to meet specific needs in different regions:

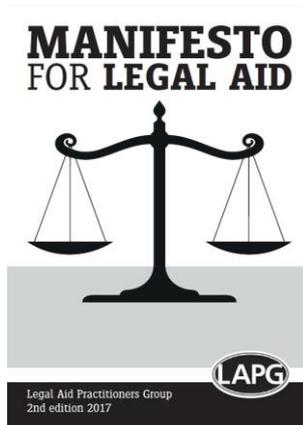
1. Identifying legal issues;
2. Legal Aid;
3. Housing Law;
4. Welfare Benefits; and
5. Immigration law (to be confirmed)

If you would like further information about either of these events or would like to hear more about the work of the APPG on Legal Aid, please contact Rohini Teather at [Rohini.Teather@lapg.co.uk](mailto:Rohini.Teather@lapg.co.uk) or Chris Peace at [Christine.Peace@lapg.co.uk](mailto:Christine.Peace@lapg.co.uk).

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## Legal Aid – In the News

LAPG Manifesto – Undoing Damage Caused by LASPO Cuts



The Legal Aid Practitioners Group has drawn on the expertise and experience of its members to produce a 'pragmatic and clear' manifesto for restoring access to justice, lost following the 2012 Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act. Writing in the foreword, LAPG co-chairs Jenny Beck, a leading family lawyer, and Nicola Mackintosh QC (Hon), an expert in community care and mental capacity law, say (p4-5):

*"A whole generation of children is growing up knowing only one of their parents, or only one set of grandparents. People fleeing domestic abuse cannot obtain the protection they need...Unlawful decision making by public bodies goes unchallenged. The legal aid practitioners who provide the advice and the representation are at risk of extinction."*

The [manifesto](#) sets out detailed reforms in 16 areas of law, ranging from actions against the state, to crime, to mental health and welfare benefits, which would reduce expensive inefficiency and ensure people's rights are better protected. It emphasises the urgent need to save money by simplifying processes.

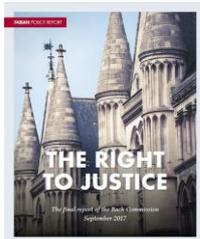
LAPG's proposals include:

- Reinstating early legal advice (page 11)

- Restoration of legal aid in some family, housing, welfare benefits, employment, inquests, prison and immigration law cases (chapter 8)
- A practitioner-led review of inefficiencies and waste in the criminal justice system (page 5)
- The Legal Aid Agency to be replaced to ensure independence of decision making (page 26)
- Restoration of funding in judicial review cases (page 6)
- A programme to publicise availability of legal aid to those in need (page 6)

The APPG on Legal Aid will formally launch the Manifesto in parliament in mid-November. Further details to follow soon.

### BACH Commission Final Report Published



In its report, [The Right to Justice](#), the Bach Commission advocates strongly for a Right to Justice Act to establish a clearly defined, enforceable right “*for individuals to receive reasonable legal assistance without costs they cannot afford*”. The report also calls for the creation of a Justice Commission to monitor and enforce the right to justice, and for reform of the financial eligibility and scope rules for legal aid to create a simpler, more generous system which enables many more people to access publicly funded legal help.

Four years into LASPO we continue to see the cuts biting and gaps emerging in the legal system. According to [statistics](#) released by the Legal Aid Agency on 28 September 2017:

- Criminal practice is showing a lower workload - down 4% compared to same quarter last year with billing down 3% which comes to a pretty hefty £70m
- Crown Court completed workload down 12%
- 14% fewer legal help new matter starts
- Family mediation starts were 24% lower than same quarter last year

According to Crimeline [statistics](#) also published in September: Virtual court cases (which were touted as being an answer to access to justice for all) were also down a huge 20%.

In order to address this ongoing decline in access to justice, *The Right to Justice* makes recommendations for both urgent and long-term reform. It calls on the government, which is currently in the process of conducting its own review of the cuts to legal aid (due to be completed by the fifth anniversary of LASPO in April 2018), to invest £400m per year on short-term measures including restoring early legal help for all social welfare law, extending financial eligibility for civil legal aid and bringing back into scope all matters concerning legal support for children.

The Bach Commission accepts that while it “*may not be possible to immediately reverse*” the decline in legal aid eligibility since 1980, there is a desperate need to “*ensure that justice is within the reach of the majority and not just the very wealthy and the very poor*”. It proposes that, for now, the aim of government could be to provide publicly funded legal assistance to everyone with a below median income, as was the case in the late 1990s when 53% of the population were eligible for civil legal aid.

## Extended Hours Court Pilot Scheme Postponed

HM Courts & Tribunals Service (HTMS) has announced that the highly controversial extended court hours pilot has been deferred until February 2018. With the summer tender process failing to deliver a "satisfactory outcome" and outcry from members of the legal profession who might be affected by the earlier starts and late night court hearings, the scheme has been postponed pending a further tender process and consult further with legal professionals across England and Wales – not just those in the pilot areas. For further information click [here](#).

## Civil Contracts - Tender Process Underway for 2018 Contracts

The Legal Aid Agency is currently tendering for 2018 Civil Contracts for face-to-face, telephone and housing possession court duty scheme (HPCDS) services. Face-to-face and telephone (CLA) contract tender documentation has been [published here](#) and HPCDS tender documentation is due to be published shortly.

Tenders must be submitted by **5pm on Friday, 10 November 2017**.

If you have any questions about the tender process these must be submitted to the LAA via the online tendering system. The LAA will publish FAQs so please check these carefully.

## Legal Aid Practitioners Group | Young Legal Aid Lawyers 10<sup>th</sup> October 2017

[Visit the APPG on Legal Aid website](#)



The APPG on Legal Aid is co-sponsored by the Legal Aid Practitioners Group



In association with Young Legal Aid Lawyers



Supported by The Legal Education Foundation.

### 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](mailto: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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**Our mailing address is:**

Legal Aid Practitioners Group  
12 Baylis Road  
London, England SE1 7AA  
United Kingdom

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