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January Bulletin from the APPG on Legal Aid

Welcome to our first bulletin of the new decade. We look forward to working with you in the coming term. With the mechanics of Brexit finally in place, those of us who work in policy hope that attention in Westminster can shift back to a domestic agenda that has been sorely neglected over the past few years. With the justice system on its knees after years of cuts and austerity, will the new class of 2019 make a stand for Access to Justice? Will they prioritise equality and fair play for their constituents? Will they recognise that unresolved legal problems damage health, interrupt education and employment, and destroy life chances and work with us and others in the sector to turn back the tide?

We do believe that there is potential for change in this political landscape. As an APPG we have approached all of the new MPs and asked them to come along to our meetings and to see first-hand the work that we do. We will be asking them to sign up to our #TakeYourMPtoWork campaign with Young Legal Aid Lawyers and to get a better understanding of life on the coalface for legal aid practitioners. Do you have an interest in Justice and fair play? If so and you would like to get a better understanding of our work, please contact Rohini Teather for further details on rohini.teather@lapg.co.uk.

Monday 3 February 2020 – ‘Justice in the new Parliament’

We will be kicking off our year with an overview meeting of Justice issues and priorities for 2020. This will take place on Monday 3 February 2020 from 16.00-17.30 in the Jubilee Room, Westminster Hall. Refreshments will be provided. Whether you're an MP with constituents to represent, a justice organisation, a student or a member of the public, please do come along and have your say.

We will be hearing from an amazing array of speakers across the Justice sector, including:

- Sir Bob Neill MP
- Lord Charlie Falconer
- Baroness Natalie Bennett (on behalf of the Green Party)
- Daisy Cooper MP (on behalf of the Liberal Dems)
- Members of the MoJ LASPO Review team
- Amanda Pinto QC, Chair of The Bar Council
- Simon Davis, President/ David Greene Vice-President of The Law Society of England and Wales
- Caroline Goodwin QC, Chair of the Criminal Bar Association

- Chris Minnoch, CEO of LAPG
- Faith Rowan on behalf of Young Legal Aid Lawyers

To reserve your tickets, please use the booking link below. The password is **APPGLegalAid**:

<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/the-appg-on-legal-aid-justice-in-the-new-parliamentary-session-tickets-89580508713>

Inaugural Meeting – Wednesday 15 January 2020

The APPG on Legal Aid held its inaugural meeting of the new session on 15 January 2020, re-establishing the group and re-electing Karen Buck MP as Chair. The following Vice-Chairs were elected unopposed.

Lord Willy Bach (who sent his apologies)



Lord Colin Low (who sent his apologies)

Lord Charlie Falconer (who sent his apologies)

Baroness Helena Kennedy (who sent her apologies)

Alex Chalk MP

Yvonne Fovargue MP (who sent her apologies)

Andy Slaughter MP

Jo Stevens MP

Kate Green MP

Ellie Reeves MP (who sent her apologies)

Bambos Charalambous MP

The Group has swelled its ranks considerably over the last few years and we have been delighted to welcome Lord Bach, Lord Low and Lord Falconer to our midst. We are actively seeking members from all political walks of life so please do get in touch with us if this would be something of interest to you or you have any ideas for future events that we might hold.

You can read the minutes from the meeting [here](#).

APPG+ Training

By way of a reminder, the APPG conducted cross-party research in 2017. We received over 300 responses from MPs and their casework staff about the nature of the enquiries that they were dealing with in their surgeries. We saw that MPs are inundated with constituents requiring help with legal problems. MPs have always provided a vital casework service but now many queries that used to go to local law centres or legal aid firms are being directed towards MPs because constituents feel that they have nowhere else to turn. Accordingly, we started running free training for MPs' caseworkers through the House of Commons Library in a variety of subjects including Housing and Disrepair, Immigration, Interview Skills, Employment Law and Special Education Needs. We are exceptionally proud of the training that we have put together and grateful for the opportunity to work with so many people. We will shortly be publicising this year's programme of training events in collaboration with the House of Commons Library and Learning and Development Teams. Watch this space for further information or contact us should you wish to discuss something specific.

Legal Aid in the News

Biggest ever survey of legal needs undertaken – the results? Not so surprising.

The [biggest ever survey of legal needs](#) in England and Wales has delivered a ringing endorsement of the quality of service provided by solicitors. But the research also found that nearly one in three people faced with a contentious issue either did not seek help, wanted more help, or waited over two years for their issue to be resolved. This is reflected by the anecdotal evidence that MP caseworkers provided us with when we undertook our survey in 2017.

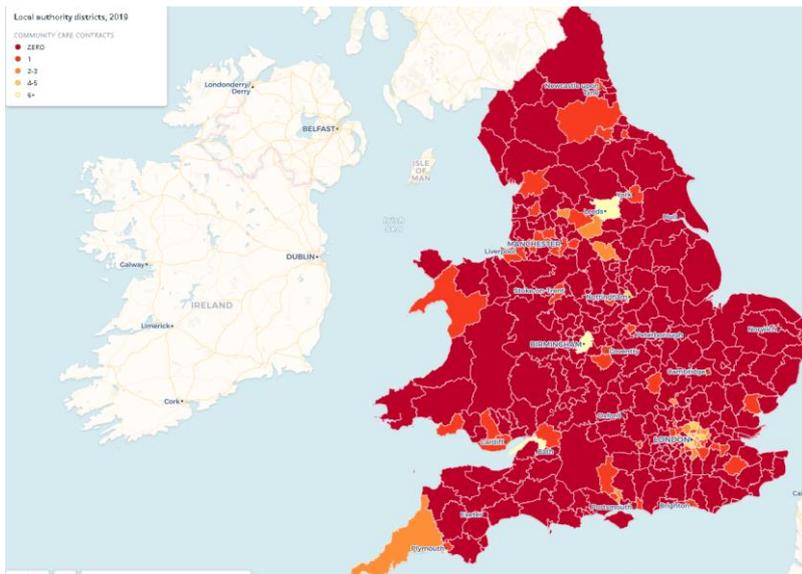
The Legal Services Board, which co-commissioned the research with the Law Society, has indicated that it will seize on fresh evidence of an 'access to justice gap' to pursue its agenda of deregulation.

Based on data collected by YouGov in February and March 2019, the survey collates the perceptions and experiences of 28,633 people. It is the first study in England and Wales to use OECD guidance on how to develop legal needs surveys, profiling the population by income and how well consumers are equipped to make decisions. Some notable headlines from the survey include:

- 9/10 people who had used a solicitor were satisfied with the service they received, while 84% thought the solicitor provided value for money perhaps finally exploding some of those lawyer jokes that we have all heard.
- Respondents who received professional help were also more likely to feel they had a fair outcome (66%, compared to 53% who did not).
- Unregulated providers received the worst ratings, with 1/5 people dissatisfied with the service they received from sources including will-writers and McKenzie Friends.
- Overall, 2/3 people had experienced a legal issue in the previous four-year period surveyed, with most issues (53%) contentious in nature.
- Solicitors were most likely to be consumers' main advisers (30%, rising to 40% for contentious issues). Doctors, combined with law centres, not-for-profit sources and Citizens Advice equated to 32%.
- Older people were more likely to consult a solicitor. 4/10 aged 65 or over reported that a solicitor was their main adviser, declining sharply to 26% in the 30-49 bracket and just 18% of those aged 18-29. Younger people are more likely to seek informal help.
- Most people who obtained help from a main adviser did not personally pay for it. Most commonly those who did not pay obtained advice through a free service (49%), while 7% were subsequently funded by an insurance company or friends and family.

The future is not bright. The future is red

This week The Law Society brought out an infographic showing the number of community care providers in England and Wales. It makes for rather chilling viewing.



Through analysis of data from the [Legal Aid Agency directory of providers](#) (September 2019) and the [Office of National Statistics](#) (2017) they found that in England and Wales:

- more than 37 million people in England and Wales live in a local authority area without a single community care legal aid provider, including over 7.5 million people aged 65 and over
- 78% of local authorities in England and Wales do not have a single community care legal aid provider

Justice Questions

On 14 January 2020 Justice Questions were held in Parliament on Legal Aid Access, with Sarah Dines MP, (a former legal aid barrister) asking what steps the Lord Chancellor is taking to ensure that legal aid is accessible to those who need it. Wendy Morton MP, the Minister with responsibility for legal aid, replied with "Access to justice is a fundamental right and the Government are committed to ensuring that everyone can get the timely support that they need to access the justice system. However, legal aid is only part of the picture. We are also enhancing the support and offer to litigants in person by providing a further £3 million of funding over the next two years to ensure that those representing themselves in court understand the process and are better supported through it. We are additionally investing up to £5 million in a legal support innovation fund alongside many other initiatives.

Shadow Lord Chancellor Richard Burgon came in with the following: "Over a year ago, the UN special rapporteur said that Conservative cuts to legal aid had 'effectively deprived' people of their human right to a remedy." "Is it not the case that if the UN special rapporteur returned today they would make exactly the same finding because the Government have not done anything to address that? Is that failure to respond the result of incompetence or is it simply because they do not care?"

APPG on Legal Aid Vice-Chair, Andy Slaughter asked the Minister whether she would "share with us any plans she has to reverse the hundreds of millions of pounds of cuts to legal aid budgets under the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012 that have been so destructive of access to justice in this country?" In both instances, the Minister reiterated the Government's commitment to ensuring that everyone can have the timely support that they need and listed the steps that were already being taken in these areas.

You can read the transcript in full [here](#).

Justice Questions in January 2020

Marion Fellows (Motherwell and Wishaw) asked the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what support her Department is providing to the Disabled People's Organisation to monitor the implementation of the recommendations of the UN Committee on the Rights of Disabled People in relation to the UK

Government's social welfare policies.

Afzal Khan (Manchester, Gorton) asked the Secretary of State for Justice, whether he has plans to bring forward legislative proposals for a non means tested **legal aid** funding for families in relation to state-related deaths.

Rachael Maskell (York Central) asked the Secretary of State for Justice:

- how many people (a) applied for and (b) were granted civil **legal aid** in York in (a) 2009-10 and (b) each subsequent year.
- how much has been spent on (a) civil and (b) criminal **legal aid** in (i) cash and (ii) real terms in (A) England and (B) York in each year since 2010; and how many and what proportion of people with cases before (a) civil and (b) criminal courts received **legal aid** in (i) England and (ii) York in each year since 2010.

Jessica Morden (Newport East) asked the Secretary of State for Justice, how many publicly-funded providers of **legal aid** for housing cases there are in (a) Newport and (b) Monmouthshire.

Andrew Rosindell (Romford) asked the Secretary of State for Justice, how many people (a) applied for and (b) were granted civil **legal aid** in family law cases in Romford constituency (i) 2015-16, (ii) 2016-17 and (iii) 2017-18.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) asked the Secretary of State for Justice, if his Department will include women unable to afford a divorce without access to **legal aid** as part of his Department's review of the financial eligibility thresholds for people seeking **legal aid**.

Andrew Rosindell (Romford) asked the Secretary of State for Justice, how many people (a) applied for and (b) were granted civil **legal aid** in Romford constituency in (i) 2015-16, (ii) 2016-17 and (iii) 2017-18.

Feryal Clark (Enfield North) asked the Secretary of State for Justice, what assessment he has made of the adequacy of funding for Law Centres.

Baroness Lister of Burtersett asked Her Majesty's Government whether **legal aid** will be available for individuals seeking to initiate legal proceedings based on an alleged diminution of rights, safeguards or equality of opportunity, as set out in the Belfast Agreement.

Ms Angela Eagle (Wallasey) asked the Secretary of State for Justice, what recent steps his Department has taken to ensure that adequate numbers of criminal duty solicitors are available in (a) the North West, (b) Merseyside, (c) Wirral and (d) Wallasey.

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi (Slough) asked the Secretary of State for Justice, what assessment he has made of trends in the number of people able to access early legal advice.

Mr Andrew Mitchell (Sutton Coldfield) asked the Secretary of State for Justice, what recent steps his Department has taken to ensure sufficient numbers of criminal duty solicitors are available in the West Midlands.

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

Rohini Teather

Head of Parliamentary Affairs

29 January 2020

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

In association with Young Legal Aid Lawyers



The Legal Education Foundation

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:

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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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You are receiving this email because you have expressed an interest in the work of the APPG on legal aid or generally in issues affecting access to justice.

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