



## Press Release

### Ministry of Justice's Post-Implementation Review of Part 1 of the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012 (LASPO)

The report is an overdue recognition of the crisis in access to justice, triggered by LASPO.

Many of the recommendations for the future are positive, but much more is needed to remedy the legal aid and justice system now.

We particularly welcome the call for restoration of early legal advice, which is something we have been pushing for. Every day LAPG members see the impact of LASPO's removal of early legal advice, on people whose problems with, say, debt or housing, have spiralled out of control. Often, these are things which could have been solved quickly and easily if they had been able to seek our members' help earlier. Plans to expand the provision of family legal aid, are a positive way forward but this needs to happen quickly because people are in urgent need.

We welcome the recommendation to end the mandatory nature of the telephone gateway, which was misconceived from the start, and has only served to stop people with special educational needs, debt and discrimination problems from getting access to justice. We are interested to hear how the government will ensure adequate provision of face-to-face in these areas.

The government has committed to review the legal aid means test, which is welcome as the current rules exclude many of those in genuine need. However this needs immediate attention and we urge the government to expedite this aspect of its commitment.

The call for government to mount an awareness campaign is also positive. If done well, that could be a game-changer for those with legal problems and could transform lives, as too many people currently don't know where they can go for help.

One of the areas where we strongly disagree with the review is with the conclusion that the network of advice providers, whether law firms or advice agencies, is sustainable. That is contrary to all the evidence we provided, which shows providers are struggling to keep afloat, following years of static or reduced fees, and increased bureaucracy. Law Centres and advice centres have closed down and high street legal aid practitioners have pulled out of legal aid. Much more needs to be done now to make sure that we have a justice system for the future.

The report identifies many areas for improvement and we are wholeheartedly committed to working with the government to bring about positive change sooner rather than later.

Jenny Beck and Nicola Mackintosh QC (Hon), co-chairs of LAPG state:

*'Whilst we cautiously welcome the recognition that the system is no longer delivering access to justice, we are concerned to ensure that addressing the problems identified could deliver significant improvement. There is a need for solutions to be properly resourced and delivered expeditiously because access to justice is in crisis right now.'*

**End**

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