



Casework and your constituents

A Guide for MPs to setting up and managing a constituency casework service in England and Wales.

October 2024

► Welcome

Casework staff and the Members of Parliament that they work for have a very specific role within the advice sector. Caseworkers themselves have a distinct employment status; they are not public servants in the way that a civil servant is and are employed directly by the MP. Unlike law firms, charities, law centres or other forms of advice agency, there is an expectation that an MP and their staff will do something to help with an issue or act in some way. Staff may undertake a wide variety of roles: as first point of contact, managing access to the MP by constituents and interest groups; as resources, providing research and policy advice; as channels, linking the constituency to Westminster; and they are providers of vital administrative support to both the MP and the community that they work in.

It has been a privilege to work with Members, their teams and the exceptional House of Commons Library over the years. This second edition of our guide to casework is dedicated to them and the life-changing work that they do. Aimed at Members of the Commons as well as their staff, it provides a basic introduction to some of the issues which MPs and their casework teams encounter daily, together with guidance as to how to approach them. It is intended to serve as a companion to the training that we offer in the House of Commons (further details of which can be found on page 35).

If you have any questions about the guide or any other Legal Aid matters, please contact us for further support.

All-Party Parliamentary Groups (APPGs) are informal, cross-party interest groups of MPs and Peers interested in a particular issue. The All-Party Parliamentary Group on Access to Justice (the Group) is the result of a merger between the APPG on Legal Aid and the APPG on Pro Bono and Public Legal Education.



The Group aims to foster parliamentary and public understanding of access to justice by acting as a forum for discussion and debate. It provides an interface between Government, Parliament and all those who have an interest in the justice sector: these include constituents, lawyers, the public, professional bodies, practitioners' groups, charities, campaign organisations, and many others.

As a Group we have been training MPs and their caseworkers in and around Westminster since 2017, becoming official training providers for the House of Commons in 2019.

Over that period, we've learned a lot about MPs and their casework. The MPs that form this Group have told us of their experiences in their own constituencies with increasing casework demands but a diminishing number of organisations to refer constituents to for legal assistance. Additionally, although some people may experience only one type of problem in isolation, it is the nature of social welfare problems that they occur in a cluster of interrelated issues. Both socio-legal research¹ and social exclusion studies have shown that people tend to experience a combination of interrelated problems, with money and debt identified as the 'central element'. A recent LawWorks report revealed that 89.5% of problems brought to MPs involved legal or access to justice issues².

We also know that MP casework is supported by just over 2,600 staff (or 'unsung heroes', as former Commons Speaker John Bercow called them), working in 650 offices across the UK and that these offices are all run almost like 650 small businesses. These offices may have different staffing structures, casework management systems and resources and the nature of the problems presented by constituents will vary hugely depending on location and the demographic makeup of the constituency.

All in all, casework can be incredibly complex. Constituents will often present with multiple issues, all of which need to be unpicked before the problem can be resolved.

It can also be an incredibly rewarding role as you and your MP are truly making a difference in someone's life.

This guide is intended as a summary of some of the issues that you may encounter and some suggestions for how to deal with them.

With thanks to law firm Linklaters LLP for design and printing.

We hope that you find it useful.

¹ P Pleasence, N Balmer, A Buck, A O'Grady, H Genn, 'Multiple justiciable problems: common clusters and their social and demographic indicators', *Journal of Empirical Legal Studies*, July 2004.

² <https://www.lawworks.org.uk/about-us/news/minding-gap-%E2%80%93-training-mps-caseworkers>

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► Foreword: Sarah Sackman KC MP, Solicitor General

With many thanks to the APPG, it is my pleasure to introduce the second edition of this essential guide to constituency casework, especially for newly elected Members of Parliament and their staff based at Westminster and around the country.

As you embark on your journey in public service, the role of effective casework cannot be overstated. It is at the heart of addressing the needs of your constituents and ensuring that their voices are heard and acted upon. It is one of the great strengths of our political system that members of the public can raise issues directly with their MP, who can then represent their views and advocate on their behalf in Parliament and elsewhere.

As MPs, we are regularly called upon to help constituents with their legal problems, including issues such as immigration, housing and eviction, access to health and social care services, and challenging local authority decision-making.

For most first-time MPs (such as myself) and their casework teams, this will be a new experience, and in some cases potentially quite daunting. The issues you tackle in casework will inform others aspects of your work as an MP, such as the questions you post to Minister and issues that you campaign on.

This guide is designed to demystify some of the processes, support you and your dedicated caseworkers, and is intended to be used as a companion piece to the training available to MPs and their case workers through the House of Commons.

I hope this will help MPs and caseworkers and enhance your ability to address constituents' concerns.

I wish you and your casework team every success in your important work.



Sarah Sackman KC MP

► Endorsements

“Many constituents contact their MP as a last resort where other routes have been exhausted. Casework can be far-ranging, although this guide provides candid, practical advice. I would urge Caseworker teams to consult this document for guidance, especially on access to legal advice, and to sign up for training via the APPG. Thank you to Rohini Jana and Angharad Kellett on producing this guide and the invaluable wider work they do for the APPG.”



Andy Slaughter MP: Chair of Justice Select Committee

“This is a useful guide for caseworkers and MPs on how to better engage with constituents, identify the issues at hand and understand how to assist people in need. The APPG has done great work in setting out when and where constituents can receive legal aid, and how offices can support them to access justice.”



Catherine Atkinson MP: Co-Chair of APPG Access to Justice

► Advice sought by constituents: What do we mean when we talk about advice in this context?

Constituents will contact you on a wide range of matters. The cost-of-living crisis, the aftermath of the pandemic and a lack of affordable housing has put an additional strain on people's lives and budgets. Often, those accessing advice services are some of the most vulnerable and present with multiple legal issues. Around half of constituents in receipt of free specialist legal advice last year had a long-standing illness, disability, or infirmity³. These factors, in combination with stricter Legal Aid legislation, has led to increased demand for free specialist legal advice and an increase in MP casework.

Some matters may fall predominantly under the jurisdiction of the local authority. These can be anything ranging from questions and problems with housing, and paying their rent, council tax, to planning matters, parking, social services, libraries and so on.

Every local authority has a different preferred method of contact with the MP's office. In some areas, the MP will email everything to the Chief Executive or Town Clerk, regardless of whether it is casework, policy or other local issues. In other areas, the MP might email individual council departments or officers responsible for the different issues. Some councils have web submission forms which direct the matter to the correct department, ensuring that you provide all the required information whilst, at the same time, providing a tracking system which ensures that your correspondence receives a timely response. Please do check to find out your local authority's preferred method of contact – you may be slowing down the response time if you are not contacting them in the correct manner.

Other constituents may ask you for help with family issues, asylum and immigration, housing problems, social security benefits enquiries, problems with NHS appointments, alleged child abuse, anti-social behaviour of neighbours – a seemingly endless list of issues. Members of the public are often far more comfortable coming to their MP for help than trying to understand the often-complex advice ecosystem, which will give you a familiarity with a huge number of different areas or law. They are all also legal problems where you may wish to refer the constituent to a lawyer (whether under the Legal Aid scheme or not).

However, the demographics of those accessing free advice appear to be shifting. Providers we spoke with reported a notable increase in people who previously would have paid for legal services, for example homeowners, now accessing free legal advice due to affordability issues.

We offer free training for caseworkers through the House of Commons on a number of these areas to assist you to be able to support constituents. More details on our current courses can be found on page 35.

One of the aims of this guide is to provide you with resources to support your constituents and to signpost them to other sources of assistance. You may wish to incorporate elements of this guidance into your office manual.

3 <https://atjf.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/The-value-of-justice-for-all-a-report-for-the-Access-to-Justice-Foundation-and-the-Bar-Council-from-Pragmatix-Advisory.pdf>

Some questions to ask when you are considering how to help your constituents:

- ▶ Is my MP best placed to assist with this inquiry or would the matter be better helped were I to signpost or refer the constituent?
- ▶ There are some matters, such as certain types of immigration work and criminal defence work where the constituent must be referred to a lawyer.
- ▶ Some issues are not the direct responsibility of UK Parliament or the UK Government. In these instances, you could refer your constituent to the local council or your nearest Citizens Advice, Law Centre or Legal Aid firm.

These issues include matters relating to:

- ▶ Council tax;
- ▶ Housing;
- ▶ Private problems with neighbours, landlords, employers, family; or companies who have sold faulty products;
- ▶ Decisions made by the courts;
- ▶ Issues that are the responsibility of your local council such as refuse collections or street repairs.

▶ Setting up your advice surgery

Constituents may communicate with you in a variety of ways including:

- ▶ email
- ▶ telephone
- ▶ letter
- ▶ advice surgeries
- ▶ appointments at your office
- ▶ cold callers at your office
- ▶ via social media channels/platforms

Emails:

By far the most common method of communication is by email. Some MPs receive more than 500 emails a day, many of which are from constituents needing advice or assistance. Each email from a constituent or member of the public will trigger a response along the following lines:

Please read this automatic reply

Thank you very much for your email. This automated response is confirmation that my office has received it.

If your email does not include your current residential address, I will need your **full name** and **address** to assist you, and it can also help to have your phone number for matters of urgent personal assistance. **I am sorry if this sounds bureaucratic**, but I do get many emails from people who are not my constituents, and it makes it much easier to prioritise my own constituents, as all MPs are required to do.

I will not be able to reply to you unless you have provided your full name and address.

If you are not a [] constituent, I am unable to make any representations on your behalf due to strict Parliamentary protocol. You can find your MP through the Parliament website:

<https://members.parliament.uk/FindYourMP>

Postcode check:

Members should usually intervene only on behalf of people living within their constituency. If people call the constituency office to enquire about surgeries, it is important to check they live in your constituency. The easiest way to do this is by putting their postcode into either the **writetothem.com** or **theyworkforyou.com** websites. You can also do this on the day of the surgery and refer them to their own MP.

► Can we help?

Referrals to other MPs:

Your MP is not obliged to act on every matter that a constituent raises with them, whether they be their own constituent or the constituent of another MP. If you receive a letter or email from an individual who is not your MP's constituent, you should inform them that they should contact their own MP. It may be worth having a template response which:

- Thanks the constituent for their communication;
- Makes them aware that your MP is not their MP; and
- Lets them know who their MP is and how to contact them.

Parliamentary guidance advises you not to forward the correspondence directly to the other MP, as this has the potential to leave you open to an accusation of a breach of the Data Protection Act.

To find the MP for any address in the UK, use this website:

<https://members.parliament.uk/constituencies/>

All you need is the constituent's postcode.

The House of Commons Information line on **0800 112 4272** will give you the same information. Both resources are publicly available.

► Surgeries

MPs hold regular surgeries where constituents can go and visit them to raise issues or concerns and receive advice or assistance. This may be at their offices, town or church halls, local advice agency setting, supermarkets or any other easily accessible location.

While most MPs schedule casework surgeries and meetings with constituents to discuss individual cases, the bulk of their responses will be drafted by their casework team who will almost always deal with constituents' local and personal concerns, and probably enquiries about national policy issues as well.

Most MPs have at least one member of casework staff attend their surgeries so that the caseworker can make notes of the meeting, assist the MP in relaying the right information to the constituent, and take the matter forward on their behalf.

In recent years and since the tragic deaths of MPs Jo Cox and Sir David Amess, many MPs no longer offer drop-in advice surgeries, although some may still operate them at local centres. Constituents should check with the MP's office before turning up. Some MPs also hold an appointment-only surgery at the Constituency Office. This is particularly useful for constituents who need papers to be produced in relation to their matter or who require a lot of time to go through a complicated issue with a caseworker. Constituents can also get in touch via telephone, email or post at any time.

Surgery appointments are a limited resource, and therefore in practice are often reserved for the trickiest cases. When a constituent raises a case, it is standard practice that enquiries to resolve a case in advance will be made, to avoid booking a surgery appointment if possible.

It is standard procedure to not arrange a constituency surgery appointment in the following circumstances:

- If the issue cannot be helped with i.e. all routes to pursue have been exhausted, or a constituent is clearly seeking legal advice which cannot be provided.
- If a constituent has been abusive, or if there is a risk to the MP. Parliamentary Security can provide security operatives for MP Surgeries if needed, or install CCTV, panic alarms and issue lone worker devices in constituency offices where surgeries are usually held.

It is therefore crucial that caseworkers prepare some information on the kind of issues the MP can help with and information as to where to find further assistance.



Some suggested language to clarify the limitations of the MP Surgeries:

“As an MP, I am strictly unauthorised to offer legal advice. As such, I will not be able to advise you in this regard, and would suggest you seek specialised advice from the following: e.g. Law Centres, Citizens Advice, Advocate, FRU, OISC regulated advisers”

“As an MP, I operate independently from third party organisations, such as Local Authorities. Whilst I am willing to raise your concerns with them, I do not have the authority to overturn their decisions. You may wish to raise a formal complaint and/or raise with the Ombudsman if you have a final response, or seek legal advice”

Or, if clarifying the legal position:

“The following people can provide immigration advice in the UK: An immigration adviser who is registered with the Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner (OISC), or an individual who is exempt from registration. Please refer to the OISC Adviser Finder⁴ to find a registered adviser near you.”

The law in relation to immigration and asylum seeking is very complicated. The House of Commons offers a free training course for caseworkers in immigration and one in asylum. Enrol to find out more about the areas in which caseworkers are permitted to give assistance.

Registration forms:

When scheduling a constituency surgery to discuss individual cases, caseworkers should prepare registration forms to include all relevant information regarding the constituents’ local or personal concern or national policies etc.

For drop-in surgeries, if you ask constituents to fill in the registration forms whilst they are waiting, you can check that everyone in attendance is your constituent and ensure that people who are not your constituents don’t end up waiting an hour, only to be told they must go somewhere else.

Examples of questions to include on a registration include:

Name/Address/Contact info/Nature of issue

Please describe your problem/issue.

What steps have been taken so far to resolve the issue?

- ▶ Have you contacted the person or organisation your complaint/issue involves directly?
 - ▶ Have you received a response?
 - ▶ If so, what?
- ▶ Have you been through an independent complaints channel like an Ombudsman service?
 - ▶ If so, have you received a response?
 - ▶ If so, what?
- ▶ Have you received any advice from a lawyer or advice organisation regarding this issue?
 - ▶ If so, what?

⁴ <https://portal.oisc.gov.uk/s/adviser-finder>

Councillors:

Constituents often take a problem to their MP because they do not know who can help them. They may think that a letter from an MP will carry more weight with the local authority or Home Office.

The reality is that there is much that an MP can do on behalf of their constituents. MPs are very generous at giving help and advice and may have a local Councillor at their constituency surgeries to help those constituents whose problems relate to the services provided by local authorities such as rubbish collection or housing repairs.

If you feel that a constituent's problem really concerns the council rather than central government, then you should contact your local council or councillor. It would be a good idea to have the name and contact information of all your local councillors on hand during the surgery and to have established good working relationships with them.

► Referrals to other support & advice providers:

Every MP will try to be as helpful as they can but, since they have many constituents to look after and their Parliamentary duties to attend to, this will place limits on the amount of time which can be spent in the constituency. It is then important that they spend their time dealing with problems that relate to them, rather than diverting queries that should have been taken elsewhere.

Not-for-profit advice organisations such as Citizens Advice and Law Centres play a significant role in providing free information and advice to the public on a wide range of issues including debt, housing, benefits, employment, family, asylum and immigration, discrimination and consumer problems. Caseworkers should therefore prepare printed copies of contact details for local support and advice providers for constituents to visit.

We also advise that casework teams familiarise themselves with their local Legal Aid providers and law firms. MPs and not-for-profit organisations can assist with many legal queries, but there are some matters that will be better managed within a formal legal relationship. MPs can also invite someone from their local Citizens Advice, Law Centre or similar agency to provide an overview of local services.

► Safety at Advice Surgeries

Whilst most constituents are polite and respectful, there have been instances where MPs and their staff have been threatened, injured and, tragically, killed whilst dealing with members of the public. Some of the people who come to see you may be upset, distressed, agitated, angry or aggressive. It is, therefore, vital that you take every possible safety precaution at your advice surgeries. Whilst you may have security measures installed at your constituency office, outside venues may not offer you the same protection.

The Members' Security Support Service (MSSS) provides guidance, advice and support to Members of both Houses and their staff, about security away from the Parliamentary Estate⁵.

5 [14](https://login.microsoftonline.com/1ce6dd9e-b337-4088-be5e-8dbbec04b34a/oauth2/v2.0/authorize?constituent_id=c5796695-73d9-4cc0-bf0b-fe78671177b&redirect_uri=https%3A%2F%2Fparliament.parliament.uk%2F&response_type=code&scope=openid%20offline_access%20email%20openid%20profile&code_challenge=70vo_oUr2q73eu9z7FnNBTTpPCijx070pyiEx_N2n4&code_challenge_method=S256&response_mode=form_post&nonce=638599304486176166.YThjZjkzY2UjMjgwNS00YjMzLWFiNTIyYjM0ODk5OTgxNjU1MmY4ZWRRmmltNDM0Ny00NmY4LTg4ZjQ1YzgzMlZmJmNkYTMx&state=CfDJ8BNVoAVbA35NbpR9N0d2f9QB20-DntaP7EdD6uWIP7TR2tQ5Hv8tCGS9ZdKMHl7tKVbiz5ef2fHyDSQEsgOFvjGZyh4zVnqBNSBtsclnIvHe9znqHBejasQfM39COZFrAJEhHnMXkGkGj0FP-XGkKJ8tRRvFvR8Z-FmFfNiu4cpPAovsZEiXNNACiRl-y03eN0jLbCT5e4v1sPOM3ZnU2B8HkR52EaNIx9M8aAARYeQjKzOCVW3CScoEmaq7uKM8Aw5zeuwmz4XyIrf543IWu6JZgKca0LcoRE2JwlmvbkSRpUWueBXjKlepMry18wzLV4MikPdOaJJV_syluOQ_GmKaYlgo3NncYPrsgZh2j1HpvgoFucm3yBqKq5UHZkFguBaM-PhoMYLkRlXWtV8G17JdWd33iVg7&x-constituent-SKU=ID_NET6_0&x-constituent-ver=6.21.0.0</small></p></div><div data-bbox=)

► Authority to act

The most important thing you will need to start with is a written statement signed by the constituent, confirming what the problem is, what they want the MP to do to help, and an authority given for the MP to make representations on behalf of the constituent. Whilst not legally required for data protection purposes, it is good practice and may save you a lot of time if external agencies ask you to provide proof of authority to act.

Standard response letter for constituents

[Constituent name]

[address]

[date]

Dear *[Constituent]*,

Thank you for your letter of *[date]* about *[issue/problem/complaint]*. I have sent a copy of your letter to *[name]* at *[Ministry/Department/Agency]* and asked him/her to *[respond/investigate/comment]*. I will let you know as soon as I receive a response. To get the reply to you as quickly as possible, I will forward the reply to you with a compliment slip rather than wait for a letter to be typed out. However, if there are any issues arising from the response which you wish to pursue further, please do not hesitate to let me know. I will treat as confidential all personal information you give to me or to my staff. I may need to pass on this information to others so they can help you. I undertake to handle the information you give me in line with the requirements of GDPR Regulations. If you have any queries regarding the processing of your personal data by my office, please contact (insert contact details).

Yours sincerely,

[Name of MP]

Member of Parliament for []

► Requesting reference details

For individuals who have asylum and immigration issues, you will need their Home Office reference, if it is available, and for those with social security issues, the National Insurance number will be required.

If you are dealing with the local authority on Universal Credit and council tax enquiries, try and make sure you have any relevant reference details.

► Hotlines for MPs

Do make use of the dedicated MP hotlines for a lot of government agencies. A regularly updated compendium of all MP Hotlines can be found via the UK Parliament Digital Service, in the MP Portal.

If you have specific questions on social welfare issues that you encounter, we also strongly recommend the excellent House of Commons Library. The Library provides an impartial and confidential information and research service for individual MPs and their staff. The department answers tens of thousands of specific enquiries arising from the wide range of Members' parliamentary duties. They are likely to be able to answer your queries directly or will be able to refer you to someone else who can.

House of Commons Enquiry Service

Telephone: **020 7219 4272**

Email: **hcenquiries@parliament.uk**

► Case management systems

There are several different case management systems used by MPs and their casework team. Several of the teams that we spoke to recommended **Caseworker.mp**. For more details, visit <https://www.caseworkermp.com/>.

The benefits of a case management system include:

- Centrally co-ordinated and updated Ministerial database, meaning no need to sync between Westminster and constituency data.
- Integration with the Electoral Register.
- An integrated inbox which captures information about constituents and pre-populates forms and case notes.
- A statistics system providing an overall view of case types and workload.
- Digital letters on letterhead to ministers, 3rd parties and constituents.

Other systems which you may hear mentioned include **eCasework and AIMS Advice & Information Management System** which are often used by local authorities and unions.

► Complaints

Whilst 'advice' is distinct from 'complaints', in practice the solution to issues raised by constituents often involves a mixture of the two.

Often, it is very important to ensure that your constituent has followed the appropriate complaints procedure if relevant so that they are not barred further down the line in independent stages such as Ombudsman procedures. Following a complaint and / or Ombudsman route does not preclude subsequent legal action (subject to limitation periods), so it is often sensible to follow this route initially.

Issues where it is particularly important to follow relevant complaints procedures first include (but are not limited to):

- Local government issues
- Some social housing issues e.g. transfers and longer-term repair issues
- Healthcare
- Education
- Some welfare benefit issues

When your constituent completes a complaints procedure, it is important that they copy caseworkers into correspondence to keep a clear record.

Caseworkers also should reassure constituents who are pursuing complaints by:

- Agreeing to chase if specified complaint timescales are not adhered to
- Reminding constituents that MPs have a formal referral role to several independent complaints' bodies.

Issues where it is best to pursue legal/specialist assistance ASAP:

- ▶ Serious anti-social behaviour
- ▶ Employment issues
- ▶ Family issues
- ▶ Complex leasehold disputes
- ▶ General 'private' legal matters

▶ **Where can you signpost?**

There are a wide range of organisations that deliver some form of legal assistance funded by central or local government, or funded by charitable donations and grants. The providers of advice and legal support on social welfare law issues in England and Wales fall into six main categories. These are:

- ▶ private law firms, providing paid-for, publicly funded (Legal Aid) and representation, such as the Direct Access Scheme for Barristers⁶
- ▶ pro bono services, such as Advocate⁷, the Free Representation Unit⁸, university-run legal clinics
- ▶ Not for Profit advice agencies, comprising around 330 local Citizens Advice charities, around 750 agencies forming the AdviceUK network (50 of whom employ lawyers), and other local organisations providing information and advice and some legal support across several areas of social welfare law
- ▶ 42 local Law Centres under the umbrella of the Law Centres Network, set up to alleviate poverty, provide legal help and representation, and undertake policy work across many aspects of social welfare law
- ▶ larger, national charities such as Age UK, Shelter and Mencap that, along with other services, provide information, advice and representation in various practice areas
- ▶ local authorities, providing general information and advice through a wide range of social and community workers, as well as dedicated specialist staff providing advice on homelessness and some other social welfare issues such as welfare benefits.

We include several useful addresses and telephone numbers at the end of this guide.

As the APPG, we campaign around access to justice and urge firms and organisations working within communities to come and introduce themselves to MPs and their casework teams. Having an awareness of the members of your local advice community and good relationships with providers may be hugely beneficial in being able to assist your constituents swiftly and efficiently. Other organisations, such as LAPG, Young Legal Aid Lawyers and Migrants Organise, run outreach programmes such as the "Take Your MP to Work" initiative⁹.

6 <https://www.directaccessportal.co.uk/#:~:text=Direct%20access%20is%20a%20scheme,first%20going%20through%20a%20solicitor.>

7 <https://weareadvocate.org.uk/>

8 <https://www.thefru.org.uk/>

9 <https://younglegalaidlawyers.org/take-your-mp-to-work>

► Different Types of Legal Support Organisations

Paid help from Law Firms

For someone experiencing a legal problem, the first step may be to contact a solicitor for advice. However, solicitors working in private law firms, who do not have a contract to provide Legal Aid (see below), may charge on average of £350 per hour, which is unaffordable for a large percentage of the population. If your constituent can afford a private solicitor, they can use the free Law Society “Find a Solicitor” service to find a suitable one with capacity to take on their matter¹⁰. Direct access barristers can also be engaged by the public. It may also be useful to signpost constituents towards the Legal500, which lists highly regarded practitioners in various fields and specialisms¹¹.

The Legal Aid Scheme

For those unable to afford the services of a private solicitor, consider if they may be eligible for assistance under the Legal Aid scheme. Legal Aid or publicly funded legal assistance is a critical part of the English and Welsh legal system. It provides access to justice for those people who are unable to pay for their own lawyers. This includes providing access to specialist advice and legal representation. Legal Aid can help pay for all or part of an individual’s legal costs, provided their issue falls within the scope of Legal Aid provision and they satisfy the eligibility criteria. As it stands, 25% of adults in the UK may be eligible for Legal Aid, even after stringent reductions to the Legal Aid regime¹².

In England and Wales, constituents should engage a Legal Aid solicitor, who will apply to the Legal Aid Agency for Legal Aid on their behalf, especially in more complex cases.

However, recent statistics have revealed that 38% of those who require Legal Aid remain unaided, often unaware of available support or perceiving considerable cost barriers to support¹³.

Demand for Legal Aid is increasing while resources remain tight. A constituent’s problem might not always seem overtly “legal” and might be multifaceted. Resolving the problem may be essential to improving a constituent’s standard of living and maintaining their belief in the democratic system. If not addressed early on, problems may cluster, leading to a greater strain on civil society and public services. Assisting your constituent or directing them to the appropriate service early is vitally important.

Many MPs will see constituents who are looking for help because they are not eligible for Legal Aid but cannot afford legal advice. In certain cases, it is possible for them to assist directly with a matter but there remain strict rules, particularly in immigration law, which state what an MP can and can’t do.

On the next page is a diagram setting out the areas of law covered by the Legal Aid scheme.

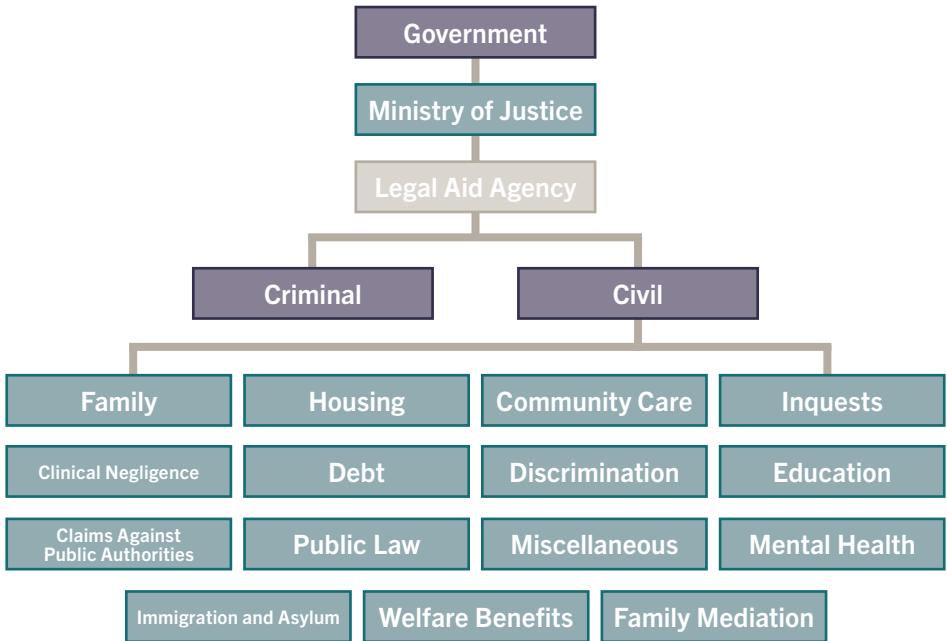
¹⁰ <https://solicitors.lawsociety.org.uk/>

¹¹ <https://www.legal500.com/>

¹² The Civil Legal Aid Means Test: a system still failing those who need it most - Public Law Project

¹³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/legal-aid-statistics-quarterly-october-to-december-2023/legal-aid-statistics-england-and-wales-bulletin-oct-to-dec-2023>

► The Legal Aid structure illustrated



► What problems qualify for Legal Aid?

Only specified areas of law are covered by Legal Aid. Legal Aid is only available to individuals, not for companies or organisations.

The statutory basis for Legal Aid is the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012 (LASPO). LASPO reversed the position of the Access to Justice Act 1999 and specified that Legal Aid is not available for any matter unless specifically included in Schedule 1 to the Act. Lawyers refer to these areas as being within 'scope'.

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Some implications of LASPO include:

- ▶ The number of early advice Legal Aid cases has fallen from nearly one million in 2009/10, to only 130,000 in 2021/22¹⁴.
- ▶ In the same period, the number of people going to court without legal representation has tripled¹⁵.
- ▶ The number of advice agencies and law centres doing this work has fallen by 59%¹⁶.
- ▶ Millions of people live in areas referred to as “advice deserts”, where they cannot access the help and advice that they are statutorily entitled to¹⁷.
- ▶ The Legal Aid workload now sits at less than one quarter of pre-LASPO levels¹⁸.

In the post-LASPO landscape, it is more important than ever to support constituents in need of accessing Legal Aid resources. There is a huge amount that MPs and their casework teams can do for a constituent, however some areas of law are so complex and the guidance changes so rapidly that the best outcome for the constituent will be obtained by having specialist legal advice.



14 <https://www.lawsociety.org.uk/contact-or-visit-us/press-office/press-releases/a-decade-of-cuts-legal-aid-in-tatters>

15 Ibid

16 Ibid

17 <https://www.lawsociety.org.uk/campaigns/civil-justice/legal-aid-deserts>

18 <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/legal-aid-statistics-quarterly-october-to-december-2023/legal-aid-statistics-england-and-wales-bulletin-oct-to-dec-2023>

► What remains in Scope?¹⁹

Legal Aid funding remains available in the following areas.

Area of Law	Restrictions
Housing	Only for cases of homelessness or risk of homelessness, or where the person's home is at risk Or if an individual is at serious risk of harm due to disrepair or appeals on a point of law relating to council tax reduction schemes Free advice and representation is also available for possession proceedings through the Housing Loss Prevention Advice Service ²⁰
Debt	Only when the person's home is at risk
Welfare Benefits	Only in relation to appeals to the Upper Tribunal, Court of Appeal, Supreme Court
Immigration	Only if there are problems of domestic violence, human trafficking, slavery, servitude, forced labour, terrorism prevention When proceedings are in the Special Immigration Appeals Commission Available for migrant children separated from parents in non-asylum immigration and citizenship cases. Advice on asylum cannot cover the substantive issue unless independently in scope
Family – Public Cases	Child protection cases only
Family – Private Cases	Only for cases with evidence of domestic violence, child abuse, child abduction, forced marriage, FGM or where the child is a party to the case
Mental Health	Only relating to the Mental Health Act 1983, the Mental Capacity Act 2005 and para 5(2) of the Schedule to the Repatriation of Prisoners Act 1984
Community Care	Only for the provision of community care services, and of facilities for disabled persons
Discrimination	Only in relation to a contravention of the Equality Act 2010, or another specified discrimination statute
Mediation	Only relating to family disputes
Actions against Public Authorities	For allegations of deliberate abuse of a person in the care of an authority Where the public authority has the power to detain, imprison or prosecute: abuse of a child or vulnerable adult, deliberate or dishonest abuses of power by a public authority, breaches of human rights or advice to victims of sexual offences
Public Law	Judicial Review
Education	Discrimination and Specialist Education Needs
Clinical negligence	Only when infant suffers a neurological injury resulting in severe disability during pregnancy, childbirth and postnatal period
Miscellaneous	Specific Schedule 1 Areas remain in scope

¹⁹ Taken from the Westminster Commission on Legal Aid [link]

²⁰ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/housing-loss-prevention-advice-service-hlpas>

► Is my constituent eligible for Legal Aid?

Apart from very few cases, Legal Aid is subject to a Means Test. To be eligible for Legal Aid, your constituent must pass both a 'Means Test' and 'Merits Test'. Once you refer your constituent to a Legal Aid provider, they will apply the relevant tests and determine whether your constituent's matter can be resolved using Legal Aid. Once eligibility has been established, this must be kept on file and the Legal Aid Agency must be updated if there is a change to your constituent's circumstances.

Constituents in England & Wales can check their eligibility for civil Legal Aid here²¹.

► Civil Legal Aid: understanding the Means and Merits Test

This section focuses on certificated Legal Aid work. More detail about Legal Help, which is not certificated, can be found below.

► The Means Test

There are both capital and income-based benchmarks which determine whether your constituent's means are considered by the Legal Aid Agency to be inadequate to fund a case themselves.

The amendments to the Means Test in 2013 via the Civil Legal Aid Regulations 2013 has meant that considerably fewer individuals are eligible for Legal Aid. The proportion of the population eligible for Legal Aid fell from 80% in 1980 to 52% in 1998, down to 25% in 2016²². The Means Test was recently reviewed with thresholds raised in line with inflation, but the last government pushed the date for these changes to come into effect back to 2026.

At present, your constituent is only eligible for Legal Help if their gross monthly income does not exceed £2,657 and their disposable income does not exceed £733 per month. If they receive a 'passporting' welfare benefit, they will automatically satisfy the income test. As far as capital is concerned, they must not have capital in excess of £8,000 (or £3,000 for immigration matters).

Income

- Income includes income from all sources including salary, benefits, business income, self-employed income, maintenance, gifts of money from family/friends, or payments made on the constituent's behalf e.g. gas/electricity.
- If the constituent has a partner their means are combined, unless the partner is the person with whom they are in dispute. A partner is a spouse or civil partner, or someone who the constituent ordinarily lives with as a couple.
- Any applicant's income must be below £2,657²³.
- Disposable income must be no more than £733 per month. Once disposable income is over £315, the applicant must pay a monthly contribution²⁴.

Capital

- ▶ Capital is very widely defined, as “every resource of a capital nature belonging to the constituent on the date the application is made”.
- ▶ The disposable capital limit is £8,000²⁵.
- ▶ Those in receipt of Passporting State Benefits automatically qualify for the income means test, but still must undergo a capital analysis. Passporting benefits include Jobseeker’s Allowance (JSA) and Universal Credit (UC), amongst others.
- ▶ The capital analysis can create issues when considering a constituent’s means. Often, this analysis may consider inaccessible capital such as equity in a family home which is not commonly considered disposable.

The government Legal Aid Eligibility Calculator is a useful resource²⁶.

It is worth noting that The Law Society recently calculated that only individuals living in deep poverty – up to 80% below the minimum income standard (MIS) – will be eligible for full Legal Aid²⁷.

Many people living on incomes well below the minimum income standard are expected to contribute to their own legal costs, pricing them out of the legal help and advice they are entitled to.

By next year, a couple with two children will need to be surviving on just £41 a day (£1,234 a month) to qualify for full Legal Aid: 57% below the minimum income standard. For a single person, it will be less than £9 a day (£268 a month), which is 81% below the minimum income standard.

These calculations exclude rent/mortgage payments, council tax and childcare costs.

▶ The Merits Test

Alongside financial eligibility, the merits of any case must also be proven in order that the Legal Aid Agency will issue a Legal Aid certificate. This is set out in Regulation 32 of the Civil Legal Aid (Merits Criteria) Regulations 2012 as follows:

“there is likely to be sufficient benefit to the individual, having regard to all the circumstances of the case, including the circumstances of the individual, to justify the cost of provision of legal help.”

21 Check if your constituent qualifies for Legal Aid | GOV.UK ([check-your-constituent-qualifies-for-legal-aid.service.gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk/check-your-constituent-qualifies-for-legal-aid))

22 <https://publiclawproject.org.uk/blog/the-civil-legal-aid-means-test-a-system-still-failing-those-who-need-it-most/#:~:text=The%20proportion%20of%20the%20population,growing%20cost%20of%20living%20crisis.>

23 <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/civil-legal-aid-means-testing>

24 Ibid

25 Ibid

26 <https://www.gov.uk/check-legal-aid>.

27 <https://www.lawsociety.org.uk/topics/research/improving-the-legal-aid-means-test-as-living-costs-rise>

What indicates the merits of a case?

All other avenues must have been exhausted before recourse to legal procedure

- ▶ **1: The matter must have ‘sufficient benefit’**
 - ▶ “There is likely to be sufficient benefit to the individual, having regard to all the circumstances of the case, including the circumstances of the individual, to justify the cost of provision of legal help”.
- ▶ **2: The “reasonable private paying citizen test”**
 - ▶ Would a reasonable person be prepared to risk his or her own money to pay their own, and maybe the other side’s, costs in a case? Considering all the circumstances.
 - ▶ The reasonable person is one who is “a person with reasonable but not super abundant means”.
- ▶ **3: The cost/benefit matrix:**
 - ▶ The LAA also applies a test based on the ratio of likely financial award, compared to the likely legal costs. This means that if a case has very high potential merits, the legal costs may be higher than when the merits are either good or moderate.
 - ▶ The Legal Aid Agency also consider whether the case is of “overwhelming importance to the individual” e.g. meaning where life, liberty or physical safety are concerned.
- ▶ **4: Proportionality**
 - ▶ Civil Procedure Rules limits the costs which can be claimed from an opponent to those proportionate to the sums of many at issue, considering non-monetary remedies and other wider factors such as reputation / public importance.
 - ▶ Most cases which pass the cost/success matrix test, or the reasonable private paying individual test will pass the proportionality test

In all cases, a Legal Aid certificate is only issued if the Legal Aid Agency is satisfied that the claim should be funded.

What happens on approval?

- ▶ A Legal Aid Certificate will be issued.
- ▶ This will contain the following details:
 - ▶ Details of the case
 - ▶ Details of the scope of the case
 - ▶ Limitations of the costs which can be incurred under the certificate.

Legal Help and Family Help (Lower)

What is Legal Help/Family Help (Lower)?

Legal Help and Family Help (Lower) are forms of service called ‘Controlled Work’.

They are forms of service normally available to provide legal advice and assistance outside of actual or contemplated legal proceedings (with a slight difference for Family Help).

Under Legal Help/Family Help (Lower) you can:

- ▶ advise a constituent about their legal rights and entitlements;
- ▶ advise a constituent about a claim/case that they are considering bringing or that has been issued against them;
- ▶ conduct correspondence to assist resolving their legal problem;
- ▶ write a pre-action protocol letter;
- ▶ conduct negotiations.

Generally, however, if you need to take a step within proceedings (like drafting statements of claim), you need a Legal Aid certificate. The exception is in Family Help (Lower) where you can issue proceedings in order to obtain a consent order following the settlement of a family dispute.

Matter Starts

Each contract year, every provider is allocated a number of matter starts in each category of law named in their contract schedule. You must ensure that the provider you work for has available matter starts before you open a new case. If the provider has already run out of matter starts (and can't be allocated any more) then the LAA will not accept a claim for costs in respect of that new case.

Constituent Eligibility

Eligibility for Legal Help (and Family Help) is determined by the provider rather than by the LAA. The LAA has delegated this responsibility to the provider and periodically audits provider files to check that the provider is getting these decisions right.

In order to qualify for Legal Help/Family Help:

- ▶ the matter must meet the definition of civil legal services (as set out in section 8 of LASPO);
- ▶ the matter must meet the definition of Legal Help (or Family Help) as set out in the regulations;
- ▶ the matter must have 'sufficient benefit';
- ▶ the constituent must be financially eligible;
- ▶ the constituent must have fully and accurately completed a Legal Help form and provided acceptable evidence of their financial eligibility (copies of which must be kept on file).

Similarly to certificated work, to be eligible for Legal Help your constituent must be eligible via the Means and Merits Tests.

► Criminal Legal Aid

If a constituent has a criminal law issue, it is crucial to refer them to a Legal Aid criminal practitioner. The services of a court duty solicitor are available at all police stations and Magistrates Courts to everyone, free of charge, regardless of income or capital.

Your constituent's position within the criminal justice system determines the Means Test they will undergo.

Magistrates Court	Two-part test: 1) Must be "in the interests of justice"; meaning a complex legal issue, in which the constituent is unable to represent themselves 2) Financial: a. Certain benefits (JSA) are "Passporting" b. Annual income (including partner) must be under £22,325
Crown Court	Household disposable income must be under £37,500 to be eligible If gross monthly income is over £283.17, the constituent must pay a contribution ²⁸
In Prison	Must check as not all matters regarding imprisonment or seeking to change the terms of a sentence are covered.



²⁸ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/work-out-who-qualifies-for-criminal-legal-aid#:~:text=Crown%20Court%20trial,in%20a%20Crown%20Court%20trial.>

► An Introduction to Exceptional Case Funding

If your constituent's case appears to be out of scope of Legal Aid, it may be worth considering applying for Exceptional Case Funding (ECF).

Exceptional Case Funding was introduced under Section 10 of LASPO. An ECF application for legal services may be made where a case falls outside the scope of civil Legal Aid, but either the constituent or a solicitor believes that a failure to provide funding would be a breach of the European Convention on Human Rights and therefore also the Human Rights Act.

- Access to the scheme was initially heavily restricted; in the first year of the scheme, the grant rate was only 1%, with 1,520 applications made.
- However, since then the grant rate has improved considerably, with a rate of 73% in 2020/21. However, gross application numbers remain very low.
- Applications are very often made by a specialist professional, suggesting that many applicants may not have the resources to apply for ECF at all and these applications lie dormant. In the 2021/22 financial year, only 545 of 3,724 applications were made by individuals²⁹.
- Improvements to the scheme have been made, thanks to the targeted policy work and litigation of the Public Law Project.
 - The introduction of the simplified application form CIV ECF1 in June 2022 has addressed some of these concerns.
- Legal Aid providers are not paid for unsuccessful applications, dis-incentivising the ECF scheme altogether and meaning that applications for ECF are made at financial risk to Legal Aid practitioners.

For detailed provisions of Exceptional Case Funding, see Section 10 of LASPO³⁰, and the Public Law Project's helpful guide³¹.



29 <https://www.lag.org.uk/article/213605/the-state-of-exceptional-case-funding>

30 <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2012/10/section/10>

31 <https://publiclawproject.org.uk/exceptional-case-funding/>

► Do you think you have a constituent in need who might qualify for Legal Aid? Next steps

- Make them aware of the Civil Legal Advice helpline: 0345 345 4345
- Refer them to a local Legal Aid provider: the government’s database of providers is an excellent start³², or we can help put you in touch with someone.

What to do: The practical side

Once your constituent has secured an initial appointment, it is essential that they are prepared.

What to bring

All appointments NB: These all must include the income of a partner, unless your constituent’s partner is the person with whom you are in a dispute.

Proof of Income:

- Wage slip
- Benefit or tax credit letter

Bank statements:

- Should cover the last three months for all accounts

Proof of housing costs:

- Rent / mortgage costs

Proof of disposable capital:

- E.g. savings account statements

Family Issues

Parental responsibility agreement

Partnership certificate

Court documents /legal agreements

Passports of both spouses, civil partners and children included in applications

Birth certificates of any children relevant

Marriage certificates

Paperwork / letters relating to the issue

Divorce Papers

Housing

Tenancy agreement

Mortgage details

Court papers

Title deeds

Inventory

Correspondence with landlord

Receipts

Any other relevant contractual information

³² <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/directory-of-legal-aid-providers>

► Alternative Options to Support a Constituent

For many constituents, their best starting point will be a local advice agency, and for some online guidance might provide assistance. We set out below key sources for both, followed by other sources.

► Law Centres Network³³

The Law Centres Network operates Law Centres throughout England and Wales. They employ lawyers and other advisory professionals to provide a free service to support with common problems, such as landlord issues or benefits.

- Bristol Law Centre
- Cambridge House Law Centre
- Central England Law Centre (Birmingham)
- Central England Law Centre (Coventry)
- Citizens Advice Bradford & Airedale and Bradford Law Centre
- Cumbria Law Centre
- Derbyshire Law Centre
- Ealing Law Centre
- Equality and Employment Law Centre
- Greater Manchester Law Centre
- Hackney Community Law Centre
- Hammersmith & Fulham Law Centre
- Haringey Law Centre
- Harrow Law Centre
- Hillingdon Law Centre
- Islington Law Centre
- Kirklees Citizens Advice & Law Centre
- Law Centre (Northern Ireland)
- Leicester Community Advice and Law Centre
- Luton Law Centre
- Merseyside Law Centre
- North East Law Centre
- North Kensington Law Centre
- North West London Law Centres (Brent and Camden)
- North Yorkshire Citizens Advice & Law Centre
- Nottingham Law Centre
- Paddington Law Centre
- Plumstead Community Law Centre
- Public Interest Law Centre
- Sheffield Citizens Advice and Law Centre
- South West London Law Centres (Croydon)
- South West London Law Centres (Merton and Sutton)
- South West London Law Centres (Wandsworth)
- Southwark Law Centre
- Speakeasy Law Centre
- Springfield Law Centre
- Suffolk Law Centre
- The Derby Law Centre
- Tower Hamlets Law Centre
- Vauxhall Community Law and Information Centre
- Wiltshire Law Centre



33 <https://www.lawcentres.org.uk/list-of-law-centres>

► Citizens Advice

Citizens Advice deliver advice services from over 3,300 community locations in England and Wales, run by 338 individual charities. Citizens Advice is the national body and is a registered charity. As the UK's largest advice provider, they can advise on any issue for anyone, spanning debt and employment to consumer and housing plus everything in between.

To find your local Citizens Advice, use the following search tool:

<https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/about-us/contact-us/nearby/>³⁴.

There are lots of ways constituents can access their advice:

- 270 independent local Citizens Advice charities with over 600 offices across England and Wales – to find your local Citizens Advice go to [citizensadvice.org.uk](https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk).
- Almost 2,000 outreaches in local communities, such as GP surgeries, hospitals, libraries, prisons and community centres.
- One-off services in locations across the country, such as shopping centres, schools and faith groups.
- The Citizens Advice Consumer service helpline – 0808 223 1133, or 0808 223 1144 for a Welsh-speaking adviser. If you are in Scotland, you should contact [consumeradvice.scot](https://www.consumeradvice.scot).
- Self-help information on the Citizens Advice website – [citizensadvice.org.uk](https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk).
- An Extra Help Unit that helps people with complex energy or postal complaints. The unit is not a public helpline – people can be referred to it by the Citizens Advice Consumer Service or their local MP.

As well as core advice, Citizens Advice deliver:

- The Witness Service
- Pension Wise
- The Help to Claim service
- Debt advice funded by the Money and Pensions Service.

They are also the statutory consumer champion for the energy market and the statutory consumer watchdog for the postal service.

Citizens Advice Scotland

Citizens Advice Scotland (CAS) is the umbrella organisation for Scotland's network of 59 members. These members, as independent charities, deliver free, impartial and confidential frontline advice services.

For more information, visit the Citizen Advice Scotland Website here: www.cas.org.uk



³⁴ <https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/about-us/contact-us/nearby/>

Citizens Advice Cymru

Citizens Advice Cymru is the largest voluntary advice provider in Wales, with 17 member local Citizens Advice. CAC assist tens of thousands of people with issues regarding benefits, debt, consumer issues, housing problems and employment disputes.

Single Advice Fund in Wales

In October 2019 CAC was awarded the Single Advice Fund of £8.1 million to provide advisory services throughout Wales, including a remote advice service which launched on 1st January 2020. Now known as Advice Link, this service is available across Wales in: Cardiff and Vale, Swansea Neath Port Talbot, Cwm Taf, Mid and West, Gwent, and North. Local Citizens Advice have worked together within their regional areas to plan for how they will deliver advice services in their region.

Appointments


Citizens Advice have a limited drop-in service but for face-to-face advice you generally need a pre-booked appointment. Constituents can visit them without an appointment if they don't have access to a phone or the internet or face other barriers to accessing advice remotely, for instance hearing impairment.

► Advicenow

Advicenow is a national online support and advice service provided the charity Law for Life, funded by the Ministry of Justice. We help people address and resolve their legal problems with the aim of reducing poverty, discrimination, and health inequality.

Our free online legal resources are clear, user-centred, reliable and supportive. We are here for people when they cannot access an adviser or afford a solicitor.

We have lots of free step-by-step guides and personalised legal support tools to help with common housing, benefit, employment, and family problems as well as help for anyone going to court or tribunal about a civil issue. We find that our guides are often used by MP caseworkers, Citizens Advice advisers, law clinic staff and volunteers, support workers, and community volunteers.

All our information can also be accessed in over 100 other languages or can be read aloud via our accessibility tool bar so your caseworkers can also signpost constituents to our website. Just click on this icon  on any of our Advicenow pages.

Help with housing problems

www.advicenow.org.uk/help-deal-housing-problems³⁵

- Eviction
- Homelessness
- Problems with temporary accommodation
- Disrepairs

Welfare benefits

www.advicenow.org.uk/help-deal-benefit-problems³⁶

- ▶ Step-by-step guides to deal with incorrect decisions of PIP
- ▶ Disability Living Allowance (DLA), or the work capability assessment for ESA or Universal Credit
- ▶ Legal support tools that write the necessary letter asking for a mandatory reconsideration
- ▶ Help for people who have been sanctioned who have a Universal Credit overpayment they cannot afford to pay back (due to be published in September).

Family law disputes

www.advicenow.org.uk/help-deal-family-problems³⁷

- ▶ Step-by-step resources for families facing divorce and separation, or disagreements over the children or money
- ▶ Affordable Advice service where readers of our guides can get further help from a Resolution lawyer for a low-cost fixed fee. For more information on this innovative service go to Getting affordable advice from a family solicitor via Advicenow³⁸.

Employment problems

www.advicenow.org.uk/help-problems-work³⁹

- ▶ Short helpful guides to common employment problems
- ▶ New step-by-step guides (from September) about what to do about suspected discrimination or bullying, and how to take a case to an employment tribunal.

Small claims in the county court

www.advicenow.org.uk/how-sue-someone⁴⁰

- ▶ How to take a case to the small claims court or county court and how to resolve the dispute out of court
- ▶ How to enforce an order (to be published in September)

Further help

www.advicenow.org.uk/guides/help-directory⁴¹

If we don't have the information your constituent needs, then you may well find something useful in our Help Directory which explains which national organisations offer advice on that legal area and how to access it.



³⁶ www.advicenow.org.uk/help-deal-benefit-problems

³⁷ www.advicenow.org.uk/help-deal-family-problems

³⁸ <https://www.advicenow.org.uk/know-hows/getting-affordable-advice-family-solicitor-advicenow>

³⁹ www.advicenow.org.uk/help-problems-work

⁴⁰ www.advicenow.org.uk/how-sue-someone

⁴¹ www.advicenow.org.uk/guides/help-directory

► Signposting to other free help including Pro Bono

The 'Guide to Pro Bono and Other Free Advice in England & Wales' is a directory for MPs and Caseworkers looking to signpost constituents to free legal and related help.

This includes charities across England and Wales which offer legal advice, covering immigration, domestic abuse, employment, social security, family issues and how to access Legal Aid. It also includes information of specialist charities which provide non-legal support.

Produced under the oversight of the Attorney General's Pro Bono Committee's steering group, in the last Parliament it was endorsed by the Solicitor General and Lord Chancellor and can be downloaded at probonocommittee.uk/MPs⁴².

We will be sending hard copies together with this guide to all MP Offices. Additional hard copies can be request by emailing guide@probonocommittee.uk.

In addition to information on the advice sector and specialist charities, the Guide includes details of pro bono help (free assistance from volunteer lawyers. Notable sources include:

- **LawWorks Clinics Network** is a network for around 300 clinics that provide free initial advice on various areas of social welfare law, employment law, housing, consumer disputes and debt⁴³.
- **Advocate** provides advice and representation from volunteer barristers to those who cannot get Legal Aid. A network of duty schemes also operates at a number of courts⁴⁴.
- **Support Through Court** provides emotional and practical support for litigants in person in civil and family proceedings⁴⁵.
- **Liberty Human Rights Information Line** provides legal information about public law and human rights law⁴⁶.

A Wales chapter (also available in the Welsh language) helps direct constituents in Wales to help including in devolved areas of law.

The 'Guide to Pro Bono and Other Free Advice in Scotland' is the sister publication for Scotland produced jointly by Faculty of Advocates, Law Society of Scotland and JustRight Scotland. It is available from the same website as above.

42 probonocommittee.uk/MPs

43 <https://www.lawworks.org.uk/legal-advice-individuals/find-legal-advice-clinic-near-you>

44 <https://weareadvocate.org.uk/>

45 <https://www.supportthroughcourt.org/>

46 <https://www.libertyhumanrights.org.uk/advice-and-information/contact-us/>

► Useful resources

Civil Legal Advice Helpline

Helpline Number: 0345 345 4345

- Open from 9am to 8pm, Monday to Friday
- Open from 9am to 12.30pm on a Saturday
- More details about call charges can be found at the following:
<https://www.gov.uk/call-charges>⁴⁷
- If you are worried about the cost of the phone-call, you can ask an advisor to call you back. If you text 'legalaid', along with your name, to 80010, an advisor will call you back within 24 hours.
- The CLA offers a translation service, as well as a minicom service for those who are deaf or hard of hearing.

Find a Legal Aid Advisor or Family Mediator:

- <https://find-legal-advice.justice.gov.uk>⁴⁸

Legal Aid General

- <https://www.gov.uk/legal-aid>⁴⁹

Civil Legal Aid

- <https://www.gov.uk/civil-legal-advice>⁵⁰

Eligibility calculator

- <https://www.gov.uk/check-legal-aid>⁵¹

Law Society

A constituent can still get Legal Aid:

- <http://www.lawsociety.org.uk/policy-campaigns/Campaigns/Access-to-justice/documents/Legal-aid-leaflet>⁵²

LASPO review

- <http://www.lawsociety.org.uk/support-services/research-trends/laspo-4-years-on>⁵³

LASPO Critique

- <https://www.lawsociety.org.uk/contact-or-visit-us/press-office/press-releases/a-decade-of-cuts-legal-aid-in-tatters>⁵⁴

Advicenow

- <http://www.advicenow.org.uk>⁵⁵

Citizens Advice - Eligibility and Help with Legal Costs and Legal Aid

- ▶ <https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/law-and-courts/legal-system/taking-legal-action/help-with-legal-costs-legal-aid>⁵⁶

APPG on Access to Justice

- ▶ <https://www.appg-access-to-justice.co.uk/>

Legal Aid Practitioners Group

- ▶ <http://www.lapg.co.uk>⁵⁷

House of Commons Library

- ▶ Caseworkers can contact the Library via commonslibrary@parliament.uk. They provide bespoke research for staff and can organise constituency sessions to introduce their services for caseworkers. They provide objective, information rather than advocacy responses.
- ▶ <http://researchbriefings.parliament.uk/ResearchBriefing/Summary/SN03207>⁵⁸

47 <https://www.gov.uk/call-charges>

48 <https://find-legal-advice.justice.gov.uk>

49 <https://www.gov.uk/legal-aid>

50 <https://www.gov.uk/civil-legal-advice>

51 <https://www.gov.uk/check-legal-aid>

52 <http://www.lawsociety.org.uk/policy-campaigns/Campaigns/Access-to-justice/documents/Legal-aid-leaflet>

53 <http://www.lawsociety.org.uk/support-services/research-trends/laspo-4-years-on>

54 <https://www.lawsociety.org.uk/contact-or-visit-us/press-office/press-releases/a-decade-of-cuts-legal-aid-in-tatters>

55 <http://www.advicenow.org.uk>

56 <https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/law-and-courts/legal-system/taking-legal-action/help-with-legal-costs-legal-aid>

57 <http://www.lapg.co.uk>

58 <http://researchbriefings.parliament.uk/ResearchBriefing/Summary/SN03207>

► **House of Commons Training for Caseworkers**

The APPG, via its Secretariat LAPG, and partner organisations from across the sector, offers a training programme for MPs, caseworkers and councillors covering key issues such as Legal Aid and sectors in which constituents often bring issues e.g. housing law, welfare benefits, identifying legal issues.

If you or your caseworkers are interested in accessing our training programme, please get in touch.

Contact Details

Rohini Jana

- ▶ Rohini.Jana@lapg.com
- ▶ 07980 240676

APPG on Access to Justice

- ▶ <https://www.appg-access-to-justice.co.uk/contact-us>

Legal Aid Practitioners Group

- ▶ <https://lapg.co.uk/contact/>

► **About the APPG on Access To Justice**

The All-Party Parliamentary Group on Access to Justice is the result of a merger between the APPG on Legal Aid and the APPG on Pro Bono and Public Legal Education. Co- Chaired by Lord Willy Bach and Catherine Atkinson (MP for Derby North) the Group reconstituted itself in September 2024. It works to highlight the importance of access to justice as a fundamental principle of the rule of law and to empower individuals to exercise their rights, challenge discrimination, and reduce inequalities.

► **About the Legal Aid Practitioners Group**

LAPG is a membership body representing Legal Aid practitioners across England and Wales. Our Members are private practice and not-for-profit (NFP) organisations, Law Centres, barristers and costs lawyers. Constituted in 1984, we are one of four bodies officially appointed to formally consult with the Government on all Legal Aid contracting issues.

► Acknowledgements

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Casework and your constituents

A Guide for MPs to setting up and managing a constituency casework service in England and Wales.

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Baylis Road, London SE1 7AA

020 7833 7431

office@lapg.co.uk

www.lapg.co.uk

