

Submission of evidence to the Commission on Justice in Wales

Dr Jennifer Sigafos and Dr James Organ

sigafos@liverpool.ac.uk organ@liverpool.ac.uk

School of Law and Social Justice

University of Liverpool

26th February 2019

Introduction

1. We are Lecturers at the University of Liverpool, School of Law and Social Justice. We welcome the invitation to submit evidence to the Commission on Justice in Wales. This submission is based on a study we carried out in 2018, commissioned by the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC). It explored the impact of the changes to legal aid under the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012 (LASPO) on individual lives and people's routes to justice. We did this through 115 qualitative interviews with people with a legal problem for which they can no longer receive assistance through legal aid, in the area of welfare rights, family and employment law, and 16 service providers. The report [Impact of LASPO on Routes to Justice](#) was published by the EHRC in September 2018, and the other research data from the study is the subject of ongoing research. We can provide further details relating to specific issues if it is beneficial to the work of the Commission.
2. The interviews were conducted in the Liverpool City Region, but the access to justice issues that the participants raised are relevant to justice in Wales and should help to inform future policy decisions. We believe that we are able to offer evidence that is relevant to deciding how to promote better outcomes in terms of access to justice in civil law, specifically in response to questions four and ten of the Commission's Call for Evidence. Our submission is based upon extensive evidence of the lived experience of people with limited resources and a legal problem in the areas of welfare rights, family law and employment. This submission includes a summary of key findings, provides a sample of the voices of the participants in the study and makes policy recommendations.
3. The study highlighted the difficulties of getting professional legal advice, particularly that the cost of using a solicitor is prohibitive for those on low incomes with a legal issue that is no longer in scope for legal aid. The legal issues themselves, though, have not gone away.
4. The barriers faced in the various routes to justice had extensive and often severe impacts on lives of people struggling to resolve or move on from legal issues. These impacts were wide-ranging financial, physical, social, emotional and mental health issues.
5. The interviews tell a narrative of the everyday difficulties of coping in the age of austerity politics with restricted access to justice. These include the need to juggle between essentials such as heating and food; the severe impact of relatively small changes in income to those in

low-paid jobs; the upheaval caused by welfare benefit reforms and cuts; the precariousness in employment and housing, and more. The qualitative study therefore gives a full and detailed picture of the impact of LASPO on routes to justice and the lives of people.

Family Law

6. Family law issues mostly concerned divorce or child contact issues. Participants perceived that family problems require solicitors, and were much more likely to report having attempted to use a solicitor. Family law is the most adversarial of the 3 areas of law examined in the study. Some participants had received legal aid for a previous family problem, or in an earlier stage of the current problem that has re-emerged, for example, around child contact or support. Participants were generally unhopeful of a positive resolution to their situation. Financial barriers to resolving problems and domestic violence evidence issues were themes in family law. For many participants their problems were too complex to pursue without advice. Most formal advice was from solicitors, but some participants took advantage of the limited free advice from university law clinics, Women's Aid and Citizens Advice.
7. Cost was the main barrier to resolution reported by participants, for example they could not afford the advice and representation needed to get or to enforce a contact order, or they reported lengthy separations where they wanted but could not afford a divorce. The cost barrier is presented by both the cost of a solicitor and the high cost of court fees.

'I mean I am at the moment still married, I would get a divorce but obviously I know there's no legal aid and I haven't seen him for 5 years now. You know we moved away. He's in another relationship but we've had no contact for 5 years so a divorce would... I would have normally have done that.' (Interview 36)

'But I'm not asking my wife for anything and today I've come to CAB to try and get a divorce on the grounds that we've been separated for 4 years now. [...] but I believe it's quite expensive. I think the court costs are £550 so I'm looking to see if I can get any help with that.' (Interview 91)

8. Service provider interviews pointed out that the costs barrier goes beyond the cost of representation:

'A lot of them need representation in court, which they don't have at all. And then there's all the other add ons around the proceedings, like the fact that they can't afford to get evidence, they can't afford to get medical reports, drug test reports, psychiatric reports.' (Interview SP2)

9. Although most participants identified family law problems as requiring the assistance of a solicitor, a number of participants reported being forced to pursue justice on their own for a variety of processes associated with family law legal problems, from form filling, through mediation to court hearings. Handling issues themselves frequently led to little success for participants, with intermediaries and costs cited as barriers to justice:

'I did set up mediation [to enforce a child contact order where the participant's mother has care of her children] and my mum said she would do the mediation, but she didn't want to sit in the same room as me so therefore, there is no mediation. She basically put a blocker on it.' (Interview 63)

'So, it's just basically me trying to sort out, trying to get [my son] back but I applied to the court but then I couldn't afford that fee either you know to go down that road. But as I say it's just really difficult to find the right legal paths to go down which I can actually afford.' (Interview 15)

10. Some participants assumed that legal aid was not available. Other participants reported multiple attempts to locate an affordable solicitor, usually trying for legal aid. Participants were informed that legal aid was only available if domestic violence was involved, and were deterred by the prior limitations on the sorts of evidence that were acceptable to evidence this.

'I phoned every solicitor... I don't know how much I phoned but at least 6 of them. And all of them were saying no, we don't do legal aid, we don't do legal aid. You've gotta have some sort of domestic abuse to yourself from him to receive it.' (Interview 38)

11. Many participants spoke of dead ends trying to find free advice for their legal issue and going into debt or taking extreme financial measures to be able to pay for formal advice:

'I did seek legal advice but like I'm saying you get 20-30 minutes free and the next thing you know you're getting a letter for a bill and I don't know. Say I need their services to go through the courts because I didn't know the system, I didn't know how they operated things so I ended up in thousands and thousands of pounds in debt.' (Interview 27)

'I suppose if I hadn't have had nearly £5,000 in [legal] bills I may have been able to scrape together the money to pay him off so I wouldn't have had to sell my house.' (Interview 39)

12. Participants reported a wide range of financial, mental, physical, social and other impacts of family law problems. These impacts interconnect and there are major knock-on effects, such as the splitting up of children, leaving work, possible eviction, and social exclusion. Participants ended up in inadequate housing situations with rent arrears and the risk of homelessness. Participants reported selling off property to pay for legal fees and paying more than could be afforded on private tenancies to accommodate children. Participants also reported the financial knock-on effects of leaving work due to stress and anxiety, which occurred throughout the family law issue and carried on afterward.

'It's just draining me. And like, I can't even go to work because at the end of every week I know that I've got that problem, so it's pointless.' (Interview 21)

13. The service provider interviews also emphasised this impact on children and contact with non-resident parents. In the absence of representation or sufficient funding to provide the evidence needed to assist the court to evaluate claims of alcohol or substance abuse, or mental illness, or violence, courts cannot make the right decisions to protect children while allowing appropriate access to their parent

With the domestic violence there are real problems around evidence and legally really the court should hold fact finding hearings if there isn't enough evidence. They don't want to hold fact finding hearings where people aren't represented, because they don't want the alleged abuser cross examining somebody. Plus also it's quite difficult for the court to actually find out what really happened without legal representation in a fact finding hearing. It is quite complex. So, that can be problematic. Either it might mean that the father doesn't get to see his children when he hasn't been violent. Or alternatively the court will allow him to have contact when he has been violent, because they haven't really got enough evidence to make a decision either way, so they... well it just... they can't really make good decisions. (Interview SP2)

Employment Law

14. In the interviews with employment law issues there were themes around a perceived loss of status, both at home and as a worker; of complexity and difficulty understanding employment law issues and processes; and of powerlessness and precarity. As a result, services where participants can only get advice, but not casework or representation, were sometimes perceived as being of little value, and participants reported that they had not engaged with trying to correct their employment problem because they did not believe that there was any point to it. Due to legal aid mainly being limited to claims with a discrimination element, difficulties engaging solicitors, and limited advice from not-for-profit agencies, there was lack of opportunity for much needed advice. This led to people, particularly those on lower incomes, not challenging legal issues, such as a reduction in hours or pay, that they need not have accepted, and which they could ill afford.
15. In employment law formal specialist advice is mainly accessed from trade unions and employment solicitors at private law firms. There is limited advice available from not-for-profit agencies, if you do not pay for one of these sources, and there was little evidence of ongoing employment casework.
16. Participants reported that they tried to get advice from solicitors, but found it difficult to access or expensive. Some participants reported that solicitors would not take their case. The availability of the 'no win no fee' option is limited, particularly for lower value claims, and the participants in the study did not refer to this as an option explored.

I find the solicitors these days it's... they seem to cherry pick what work they take. One time years ago when I did use a solicitor you used to be able to get one quite easy that's when you could get help but now they don't seem to want to deal with small problems, yeah. So that's what I found. (Interview 31).

This left people with smaller claims at risk of not finding the support that they need to continue with their cases. Specialist employment law providers, even when offering reduced rates, highlighted that it is the low value claims that are least likely to be taken forward in the absence of legal aid, as conditional fee arrangements would not be equitable either for the provider or the client.

17. Participants reported access to advice as a member of a trade union as a route for formal employment, with several joining the union on the advice of family members or because they could not use a solicitor. A number of participants expressed regret at not being union members and experience of trade union support was generally positive:

If the 2 of us in work hadn't of joined the union and got that help we would have all accepted what was coming because we thought that they were right in doing what they were but it was only through family members saying no that's not right they can't do that I stuck at it and had a go at fighting for it. (Interview 31)

18. Participants commonly sought to resolve their problems directly with their employer instead, through either formal grievance or disciplinary proceedings, or informally through working with human resources or management. Problems experienced where participants handled cases on their own include issues such as bullying, changes to terms and conditions, TUPE and disciplinary meetings. Although formally still employed, a number of the participants were on sick leave at the point of interview, in some cases as a result of stress related to formal disciplinary or grievance proceedings, which in some cases became an additional employment problem or aggravating factor:

I'm not in work at the moment I'm currently signed off ... stress related illness ... due to work. And again, part of my grievance was that while I've been off, I don't feel that I've been offered any sort of help at all from my workplace to get me back to work. (Interview 79)

19. Participants were mainly unsuccessful when handling cases alone. A number of participants interviewed at Citizens Advice offices, although expressing dissatisfaction with an employment issue, had either accepted the change in their employment contract or left it unresolved. They were instead seeking advice regarding welfare benefits, often as first time claimants. They were struggling with trying to substitute their lost wages, and participants reported knock-on effects of debt problems. A number of participants stated that they had never claimed welfare benefits before. There were difficulties adjusting to the new position of needing to apply for benefits and the associated perceived loss of status.

Any [advice] would help, to help me in the situation, anything. I don't want to come out of work I've never not worked. This is why I don't understand what [welfare benefits] I could be entitled to. Nothing at all I don't understand any of it. (Interview 100)

It impacted on me because I then... when I took the redundancy and I thought oh I'll get another job, it took me 15 months to get another job and I ended up on [unintelligible] I still

had the money of course but ... I ended up not having to work and going to the Job Centre which is the worst place on the planet and they treat everybody exactly the same. They treat everybody like you're a scrounger. (Interview 24)

20. A lack of understanding of employment rights was a common reason for inaction, even in the most serious of cases, and where legal aid is available. This participant, for example, had come in to get information about benefits and was not aware there was an employment case she could pursue:

Interviewee 1: [speaking of her former employer] He's just a horrible person but no other issues. He's never, no there hasn't been. Just, he told me last minute I had to get let go. It was like, it was 6 months pregnant and he was asking me to climb ladders and I was like no I'm pregnant and I could fall and injure myself and my, the baby ... And he just let me go from them so. Now that I'm pregnant he just took the micky a bit and just said, yeah I'll let her go. (Interview 96)

21. Service providers also reported that potential clients generally struggle or are disinclined to take action alone:

Interviewer: And are you aware of what clients do when you are unable to offer legal help?
Interviewee: I think that they might give it a go, but when it's a more complex issue, like even so much as submitting your ET1, sometimes that is quite overwhelming for clients so I think that they will then go...'do you know what, I can't take this any further, for me it's too much time and it's not something I am capable of doing on my own' so I think that they do just drop it so it's not, well really...fair. (Provider Interview 12)

22. The precariousness of employment was evident in a number of participant interviews and meant that they were unlikely to do anything to resolve their issue. As one participant from another EU country stated:

But this unfair treatment I can be scared about it and be thinking, to be thinking about or be too, too confident and if I want to do any problems for my employer then they can just sack me in 1 second. So this is problem. (Interview 108)

23. The degree of complexity reflected in the interviews and powerlessness and inequality of arms in dealing with employment issues emphasises the importance of receiving advice, and highlights the impact that the shortfall in employment advice can have.

24. Participants reported financial, emotional and mental health, physical, social and other impacts of their employment problems. They reported impacts from the routes that they pursued, and their success or lack thereof. Significant themes were the knock-on effects of problems and their impact. Participants' financial problems included difficulties choosing between basic necessities, such as bills and housing.

I haven't got a penny to my name. (Interview 70)

The dentist, you can't afford the dentist no more because it costs money. (Interview 27)

25. The financial impacts associated with the employment problem also led to related stresses. Participants reported sleeplessness from anxiety, as well as loss of confidence and the loss of their perceived status.

'Because I just... I just can't... well I'm awake most nights. I just can't... you know I'm scared I'm gonna be evicted, if I can't... you know. If I don't get any help but you know really I want a job.' (Interview 23)

Welfare Rights Law

26. The main themes in the interviews relating to welfare rights were the everyday narrative of austerity; the high value placed upon, but also the limits of, advice from third sector agencies; the mental and emotional impacts on claimants; and the complexity of the welfare benefits system and specific claim processes. These resulted in barriers to routes to justice available to participants with welfare rights law issues, and heavy reliance on the limited advice available from the third sector.

27. The voluntary sector advice and information services, mainly Citizens Advice and law centres were seen to occupy an important position as an emergency enabler of access to welfare rights legal advice. The services were needed to overcome the complexity of the welfare benefits applications:

Interviewer: Was there any stage of the PIP form when you thought I should try and fill it out myself?

Interviewee: I got it through the post and I looked at it, I looked through it myself first and there was just no way. The only thing I could probably fill in was my name and address. (Interview 95)

28. Most participants used a mix of self-help and formal advice during the process of trying to resolve their welfare rights issue. The self-help took place at all stages of the welfare rights routes, most commonly at either end: form filling and appearance at tribunal. For example, it was common for participants to seek advice about mandatory reconsideration after submitting their forms themselves and getting a negative decision; and for participants to get advice on the later appeal process, but to have to represent themselves at the final tribunal hearing.

29. Most participants found a tribunal hearing to be a complex and intimidating prospect, particularly when they were unwell, which is usually the reason that participants were applying for benefits in the first place:

'If I was going on my own I don't know what the law is. Really, I feel like I'm at the mercy of the tribunal and I don't know what's happening or what's going to happen. It's very worrying, it feels like it's a gamble you just don't know what's gonna happen.' (Interview 45)

30. Several participants stated that they had delayed taking action or considered doing nothing because of the stress and complexity of the benefits process, while others questioned whether the process was worth going through because of the stress:

You basically just wanna put your head in the sand and just completely ignore because it's getting too much because the housing benefit ... it's like really complicated to follow. (Interview 6)

31. For other participants a serious situation or event related, for example, to their health, finances or housing prompted them to pursue their claim or to try to resolve an issue after a period of inaction. Almost all participants were interviewed at locations they were visiting to get advice to try to resolve the issues they were facing, so there were limited numbers of participants who were doing nothing at the time of interview. It is likely, though, that the evidence of doing nothing in our sample implies much wider inactivity in relation to welfare rights in the general population:

'I don't think people are trying to resolve [issues] I think people are just leaving things ... Particularly with, maybe benefits. Maybe they don't turn up for a medical and they get their benefits cut. We're only seeing people who make their way here. I think there's a lot of people who are just not living on any benefits because they haven't got the capacity to come to a bureau. I suppose that's why we've got the advice on prescription programme [advice is delivered in GP surgeries]. (Provider interview 15)

You know you're putting a plaster on a broken knee. It's not something that's going to resolve the situation. So I think there are clients who just thought 'I give up, I can't afford to do this. (Provider Interview 11)

32. Once participants get to an advice centre they reported that it is not always easy to get the support they are seeking, sometimes waiting up to 10 weeks for appointments. Demand is high for welfare rights advice and advice agencies and law centres are limited in resources:

I accept you have to wait in the Citizens Advice for a long time for your initial assessment and so, it was something that I dealt with... luckily I don't live very far from Citizens Advice. And I was lucky there wasn't 50 people. In some Citizens Advice they take the first 10 and the others have got to go. (Interview 18)

33. Participants reported financial, emotional, social, physical and other impacts as a result of welfare benefits issues. Participants spoke about the challenges and effects of navigating the current benefits system. A particular - and recurring - challenge related to the experience of having to engage with an increasingly complex and conditional welfare system, impacting emotional and mental health. One common thread is the financial implications of facing or

receiving a benefit sanction or reduction in a payment schedule. There are also severe, knock-on financial effects where receipt of benefits 'passport' individuals to further support. Unresolved welfare rights problems had major emotional, social and physical impacts for the majority of participants.

34. Participants often reported difficulties paying for essentials, most notably utility bills that until recently were financially viable to cover. Many participants reported spiralling into debt as a result:

Yeah, we're on meters because of it, they forced their way into the house to be fair when we weren't there. Because I ran up a huge bill so we're now on meters, which is not great - that kills us now, which is ridiculous. There's no help out there. There's nothing, there used to be, there's nothing anymore and I did try and try maybe even with the electric companies I tried and begged them. They were like no. You know I offered them £50 it was never enough a month. Because it's not, you're not covering your consumption blah blah blah blah. So you know you're just in a big mess and it was like £4000 in the end and was just ridiculous. (Interviews 110)

35. Participants are being forced to prioritise between essential items, such as clothing and food and the number of meals consumed in a day, having a knock-on effect on physical health:

Sometimes I go on a bit of a... I sort of diet anyway obviously to keep slim but [...] well, cut down on the shopping this week because I'm going to sort of ... do something else with my money like buy some clothes or something like that - it is a juggle. (Interview 114)

I'm diabetic, I need to keep an eye on my sugars and all the rest of it. I've had to stop taking one needle as much because I haven't had as much food to be able to take that. You know how you're supposed to take so many meals a day to have your sugar regulated - I can't do it. I can't do it. I'm living on bread. Toast. (Interview 42)

36. Participants discussed a sense of social exclusion and the limited social choices they have due to a lack of funds and the stress and anxiety linked to their welfare benefits situations:

I mean there are a lot of people who are lonely out there, who don't go out and I'm one of them. because I haven't got that extra money to do anything with, just that little bit - I'm not asking for millions, just all you want is that little bit of money so you can say 'right, today I'll go the beach' or 'today I'll just go for a nice walk somewhere'. All I do is walk around the block because I got no money. (Interview 49)

37. The third sector is the main route to justice for those with legal issues related to welfare rights and the benefits system. Financial pressures, welfare reform and increased demand mean that there are limits to the service that can be provided, particularly due to the reduction in specialist advice and representation at tribunal. There is pressure on the remaining mainly volunteer led services, which has led to increased waiting times and less availability of appointments.

38. The impact of the barriers to justice on people's lives is often extreme. The financial impacts are increased by the very tight margins that people on benefits live within, meaning that small changes have significant impacts, including rent arrears and homelessness, unaffordable debt, and social exclusion. Physical and mental health problems occur and can worsen dramatically as a result of the emotional stress of the claim and appeal processes. There is also evidence of people deciding not to claim benefits or challenge, even when they need them, because of the stress and complexity of the application process.

Conclusion

39. *The loss of legal aid is devastating, yeah devastating because [people] cannot get their rights at all. But someone with money can, it's just ... it's wrong. (Interview 29)*

The above quote reflects the sense of injustice, frustration and unfairness for those trying to resolve legal issues without legal aid.

40. The processes people need to follow to resolve often complicated legal issues in family, employment, and welfare rights law are complex and difficult to understand. The LASPO cuts to legal aid, which previously gave people a means to mitigate this complexity, have clearly had an impact on choices made in relation to routes to justice and people's ability to navigate to a satisfactory resolution in all areas of law. Legal advice is now unaffordable for large numbers of people. Those that are financially eligible for legal aid, but with issues that are no longer in scope of legal aid as a result of LASPO, lack the financial resources to get the help they need. Many are on low incomes or rely on the benefits whose payment they are often trying to resolve.

41. Most participants in the study were in the process of seeking advice at the point they were interviewed and many were already living precarious lives. Despite this, and given the methodological difficulties of identifying inactivity, there was evidence of people doing nothing to resolve their legal issues. Some participants stated that there were other previous or concurrent issues that they were doing nothing about, often pending resolution of the current problem. Some participants did nothing until a crisis event precipitated action to try to resolve an issue. These delays frequently resulted in a more complicated and time-consuming legal issue. This highlights the value of making effective, early intervention available.

42. The majority of participants tried to handle their legal issue alone at some point in their resolution process. The complexity of the law and processes to claim rights and challenge decisions meant that there is often an overlap between self-help and seeking legal advice and support. Participants will typically start the process themselves, face difficulties and seek legal advice in the middle stage of their cases, but then have no representation at the tribunal/court stage of the process even if they do get some help. There is a sense of powerlessness, difficulty coping with the complexity of law and processes, and a lack of

understanding of their rights and/or resources to proceed with cases to a satisfactory solution.

43. Across all three areas of law in the study, participants reported difficulties in accessing formal advice, whether through a law firm or from a third sector organisation. The use of solicitors was rare among the participants, despite ringing or visiting offices to try to engage one. Participants repeatedly cited cost as the barrier to using a solicitor. There was an awareness that in the past legal aid could have paid for the services of a solicitor, but participants felt that now there was no point even asking. One service provider in family law stated that this meant people were missing out on civil legal aid for issues that were still in scope.
44. The other route of formal advice is from third sector organisations. This was highly valued by participants. However, limitations exist. LASPO meant significant funding cuts for the third sector. Citizens Advice, for example, saw a drop in income of £17.6m in 2 years, and lost most of its welfare rights caseworkers across England and Wales. There have also been significant reductions in funding from national and local authority sources. Organisations have evolved and refocussed their services to try to minimise the impact of these changes, but limitations remain, including long waiting times for appointments, and support that is now one-off advice or information, rather than specialist, on-going casework, which can delay the resolution of issues.
45. The impact on people's lives of barriers to routes to justice is extensive and often severe. In all areas of law, participants reported financial, social, emotional, physical and mental health impacts. The financial impacts are particularly harsh because participants, and the wider population of those that qualify for legal aid, are often in a precarious financial position with little savings or access to affordable credit as a buffer in times of reduced income. A relatively small change in their income can therefore have a major impact on their lives. For example, rent arrears leading to homelessness, an inability to afford to pay for utilities and other essentials, and social isolation. The process of trying to pursue a route to justice adds extra physical and mental strain on people and can exacerbate existing physical and mental health issues and cause the occurrence of new ones. These impacts are interconnected and reinforcing, and can lead to the most severe of consequences, such as suicide and homelessness.
46. The reductions in civil legal aid have brought down the cost to the public purse in the short term, but the findings from this study indicate that in the long term there may not be better value for the taxpayer, without some careful policy decisions. A wide range of 'false economies' were highlighted by participants in the study. For example, a number of people could have stayed in their jobs if free employment advice was available, and therefore avoided the need to claim benefits; or avoided recourse to social services as a result of difficulties in family law cases. There are also other indirect public costs as a result of the impact of legal aid cuts highlighted by the evidence in this report. The most glaring is the cost to the NHS of supporting those with worse physical and mental health problems as a result of the barriers to seeking justice. The everyday tale of poverty and hardship in the age

of austerity politics recounted by participants in this study is therefore one that has been clearly exacerbated by the barriers to routes to justice.

Policy Recommendations

47. There is a significant link between lack of access to justice and health and general well-being. In 2015, Citizens Advice commissioned a study of GPs across the UK.¹ 34% of GP respondents spent between 10-19% of their time discussing non-health matters with patients, and 29% of respondents spent between 20-29%, with a total mean time spent of 18.7%. The most common areas for these non-health matters were personal relationship problems (92%), welfare benefits (67%), housing (67%) and unemployment/work-related issues (66%). There seems to be potential for linking health and advice services as a means to mitigate the impact of legal aid cuts. As an example of joined-up health and advice services, in Liverpool GPs are able to prescribe for patients a specialist advice session as part of the Advice on Prescription Project, commissioned by the Liverpool Clinical Commissioning Group from Citizens Advice Liverpool. Similar projects in Wales would further the objectives of Prosperity for All: The National Strategy for supporting people and businesses to drive prosperity; tackling regional inequality and promoting fair work; and promoting good health and well-being for everyone.
48. Devolved spending decisions should be made in a way that supports the provision of legal advice at early stages of civil law issues, in order to promote better outcomes in terms of understanding rights and accessing justice. This should also ensure that issues are dealt with before crisis point, which will reduce the impact on individual lives and reliance on state support resulting from the cuts to legal aid.
49. Recognise that LASPO reforms have had a detrimental effect on access to justice for large numbers of people, but particularly on people at greater risk of discrimination, disadvantage, harm or abuse, and take steps to minimise the impact. For example, by providing support and legal advice for all children and young people that are involved in family law issues; and through providing advice about welfare rights for disabled people, who have been disproportionately impacted by the legal aid cuts and welfare reforms.

¹ ComRes (2015) *Citizens Advice GPs Polling*, https://www.comresglobal.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/Citizens-Advice_-_GPs-Polling.pdf.