



DEBATE PACK

Number 2015/127, 11 December 2015

Access to Justice in Wales

Westminster Hall Debate

15 December 2015 at 1630hrs

A Westminster Hall debate on access to justice in Wales has been scheduled for Tuesday 15 December 2015 at 1630hrs.

The member in charge of the debate is Carolyn Harris.

There have been a number of changes to the justice system in England and Wales in recent years. This debate pack provides an overview and links to further information on three areas of the justice system:

- Proposals for court closures in Wales
- Changes to legal aid
- The criminal courts charge

The proceedings of this debate may be viewed on parliamentlive.tv

The House of Commons Library prepares a briefing in hard copy and/or online for most non-legislative debates in the Chamber and Westminster Hall other than half-hour debates. Debate Packs are produced after the announcement of parliamentary business and are intended to provide a brief summary or overview of the issue being debated and identify relevant briefings or useful documents, including press and parliamentary material. A more detailed briefing can be prepared for Members on request to the Library.

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Contents

1.	Background	2
1.1	Court Closures in Wales	2
1.2	Changes to Legal Aid	3
1.3	Criminal Courts Charge	5
2.	Parliamentary Business	7
2.1	Parliamentary Questions	7
2.2	Debates	11
2.3	Early Day Motions	12
3.	Media Articles	16
3.1	Newspaper Articles	16
3.2	Journal / Magazine articles	17
4.	Further Reading	18
4.1	Library Briefings	18
4.2	Committee Reports	18
4.3	Other	18

1. Background

1.1 Court Closures in Wales

On 16 July 2015 the Government published a [consultation](#) on plans to close 91 courts and tribunals, of which 11 are in Wales.¹ The Government argues that the closures are necessary to improve access to justice. Shailesh Vara, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Courts and Legal Aid, put the case as follows:

We can only provide better access to justice if we take difficult decisions to reduce the cost of our estate and reinvest the savings. As the Secretary of State told Parliament on 23 June, this means a “significant number of additional courts will have to close.”²

On 8 July 2015, Lord Faulks explained that since May 2010 146 courts in England and Wales had been closed.³ Sixteen of these courts were in Wales. On 9 July 2015, it was announced that [Abergavenny Magistrates’ Court](#) and [Caerphilly Magistrates’ Court](#) would close. The list of recent court closures in Wales and those proposed in the Government consultation is shown in the table below:

Courts closed in Wales during the 2010-2015 Parliament	Proposed court closures in Wales
Ammanford Magistrates' Court	Brecon Law Courts
Cardigan Magistrates' Court	Bridgend Law Courts
Llandovery Magistrates' Court	Carmarthen Civil, Family, Tribunal and Probate Hearing Centre
Abertillery Magistrates' Court	Carmarthen Law Courts (The Guildhall)
Chepstow Magistrates' Court	Dolgellau Crown and Magistrates' Court
Denbigh Magistrates' Court	Holyhead Magistrates' Court
Flint Magistrates' Court	Llangefni Civil and Family Court
Llangefni Magistrates' Court	Neath and Port Talbot Civil and Family Court
Pwllheli Magistrates' Court	Pontypridd Magistrates' Court
Aberdare Magistrates' Court	Prestatyn Magistrates' Court ⁴
Barry Magistrates' Court	Wrexham Tribunal and Hearing Centre (Rhyd Broughton)
Llwynypia Magistrates' Court	
Aberdare County Court	
Chepstow County Court	
Pontypool County Court	
Neath Magistrates' Court	

¹ Ministry of Justice, *Proposal on the provision of court and tribunal estate in England and Wales*, consultation ran from 16 July to 8 October 2015.

² Ministry of Justice, *Proposal on the provision of court and tribunal estate in England and Wales*, (2015), p2.

³ Written question [HL770](#) [Courts: Closures] asked on 24 June 2015.

⁴ The consultation proposes that the Court is closed, but the building will continue to operate as a Civil, Family and Tribunal hearing centre.

1.2 Changes to Legal Aid

Legal Aid in Civil Cases

The [Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012](#) removed many areas of law from the scope of civil legal aid.

In very broad terms, the coalition Government argued repeatedly that it had to make savings from the legal aid budget in England and Wales. It also wished to discourage cases from coming to court when they might better be resolved by other means, such as mediation. Critics of the changes, on the other hand, argued that people seeking help with legal problems might be left with nowhere to turn.

Commentators such as the National Audit Office and Commons Public Accounts and Justice Committees agree that the changes have reduced spending on civil legal aid, but have questioned whether they have increased costs elsewhere in the legal system. They have also drawn attention to the increased difficulties that people may face in obtaining help with legal problems.

Concerns about “advice deserts” — that is, areas where people cannot access certain legal aid services — were also revived by the Act’s changes which (its critics claimed) would have an adverse impact on providers of legal aid and especially, but not exclusively, the not-for-profit sector. Although neither the Justice Committee nor the Ministry of Justice know for certain whether there are advice deserts in England and Wales, data reported by the National Audit Office indicate that there might be a substantial number.

More information on the changes to civil legal aid is available from the Commons Library Briefings, [Changes to Civil Legal Aid in England and Wales since 2013: the impact on clients](#) (SN06645), and [Have changes to legal aid in England and Wales since 2013 created more “advice deserts”?](#) (SN06273).

Legal Aid in Criminal Cases

On 27 February 2014 the Lord Chancellor published his consultation response ‘[Transforming Legal Aid – Next Steps: Government Response](#)’ (V1//1-100) in which he set out his decision to:

- Reduce fees by 17.5% in two stages
- Separate the contracting of Own Client Work (the representation of a person who has asked for a particular solicitor or firm) and Duty Provider Work (carried out on a rota, a duty solicitor will see any person who asks for legal assistance at a police station or a Magistrates Court who does not seek a particular representative)
- Cap the number of Duty Provider Work contracts.

The first challenge

The Lord Chancellor had instructed KPMG LLP to consider the economic effects of his proposals. The Law Society criticised the conclusions reached by the Lord Chancellor based on KPMG’s work but the report was not made public or made subject to consultation.

The London Criminal Courts Solicitors Association (LCCSA) and the Criminal Law Solicitors Association (CLSA) brought a claim for judicial review of the failure to publish or consult on the KPMG report. [Mr Justice Burnett upheld the claim](#) finding the Lord Chancellor's decision making process was 'so unfair as to result in illegality' because of the failure to consult on the report.

Further consultation

In response the Lord Chancellor launched a second consultation five days later: 'Transforming Legal Aid: Crime Duty Contracts'. The consultation ran for an unusually short period of three weeks.

On 27 November 2014 the Lord Chancellor [published his consultation response](#). It announced the commencement of a tender process for 527 Duty Provider Work contracts, under which successful bidders would be contracted to provide a share of advice and assistance in police stations in a particular area.

The second challenge

The tender was suspended on 23 December 2014 when the High Court granted an application for an interim injunction brought by the LCCSA and the CLSA with the support of the Law Society. However on 18 February 2015 the High Court [dismissed the judicial review](#) and that decision was [upheld by the Court of Appeal](#) on 25 March 2015.

The tender

These decisions were welcomed by the Ministry of Justice, which announced on 27 March 2015 that the [invitation to tender would continue](#). Criminal solicitors were informed on 15 October 2015 if their bids were successful.

Whistleblower

On 14 October 2015 an assessor of the tender bids made a series of claims to the [Law Gazette](#) and criticised the assessment process. He alleged that staff assessing the bids had no knowledge of legal aid or previous experience of public sector procurement and worked to a timetable that did not allow for due consideration of the bids. The allegations were denied by the Legal Aid Agency (LAA).

Contacts

[Contract documents](#) for providers of criminal legal aid duty services can be found on the GOV.UK webpages.

Further legal challenges

Claims brought by firms unsuccessful in their bids for contracts have had the effect of delaying the LAA and successful firms entering into contracts. The MoJ has offered those firms holding 2010 Standard Crime Contracts a contingency extension and has delayed the commencement of work under new contracts until 1 April 2016. On 9 December 2015 Mr Justice Stuart-Smith granted the Fair Crime Contracts Alliance, a newly formed grouping of solicitors firms challenging the tendering procurement process, permission to bring its judicial review claim.

More information on the changes to legal aid in criminal cases is available in the Commons Library Briefing, [Changes to Criminal Legal Aid](#), SN06628.

1.3 Criminal Courts Charge

The criminal courts charge was introduced under section 54, [Criminal Justice and Courts Act 2015](#), which inserted sections 21A to 21F into the *Prosecution of Offences Act 1985*.

The charge currently applies in England and Wales to all adult offenders convicted for offences committed on or after 13 April 2015, except where the offender is sentenced to an absolute discharge or a hospital or guardianship order. It is separate from other financial orders that the court may make such as compensation, a fine or prosecution costs.

The amount to be paid depends upon how the case was dealt with, i.e. whether it was in the magistrates' or Crown court and whether there was a guilty plea. The amount of the charge is not linked to the sentence imposed and ranges from £150 to £1200.⁵

The Ministry of Justice has recently announced that the charge will no longer be imposed as of 24 December 2015.

Criticisms of the charge

Criticisms of the charge have focused on issues such as: the way in which the levels of the charge were set (in regulations and, critics say, without consultation), the lack of discretion for the courts in imposing the charge (it is mandatory), the perceived difficulties in enforcement and collection, the possibility that the charge would put pressure on the innocent to plead guilty and the suggestion that sentencers were altering their order for costs and compensation in order to offset the charge, at the expense of victims and the Crown Prosecution Service.

The House of Lords passed a [Motion to Regret](#) the new regulations on the criminal courts charge which was agreed with 132 content to 100 not content.

⁵ The amounts are set out in [The Prosecution of Offences Act 1985 \(Criminal Courts Charge\) Regulations 2015](#).

Justice Committee report

The Justice Committee has an ongoing inquiry on court fees which includes in its terms of reference the criminal courts charge. Various witnesses including the Howard League for Penal Reform, Centre for Justice Innovation, Criminal Justice Allowance, Transform Justice and the Magistrates' Association [provided evidence](#) which was critical of the charge.

The Committee published an early and separate report on the [Criminal courts charge](#) on 20 November 2015 in which it recommended the abolition of the charge. The Committee said it had, 'grave misgivings about whether the charge as currently framed is compatible with the principles of justice.' The [Government published their response](#) to the Justice Committee report on 10 December 2015.

The abolition of the charge

On 3 December 2015, the Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice, Michael Gove, [announced](#) that the as of 24 December 2015, the criminal courts charge will no longer be imposed. He said there would be a review of, 'the entire structure, and purpose, of court-ordered financial impositions for offenders, in order to bring greater simplicity and clarity to the system.' On the same day an amending statutory instrument was laid in Parliament.⁶

⁶ [The Prosecution of Offences Act 1985 \(Criminal Courts Charge\) \(Amendment\) Regulations 2015.](#)

2. Parliamentary Business

The following is a small selection of recent questions, debates and statements made to Parliament which are relevant to this debate. To search for more parliamentary business relating to this, or any other topic, please use [Parliamentary Search](#).

2.1 Parliamentary Questions

Criminal Proceedings: Fees and Charges [18814]

Asked by Andy Slaughter on 4 December 2015

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what estimate he has made of the cost to the public purse of changes to his Department's policy on the criminal courts charge.

Answered by Mr Shailesh Vara on 11 December 2015

From 24 December the Criminal Courts Charge will be suspended, pending a review of all financial impositions imposed in the criminal courts. There are no direct financial costs involved in making this change.

The updated Impact Assessment estimated that the Criminal Courts Charge would bring in approximately £95m per annum in steady state (from 2019/20 onwards). The Impact Assessment can be found here: <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2015/796/impacts>.

Courts: Closures [17617]

Asked by Mr David Anderson on 25 November 2015

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what assessment his Department has made of the effects of court closures between 2010 and 2015 on access to justice.

Answered by Mr Shailesh Vara on 2 December 2015

Effective access to justice has been maintained between 2010 and 2015. Access to justice is not just about proximity to a court.

We have secured over £700m of funding to invest in our courts and tribunals. We have worked closely with the senior judiciary to develop a plan for investing this in reforming the courts and tribunals so they can deliver swifter, fairer justice at a lower cost. This will include digitisation and modernisation of our IT infrastructure. This will mean court users can attend hearings remotely, and not be inconvenienced by having to take a day off work to come to court. It will also mean victims of crime can give evidence from somewhere they feel safe.

We are committed to providing alternative ways for users to access our services, including the use of other civic buildings and extending video conferencing facilities.

Courts: Closures [15360]

Asked by Caroline Ansell on 9 November 2015

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what account he has taken of accessibility of digital services for people who do not have access to the internet when considering potential court closures as part of proposals on the provision of the court and tribunal estate; and if he will make a statement.

Answered by Mr Shailesh Vara on 19 November 2015

An impact assessment was published alongside the consultation document. An updated impact assessment will be published with the consultation response, which will assess any further impacts identified from the responses received.

Oral questions on Justice Services

[HC Deb 18 Nov 2015 c658]

Liz Saville Roberts (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC): What steps he has taken to ensure access to justice services in Welsh?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Alun Cairns): It was of course a Conservative Government who introduced the Welsh Language Act 1993, which provided for the use of the Welsh language in the courts system. We are committed to remodelling our courts to make them more cost-effective and efficient, and these changes will give due consideration to the needs of Welsh speakers.

Liz Saville Roberts: [...] I understand that the Ministry of Justice has closed its consultation on the court and tribunal estate in England and Wales, which proposes the closure of 11 courts in Wales, including Dolgellau in my constituency, and that is without undertaking a Welsh language impact assessment, as required by law and under the Welsh language scheme. Will the Secretary of State ensure that a Wales-wide assessment is undertaken and that its recommendations are implemented before any decisions are reached on court closures?

Mr Speaker: I thank the hon. Lady, but we are very constrained for time and must move on.

Alun Cairns: I am happy to confirm to the hon. Lady that a full Welsh language impact assessment will be included in the Government's response to the consultation. We are determined to protect the interests of Welsh language speakers, as demonstrated by the Department's Welsh language scheme.

[...]

Albert Owen (Ynys Môn) (Lab): Access to justice in both Welsh and English is important to my constituents in north-west Wales, but following court closures alternatives such as audio-visual facilities and paying fines over mobiles would not be possible in such areas, in English or in Welsh, because we simply do not have the infrastructure. Can we put court closures on hold until we get that infrastructure?

Alun Cairns: Estate reform of the Courts Service must continue, but that is allied to the digital transformation that the Government are bringing about. A total of £69 million has been invested in broadband services in Wales, in addition to European aid and Welsh Government money. We have also announced a consultation on a minimum service requirement for broadband distribution, and I hope that the hon. Gentleman will welcome that.

Employment Tribunals Service: Fees and Charges [9301]

Asked by Mr Chuka Umunna on 7 September 2015

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what work his Department is undertaking to review whether tribunal fees are acting as a barrier to justice; and how many officials were engaged in that work (a) in March 2015 and (b) on the last date for which figures are available.

Answered by Mr Shailesh Vara on 17 September 2015

On 11 June we announced the start of the post-implementation review of the introduction of fees in the Employment Tribunals. The Review is being undertaken by the Fees Policy team, which comprises five officials, with support from officials working in Analytical Services, the legal team, and HMCTS.

Legal Aid Scheme: Wales [8012]

Asked by Mr Mark Williams on 20 July 2015

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what steps he is taking to ensure that debt solicitors provided through legal aid provide services bilingually in Wales.

Answered by Mr Shailesh Vara on 9 September 2015

All solicitors acting under the legal aid scheme in Wales are contractually obliged to ensure their services are accessible to and understandable by clients whose language of choice is Welsh, in accordance with the Welsh Language Act 1993 (as amended) and Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011.

Courts: Wales [221368]

Asked by Chris Ruane on 20 January 2015

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what estimate he has made of the savings to his Department arising from the closure of (a) Rhyl family court and (b) Denbigh magistrates' court.

Answered by Mike Penning on 27 January 2015

Rhyl County Court, which deals with family work, remains open.

Denbigh Magistrates' Court closed in September 2013. The estimated savings arising from this closure are £230,000.

Criminal Proceedings: North Wales [6589]

Asked by Ian C. Lucas on 13 July 2015

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what the effect on criminal court proceedings in North Wales has been of the withdrawal of legal services by legal aid solicitors in that region.

Answered by Mr Shailesh Vara on 21 July 2015

We have asked courts to report daily on whether or not they are being adversely affected by this action. Courts in North Wales confirm that all courts are sitting as scheduled and any impact of the action by solicitors has been minimal and isolated.

Legal Aid Scheme [225411]

Asked by: Dr Matthew Offord on 25 February 2015

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what assessment his Department has made of comparative per capita levels of legal aid spending in England and Wales and other jurisdictions.

Answered by Mr Shailesh Vara on 6 March 2015 (corrected 12 March 2015)

A Ministry of Justice study published in 2011 (based on 2008 estimates) showed that England and Wales had the highest legal aid expenditure amongst countries with similar legal and judicial traditions.

The European Commission for the Efficiency of Justice (CEPEJ) publishes a biennial report "European judicial systems: efficiency and quality of justice" which contains the comparative per capita levels of legal aid spending. The Department contributes data to these reports and the most recent, published in 2014 using 2012 data, can be found at:

www.coe.int/t/dghl/cooperation/cepej/evaluation/2014/Rapport_2014_en.pdf

This report shows that England and Wales has the third highest allocated budget to legal aid (after Norway and N.Ireland) per inhabitant at €41.55 £33.74 per head. The European average is €8.63 £7.01 per head.

The Sterling figures provided in this answer were calculated from the Euro figures in the CEPEJ report, using the conversion date of 01/01/2013 as used in the CEPEJ report.

Employment Tribunals Service [960]

Asked by Justin Madders on 3 June 2015

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills, what steps his Department has taken to identify the number of people who have not pursued employment tribunal claims since the introduction of fees for those tribunals.

Answered by Nick Boles on 12 June 2015

The Government collects data on the number of claims being taken to tribunal, and how those cases are disposed of. It does not collect data on the number of people with an employment dispute who do not pursue a tribunal claim.

The Government is committed to encouraging people to resolve their disputes at the earliest point. Employment tribunals should be the last resort where earlier attempts to resolve workplace disputes have failed.

My right hon. Friend, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Courts and Legal Aid, has recently announced the start of the review of Employment Tribunal fees. Further details are available on the Ministry of Justice website

2.2 Debates

Civil Legal Aid

[HC Deb 15 October 2015 c207WH]

On 15 October 2015 a Westminster Hall debate was held on the motion that the House had considered the eighth report from the Justice Committee of session 2014-15.

Employment Tribunal Fees

[HC Deb 1 December 2015 c82WH]

On 1 December 2015, a Westminster Hall debate was held on the motion, 'That this House has considered the effect of the introduction of fees for employment tribunals.' The Member in charge of the debate was Justin Madders.

Courts and Tribunal Services (England and Wales)

[HC Deb 17 September 2015 c1265]

A backbench business debate on the motion, 'That this House has considered the closure of courts and tribunals services in England and Wales', was held on 17 September 2015. The Member leading the debate was Ben Howlett.

Lords: Motion to Regret (Criminal Courts Charge)

[[HL Deb 14 October 2015 c296](#)]

The following motion to regret was tabled in the Lords on 14 October 2015:

That this House regrets that the Prosecution of Offences Act 1985 (Criminal Courts Charge) Regulations 2015 undermine the principle of judicial discretion, and add an artificial inducement to plead guilty; and further regrets that the Regulations were laid at a time that severely limited Parliamentary oversight, as well as making claims for savings that cannot be substantiated (SI 2015/796).

The motion was agreed to with 132 content to 100 not content.

2.3 Early Day Motions

[[EDM 831](#)] Court Closures

Session: 2015-16, 8 December 2015

Primary sponsor: David Anderson, Signatures: 12

That this House is concerned by the Government's proposed closure of 91 courts and tribunals in England and Wales, and the entirely detrimental impact this will have on access to local justice; believes that the public need to see justice being delivered within the communities it is meant to serve if confidence in the system is to be upheld; is further concerned at inaccuracies relating to a large under-estimation of travel times to alternative courts contained within the HM Courts and Tribunal Service consultation document and the assumption that those attending court have access to their own vehicle, with little or no acknowledgement that many vulnerable families and victims will rely on public transport, particularly in rural areas; further believes that Government proposals to hold court proceedings in local authority-owned buildings could compromise the safety of staff and members of the public as these buildings were not built to cope with such proceedings, and therefore lack the necessary facilities currently present within court buildings; is disappointed that the consultation document remained largely silent on the impact the proposals would have on staff; and urges Ministers to listen carefully to the concerns being raised and not to continue with any closures that would restrict access to justice, remove or reduce staff and public safety and lessen public confidence in local justice delivery.

[EDM 440] Employment Tribunal Fees

Session: 2015-16, 14 September 2015

Primary sponsor: Justin Madders, Signatures: 34

That this House notes that, in the first year following the introduction of fees for employment tribunal claims, the number of claims accepted fell by 77 per cent, from 187,441 between October 2012 and September 2013 to 43,961 between October 2013 and September 2014; further notes that there was no significant change in the ratio of employers winning cases versus employees winning cases when comparing pre- and post-fee periods; notes that evidence obtained by the Citizens Advice Bureau suggests that less than a third of claims assessed as having a very good, good or fifty-fifty chance of success were considered likely to be, or were definitely being taken forward by their clients; is concerned that fees are deterring, and in some cases preventing, individuals from exercising their employment rights; and calls on the Government to remove fees for employment tribunal claims.

[EDM 795] McKenzie Friends

Session: 2014-15, 11 February 2015

Primary sponsor: Elfyn Llwyd, Signatures: 23

That this House notes that following the cuts in legal aid provision there has been an increase in people representing themselves in court with the assistance of a McKenzie Friend; understands that a McKenzie Friend is usually a non-lawyer and is often a friend or colleague of the litigant in person, who accompanies them to a court hearing for the purpose of assisting them in matters such as taking notes, organising documents and quietly making suggestions; recognises that McKenzie Friends can be a helpful presence for those experiencing court proceedings for the first time; believes, however, that they are a poor substitute for proper legal advice and representation from a qualified lawyer; is concerned that vulnerable families and individuals could be taken advantage of by unqualified people who charge for their services or who may have a political agenda; is alarmed that professionals report anecdotal evidence of a recent incident of a paid McKenzie Friend, who acted for a number of vulnerable women, who was subsequently found to have a substantial criminal record; and calls on the Government to create a suitable framework for the oversight and regulation of McKenzie Friends.

[EDM 785] Committee of Public Accounts Report on Reform of Legal Aid

Session: 2014-15, 10 February 2015

Primary sponsor: Elfyn Llwyd, Signatures: 29

That this House welcomes the Thirty-sixth Report from the Committee of Public Accounts, on Implementing reforms to civil legal aid, HC 808; is concerned by the figures published by the Committee which highlight a 30 per cent rise in cases starting in family courts where both parties are representing themselves as well as a significant fall in mediation for family law cases of 38 per cent in the year after the reforms were implemented; is alarmed by the lack of routine data collection by the Ministry of Justice on key issues such as the length of hearing, types of cases and representation of parties; agrees with the Committee's recommendation that such information should be collected in order to understand and manage the long-term impact of litigants in person; and calls on the Government and the Secretary of State for Justice urgently to review their reforms and fully evaluate their impact on the public.

[EDM 679] Access to Legal Aid

Session: 2014-15, 12 January 2015

Primary sponsor: Ian Lavery, Signatures: 42

That this House welcomes the legal challenge by Rights of Women on the lawfulness of the Government's changes to access to legal aid which prevents victims of domestic abuse from accessing legal aid for family cases, even where there has been violence or ongoing risk of violence; notes that legal aid is a lifeline for victims of domestic abuse; further notes that legal aid enables victims to escape abusive relationships, protect their children and manage their financial situations; further notes that two women are killed each week as a result of domestic abuse; and calls on the Government to enable victims of domestic abuse to access legal remedies so they can safely leave violent relationships.

[EDM 1233] One Year Anniversary of the Reforms of Legal Aid

Session: 2013-14, 31 March 2014

Primary sponsor: Elfyn Llwyd, Signatures: 24

That this House acknowledges that 1 April 2014 is the anniversary of the implementation of the reforms to civil legal aid; notes that since 1 April 2013 a range of civil and family issues have been removed from the scope of legal aid including debt advice, welfare benefits and private family law matters where no domestic violence can be proven to have taken place in the past two years; is concerned that due to the reforms of civil legal aid tens of thousands of families will no longer have access to justice and that this will have an entirely negative effect on the most vulnerable children in society; welcomes the campaign against cuts in legal aid organised by the Justice Alliance; further notes that the Family Courts Unions Parliamentary Group will host an event on the anniversary of these reforms in Parliament to hear from the professionals and staff working in the field first-hand accounts of the devastating effect they have had on the lives of children and families across the UK; and therefore calls on the Government to urgently address the serious concerns that have arisen since the start of implementation and review its entire programme of reform of civil legal aid.

3. Media Articles

The following is a small selection of recent press and media articles relevant to this debate. Please note: the Library is not responsible for the views expressed in, nor the accuracy of, external content.

3.1 Newspaper Articles

Independent, 3 December 2015

[Tax on justice: Michael Gove scraps criminal courts charges after Independent campaign](#)

The Guardian, 2 December 2015

[Only one-quarter of Britons believe legal system is fair](#)

Guardian, 15 November 2015

[Legal aid cuts: MoJ puts brakes on changes as solicitors revolt](#)

BBC News Online, 4 November 2015

[Crown courts in England and Wales 'chaotic and archaic'](#)

Daily Post, 20 July 2015

[North Wales court closures will restrict public's access to justice](#)

BBC Online, 8 October 2015

[Court closure consultation in England and Wales ends](#)

Telegraph, 9 October 2014

[Britain has largest legal aid budget in Europe, says report](#)

The Times, 5 March 2015

[Circuit leaders: cuts affect access to justice and rule of law \[subscription required\]](#)

South Wales Guardian, 27 July 2015

[Court closures will have a 'profound impact' on area](#)

Guardian, 23 June 2015

[Lawyers' levy? Michael Gove threatens to make rich law firms pay for legal aid](#)

Guardian, 1 May 2015

[Legal aid cuts threaten our very democracy](#)

Guardian, 17 January 2015

[Legal aid cuts hit divided families as contact centres close down](#)

Independent, 12 September 2014

[New fees price thousands out of access to employment tribunals](#)

Carmarthen Journal, 8 July 2015

[West Wales law firms refuse to go 'extra mile' in Legal Aid protest](#)

Independent, 26 June 2015

Legal aid cuts: criminal courts across England and Wales could grind to a halt as lawyers protest

Independent, 15 July 2015

Courts at risk of standstill as barristers vote to join solicitors' protest against legal aid cuts

3.2 Journal / Magazine articles

Law Gazette, 11 November 2015

MoJ to publish impact of reforms on civil legal aid

The Law Society, 8 October 2015

Proposal on the provision of court and tribunal estate in England and Wales - Law Society response

The Law Society Gazette, 14 August 2015

Infographic lays bare impact of court closures

The Law Society Gazette, 17 July 2015

Court closures 'won't affect legal aid and family reforms'

The Law Society - Access to Justice Day, 8 September 2014

Speech by Law Society president Andrew Caplen

Halsbury Exchange, 15 April 2015

The Criminal Courts Charge: a "tax on the poor" or making criminals "pay their way"?

Law Society, 8 October 2015

Proposal on the provision of court and tribunal estate in England and Wales - Law Society response

4. Further Reading

4.1 Library Briefings

Commons Library Briefing, *Court and Tribunal Closures*, CBP7346

Commons Library Briefing, *Changes to Civil Legal Aid in England and Wales since 2013: the impact on clients*, SN06645

Commons Library Briefing, *Changes to Criminal Legal Aid*, SN06628

Commons Library Briefing, *Controversy in 2010-11 surrounding the Government's plans for legal aid reform*, SN05840

Commons Library Briefing, *Have changes to legal aid in England and Wales since 2013 created more "advice deserts"?*, SN06273

Commons Library Briefing, *Legal Aid for Victims of Domestic Abuse*, SN05839

Lords Library Note, *Future of Legal Aid*, LLN-2015-48

4.2 Committee Reports

Justice Committee, *Criminal Courts Charge*, 2nd report of the 2015-16 session

Justice Committee, *Criminal Courts Charge: Government Response*, 2nd special report of the 2015-16 session

Justice Committee, *Courts and Tribunals Fees and Charges*, ongoing inquiry 2015-16

Justice Committee, *Impact of changes to civil legal aid under Part 1 of the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012*, 8th report of the 2014-15 session and the Government Response to this report from July 2015

4.3 Other

Equality and Human Rights Commission, *Equality, Human Rights and Access to Civil Law Justice: A literature review*, 2015

The Bar Council, *The Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012: One Year On*, (2014)

Criminal Justice Alliance, *'Structured Mayhem': Experiences of victims, witnesses and defendants in Crown Courts*, (2015)

Justice, *Delivering Justice in an Age of Austerity*

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