



Ministry
of Justice

Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown MP
Chair of Public Accounts Committee
Houses of Parliament
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Or by email

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Dear Sir Geoffrey

Public Accounts Committee January 2026 report recommendation 4: Ministry of Justice survey of local authority funding of advice services and Litigants in Person.

Survey of local authority funding of advice services

As part of the ongoing Public Accounts Committee (PAC) scrutiny on Value for Money from Legal Aid, the committee recommended that the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) write to the committee regarding: *“The results of and its response to its survey of local authorities about the effects of shunting costs to other government departments, and any further investigations it plans. For example, exploring where a lack of early advice creates additional costs for other areas, such as healthcare.”*

I am pleased to provide an embargoed copy of the report entitled *“Understanding the funding, provision and outcomes measurement of free advice services provided by local authorities in England and Wales,”* which contains the results of the local authority survey that MoJ commissioned, with fieldwork taking place between February 2025 and May 2025. This report is scheduled for publication in Spring 2026 alongside a tranche of other legal support research. We will share an advance copy of the report with the Committee a few days before publication.

The Ministry of Justice commissioned this research to inform the design of an Outcomes Framework that we are developing, which will be used by advice sector organisations and funders of social welfare advice provision (excluding legal aid funded advice). The Outcomes Framework aims to support advice organisations and funders to better evidence the outcomes they achieve for service users and to engage in reflective practice. As many local authorities are key funders of advice provision, and therefore potential users of the framework, the survey sought to understand the landscape of provision, including the types of advice provided, delivery models (inhouse or commissioned), and the extent to which local authorities collect data to monitor services or measure outcomes.

The survey was not intended to identify “the effects of shunting costs to other departments”, nor to quantify demand for advice services or the drivers of any such demand. The survey did not collect any management information from local authorities. The intention was to build a clearer picture of the funding and delivery landscape to support development of the Outcomes Framework.

The survey was conducted by an external provider. Despite best efforts, the response rate was low at 18% (of 339 local authorities surveyed, 62 responded). As a result, the findings presented can only be treated as a snapshot of those local authorities that responded and are not necessarily representative of all local authorities across England and Wales.

The Committee will find the report helpful in understanding the context, methodology, limitations and findings of the survey. The Committee may also want to note that the vast majority of local authorities (97%) that completed the survey were providing free advice services for residents through a combination of ‘in-house’ provision and the funding of external organisations. Of those, 47% reported funding immigration advice (not necessarily exclusively).

We recognise that the Committee is interested in further investigations on how the current legal aid model affects other public services, beyond the survey reported here. We will continue to work with other government departments to understand how any proposed changes in legal aid policy may impact on them, but we have no current plans for further specific investigations on ‘*effects of shunting costs to other government departments*’. This is primarily because our current research priorities are focussed on the demand for, and capacity of, our current system. We will keep this under review.

Impact of the increase in litigants in person on courts

In this recommendation, the Committee also asked MoJ to write regarding *the increase in litigants in person on courts, including any additional time and cost as a result, and how it will improve the data it bases its analysis on. For example, taking into account how active a LIP is in court processes.*

The department recognises that there is now an opportunity to gather data and analyse the impact of Litigants in Person (LiPs). In 2026, MoJ will explore working with HMCTS on a scoping study about the assessment of the impact of LiPs on Courts, including looking at how we might identify the time and cost implications associated with LiPs. We will write to the Committee in Autumn 2026 to update on progress of scoping this study.

We can advise that committee, that in family cases, HMCTS already collect and the MoJ publish data on representation, broken down by volumes and timeliness. Quarterly updates can be found here: [Family Court Statistics Quarterly - GOV.UK](#) The planned roll out of a new digital portal for private law cases in 2026 will provide further opportunity to gather further data.

In regard to criminal cases HMCTS currently operates two criminal case management systems. The legacy system, Libra, and the new system, Common Platform. Libra does not have the functionality to track/report on unrepresented defendants. Common Platform has

the functionality to record details of representation (or not); and HMCTS/MoJ can access related reports on representation levels. However, HMCTS is reliant on external parties inputting and, if necessary, updating their information. Our confidence in this data is accordingly low. Representation (or not) has no direct bearing on how HMCTS lists or administers cases. This is in line with official judicial guidance, although we recognise that judicial courtcraft may need to change.

We trust that the Committee will find this update helpful.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jo Farrar', with a stylized, cursive script.

Dr Jo Farrar CB OBE
Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Justice