

Written evidence submitted by Domestic Abuse Alliance (ATJ0084)

1. How does the current state of the legal services and representation market in England and Wales, and associated operating pressures, affect access to justice for clients?

The legal services market in England and Wales faces rising costs, tighter court deadlines and increasing demand for faster case progression. These pressures slow proceedings, increase costs for clients and limit firms' capacity to take on new cases, all of which restrict access to justice.

At [Domestic Abuse Alliance](#) we are harnessing the power of technology in the following ways, to address these challenges:

[WeProcess](#) provides a next-generation legal document service platform, including instant status updates, instant proof of service, AI-driven document checks, and secure portals for real-time communication and document exchange. Combined with our nationwide network of vetted process servers, we reduce delays, cut costs, and give law firms the tools to move cases forward quickly, helping clients access justice sooner.

The [WEPROTECT victim referral service](#) addresses gaps caused by legal aid deserts and overstretched services by offering immediate referral to civil legal support and protection. Domestic abuse victims often face delays, confusion, or lack of legal representation when seeking civil legal support and protection – WEPROTECT mitigates this by accelerating access to legal assistance, without delay.

2. What is the role of supplementary advice services in supporting access to justice?

Supplementary advice services bridge the gap between legal representation and the practical steps needed to progress a case, making the justice system more accessible for all. In process serving, this means guiding clients and legal teams on procedural requirements, correct service methods, and evidential standards so cases are not delayed or dismissed.

The WeProcess platform integrates these advisory functions directly into the service process, providing real-time updates, clear guidance on next steps, and AI-assisted checks to ensure all documents meet court requirements. This proactive support reduces errors, improves compliance, and helps both solicitors and clients navigate proceedings more confidently and efficiently, improving overall access to justice.

The WEPROTECT referral service acts as a supplementary legal triage tool, connecting frontline responders (e.g. police officers and DA support workers) with civil legal professionals. WEPROTECT provides victims of domestic abuse with fast, free access to

empowering legal information, as well as support to secure court orders, typically non-molestation orders, occupation orders, and domestic abuse protection orders.

3. What is the impact of those acting without legal advice and / or representation having on access to justice?

When individuals act without legal advice or representation, cases often face delays, procedural errors, and incomplete or incorrect documentation. This can lead to failed hearings, increased costs, and, in some cases, the loss of the right to pursue a protective order, all of which limit access to justice.

Victims who do not have access to legal support and representation are more likely to experience re-traumatisation. This may lead to disengagement in the process leaving them at greater risk of harm.

WEPROTECT reduces this risk by ensuring legal support and representation is secured early, even for those ineligible for legal aid via pro bono support.

4. Without impacting the public purse, what potential funding options would increase access to justice? e.g. an access to justice fund levy, conditional fee arrangements, third party funding.

At Domestic Abuse (DA) Alliance we believe that increasing access to justice for domestic abuse victims requires a multi-pronged approach, including innovative funding models that do not rely solely on public expenditure. Viable options include:

1. Access to Justice Fund Levy

A legal sector levy, as previously proposed by government ministers could be applied to high-earning legal firms or corporate entities operating within the justice system. This would generate a ring-fenced fund to support legal aid and specialist services without burdening the public purse.

2. Third-Party Litigation Funding and Conditional Fee Arrangements

These models could be adapted to support civil claims related to domestic abuse, particularly where victims seek protective orders or compensation. Regulation would be essential to ensure ethical practice and prevent exploitation.

3. Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) Partnerships

Businesses can play a vital role in funding emergency support and legal access. For example, TSB's "Flee Fund" has provided emergency payments to survivors seeking safety.

These approaches reduce upfront costs for clients while ensuring service providers are compensated when cases succeed.

WeProcess already helps lower costs for law firms and clients by streamlining the service process, reducing errors, and minimising repeat work. Combining these operational savings with innovative funding models would make legal processes more affordable, enabling more people to pursue and defend claims without financial barriers.

5. If limited funds were available, what would be the priority areas for spending?

If funds were limited, priority should go to supporting the development of solutions that deliver the greatest impact on speed, accuracy, and cost-efficiency in legal processes. This includes investing in technology that streamlines case progression, reduces administrative delays, and ensures compliance with court rules.

Targeting resources toward these kinds of innovations would help more cases move forward efficiently, improving access to justice even with constrained budgets.

Other priority areas for spending include:

1. Legal Aid Reform

Removing the means test for victims of domestic abuse and ensuring access to legal representation in family and criminal courts would address one of the most significant barriers to justice.

2. Funding Community-Based Specialist Services

These services are often the first point of contact for victims and provide critical support including safety planning, legal advocacy, and emotional care. A statutory duty to fund these services is essential.

3. Training for Police and Legal Professionals

Consistent and mandatory training in domestic abuse is vital. This includes risk assessment, enforcement of protective measures, and trauma-informed engagement with victims.

4. Support for Children and Young People

Children are now recognised as victims under the Domestic Abuse Act 2021. Funding specialist services for child victims and embedding domestic abuse awareness / education around what a healthy relationship looks like in schools is critical.

6. How are the legal services regulators responding to their obligation to improve access to justice under the Legal Services Act 2007?

Legal services regulators are encouraging innovation and technology to widen access to justice under the Legal Services Act 2007.

Legal service regulators should continue to:

- Encourage and support technological innovation like WEPROTECT and WeProcess.
- Support wider data-sharing frameworks to improve information-sharing and victim outcomes.
- Promote cross-sector collaboration between legal, tech, policing and specialist support services.

7. How is pro bono work and free legal advice being used to support access to justice and what reliance is placed on it?

Pro bono work and free legal advice provide essential support where clients cannot afford representation, but they are limited in capacity and consistency. Reliance is high, especially in areas like family law, yet demand often exceeds availability. This highlights the need for greater efficiencies – such as the services like WEPROTECT and WeProcess - where technology reduces costs and speeds up procedures, easing pressure on pro bono resources.

8. How can advice, legal support or non-court dispute resolution, such as mediation and restorative justice, help the early resolution of disputes?

Advice and non-court dispute resolution methods such as mediation and restorative justice enable earlier settlement by promoting dialogue, reducing costs, and avoiding lengthy litigation. This supports faster, less adversarial outcomes while easing demand on the courts.

Early legal advice provided through the WEPROTECT referral often leads to:

- Court orders being granted quickly.
- Avoidance of escalation into criminal proceedings.
- Empowerment of victims to make informed decisions.

9. What role is there for digital innovation and data collection in supporting access to justice?

Digital innovation can improve access to justice by making legal services faster, more transparent, and more affordable. Data collection helps identify gaps, track performance, and improve decision-making.

The WeProcess platform uses real-time updates, digital case tracking, and secure data management to give clients and courts instant visibility, reducing delays and building confidence in the legal process.

WEPROTECT is a data-driven platform that enables fast, secure referrals from frontline responders; monitors victims' civil legal journeys end-to-end; and provides referral partners with real-time insights to improve service delivery.

10. How could the current system of legal aid be improved to provide a cost-efficient and cost-controlled service, with suitably remunerated legal practice across civil, criminal and family law?

We believe that the current system of legal aid could be improved by:

- Streamlining legal aid eligibility assessments and removing means testing criteria for victims of domestic abuse, ensuring swifter and surer access to justice to those who need it most.
- Providing fair remuneration for legal aid providers to ensure sustainability.
- Ensuring systems are digital by default to streamline legal aid applications, evidence sharing, and court bundles.
- Targeting funding to legal advice 'deserts' to maintain national coverage.
- Ensuring process efficiency, i.e., wider use of e-service and digital proofs of service to cut adjournments, reduce travel, and lower disbursement spend.

11. What has been the impact of the Legal Aid Agency cyber-attack, revealed in April 2025, on recipients and providers of legal aid work, and how have the Legal Aid Agency and Ministry of Justice responded?

The cyber-attack has significantly impacted access to legal aid, disrupting cashflow for providers, delaying protective measures and negatively impacting trust and confidence in the service.

For WeProcess and WEPROTECT, this highlights the fragility of legacy systems. Our secure, cloud-based platform with encrypted data handling and real time tracking can help providers stay operational even during system outages.

By reducing reliance on manual processes and ensuring transparent updates, our technology offers resilience, continuity and cost control in an increasingly digital justice system.

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