

Millions invested to help people facing eviction or repossession

- New service to provide free legal support for those at risk of losing their home
- Early legal advice will also reduce burden on courts

More people will get access to free expert legal advice to give them the best chance of keeping their home when they fall into difficult financial times, backed by over £10 million of extra funding injected into housing legal aid every year.

Reforms to the former Housing Possession Court Duty Scheme (HPCDS) mean that anyone facing eviction or repossession will now receive free early legal advice on housing before appearing in court, as well as continuing to get advice and representation on the day of their hearing. By helping people facing repossession at the earliest point, it will potentially avoid the need for court proceedings altogether.

Additionally, individuals with a repossession notice can also receive early legal advice on debt and welfare benefit matters, to help with the wider issues they may face. This wrap-around care aims to help individuals and families keep their homes, improve their finances and gain access to support to improve their health and life prospects.

Justice Minister James Cartlidge said:

We don't want anyone to go through the devastating experience of losing their home, which is why we have overhauled the legal aid scheme to ensure anyone that needs it has earlier access to free legal advice.

During such a stressful and uncertain period in people's lives, our raft of reforms will also provide wider, wrap-around care to support individuals and families on money and welfare issues.

The Ministry of Justice will also be introducing a panel of legal experts to assist and train housing legal aid providers where they need further support in resolving more complex legal issues. This is alongside funding for a pilot solicitor training scheme to increase the number of lawyers providing this vital service.

Co-chair Housing Law Practitioners Association Simon Mullings said:

I welcome the proposals to put in place funded, non-means-tested, early legal advice to those facing possession proceedings.

The revised proposals take into account many of the issues we raised in the consultation period for the Housing Loss Prevention Advice Service (HLPAS).

While I still continue to advocate for 'crisis navigator' support at court and elsewhere, I believe that the HLPAS proposals, if implemented in the right way and aligned to further work by government to shore up the viability of housing providers, can be a significant step towards effective early legal advice.

The move follows a two-month consultation into the reform of housing legal aid, part of our wider civil legal aid strategy to improve the breadth and quality of advice available for those who need it.

Notes to Editors

- The support will be via 1:1 legal advice from a housing legal aid provider who holds a contract for the new service.
- The MOJ is bringing forward the legislation to implement the proposals this summer.
- Implementation will be in in spring 2023, once the Legal Aid Agency's contractual tender process has concluded.