Dear Bob,

**PUBLICATION OF POST-IMPLEMENTATION REVIEWS OF PART 1 AND PART 2 OF LASPO ACT 2012, THE OUTCOME OF INQUESTS REVIEW, AND NEW LEGAL SUPPORT ACTION PLAN**

I am writing to inform you that the Government has published the findings of the Post-Implementation Reviews (PIR) of both Part 1 and Part 2 of the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders (LASPO) Act 2012, and the outcome of the review of legal aid provision for inquests. Alongside these three reviews, we have also launched a new Legal Support Action Plan, which sets out our vision for where we can put earlier intervention at the heart of helping people resolve problems sooner, before they escalate.

Part 1 of LASPO, along with its secondary legislation, was introduced with the aim of targeting limited resources at the most vulnerable, following a long period of expansion of legal aid that had resulted in annual spend at the time of over £2bn per annum. Coming into force in 2013, the Coalition Government implemented the first significant reforms to the scope of, eligibility for and fees paid under, legal aid in England and Wales for more than a decade.

Given the extent of the changes that Part 1 of LASPO introduced, the Government committed to carrying out a review of the reforms, assessing the impact of the policies against the original objectives of the Act. The review we have released benefited from an extraordinary level of engagement over the course of an extensive, year-long process of evidence gathering and analysis. We worked with more than 100 different stakeholders, interested parties, legal aid providers and their representative bodies, the advice sector, judges, academics and parliamentarians to gather a wealth of research that has been invaluable in informing the review itself, as well as giving us the opportunity to reflect on the range and diversity of legal aid and wider legal support work that is being delivered across England and Wales.

The review identifies a number of challenges that need to be overcome. We heard throughout the evidence gathering process that people often require a broader range of legal support to help solve a variety of issues, and at an earlier stage.

Our vision, as outlined in the new Legal Support Action Plan, is of a broader, complementary range of legal support with early intervention at its heart. For too long our approach to supporting access to justice has solely focused on funding for court disputes. Our ambition must be to give people the tools to resolve their issues well before this point, when legal problems have intensified and require a court visit and a lawyer. Everyone in society should be able to access the right support, at the right time, in the right way for them. In order to do this, we are committed to delivering smarter, better forms of legal support that are based on evaluation of what works effectively and at what stage, making the most of the opportunities presented by new technologies.
Legal aid is, and will remain, a core element of this support, but what we have heard from our stakeholders is that it is one part of a bigger picture. Our new Action Plan responds to the evidence received as part of the LASPO Part 1 review. It takes immediate action to ensure vulnerable people, particularly children and families, can access legal aid when it is needed, but moreover is a first step towards the vision of a modern system of legal support I have set out.

We have also published the separate review of Part 2 of the LASPO. The overall objectives of the Part 2 reforms were to reduce the costs of civil litigation and to rebalance costs between claimants and defendants, while ensuring that parties with a valid case could still bring or defend a claim. The evidence we have gathered indicates that these objectives have been met. The Government is therefore not proposing to make immediate changes, though some of the issues raised will be kept under review and may be revisited at a later stage.

Finally, the outcome of the Government’s review of legal aid provision for inquests has also been made available. The review was originally commissioned in response to a number of key independent reports, which made several recommendations on improving how this branch of legal aid is delivered. This final report is the culmination of this thorough review and summarises the extensive evidence gathering process undertaken. It has found that the inquest process is, and should remain, inquisitorial, and that for the vast majority of inquests, legal representation is not necessary. However, the review has pointed to areas for improvement. We want to ensure that people are adequately supported through what can be a difficult process and are making a number of changes to the coronial system so that it is more accessible and supportive for those going through it.

This is clearly a significant set of publications for the Government, and so I hope you will take the time reflect on them in detail. Each document represents the culmination of a tremendous amount of hard work. Moreover, though they all carry a common thread of an invaluable level of dialogue with a great many partners and stakeholders. I would like to take this opportunity to place on record my thanks to everyone who has contributed, and also to reaffirm my commitment to continuing to build on this engagement, in order to collect more evidence and explore innovative ways of supporting people to access the justice system at the right stage, and in a way that is built around them.

I look forward to working with the Committee on these important issues into the future, and I would be happy to ask my officials to brief the Committee in more detail on the proposals we have announced today.

I am copying this letter to all members of the Justice Select Committee.

Yours ever,

RT HON DAVID GAUKE MP