Law Centres welcome new government Covid-19 support

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The UK government has today announced that Law Centres are among frontline charities awarded emergency support to continue their work through the Covid-19 crisis.

The Law Centres Network (LCN) will distribute a grant of £3 million to its local Law Centres across England and Wales. This will allow them to continue defending the rights of over 200,000 people a year, who live in communities badly affected by Covid-19 to protect their homes, access financial support and benefits, get vital health and care services, keep their jobs, get paid what they have earnt and challenge discrimination.

The funding, part of £5.4 million in funding announced today, replaces legal aid income lost due to Coronavirus-related restrictions, such as the closure of half the courts in the country and the suspension of housing possession proceedings, where legal aid lawyers defend tenants from eviction and homelessness.

The news comes nearly a month after the government's announcement of a £750 million support package for the UK voluntary sector. At the time, Chancellor of the Exchequer Rishi Sunak said:

> "Charities are playing a crucial role in the national fight against coronavirus, supporting those who are most in need… This will ensure our key charities can continue to deliver the services that millions of people up and down the country rely on."

Throughout the Covid-19 crisis, Law Centres have remained open and continued to serve their clients and communities, while adapting face-to-face services to social distancing. However, as small charities, the loss of income due to the pandemic was threatening their work and existence, on the eve of the movement's 50th anniversary.

Justice Minister Alex Chalk said today:

> "Law Centres and charities in the advice sector play a vital role in helping people access justice and resolve their legal problems. That is why they should be supported to continue to operate safely and effectively during the Covid-19 pandemic."

Helen Rogers, chair of trustees of the Law Centres Network, said:

> "We thank the government for this vital support, which will allow Law Centres to continue to defend people's homes, lives and livelihoods. The pandemic's uneven impact is a grim reminder of the deep inequality in our society that affects every aspect of life. This support recognises the key role of legal assistance in reducing inequality and bringing justice for all."

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Notes to editors:

- A Law Centre is a law practice that is a charity. Unlike a law firm it works on a not-for-profit basis and is governed by trustees, not equity partners.
- Law Centres employ solicitors and caseworkers who specialise in social welfare law: debt, welfare benefits, housing, social care, employment and immigration as well as human rights.
- Law Centres target their legal assistance at disadvantaged people who are least able to pay for it.

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Their work is maintained through public funding (e.g. legal aid) and charitable grants.

- There are currently Law Centres in 41 locations across the country. They are supported by the Law Centres Network, their membership body.
- Additional quotation by Julie Bishop, director of the Law Centres Network: “The first Law Centre opened 50 years ago in a converted butcher’s shop in deprived North Kensington – not far from the foot of Grenfell Tower, where it still operates today. Since then, Law Centres have sought to bring legal assistance into the community, accessible to the most disadvantaged, making it truly justice for all.”
- For further details please see www.lawcentres.org.uk

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