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An t-Ionad Fiosrachaidh

Social Justice and Social Security Committee

16th Meeting, 2025 (Session 6), Thursday, 22 May

Inquiry into financial considerations when leaving an abusive relationship

Introduction

This is the final evidence session of the inquiry. The Committee will hear from:

- Kaukab Stewart, Minister for Equalities
- Simon Coote, Head of Cross Cutting Policy
- Janine Kellett, Head of Homelessness Unit
- James Messis, Council Tax & Reform Policy Team Leader
- Eileen Flannagan, Policy Manager.

Background

The inquiry

The Committee is holding an [inquiry into financial considerations when leaving an abusive relationship](#). The Committee's 'call for views' ran from December 2024 to February 2025 and received 58 responses. It asked about the extent to which financial barriers are considered in government strategies, in the advice and information available around domestic abuse and in relation to rules and practices in managing debt, social security and legal aid.

The individual [responses and a summary of them are available on the inquiry webpage](#). The Committee also heard views from the Scottish Women's Aid 'Survivor Reference Group'. [A note of this meeting is available on the inquiry webpage](#). The

Committee heard from witnesses across four formal evidence panels between 1 and 15 May. Key themes from all these sources of evidence are summarised below.

Advice and information

While there is advice and information available, there is a lack of specialist services and mainstream services do not generally cover all the relevant issues.

People need to be able to easily access accurate, relevant advice and information delivered in a trauma informed way. The need for trauma informed training on financial and economic abuse across a wide range of services came up repeatedly. For example, the Survivor Reference Group discussed experience of poor customer service by the Child Maintenance Service and lack of understanding amongst police officers. Suggestions from witnesses on 1 May included integrating awareness of the impact of financial and economic abuse into professional qualifications of social workers and healthcare workers and a creating a Code of Practice.

Digital exclusion, particularly amongst older women, needs to be considered when designing services. Suggestions included providing information in locations likely to be visited such as pharmacies, GPs and supermarkets.

Social Security

While there are some social security rules that take account of domestic abuse, these need to be extended.

On **Universal Credit**, key points made were that:

- there needs to be far more flexibility around conditionality. Some job coaches use their discretion well, but in general, the DWP needs to move to a more trauma informed approach.
- Split payments are a priority – it's a change that could save lives. In principle, households should have the choice whether to pool income.
- The Scottish Government should mitigate the two-child limit in such a way that women do not have to apply for the 'non-consensual conception' exception. But it would be better if abolished by DWP 'at source'.
- The five-week wait should be abolished or mitigated – potentially using the Scottish Welfare Fund

Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs) and the Scottish Welfare Fund (SWF)

These are very useful funds but are not set up to help people leave abusive situations. For example, DHPs are only available to those already in receipt of housing support through Universal Credit or Housing Benefit and the SWF specifically excludes providing funds for rent in advance. This leaves a gap in support.

Fund to Leave

Many witnesses recommended that the Fund to Leave should be created as a permanent, national fund.

Child Maintenance Service

The Survivor Reference Group were particularly critical of the Child Maintenance Service. [Written evidence from the CMS](#) described how all caseworkers have received upskilling to help identify different forms of abuse and refresher training is in development. The UK Government are currently considering CMS reforms including abolishing the direct pay service.

Citizens Advice Scotland told the Committee that they see a deep reluctance to claim through the Child Maintenance Service. Rather than a fundamental overhaul, the CMS needs to be reviewed to give victim survivors the information they need to effectively navigate the system and give the agency the tools it needs to support victim survivors. Witnesses highlighted [Gingerbread's 2024 report on this issue](#). This highlighted poor understanding of domestic abuse by the CMS.

Debt

In their visit to Financially Included members heard that a high proportion of debt was public debt – particularly council tax debt. Project workers suggested that the system for dealing with council tax debt in England and Wales appears to be more flexible and that the public sector could learn from good practice on debt enforcement from the private sector.

Submissions to the Call for Views described mixed practice across local authorities on rent arrears and council tax arrears, but generally there were particularly strong concerns expressed about practices for dealing with council tax debt.

Citizens Advice Scotland recommended a Code of Practice on public debt to encourage good practice. They referred members to a code of practice and Economic Abuse Evidence Form developed by Surviving Economic Abuse.

Reflecting devolved competence, the inquiry discussions focused on public debt, but the Survivor Reference Group also referred to coerced credit card and mortgage debt.

Housing and homelessness

Witnesses discussed the lack of affordable housing, the cost of refuge and the need for women to have a genuine choice whether to stay in her own home. Members were referred to the 2020 Scottish Government working group report '[Improving housing options for women and children experiencing domestic abuse](#).'

Legal Aid

The Committee heard that civil legal aid is problematic – because the means-test is set at a very low threshold, because it doesn't take account of assets not being available because of financial and economic abuse and also because it can be difficult to find solicitors to take on legal aid cases. Scottish Women's Aid recommended that legal aid should be free for victim/survivors of domestic abuse. The Scottish Legal Aid Board described how they have discretion in assessing financial eligibility, but they are rarely asked to use it.

No recourse to public funds

There are particular vulnerabilities for those with no recourse to public funds (NRPF), and fears around visa issues can make people more vulnerable to abuse. People are directed to social work as councils can't provide accommodation under homelessness legislation. Local authorities need clear, specific guidance on how they can support victim-survivors who are persons subject to immigration control (including those with no recourse to public funds). Members were referred to the [legal briefing published by FairWay Scotland](#) making recommendations for Scottish Government action on preventing 'destitution by design.'

Overarching themes

Related to all the above points is the view in the written submissions that policies and practice need to have better recognition of intersecting equalities issues around, for example, disability, age and ethnicity.

Also impacting on all the above is the way abusers can use social security, legal aid, child maintenance, debt etc as a way of continuing abuse for years after a relationship ends by manipulating these systems.

The Scottish Government's strategy 'Equally Safe' was strongly supported by Scottish Women's Aid in oral evidence. In the written evidence, several respondents considered that it didn't cover financial issues particularly well.

Themes for discussion:

Theme 1: Provision of advice and information

The Committee heard about difficulties accessing advice that both dealt with the full range of relevant issues in the necessary depth and was provided in a trauma-informed way, with knowledge of financial abuse, economic abuse and coercive control.

In their written submission the Glasgow Violence Against Women Partnership said that women will, on average, need to contact up to 11 different services (17 if she is from a black and minority ethnic community) before she gets the information she needs.

These issues are compounded for disabled women (Inclusion Scotland) and older women (Age Scotland). A submission from [Robert Gordon University](#) described particular issues for rural areas including: "unique challenges around connectivity, geographic distance, and community surveillance."

The Scottish Women's Aid Survivor Reference Group singled out Financially Included as an example of good practice, describing the project as 'amazing'. The Committee visited Financially Included on 25 April.

Scottish Women's Aid discussed the lack of understanding of economic abuse and coerced debt. They recommended:

“Scottish Government to promote awareness and understanding of economic abuse and coerced debt within local councils, housing associations and utility companies.”

Respondents recommended training for:

- Frontline staff (Financially Included)
- Those working in debt collection (Financially Included/All in For Change)
- Local authority and housing association staff (Safe Lives)
- Job centre staff (Edinburgh Women's Aid)
- Child Maintenance Service staff and all social security staff (Safe Lives)

One of the 'deliverables' for Equally Safe is:

8.2 We will develop and implement a national framework that will inform an approach to trauma-informed VAWG training and workforce development across the public and the third sectors. Timescale: 2024-2026

Members may wish to discuss:

- 1. How can the Scottish Government help ensure there is comprehensive, trauma informed advice and support available on the financial aspects of leaving an abusive relationship?**
- 2. How will the Scottish Government help improve knowledge and skills on this issue across the full range of services that people will come into contact with – such as local authorities, the legal profession, social security providers, financial institutions etc?**
- 3. What progress has been made on the commitment in Equally Safe to develop a national framework on training and workforce development? Will identifying and responding to economic and financial abuse be included in this training?**

Theme 2: Public Debt

In the Call for Views respondents described how victim/survivors can accrue debt, due to finding new accommodation, the high cost of refuge and temporary accommodation and through abusers not paying bills for which the household is jointly liable.

PQ ([S6W-34434](#)) by Pam Gosal in February 2025 asked whether the Scottish Government intends to outline a comprehensive plan for reforming public debt

collection practices. Although not specifically on the issue of domestic abuse, the answer sets out the Scottish Government's general approach to public debt:

“it is important to be clear on the role and responsibilities of all partners in relation to public sector debt and to recognise that local authorities have independence to make decisions particularly regarding their approach to collection of council tax arrears and school meal debt.”

[...]

Scottish Ministers have consistently encouraged public bodies to share good practice on debt assistance and collection and to show empathy and dignity when working with people struggling with debts.

[...]

The Scottish Government and COSLA recognise that there are opportunities to improve collection practices in Council Tax. The 'Joint Working Group on Council Tax Reform', which is co-chaired by COSLA, is undertaking work to encourage better practices in debt collection. This includes ensuring that councils are furnished with the information they need to improve practices, and identify those in need of support.”

The submission from All in for Change describe 'aggressive' collection methods, that do not take the impact of abuse into account:

“Public sector debt, such as council tax and benefit overpayments, present a big barrier for women fleeing abusive relationships. Collection methods are often aggressive, and rent and council tax arrears follow the woman when they move to a new property, compounding an already traumatic experience. Access to debt and financial advice is vital to make sure they are supported to leave the relationship. Public sector collection methods should also allow more flexibility for victims. Currently, it is not the experience of the Change Team that public bodies consider the impact of abusive relationships on debt accumulation and collection.”

Council Tax Debt

The debt most often discussed in the Call for Views was council tax arrears. The [Scottish Government are funding](#) Citizens' Advice Scotland to work with local authorities to support good practice in Council Tax Debt. The project was previously available in nine local authorities and in March was extended to the whole of Scotland.

In oral evidence Erica Young (CAS) described mixed practice across local authorities and recommended a Code of Practice on public debt. She also highlighted the work of Surviving Economic Abuse on a code and economic abuse evidence form for money advisors to use with creditors. This form was also discussed during the Committee's visit to Financially Included.

Govan Law Centre pointed out the discretion available to councils in England and Wales:

“the Local Government and Finance Act 1992 contains provisions for allowing local authorities to consider discretionary applications for Council Tax relief in England and Wales (s13A). However, there is no equivalent of s13A in relation to Scotland. The inclusion of a similar provision for Scotland would allow Local Authorities the power to provide relief or write-offs of council tax arrears to a person who may have accrued them as a direct result of financial abuse.”

One method used by local authorities to collect unpaid council tax is arrestment of earnings or bank accounts. Currently, a minimum balance of £1000 must be left in bank accounts. In their written evidence Citizens Advice Scotland argued that this was too low for someone trying to save money in order to leave an abusive partner. They recommend that the expected [review of bank arrestments](#) should consider ‘fund to flee’ type grants in addition to looking at how to protect social security payments from being given to a creditor. A [consultation on bank and earnings arrestments is expected later this year](#)

The issue of council tax debt is also due to be discussed during Stage 2 of the Housing (Scotland) Bill. Ross Greer lodged the following amendment, which (at time of writing) had not yet been considered by the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee.

Amendment 543 The Scottish Ministers must, no later than six months after Royal Assent, undertake a review of the impact of joint and several liability for council tax arrears on those who have experienced, or are experiencing, domestic abuse.

Members may wish to discuss:

- 4. What is the Scottish Government doing to promote good practice in how public debt recovery takes account of financial and economic abuse?**
- 5. Would the Scottish Government support greater discretion for local authorities to write-off council tax debt in cases of economic and financial abuse?**
- 6. How will the impact of financial and economic abuse be taken into account in the forthcoming review of bank arrestments?**

Theme 3: Social Security and other financial support

Fund to Leave

Many submissions to the inquiry praised the ‘[Fund to Leave](#)’ pilot and recommended it should be introduced on a permanent basis.

The £500,000 Fund to Leave pilot ran from October 2023 to March 2024 in five local authorities. It offered grants up to £1,000 “to pay for the essentials they need when leaving a relationship with an abusive partner.” It was administered by Women’s Aid

groups. Women from Scottish Women's Aid's Survivor Reference Group explained that, in Glasgow and Aberdeen the budget ran out within weeks. In December 2024, in answer to a PQ by Pam Gosal ([S6W-31878](#)), Paul McLennan, Minister for Housing said:

"The Scottish Government received the final evaluation of the fund to leave pilot from Scottish Women's Aid in August 2024. The fund to leave provided financial support to women to leave an abusive relationship, including to women experiencing financial abuse. The assessment stage is nearing completion and we hope to be in a position to set out next steps soon."

Universal Credit split payments

Several respondents to the Call for Views recommended 'split payments' by default, including Citizens' Advice Scotland, Scottish Women's Aid and Glasgow Violence Against Women Partnership. In oral evidence, Citizens Advice Scotland acknowledged the technical difficulties in achieving the policy, but said that it could save lives.

Currently, split payments can be applied for in exceptional circumstances, including where there is domestic abuse. It has been Scottish Government policy since 2016 to have split payments by default in Scotland. This requires joint work with the DWP. In a [PQ answered on 6 May](#), Shirley-Anne Somerville said:

"The Scottish Government provided a Policy Design Specification in October 2023 for formal impact assessment by the DWP, which set out how the Scottish Government would like the split policy to be delivered. I also recently met with Sir Stephen Timms MP, on 30 April, to discuss the UK Governments UC review, highlighting the work being carried out on split payments policy and the need for the UC review to include a gendered analysis. The Scottish Government remains committed to working with the DWP towards delivery of split payments for Universal Credit."

Discretionary Housing Payment and Scottish Welfare Funds

In oral evidence, Citizens Advice Scotland and CPAG explained that DHPs are only available if the applicant has already been awarded housing support through Universal Credit or Housing Benefit and the Scottish Welfare Fund specifically excludes providing funds for rent or deposits. They considered that this leaves a gap in support for those who need help with rent in advance of being awarded Universal Credit/housing benefit.

The Scotland Act 2016 [limits eligibility of DHPs](#) to those in receipt of social security for rent payments and the [statutory guidance for the Scottish Welfare Fund](#) includes the following exclusion for crisis grants:

"Rent in advance, including rent deposits, which can be provided by a Budgeting Loan or discretionary housing payments."

Citizens Advice Scotland also suggested that the SWF could be used to mitigate the 'five week wait' in Universal Credit.

Members may wish to discuss:

- 7. Will the Scottish Government create a permanent, national, 'Fund to Leave'? Has the Scottish Government costed this?**
- 8. What response has the Scottish Government had from the DWP to its Policy Design Specification for Universal Credit split payments?**
- 9. What is the Scottish Government view on making greater use of the Scottish Welfare Fund to provide help with rent in advance and to mitigate the 'five week wait' for Universal Credit for victim/survivors of domestic abuse?**

Theme 4: Housing and homelessness

On 1 May the Committee heard that lack of affordable housing and the cost of refuge for those ineligible for housing benefit (either due to immigration status or having savings/income) created barriers to leaving an abusive partner. Scottish Women's Aid said that women and children are purposely having to declare themselves homeless and become destitute in order to try to secure housing. (1 May, SWA, col 11). They referred to the 2020 Scottish Government working group report '[Improving housing outcomes for women and children experiencing domestic abuse](#).' The Scottish Government has [accepted the report's 27 recommendations 'in principle'](#).

Shelter and Engender published a joint report in October 2024 on '[Gender and the Housing Emergency](#)'. The report describes how:

- Women's access to safe, secure and affordable homes is constrained by their economic inequality
- There is an urgent need to increase the supply of social homes in Scotland as a key mechanism to reduce the structural inequality experienced by women.
- Scottish Women's Aid has also evidenced the impact that a ruined credit score or rent arrears caused by their abuser can have on a woman's ability to access alternative accommodation. Homelessness services and landlords need to be more responsive and accommodating of these issues when working with women who have left or are trying to leave an abusive situation.

Planned legislative change

Part 2 of the **Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Act 2021** provides a mechanism for social landlords to terminate an abuser's interest in a tenancy and allow their partner or ex-partner to remain in the property if they choose to do so. The landlord could then enter into a new tenancy with the victim-survivor if the abuser was the sole tenant or terminate the abuser's interest if the tenancy was a joint tenancy with the

abuser and the victim-survivor. [Part 2 is expected to come into force in December 2025.](#)

The **Housing (Scotland) Bill** is currently at Stage 2. The Bill requires social landlords to have a policy which sets out how they will support tenants who are at risk of homelessness due to domestic abuse.

In addition, where there are rent arrears caused by domestic abuse a social landlord:

- must take such action to support the needs of the tenant arising in connection with rent arrears as the landlord considers reasonable having regard to its domestic abuse policy
- must provide the tenant with details of such other support that may be available to the tenant in relation to domestic abuse.

The Bill is due to complete Stage 2 by 29 May and a timetable for Stage 3 has not yet been set. At Stage 2, the Scottish Government agreed to work with members on further amendments for Stage 3 including amendments by Katy Clark on writing off rent arrears of domestic abuse survivors.

On 1 May, Vikki Fox (All in For Change) was concerned about the resource needed to make the new housing duties a reality:

“One of our main concerns would be the lack of resource that is attached to the bill with more onus and responsibilities being placed on public sector bodies without adequate training or personnel to enable them to be as successful in that as they could be.”

The Equally Safe Delivery plan included:

3.5 We will continue to support the social housing sector to embed gender equality, in preparation for the introduction of a new legal duty to develop and implement a domestic abuse policy outlining how they will support their tenants experiencing domestic abuse. Timescale: ongoing.

Members may wish to discuss:

- 10. What action has been taken on the Equally Safe commitment to “support the social housing sector to embed gender equality in preparation for the introduction of a new legal duty to develop and implement a domestic abuse policy”?**
- 11. The Committee has heard how the high cost of refuge accommodation, the lack of suitable temporary accommodation and the high cost of housing all contribute to the difficulty of leaving an abusive relationship. In what ways is the Scottish Government taking this into account in its housing policy?**

Theme 5: No Recourse to Public Funds

During the inquiry the Committee has heard of the particular vulnerabilities of those with no recourse to public funds and how councils can support them under social work legislation. Councils can use s.12 Social Work (Scotland) Act 1968 and s.22 Children (Scotland) Act 1995 to support vulnerable adults and families with children who cannot access public funds.

The written submission from the Glasgow Violence Against Women Partnership described the 'Women, Destitution and NRPF Initiative' which supported single women with no dependents subject to NRPF and not currently in the asylum system, by offering access to temporary accommodation, a cash-based living allowance and fast track to specialist legal immigration advice and information. Initially for up to 14 days, it could be extended to four weeks of support. To date the project has supported 34 women, and a report on the work of the project is currently in development.

Written submissions described a lack of knowledge amongst councils. Reflecting the issues raised in Theme 1 on advice and information, the submission from All in For Changes states that:

“some local authorities lack the specialist knowledge and capacity to support NRPF women fleeing domestic abuse”

[COSLA provides national guidance](#) for Scottish councils which describes the current legal framework and good practice to assist local authorities. In oral evidence, the Child Poverty Action Group said that this should be extended to specifically address issues of domestic abuse.

Citizen's Advice Scotland said that some existing means of support need to be more widely known – in particular the Home Office's Migrant Victims of Domestic Abuse Concession (MVDAC) which enables people who have leave to enter or remain as a partner on certain immigration routes to gain access to public funds for 3 months following a relationship breakdown with their partner due to domestic abuse.

One of the actions in the 'Equally Safe' delivery plan is:

1.4 We will mitigate the challenges associated with No Recourse for Public Funds conditions and the Illegal Migration Act within devolved competence. Timescale: 2024 onwards.

More recently, the Programme for Government included a commitment to create an 'Integration Support Service.'

The Committee wrote to the Minister for Equalities on 8 May regarding Ending Destitution in Scotland – A Road Map for Policymakers legal briefing, by Professor Jen Ang of Lawmanity. The letter asked:

- for information about what discussions have taken place between the Scottish and UK Governments in relation to mitigating destitution experienced by those with No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF), or other restricted eligibility
- for an update on the timescales for publishing the new, revised, Ending Destitution Together Strategy, and the steps Scottish Government is undertaking to develop this

A response was requested by 5 June.

Members may wish to discuss:

12. What progress has been made on the commitment in Equally Safe to mitigate the challenges associated with No Recourse to Public Funds conditions?

Theme 6: Legal Aid

In written and oral evidence the Committee heard about:

- Low thresholds for financial eligibility which exclude many from civil legal aid and advice and assistance
- The complexity of the ‘means and merits’ test. ([The application form is available here](#). SLAB told the Committee that they are reviewing it).
- Difficulties caused if assets are included which a person does not have access to due to financial or economic abuse.
- Part 1 of the Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Act not being in force yet.
- Abusers manipulating the system to perpetuate abuse
- Lack of solicitors doing legal aid work

Financial eligibility and discretion

In oral evidence SLAB suggested that the financial eligibility thresholds should be reviewed,

“the whole system could do with a bit of a review of the options for operating those thresholds and how the different changes that have happened over the past 14 years have impacted on the eligible population” (SLAB, 8 May col 3)

SLAB described how they have discretion in applying the financial eligibility criteria for civil legal aid, but this isn’t well understood.

“quite often, we find that we are either not told about circumstances where we could apply our discretion or we are not asked to apply that discretion in individual cases. We are not sure whether that is because the system is too complex and opaque or because solicitors or others supporting those who experience domestic abuse do not fully understand the ins and outs of the system or the flexibilities that we can apply.” (SLAB, 8 May col 3)

Civil protection orders

There are various civil protection orders which can be applied for, and further orders are created (although not yet in force) in Part 1 of the Domestic Abuse (Protection) (Scotland) Act 2021.

The costs of applying through the courts for current civil protection orders often must be met by the victim/survivor, either via a Civil Legal Aid application or from their own income. Witnesses to the inquiry, such as Scottish Women’s Aid, recommend automatic legal aid for these orders. SLAB described how automatic civil legal aid would be difficult if there were disputed facts:

We often see people disputing things that have been said or alleged, but that is for the court to determine. [...] you cannot get into court to establish the facts without the funding, but if determining the facts becomes a factor in whether the funding is available, we have a little bit of an insurmountable barrier. That is a practical issue. (SLAB, 8 May, col 10)

A key policy innovation of Part 1 of the 2021 Act is that the police can impose a DAPN (Domestic Abuse Protection Notice) and initiate the court application for a DAPO (Domestic Abuse Protection Order), so the victim does not have to do it.

Sophie Berry (Govan Law Centre) told the Committee that:

“the onus is on the individual at the moment. When emergency protection orders are brought in, the police will be able to step into those critical situations and get a domestic abuse protection notice in place and then a domestic abuse protection order. That will take from the victim/survivor all the onus of having to make the application themselves. In addition, it is immediate—it should be able to be put in place much more quickly. I appreciate that the police will need resources to do that, but it is essential for victim/survivors to have those protections in place as soon as possible. (Sophie Berry, Govan Law Centre, 8 May, col 21)

[Police Scotland are arguing there are significant operational difficulties for them](#)

Jamie Hepburn, Minister for Parliamentary Business told the Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee that:

“Some of the challenges that have been identified include clarity on the estimated number of cases and, in turn, the costs of implementing the scheme and the short timescales required to process and implement a DAPN

and a DAPO, which have been identified by justice partners as extremely challenging.” [Equalities, Human Right and Civil Justice Committee Official Report, 10 December 2024, col 2.](#)

In a [letter to the Equalities and Human Rights Committee in March 2025](#), Angela Constance, Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs said that a workshop planned for late March involving members of the Implementation Advisory Board would provide advice on potential next steps.

Equally Safe and legal aid reform

One of the ‘deliverables’ in the [Equally Safe Delivery Plan](#) (August 2024) includes consideration of legal aid:

12.3 We will engage with key stakeholders to inform and shape future legislative proposals in relation to the reform of legal aid, including representatives of the legal profession, third sector, victim support organisations and the Scottish Legal Aid Board.

The Scottish Government published a [discussion paper on legal aid reform](#) in February 2025 which proposed a three-stage approach to reform:

- changes to regulations to simplify the current system, to be delivered in 2025 to 2026 - for civil legal assistance, proposals include assessing financial eligibility using standardised personal allowances
- research on and reform of legal aid fees, to be delivered in 2025
- longer-term reform, including testing different funding models and embedding user experience in decision-making, with a view to introducing new legislation in the future.

SLAB discussed broader issues of legal aid reform, noting that:

“It is very difficult to direct resources towards particular areas of need. Changing eligibility opens the possibility that people might access a service, but it does not guarantee them a service. Similarly, increasing fees might make legal aid generally more attractive to more solicitors, but that does not mean that you would be able to say, for example, “Yes, there’s a solicitor who will undertake domestic abuse-related work in Perth.”

[...]

[the legal aid system] needs to be redesigned from the bottom up (SLAB, 8 May, col 16)

The Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee is currently holding an inquiry on civil legal aid and advice and assistance for civil justice issues. Their [first evidence session was on 13 May](#).

Members may wish to discuss:

- 13. The Scottish Legal Aid Board told the Committee that, when they assess financial eligibility for legal aid, they can use their discretion to take account of the impact of economic and financial abuse. However this discretion doesn't appear to be widely known or much used. What action can be taken to improve awareness?**
- 14. Will the Scottish Government commit to increasing financial eligibility thresholds as part of its short-term reform proposals for legal aid?**
- 15. The Committee heard about the barriers facing those applying for orders for their own protection through the civil courts. Does the Minister support automatic Civil Legal Aid for civil protection orders?**

**Camilla Kidner
SPICe
16 May 2025**