

## ■ Executive summary

This report is set against a backdrop of significant proposed changes in the public funding of advice. It sought to find out the impact of these impending cuts on the not for profit (NFP) advice agencies operating in London, and to gain Londoners' views of advice provision and what their advice needs are. We therefore commissioned the first opinion poll survey of over 1,600 Londoners on this issue.

### ● Key findings

1. In London there is stronger support for free publicly funded legal services for everyone regardless of income compared to the rest of the country. The number of Londoners who believed that services should be free to all was 9 percentage points greater than in a national opinion poll.
2. London has some of the greatest need for advice services due to problems of poverty, but will be the greatest loser if the government presses ahead with its plans to cut much of civil legal aid. Just under 77,000 Londoners will lose out on housing, employment, debt, welfare benefits and immigration advice.
3. If the legal aid cuts are implemented Londoners will lose £9.33m in funding for housing, employment, debt, and welfare benefits law cases. This will cost the government £55m in other expenditure.
4. Particularly in London significant numbers of all social classes use advice services. They are not just the preserve of the poor.
5. People seeking benefits and tax credits advice are more evenly spread between the social groups in London. We conclude that this is due to a greater number of higher income families qualifying for benefits because of the higher cost of living in London.
6. Despite the high number of services available in London there remain significant gaps in provision particularly in areas outside the centre of the city in which fewer advice services have been established.
7. The findings of the London survey confirm those of LAG's earlier national survey that there are barriers to people from the lowest social classes using telephone advice lines and they are reluctant to do so. Due to this LAG believes that the government's proposal to introduce a telephone gateway as the sole route to accessing legal aid services is flawed.
8. It would seem that young people are much more likely to seek help using the internet, which might explain the finding that they believe advice is easier to access than other age groups.
9. While the research showed that Citizens Advice Bureaux had wide brand recognition among Londoners, when seeking advice they would go to a wide range of advice centres. The report suggests that non-Citizens Advice Bureaux services need to do more to raise public recognition or risk losing out on influencing policymakers.
10. There was evidence that transition fund payments made by the government to offset the impact of the public sector cuts will be largely wasted, as organisations will be unable to replace the loss of legal aid and other government funding.