

Minister for Victims and Community Safety
Ministear airson Luchd-fulaing is Sàbhailteachd
Choimhearsnachd
Siobhian Brown MSP
Siobhian Brown BPA



T: 0300 244 4000
E: scottish.ministers@gov.scot

Karen Adam MSP, Convener
Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice
Committee
The Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh
EH99 1SP

13 December 2024

Dear Convener,

Thank you for your letter to the Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Shirley-Anne Somerville MSP, regarding the grant funding provision in 2024-25 from the Scottish Legal Aid Board's (SLAB) Early Resolution and Advice Programme, with particular reference to Shelter Scotland. I am replying as the responsibility for Legal Aid sits within my portfolio and I apologise for the delay in responding.

Scottish Ministers recognise and appreciate that independent advice services play a critical role in helping people to understand and access their rights, and to seek solutions in a range of areas.

This is why, in 2024-25, the Scottish Government has allocated over £12 million to support the delivery of welfare, debt and income maximisation advice services from the Social Justice Budget. Funding has also been provided through the Scottish Empty Homes Partnership project of £423,000 to bring empty homes back into use is adopted across the country, enabling better targeting of resources and tracking of progress to bring more empty homes back into use.

This year the Scottish Legal Aid Board's (SLAB) Legal Aid budget continues to support projects under the Early Resolution and Advice Programme of over £2 million. Shelter Scotland has received continued funding of approximately £295,257, to deliver in-court advice services to secure help for people facing formal legal action at the Sheriff Court on housing law or related debt.

Early intervention for people needing advice to prevent them going into the justice system is one of the key priorities laid out in the Scottish Government's Justice Vision Three Year Plan. The design of the Early Resolution and Advice Programme was to take account of how to complement other existing sources of help, including other targeted legal aid provision through the direct employment of solicitors in the publicly funded Civil Legal Assistance Office (CLAO) network provided through SLAB.

Scottish Ministers, special advisers and the Permanent Secretary are covered by the terms of the Lobbying (Scotland) Act 2016. See www.lobbying.scot

St Andrew's House, Regent Road, Edinburgh EH1 3DG
www.gov.scot

INVESTORS IN PEOPLE™
We invest in people Silver



In addition to the direct delivery of advice and assistance, the CLAO also explores emerging trends, including areas of unmet legal need.

I am acutely aware that both the outcome and the timing of the decision-making process this year has had a significant impact on providers, and I am very sympathetic to the real-life impact this has on the staff in the projects and those who benefit from the services they deliver but I also appreciate that difficult decisions are being made across the Scottish Government about the funding of public services.

I acknowledge that, like every other sector, the advice sector is under pressure due to the impact of the continuing cost-of-living crisis on households. The Scottish Government continues to take significant action in the face of continued austerity from the UK Government.

Despite financial constraints, the Scottish Government continues to focus on building a more inclusive Scotland for all, investing in services and support that will help our communities during these difficult times. Our budget if passed by Parliament will ensure that this government can continue to prioritise action to eradicate child poverty, protect our public services, grow Scotland's economy and tackle the climate emergency, while addressing the inequalities that many in our communities still face.

As set out in the 2023 Programme for Government, and as part of our commitment to support the third sector with Fairer Funding, the Scottish Government is taking forward actions to produce a plan to deliver improvements including greater clarity and consistency of existing arrangements, recognising the sector's strategic role in enabling the transformation and delivery of person-centred services for the people of Scotland.

We will continue to work with SLAB and our stakeholders in the third sector to co-design any new policies and future funding models in partnership with those organisations and individuals who deliver front line advice services.

Yours sincerely,

SIOBHIAN BROWN

Scottish Ministers, special advisers and the Permanent Secretary are covered by the terms of the Lobbying (Scotland) Act 2016. See www.lobbying.scot

St Andrew's House, Regent Road, Edinburgh EH1 3DG
www.gov.scot

INVESTORS IN PEOPLE[™]
We invest in people Silver

