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March Bulletin



Introduction

Chancellor Rachel Reeves delivered her Spring Statement on Wednesday this week. Whilst the statement held some upside for the Chancellor, there was enough downside to indicate challenging times ahead. The Chancellor has opted to try and have as small a fiscal event as possible (this may look, sound and bear an uncanny resemblance to a Budget but is categorically NOT a Budget), using welfare cuts, clamping down on tax avoidance, and tweaking departmental budgets to try to return to the £9.9 billion fiscal headroom she had in the autumn. The statement only provides her with a relatively small headroom which may have already been wiped out by high borrowing costs and new tariffs from across the pond. **The OBR forecasted back in the autumn that without any changes**, the UK would be £4.1bn in deficit in 2029/30.

Notably on spending cuts, the changes to welfare and employment support will add £4.8 billion to the headroom while cuts to unprotected budgets such as Local Government and Justice will save £3.6 billion (more on that below). The specifics of these will be

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weeks. In terms of cuts, £4.7 billion has been cut from PIP with 800,000 people losing around £4,500 a year. Another 150,000 people will lose the carers' allowance (around £4,300 a year), and a further £3 billion has been cut from the Universal credit health element.

These cuts are expected to send 250,000 more people into poverty, including 50,000 children. Across all the changes, about 3.2 million current or future claimant families will lose an average of £1,720.

They occur within the context of 7.5 million people facing hunger (up from 7.2 million) including 2.6 million children and 4.7 million people in disabled families.

The measures themselves represent **the largest package of welfare savings since 2015.**

This week, the Chancellor also announced a 'Transformation Fund' worth £3.25bn over three years to support public sector reform. Initial allocations include £42m for testing and deploying AI applications in government and £150m for civil service employee exit schemes, as part of the drive to reduce administrative costs by 15% by 2030.

You can **read all the Treasury documents by clicking here** and the **OBR's updated economic and fiscal outlook by clicking here.**

We break down some of the detail below together with some thoughts.

As ever, if there are any stories that you would like us to cover in the bulletin, please do get in touch with rohini.jana@lapg.co.uk

Spring Statement



Is this a return to austerity?

The government say no, but many commentators have described it that way and the mood certainly feels familiar. While the cuts themselves may not be as deep as those intended by the coalition government in the wake of the global financial crisis, the consequences of a more than a decade of cuts to unprotected departments such as the Ministry of Justice are punitive.

There are no easy savings to be made within the system and these cuts are likely to hit hard. That being said, despite fears that the poor economic outlook would lead to heavier cuts in unprotected departments, the government has more or less maintained the implied cut for departments such as the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry for Housing Communities, and Local Government and the Home Office at around 1% per year in real terms. That has come despite a slight drop in day-to-day spending in 2028/29 and 2029/30 (£1.7 billion and £3.7bn in 2024/25 prices respectively).

Home Affairs and Justice:

- £8m funding from the new transformation fund for technology in the Ministry of Justice to deliver probation services more effectively. A welcome investment but some (including LAPG and The Law Society) have said that what is missing is strategy for justice more generally.

Employment and Welfare:

- The OBR estimate that welfare reforms will save £4.8 billion from the welfare budget.
- The Universal Credit standard allowance will increase from £92 per week in 2025/26 to £106 per week by 2029/30. As mentioned above, the Universal Credit health element will be cut by around 50% for new claimants, and then frozen.
- £1 Billion is being dedicated to support people back into work, with £400 million being provided to help Jobcentres get more people into work and deliver the changes.

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- The Government will also take further steps to tackle fraud and error in the welfare system by increasing preventative checks in Universal Credit, and investing to recruit over 500 fraud and error staff, saving £240 million in 2029-30.
- The Government will also increase checks on potential Universal Credit claimants by introducing more ways to verify the amount of savings they hold, as well as their earnings and expenses. This is expected to save £200 million in 2029-30.

Housing:

- The OBR estimates that planning reforms would support a 0.2% GDP increase by 2029/30 and has forecast that 305,000 new homes a year would be built by 2029/30, with 1.3 million new homes forecast to be built by the end of the OBR forecast period.
- How close this takes the Government to its housebuilding target has, however, been questioned. The OBR's 1.3 million new homes assessment is a UK-wide assessment, but as the Shadow Housing Secretary Kevin Hollinrake noted, the Government's 1.5 million new homes target is England only and includes reforms not considered by the OBR in its forecasts.

Comments

A number of news outlets including The Telegraph, Guardian and Daily Mail have reported widespread dismay in the Labour ranks with backbench MPs angry as impact assessment shows 3.2 million households will be worse off as a result of the cuts, with an extra 250,000 people falling into relative poverty by 2029-30. Reports vary, but some indicate as many as 80 Labour MPs publicly opposing plans.

The government welfare reform plan faces criticism from the OBR, which found no evidence that these cuts will effectively boost employment. As reported by **The Independent**, instead they find that the proposed £4.8 billion welfare reforms could push up to 400,000 people into poverty. Experts have also warned that the proposed changes may make job-seeking harder for vulnerable individuals.

Disability campaigners such as the Multiple Sclerosis Society have also reported members worrying about covering "their basic living expenses and the extra costs of their disability – like visits from carers to help with things like washing, cooking and going to the toilet" adding that "the government has a moral obligation to scrap these cuts before the real damage is done."

A group of the UK's most distinguished economists have written an open letter to the Chancellor, warning her that new cuts to investment or to public spending would be a 'profound mistake' if the intention remains to grow the economy. The group, which includes Professor Mariana Mazzucato point to the increases to public investment announced as part of the autumn budget simply cancelling out cuts planned by the

welfare net.

To read the letter in full, please click here.

Despite this, Number 10 is said to be confident that the public support the reforms, with **YouGov polling showing that 68% of public** believe the benefits system works badly and needs reform, while only 18% believe it does not.

International Women's Day



March 8th was International Women's Day (IWD) 2025. This year's focus on rights, equality and empowerment emphasised the need to accelerate action towards gender equality. To that end, the month saw a host of legal reforms and measures designed around women, their safety and their rights.

Legal aid for domestic abuse victims

Earlier this month, the MoJ laid a draft affirmative Statutory Instrument before parliament which, if approved, will make several important changes to the scope of legal aid for domestic abuse victims, helping ensure legal aid is available for those who need it most.

The measures, which will amend LASPO and associated regulations, include:

domestic abuse victims can access legal aid for applications under this immigration route.

b) Changes to the evidence requirements for domestic abuse to ensure that victims can provide overseas medical evidence from appropriate health professionals for legal aid applications in domestic abuse cases.

c) Changes to terminology to align with the Domestic Abuse Act 2021, replacing 'domestic violence' with 'domestic abuse', 'financial abuse' with 'economic abuse' and recognising that abuse against an individual (B) may consist of behaviour directed at another individual (e.g. B's child).

d) Changes that complement orders made in 2023 and 2024, in relation to the scope of legal aid for Domestic Abuse Protection Orders and Domestic Abuse Protection Notices, to ensure full availability of legal aid for individuals in respect of these orders.

[Click here to access the full Statutory Instrument](#)

NB/ this Statutory Instrument is not yet law and must go through several stages before being enacted. If enacted, it will become law in mid-2025.

[Domestic Abuse \(Safe Leave\) Bill](#)

Writing in Politics Home, Uma Kumaran MP announced her co-sponsorship of Alex McIntyre MP's Domestic Abuse (Safe Lives) Bill, which seeks to introduce 10 days of paid leave for victims experiencing domestic abuse.

As noted by the Member for Stratford and Bow: "too many victims are currently being failed by a system that does not recognise the economic impact of domestic abuse. Safe leave would transform the experience of those taking the – often life-threatening – step to leave an abusive partner"

This is a policy which will broaden access to justice and support the government's pledge of halving violence against women and girls in a decade. In recent weeks we have been in discussions with Survivors of Economic Abuse (SEA), hearing of the impact of this kind of abuse, and the lack of attention this subject receives. We are currently planning an event with charities Women's Aid and SEA in the coming months. Watch this space for further information.

[Click here to read Uma Kumaran MP's full article](#)

[Click here to access the official Bill page](#)

As reported by Monidipa Fouzder in the Gazette, The Criminal Bar Association's National Survey concluded earlier this month, with troubling findings for the criminal justice system.

The survey shows that one in three criminal barristers are actively considering leaving the Bar.

One in three criminal barristers are actively considering diversifying their practice into a different area of law.

39% of barristers on the CPS' RASSO panel, which prosecute rape cases, do not intend to reapply, whilst only 9% intend to join the panel.

This disparity is likely explained by a whole host of problems reported by a significant portion of respondents:

- Nearly two-thirds suffered from chronic lack of sleep
- Around three-quarters suffered from low mood and fatigue
- More than half were eating poorly
- More than half had unhealthy coping mechanisms
- Nearly half reported poor mental health
- Nearly half had physical health issues (examples included heart attacks and strokes among others)
- Nearly two-thirds felt overwhelmed and unable to cope

Low fees also remain a concern for respondents.

These statistics show that investment is desperately needed in order to ensure the victims of these crimes have the representation they need and they access to justice they deserve.

[Click here to read the full article.](#)

SEND and the Councils crisis

Findings of a survey conducted by The House published earlier this month have found that, following a dramatic increase in the number of children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), Private companies have doubled their share of the SEND education market within the last four years – the costs of which are pushing councils toward bankruptcy.

The survey found that private companies "are charging local authorities up to £350,000

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(EHCPs) within the last decade and there remain large numbers of children with additional needs in the application process or who do not yet have EHCPs. Funding in this area remains a cause for concern.

Council funding has shrunk by roughly 40% over the last decade, whilst demand for social care has continued to rise, and councils have made room for these growing costs by shutting down other services.

Top-tier local authorities' remaining spending power is increasingly dominated by adults and child social care, for which they have defined legal and regulatory duties. The two services can take up as much as 70% of council budgets, at the expense of what have come to be known as "discretionary" services such as parks, leisure centres, arts, youth clubs, children's centres, community buses, recycling and climate change.

[Click here to read the full article.](#)

Upcoming Events

We are in the process of confirming dates for the following meetings in 2025:

[Access to Justice: The State of the Estate](#)

This meeting will discuss court backlogs, legal aid deserts and the barriers to justice represented by court infrastructure. Chaired by Sarah Sackman KC, Minister of State for Courts and Legal Services, other invited speakers include Shadow Attorney General Lord David Wolfson, and Joanna Hardy-Susskind, Criminal Barrister at Red Lion Chambers.

[VAWG](#)

We have invited Minister Davies-Jones to chair a panel event on the subject of Violence Against Women and Girls, including economic abuse and the availability of legal aid for advice. Other speakers will include Rights of Women, SEA, Jenny Beck KC (Hon) and an expert by experience.

[The AI Bill](#)

As part of our work around the AI Bill, we will be hosting an event regarding the use of AI in the legal profession. We have invited Minister Kyle to speak at the event and a number of other speakers from civil liberties organisations and academia.

[Access to Justice and Special Educational Needs](#)

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MP, we will hear from Minister for School Standards Catherine McKinnell, Ollie Persey, Barrister at Garden Court Chambers, and experts by experience.

[Breaking Out of the Prisons Crisis](#)

This meeting, rescheduled from November, will be discussing the Issues facing the Prisons estate. Speakers will include Lord Timpson, Minister for Prisons, Probation and Reducing Reoffending, Andrea Coomber KC (Hon), CEO of the Howard League, Mark Day, Deputy Director of the Prison Reform Trust, Dr Laura Janes KC (Hon), Prisons Lawyer and an expert by experience.

LALY nominations closing soon!

Less than 1 month until nominations for this year's LALYs close!

This year sees the 23rd outing of these non-profit-making awards, which were founded by LAPG in 2003 to celebrate the work of social justice lawyers. Nominations will close on 22 April 2025. Winners in the 10 award categories will be announced to an audience of around 500 guests at a ceremony in central London on 4 July 2025.

The LALYs are the annual celebration of the work of legal aid lawyers and support staff for their clients across England and Wales and remain one of the most uplifting nights of the legal year. Legal Aid Practitioners Group (who provide the secretariat for the APPG) is proud to organise these unique, non-profit-making awards, recognising the vital and life-changing work of social justice lawyers and their colleagues. They remain the only awards organised by and for grassroots legal aid lawyers.

The LALY25 Award categories are:

1. Legal Aid Newcomer
2. Legal Aid Support Staffer/Support Team
3. Family Legal Aid including Children's Rights
4. Criminal Defence
5. Legal Aid Barrister
6. Legal Aid Firm/NFP Agency
7. Immigration & Asylum
8. Social Welfare Law
9. Public law
10. Outstanding achievement

You have until 22 April 2025 to tell us about your legal aid heroes. We would love to

Interested in attending the LALYs? Contact rohini.jana@lapg.co.uk for more information.



Bills, Bills, Bills

Each month we will be updating you on the status of all access to justice related Bills going through Parliament.

Domestic Abuse (Safe Leave) Bill

- Last stage: 1st Reading (Commons), 7 Jan 2025
- Next stage: 2nd Reading (Commons), 20 Jun 2025

 Bill started in the House of Commons	 Bill in the House of Lords	 Final stages
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1st reading <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 2nd reading <input type="checkbox"/> Committee stage <input type="checkbox"/> Report stage <input type="checkbox"/> 3rd reading 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> 1st reading <input type="checkbox"/> 2nd reading <input type="checkbox"/> Committee stage <input type="checkbox"/> Report stage <input type="checkbox"/> 3rd reading 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Consideration of amendments <input type="checkbox"/> Royal Assent

Crime and Policing Bill

- Last stage: 2nd Reading (Commons), 10 Mar 2025
- Next stage: Committee Stage (Commons), 1, 3 Apr 2025

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 1st reading 2nd reading **Committee stage** Report stage 3rd reading 1st reading 2nd reading Committee stage Report stage 3rd reading Consideration of amendments Royal Assent

Renters' Rights

- Last stage: 2nd Reading (Lords), 4 Feb 2025
- Next stage: Committee Stage (Lords), 22, 24, 28 Apr 2025

Bill started in the House of Commons

 1st reading 2nd reading Committee stage Report stage 3rd reading

Bill in the House of Lords

 1st reading 2nd reading **Committee stage** Report stage 3rd reading

Final stages

 Consideration of amendments Royal Assent

Boarder Security, Asylum and Immigration Bill

- Last stage: Committee Stage 12th Sitting (Commons)
- Next stage: Report Stage (Commons) TBC

Bill started in the House of Commons

 1st reading 2nd reading Committee stage **Report stage** 3rd reading

Bill in the House of Lords

 1st reading 2nd reading Committee stage Report stage 3rd reading

Final stages

 Consideration of amendments Royal Assent

Mental Health Bill

- Last stage: Committee Stage (Lords), 24 Feb 2025
- Next stage: Report Stage (Lords), 31 Mar 2025

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Data (Use and Access) Bill

- Last stage: Committee Stage (Commons), 4, 6 Mar 2025
- Next stage: Report Stage (Commons), date TBC

 Bill started in the House of Lords	 Bill in the House of Commons	 Final stages
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1st reading <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 2nd reading <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Committee stage <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Report stage <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 3rd reading	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1st reading <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 2nd reading <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Committee stage <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Report stage <input type="checkbox"/> 3rd reading	<input type="checkbox"/> Consideration of amendments <input type="checkbox"/> Royal Assent

Justice Oral Questions

Our highlights from this month's justice oral questions are listed below:

Matthew Patrick (Wirral West, Labour) asked what steps she is taking to help increase prosecution rates in cases of violence against women and girls.

Responding, **Solicitor General Lucy Rigby** said violence against women and girls needs to be tackled, adding that the Government has introduced domestic abuse experts in 999 control rooms.

Following, **Mr Patrick** asked what is being done to fix the system that is not delivering justice for rape victims.

In reply, **Ms Rigby** said the Government inherited a record Crown Court backlog, adding that pilot measures are being set out in some areas to speed up the process.

Irene Campbell (North Ayrshire and Arran, Labour) asked what work is being done to make women feel more comfortable coming forward to report sexual violence, and what is being done to support victims throughout the process.

Responding, **Solicitor General Lucy Rigby** noted the introduction of the CPS Victim Transformation Programme and emphasised that the issue of victim attrition is a core area for the Government, and the Scottish Parliament.

Lee Pitcher (Doncaster East and the Isle of Axholme, Labour) asked what steps she is taking with Cabinet colleagues to use technology to help improve efficiency in the

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explaining that technology is being used by the Serious Fraud Office to speed up disclosure work.

Following, **Mr Pitcher** asked what specific technological innovations are being used to improve the court process.

In reply, **Ms Rigby** said the Government is providing leadership in this area through the AI Centre of Excellence to allow for technological innovations to be implemented.

Liberal Democrat Justice Spokesperson Josh Babarinde (Eastbourne) asked what technology the Government is set to deploy to address backlogs in the criminal justice system.

Responding, **Solicitor General Lucy Rigby** stated that technology is very important for the whole criminal justice system, with CPS piloting digital jury bundles. She noted the SFO is trialling technology in a number of areas, including in case management. She emphasised that better use of technology, especially in the courts, can enable more prosecutions.

Ben Obese-Jecty (Huntingdon, Conservative) asked what steps she is taking with the Crown Prosecution Service to help ensure the effective functioning of the courts.

Responding, **Solicitor General Lucy Rigby** stated that the Government inherited incredibly long court backlogs. She stated that Lord Chancellor has set increased Crown Court sitting days to take pressures off the courts.

Following this, **Mr Obese-Jecty** asked if she agreed with the Justice Secretary that new guidelines would introduce two-tier justice.

In reply, **Ms Rigby** stated that the Conservative Sentencing Minister at the time welcomed the new guidelines. She noted that the Lord Chancellor met the Chair of the Sentencing Council last week, where they had a productive conversation.

Chair of the Justice Committee Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith and Chiswick, Labour) asked what discussions are being had with the CPS to improve prosecutor attendance.

Responding, **Solicitor General Lucy Rigby** said CPS are looking to increase capacity, adding that conversations are also being had on this issue in the Ministry of Justice.

Training

We were pleased to see so many attend our training on Housing Law earlier this month.

Many thanks to Giles, Connor and Diane for fantastic sessions.

We will be repeating the previous sessions and adding more to our training offering in coming months, so stay tuned!

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And that's all from us for this edition. If you made it this far, thank you very much for reading and for your continued support and engagement with the APPG.

See you next month for the stats bulletin!

Rohini Jana
Director of Parliamentary Affairs
28 March 2025

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About the APPG on Access to Justice

We strive to highlight the importance of access to justice as a fundamental pillar of society, and to empower individuals to exercise their rights, challenge discrimination, and reduce social inequalities. We foster parliamentary and public understanding of access to justice by acting as a forum for discussion and debate, providing an interface between Government, Parliament, and the justice sector.

For more information contact:

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