



Ministry  
of Justice

**Mike Freer MP**  
Minister for Courts and  
Legal Services

Kevin Foster MP  
House of Commons  
London  
SW1A 0AA

**MoJ ref:** Sub 113735

27 March 2024

Dear Kevin,

### WESTMINSTER HALL DEBATE

I would like to thank you again for your engagement on the matter of duty solicitors. During the debate, I mentioned that I would share the figures that I referred to. These figures are published on <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/duty-solicitors-rotas-information-and-guidance> but the table below provides a summary of the data. As of 6 March 2024, the figures for the number of duty solicitors signed up to the Legal Aid Agency (LAA) crime contracts are as follows:

Number of Duty Solicitors									
Rota commencement date	Oct-17	Oct-18	Oct-19	Oct-20	Oct-21	Oct-22	Jan-23	Apr-23	Oct-23
<b>Duty Solicitors</b>	5,240	4,923	4,600	4,539	4,361	3,813	4,023	4,100	3,948

I would like to clarify that while the data does show some increase in the number of duty solicitors registering on the scheme after October 2022, I understand that there may be specific administrative reasons for that increase. Nonetheless, the slowing rate of decline is potentially an early sign of at least some stabilisation in the scheme.

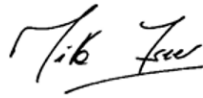
As mentioned during the debate, I meet regularly with the LAA to discuss matters pertaining to criminal legal aid. The LAA regularly reviews and monitors the number of duty solicitors on each local duty scheme to ensure adequate provision and access to legal aid. It has arrangements in place to ensure that all duty schemes have cover 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

We have already boosted the system with immediate investment in response to the criminal legal aid independent review and are investing a further £16m into the police station scheme which will benefit the duty solicitor schemes. This additional funding will contribute to the sustainability of the market and help to ensure that legal aid is accessible in the future.

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I hope I have reassured you that the Government is committed to supporting the legal profession to ensure the legal aid sector is put on a sustainable footing both now and in the future.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Mike Freer". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line underneath.

**MIKE FREER MP**

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