



**Legal Support for Litigants in Person
Law for Life Research Report on Affordable Advice
Year 1: 1st July 2021 – 30th June 2022**

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1. Executive Summary

This report presents findings from research into the second year of the Affordable Advice service provided by Law for Life in partnership with Resolution.¹ Law for Life is a national legal information and education charity that strives for social justice by legally empowering individuals and communities. [Resolution](#) is a community of family justice professionals who work with families and individuals to resolve family law issues in a constructive way.

The Affordable Advice service is aimed at people who are managing their finances on divorce or child arrangements difficulties with little or no advice. The service offers a blend of step-by-step guidance from the Advicenow website with fixed fee, unbundled legal advice from Resolution family lawyers at the most crucial points in the process.

The service was developed to meet the needs of Litigants in Person (LiPs)² and potential LiPs who do not seek the advice they need from family law solicitors due to fear and confusion about prices, the high cost of advice, and lack of confidence about how to find a good solicitor, and how to be sure it will be worth it.

This report builds on [pilot evaluation data](#) from Law for Life's Affordable Advice service as part of the research element of the Legal Support for Litigants in Person (LSLIP) project, funded by the Ministry of Justice via the Access to Justice Foundation. This research report follows interim reporting on the LSLIP grant at the end of year one, which set out findings from two service interventions. This report covers the period 1st July 2021 to 30th June 2022, the first full-service year of the project (referred to as Year 1).

The lack of evidence-based research in this area hampers the development of a wider strategy to prevent legal problems from escalating.³ This research therefore aims to contribute to the evidence base on the effectiveness of early intervention in reducing the negative impact of legal problems on LiPs.⁴

¹ This covers the period July 2021-June 2022.

² Litigants in Person (LiPs) are usually defined as parties who represent themselves in court, without obtaining legal representation. However "unrepresented parties may be encountered at any stage of the court process. Some LiPs will take legal advice up to the point of going to a court where they will represent themselves, or they might represent themselves at appeal, having been represented at first instance. It is likely to become increasingly common for LiPs to receive legal advice for some stages only. Other LiPs may have chosen to litigate or defend claims without having obtained any legal advice at all." The Law Society Litigants in person: guidelines for lawyers, London: The Law Society, 2015: 2:
<file:///Users/wendyeades/Downloads/Litigants-in-person-guidelines-lawyers-June-2015.pdf>

³ Ministry of Justice. *Legal Support: the way ahead: An action plan to deliver better support to people experiencing legal problems*, London, Ministry of Justice, 2019: 6
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/777036/legal-support-the-way-ahead.pdf

⁴ Our key findings are based on data collected by panel solicitors from 143 LiPs attending unbundled appointments with panel solicitors over 12 months, online surveys of service users and interviews of 15 service users who had attended solicitor appointments, held via video call or telephone during July – September 2022.

Law for Life's Affordable Advice service provides a blend of public legal education, practical support and specialist legal advice to individuals who are LiPs. Pilot study findings showed that the service can meet the needs of a key group of under-served LiPs who need expert advice but are unable to afford a full family solicitor service but are ineligible for legal aid due to narrow eligibility requirements across private family law cases. As a result of using the service, LiPs reported enhanced levels of legal capability, including knowledge of rights and obligations and the processes involved, as well as building their confidence and trust. Service users expressed high levels of satisfaction as well as reduced stress associated with their case and in some cases the perceived level of conflict that they experienced. Some users reported improved outcomes in their cases, including improved financial settlements.

Between 1st July 2021 and 30th June 2022 154,804 pageviews and 106,740 sessions were recorded for the Advicenow guides within the scope of the project. 328 people contacted the lawyer panel requesting an appointment with a family lawyer, an average of 27 contacts per month (an increase of 69% on the pilot period). 143 appointments with lawyers were held over the period, on average 12 appointments per month (an increase of 130% on the pilot period).

The findings demonstrate the continuing value and significance of the Affordable Advice service for those LiPs on low incomes, enabling them to move their case forward in the family court and to improve the outcomes for themselves and their families. By embedding detailed evaluation of the impact of the service on the legal capabilities of service users, Affordable Advice also adds to our knowledge of the experiences of LiPs in the family courts and informs future service development to improve the quality of that experience.

The research has also given an insight into the changing landscape of legal advice provision because of the pandemic. All Affordable Advice solicitor appointments were conducted via video call or telephone, and LiPs interviewed reported that this gave them more choice of solicitor and more flexibility in terms of arranging appointments.

The findings also help point to a number of important recommendations for the expansion of the service, including:

- the potential to trial public assistance funding to ensure equitable access to LiPs on a lower income who could not afford the help provided;
- to enhance promotion through existing information sources for LiPs including GOV.UK;
- targeted promotion for families dealing with child arrangements, particularly through CAFCASS letters;
- further research into the impact of the service on conflict reduction, and
- research into the value of the service for LiPs experiencing domestic violence or abuse that had not previously been identified.

1.1 Key findings

Affordable Advice has successfully moved from a pilot project into full-service delivery and demand has increased during its first year of full-service operation:

- 328 appointments were requested by LiPs, an increase of 67% on the pilot period;
- 231 individual LiPs requested appointments, an increase of 88% on then number during the pilot period; and
- 143 appointments were held with panel lawyers, an increase of 127% on the pilot period.

Detailed research into Year 1 of full delivery generated the following key findings:

1. The new service enabled service users to get unbundled advice for a substantially reduced fixed fee.⁵

2. The service reached a new market of people who could not afford to instruct a solicitor to act for them and those nervous about accessing legal advice because of the uncertainty of the final cost. 83% of people said they would not have sought advice or were unsure whether they would have sought advice without the service.

3. The majority of service users were from low-income, working households. Almost 60% of users were women.

4. More service users sought help with financial arrangements than child arrangements (64% and 28% respectively).

5. Satisfaction with the service was high. 98% of users said they would recommend the service to others. 75% of service users considered the service to be either good or very good value. However, 75% said they could not afford to pay more.

6. The service made a difference to users by helping them to understand their legal issues and the processes associated with their situation. It enabled them to weigh up options, make informed choices, improved their confidence to act, and helped them make their case better. Most service users reported that the combination of the guides and solicitor's advice helped them to decide what to do next and gave them the impetus to follow it through.

7. Service users reported increased trust in legal services and 82% said the service had reduced their stress. Users reported that the guides and the solicitor appointment helped them cope better with the process and mitigated the emotions generated by their case. Some users reported substantially improved outcomes in their matter.

⁵ Most appointments are £100 (+ VAT) for one hour requiring 30 minutes of preparation, or £200 (+ VAT) for more complicated financial issues requiring 1-2 hours of preparation. The solicitors on the panel, on average, charge £295 per hour (including VAT) The fee for the Affordable Advice standard appointment represents a 70% reduction on average, and users also have the benefit of a fixed fee, which gives them more control over costs.

8. Interviewees reported that they experienced an increased level of empowerment in situations where power imbalances were exposed. This links to the need to ensure equality before the law as an underpinning of the Rule of Law.

These findings confirmed the conclusions of the Pilot report that the Affordable Advice service made a significant contribution to the legal capabilities and outcomes of LiPs seeking a divorce, providing clear information and advice in an area of law in where there has been a significant increase in the number of applications but also an increase in court backlogs and delays.⁶ The number of LiPs in divorce cases has also increased exponentially since the removal of legal aid in family law cases in 2013.⁷

1.2 Recommendations

Ministry of Justice/HMCTS

- 1) Public funding could increase access to the service by low-income LiPs. Clients meeting clear income-based criteria could have some or all the fee subsidised without financially disadvantaging panel solicitors.
- 2) To increase traffic to the Affordable Advice service, there should be links throughout the Get a Divorce process on GOV.UK and the new Prototype Citizen Hub flagging help from the earliest possible opportunity.
- 3) Awareness of the Affordable Advice service and its relevance to those sorting out arrangements for children needs to be raised by more prominent links on the Cafcass websites, Cafcass letters to families, the Notice of hearing, and family mediation websites.
- 4) Further research is needed into the impact of domestic violence and abuse (DVA) and coercive control on LiPs going through divorce and child arrangements cases in the family court, and the contribution that can be made by experienced panel solicitors to help.
- 5) The provision of wider national demographic data on those involved in cases in the family court is needed to better address the early legal needs of LiPs as recommended in the Justice Report 'Improving Access to Justice for Separating Families'.⁸

⁶ From April to June 2022 there were 33,234 divorce applications, the highest in a decade, representing an increase of 22% on the same quarter in 2021. HMCTS Family Court statistics quarterly: April to June 2022

⁷ The number of cases where neither party had legal representation was 39% in April to June 2022, an increase of 25 percentage points since January to March 2013 and up by one percentage point since the same period in 2021. HMCTS Family Court statistics quarterly: April to June 2022

⁸ Gillian Douglas et al, *Improving access to justice by separating families*, London: JUSTICE, 2022
<https://files.justice.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/12154403/JUSTICE-Improving-Access-to-Justice-for-Separating-Families-October-2022.pdf>

Law for Life and Resolution

- 1) The service should be scaled up to meet demand, with wider, targeted promotion and an increase in the recruitment of panel solicitors able to provide high quality legal advice.
- 2) Additional infrastructure funding should be sought to enable the further development of the service, to provide administration and support to clients and solicitors, and to promote the service to potential service users.
- 3) A mechanism for providing public funding assistance for low-income LiPs to access unbundled advice is required. Clients meeting clear income-based criteria would have some or all the fee subsidised without financially disadvantaging panel solicitors.
- 4) Further research is needed into demographics including disability and ethnicity. Further longitudinal research is required into whether the service reduces conflict and improves emotional preparedness. Links between service use and mediation also need further research.
- 5) Better support for creating legally binding agreements on finances, known as consent orders, is needed. LawTech funding for a Consent Order Tool should be sought as a priority, as identified by service users.
- 6) Panel solicitors should have a level of knowledge and expertise commensurate to the complexity of divorce cases and have had experience of working with clients who have experienced domestic violence and abuse.

2. Background

Under the auspices of the Legal Support: The Way Ahead⁹ action plan presented to parliament by the Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State of Justice in 2019, a two-year grant programme was established via the Access to Justice Foundation to ensure effective legal support for litigants in person (LSLIP). The LSLIP grant stream aimed to gain a better understanding of how people behave early in the resolution of legal problems and the effectiveness of support targeted at people, both of which are considered crucial elements of securing effective legal support.

⁹ Ministry of Justice. *Legal Support: the way ahead: An action plan to deliver better support to people experiencing legal problems*, London, Ministry of Justice, 2019
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/777036/legal-support-the-way-ahead.pdf

Activities centred on prevention seek to encourage the public to take action to avoid unnecessary legal disputes or escalating conflicts, for example through awareness-raising designed to warn of new obligations, or to deal with common misconceptions regarding the law. However, there is only limited evidence that demonstrates the effectiveness of early intervention. More evidence is required to help form a wider strategy to prevent legal problems from escalating and compounding.¹⁰ In *Legal Support: The Way Ahead*, the Ministry of Justice acknowledges that there are gaps in the evidence relied upon to decide where to go next, and there are areas where existing evidence could be refreshed or updated to reflect societal and system changes.¹¹

Research points to the fact that failure to secure early legal advice is a compounding factor that exacerbates painful familial conflict¹². Research into LiPs in private family law cases shows the reason most often given for not having legal help or representation is cost. Researchers' recommendations include 'providing substitutes for a full legal service, including law centres, pro bono schemes, and unbundled and fixed price packages' (Trinder, 2015). Our pilot study has shown that a combination of high-quality self-help and unbundled expert legal advice from family law solicitors provides people, who would otherwise go without specialist advice, with much needed and timely support.

[Law for Life: the foundation for public legal education](#) is a national legal information and education charity that strives for social justice by legally empowering individuals and communities. We believe that everyone should be equipped with the knowledge, confidence and skills needed to deal with the law-related issues they encounter in their lives. They deliver innovative public legal education and information that tackles social injustice, empower others to use public legal education and information, and demonstrate the value of public legal education through research and policy work.

[Resolution](#) is a community of over 6,500 family justice professionals in England and Wales, who believe in a constructive, non-confrontational approach to family law matters. Resolution also campaigns for improvements to the family justice system. Resolution supports the professional development of those working in family justice through national

¹⁰ Erol Digiusto, "Effectiveness of public legal assistance services: A discussion paper", *Law and Justice Foundation of NSW Justice Issues* 2012, 16: 1
[http://www.lawfoundation.net.au/ljf/site/articleIDs/18C587ECBD959D50CA257D9D00021AAF/\\$file/JI_16_Effectiveness_paper_FINAL.pdf](http://www.lawfoundation.net.au/ljf/site/articleIDs/18C587ECBD959D50CA257D9D00021AAF/$file/JI_16_Effectiveness_paper_FINAL.pdf).

Lisa Wintersteiger et al, *The effectiveness of Public Legal Education Initiatives: a literature review*, London: Legal Services Board, 2021 <https://legalservicesboard.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/PLE-systematic-review-report-Feb-2021.pdf>

¹¹ Ministry of Justice. *Legal Support: the way ahead: An action plan to deliver better support to people experiencing legal problems*, London, Ministry of Justice, 2019: 27
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/777036/legal-support-the-way-ahead.pdf

¹² Gillian Douglas et al, *Improving access to justice by separating families*, London: JUSTICE, 2022
<https://files.justice.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/12154403/JUSTICE-Improving-Access-to-Justice-for-Separating-Families-October-2022.pdf>

and regional training opportunities, publications and good practice guides, and a specialist accreditation scheme. Resolution also trains and accredits mediators and is the only body providing training and support for collaborative lawyers in England and Wales.

Law for Life sought to meet Ministry of Justice delivery and research priorities through the delivery and testing of a range of public legal education and information initiatives with a focus of early intervention and targeted support in the context of social welfare and family law disputes. This report details research findings on the first year of Law for Life's Affordable Advice full service between July 2021 and June 2022, which confirms the continuing need for early intervention and the significant impact of the service on the outcomes and experiences of LiPs in the family courts.

2.1 About the Affordable Advice service

Law for Life and Resolution worked together to design a new service to enable LiPs to get the legal advice that they need from a panel of Resolution's solicitors. The service was developed to meet the needs of Litigants in Person (LiPs) who do not seek the advice they need because of fear, confusion about price and the high cost of advice. Many lack confidence about how to go about finding help, how to be sure they will pick a good solicitor, and how to be sure it will be worth it. There is also an absence of services in England and Wales that offer low-cost unbundled family law advice that are tailored to the needs of Advicenow service users. By unbundling, we mean the separation of legal services into parts or tasks that can be shared between the service user and the legal service provider.¹³

The Affordable Advice Service offers low-cost, unbundled family law advice tailored to the needs of LiPs. These are people who are otherwise dealing with a case themselves or who might previously have been able to secure accessible legal information online via Advicenow's in-depth guides, but without subsequent access to expert legal advice. Key features of the service are:

- advice is offered for a fixed fee and at a low cost – where the costs are clear;
- advice dovetails seamlessly with Advicenow's guides for LiPs managing their own case;
- LiPs fill in a questionnaire on their situation before the appointment, reducing the time needed by the solicitor; and

¹³ There has been some research into the perceptions and experiences of unbundled legal services over recent years including:

Legal Services Consumer Panel, *Qualitative research exploring experiences and perceptions of unbundled legal services*, London: Ipsos MORI, August 2015:

https://www.legalservicesconsumerpanel.org.uk/publications/research_and_reports/documents/Unbundling_2015_000.pdf

Solicitors Regulation Authority *Unbundled services pilot: final report*, June 2023:

<https://www.sra.org.uk/sra/research-publications/unbundled-services-pilot/>

- information on the advice is provided in a way that enables users to feel confident about exactly what help they will receive.

LiPs access Affordable Advice via one of the [four Advicenow guides included in the service](#), through which they have the opportunity to receive tailored expert legal advice at the most crucial points as they read through the content. These points have been called ‘jumping off points’ and are linked to points in the Advicenow guide in which getting further individual advice might be particularly beneficial, e.g., reviewing a draft consent order. If they are interested in arranging an appointment with a solicitor, they are taken through the following process:

- The call-out box explains what the appointment covers and how much it costs. If they would like to find out more, they are taken to a page where they can then select a panel member and request an appointment.
- The LiP is then asked to complete a detailed questionnaire, tailored to the specific appointment, and provide it to the lawyer in advance of their meeting. This gives the lawyer all the details about the client’s personal circumstances that they need to provide the advice - reducing the time needed in the appointment, thereby keeping costs down for the LiP.
- After having received legal advice, the LiP is then encouraged to return to the step-by-step guide to support them in their journey. They can choose to return to the same or a different solicitor if they require another appointment on a different ‘jumping off point’.
- Alternatively, they can choose to instruct the solicitor to deal with the problem for them.

2.2 Aims of the research

Many people in England and Wales lack the legal capability to prevent common legal problems from escalating, causing unnecessary litigation and compounding disadvantage¹⁴. Law for Life’s research for over a decade has shown that public legal education and information has the potential to tackle low levels of knowledge, skills and confidence amongst LiPs¹⁵. These difficulties faced by LiPs have been particularly exacerbated by

¹⁴ Pascoe Pleasence, Nigel J. Balmer and Catrina Denvir, *How people understand and interact with the law*, Cambridge: The Legal Education Foundation, 2015: 168
<https://research.thelegaleducationfoundation.org/research-learning/funded-research/how-people-understand-and-interact-with-the-law>

¹⁵ Lisa Wintersteiger, *Legal needs, legal capability and the role of Public Legal Education*, London: Law for Life and The Legal Education Foundation, 2015
<https://www.advicenow.org.uk/sites/default/files/uploads/Legal-needs-Legal-capability-and-the-role-of-Public-Legal-Education.pdf>

complex and rapidly changing legal rules, processes and diminishing legal support, creating more barriers to accessing justice.¹⁶

The core grant objective set out under the programme sought to:

- enhance services that support the earliest possible interventions for LiPs, reducing the risk of their problems escalating;
- develop understanding of how and when LiPs access different services, to help ensure that services are designed around the people who need to use them; and,
- contribute to building an evidence base of what works and what doesn't.

Through this strand of research and evaluation work, Law for Life also sought to:

- enhance understanding of the effectiveness of the Affordable Advice service's digital pathway to low cost, fixed-fee legal advice, and
- analyse the effectiveness of the processes that were established to enhance data collection where appropriate, to help understand how and why certain effects are being achieved.

Research questions

The research aimed to deal with two overarching questions assessing the impact of the service interventions as well as the processes through which the services were delivered. A cluster of impact related questions aim to draw out these core issues:

1. What difference has the intervention made?

This cluster of impact related questions seeks to understand the following:

- Who did the service reach? What are the demographic characteristics? To what extent did the programme reach its target population?
- Did service users increase their awareness and understanding of their legal issue and legal processes relating to it?
- Were service users able to use the information provided to identify and pursue a problem resolution strategy?

¹⁶ Pascoe Pleasence, Nigel J. Balmer and Catrina Denvir, *How people understand and interact with the law*, Cambridge: The Legal Education Foundation, 2015

<https://research.thelegaleducationfoundation.org/research-learning/funded-research/how-people-understand-and-interact-with-the-law>.

See also: Pascoe Pleasence and Nigel J. Balmer, *How people resolve legal problems* Cambridge: Legal Services Board, 2014 <https://legalservicesboard.org.uk/research/reports/how-people-resolve-legal-problems>

Legal Services Board and The Law Society, *Online Survey of individuals' handling of legal issues in England and Wales 2019* <https://legalservicesboard.org.uk/online-survey-of-individuals-handling-of-legal-issues-in-england-and-wales-2019>

- Did users avoid negative socio-economic outcomes, e.g., loss of income or health impacts?
- To what extent have different groups been impacted in different ways, how and why?

2. What can be learned from how the intervention was delivered?

- Were there any unexpected or unintended issues in the delivery? What facilitated delivery and what were the barriers? How did external factors influence the delivery?
- What worked well, or less well, for whom and why? How satisfied were users with the services?
- What could be improved? Are any changes needed before further expansion?

A further element sought to understand the interrelationship between legal capability and digital capability including which groups face barriers to accessing justice services, in particular through new forms of digital delivery.

This research report focuses on year 1 findings between the period July 1st 2021 - June 30th 2022.

[2.3 Research methodology](#)

In order to evaluate outcomes from an intervention, in general, quantitative methods which deploy suitable sample sizes and measure effects against a control group are the most rigorous approach to reliable attribution of cause and effect. On the other hand, finding out how an effect is achieved can often be better evidenced through qualitative studies and through process evaluations. In dealing with the two inter-related impact and process research questions that we have identified, we have deployed mixed methodologies that helps us to gather a contextualised body of data, through both quantitative and qualitative design. The sample size at this stage of the service was small. This includes the use of Google Analytics data, which provides data about service usage and some limited demographic data; online surveys and semi-structured interviews of service users (online or by telephone). Due to the small sample size at the start of the service it was not possible to identify a control group.

The Affordable Advice service had a 'soft' launch in December 2019, so we have included data collected from that point. The official launch took place in February 2020, just prior to the first Covid 19 national lockdown in March 2020. The period covered by the Pilot Study Report ran from February 2020 to July 2021 (extended due to the impacts of the Covid 19). A range of evaluation methods were used: user surveys sent out via email; contacts monitored through the website; records of appointments by lawyer panellists; periodic reviews with Resolution project partners and lawyer panellists; and a series of semi-

structured interviews with panellists at the end of the pilot period. The survey questions comprised closed questions and free text boxes to ask if there was anything else (about the fee, service, solicitor etc.) that the respondent would like to share. The pilot report providing initial findings can be found [here](#). Key data from the previous pilot will be drawn on where it serves to contextualise or provide comparatives to the current reporting year data in this report.

For the period covered by this report, Google Analytics was used to conduct an analysis of the use of the relevant family guides on Advicenow and requests for appointments with a panel lawyer through the Affordable Advice service. This also provided limited demographic data on age and gender.

LiPs who requested a panel lawyer were sent a survey by email, which asked about user satisfaction, legal capability, user reach and service affordability.

In Year 1 of the project, panel lawyers were asked to continue to collect basic demographic data and details for those Affordable Advice users who attended appointments, including gender, age, nationality, monthly income, and income status. This reflected the data they would normally collect for the purposes of legal aid as part of their case management records. In future, the aim is to include ethnicity and disability data, in line with the HMCTS commitment to collecting and reporting data on protected characteristics.¹⁷

Semi-structured interviews were conducted online or via telephone with a small sample of service users who had attended appointments with panel lawyers. This facilitated more detailed exploration of questions about why they used the service, its impact on their legal capabilities and outcomes, and how the service contributed to their emotional readiness and reduced the stress of the process of divorce or separation.

3. Affordable Advice Service Findings

3.1 Take up: How many people did the service reach and who were they?

The Affordable Advice Service attracted 154,804 pageviews in 106,740 sessions between 1st July 2021 and 30th June 2022. 328 people requested an appointment with a family lawyer (on average 27 contacts per month). Of these, 143 attended appointments with lawyers during the research period. This represents a 67% increase in overall appointment request

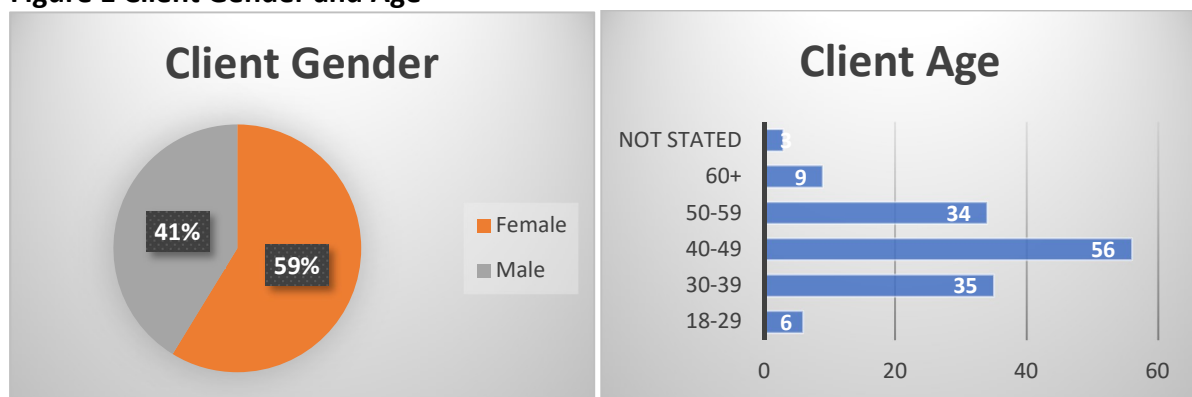
¹⁷ HMCTS *Data in the Courts and Tribunals System: HMCTS Update Report December 2021* London: HMCTS, 2021 4

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1038714/HMCTS_Data_Update_December_2021.pdf

from the pilot period, an 88% increase in individual requests¹⁸ and 127% increase in appointments held.

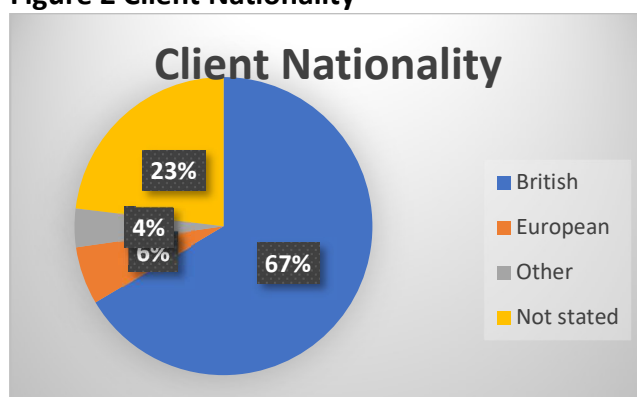
Increases in the conversion from contact to appointment may be because users were able to leave 'star rated' reviews of the service from Spring 2021, demonstrating confidence in the service and satisfaction with appointments. Search Engine Optimization was also deployed to increase the visibility of the service's webpage in Google, so people were more likely to find it. However, the number of pageviews for the four guides in the scope of the research had decreased by 18% since 2020/21 and the number of sessions had reduced by 27% from the previous year, which may relate to the increased amount of law firms advertising their services online.

Figure 1 Client Gender and Age



The service was more likely to be accessed by women (59%) between the ages of 40-49 (39%). The oldest client was 78 and the youngest was 26. For full comparison data with the Pilot Study, see Appendix 3.

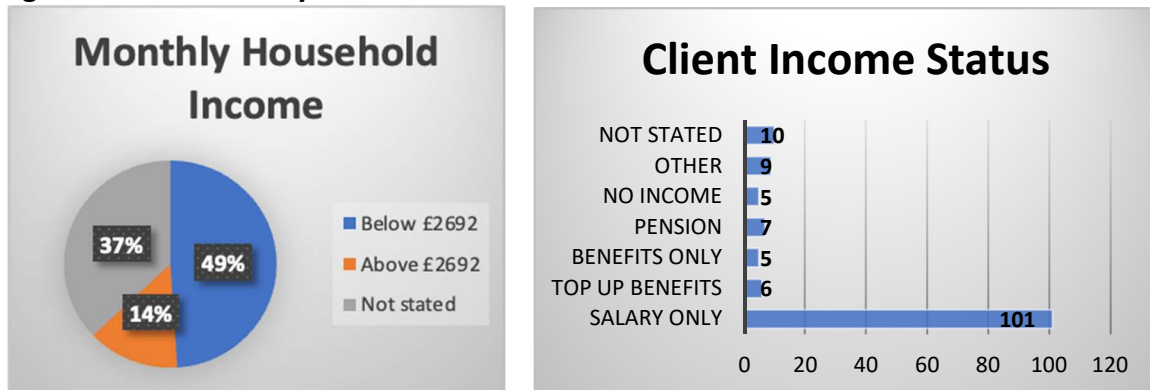
Figure 2 Client Nationality



¹⁸ LiPs were able to submit requests to more than one solicitor, to ensure a speedy and efficient response. When analysed to exclude multiple requests, the number of individual requests for appointments was 231. The reduced attendance to 143 appointments in the period may be attributable to a delay between appointment request and attendance or a more general rate of attrition for people deciding that they may no longer need the appointment or experiencing a change of circumstances.

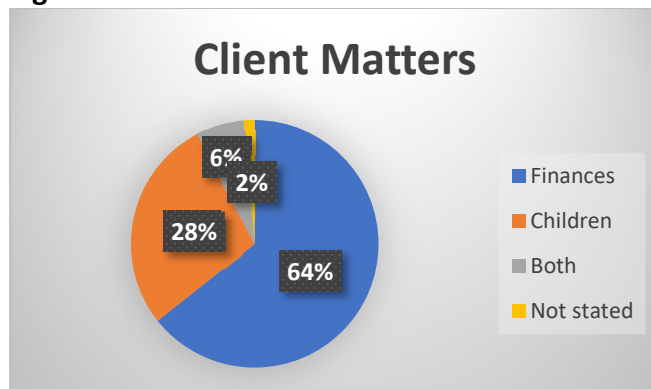
Panel lawyers ordinarily collect nationality data as an aspect of legal aid eligibility, so this data set was available, but further work to include ethnicity data sets needs to be agreed. The nationality data has been grouped into 4 categories: British, European, Other or Not stated. The vast majority (66%) of clients were British, although 23% did not state their nationality.

Figure 3 Client Monthly Income and Income status



49% of clients had a monthly income below £2692 (average UK median income), although 38% did not disclose their income. 71% were on a salary only, compared to other sources of income such as benefits, top up benefits (Universal Credit) or no income.

Figure 4 Client Matters



Panel lawyers noted whether Affordable Advice clients sought advice relating to the financial aspects of their divorce, making arrangements for children, or both (see Appendix 2). The majority of clients attended an appointment to get advice on the financial aspects of their divorce, although over a quarter needed help with child arrangements.

3.2 User survey

Our user surveys sought to understand how satisfied users were with the service. The survey also sought to identify whether service users felt their levels of legal capability had

improved as a consequence of accessing the service and whether it had enabled them to use the advice provided to identify and pursue a problem resolution strategy. Users were also asked whether they would have sought advice without the service, and whether it was affordable. Although this was self-assessed data, it triangulates with the assessment made by panel lawyers in the [Pilot Study](#).

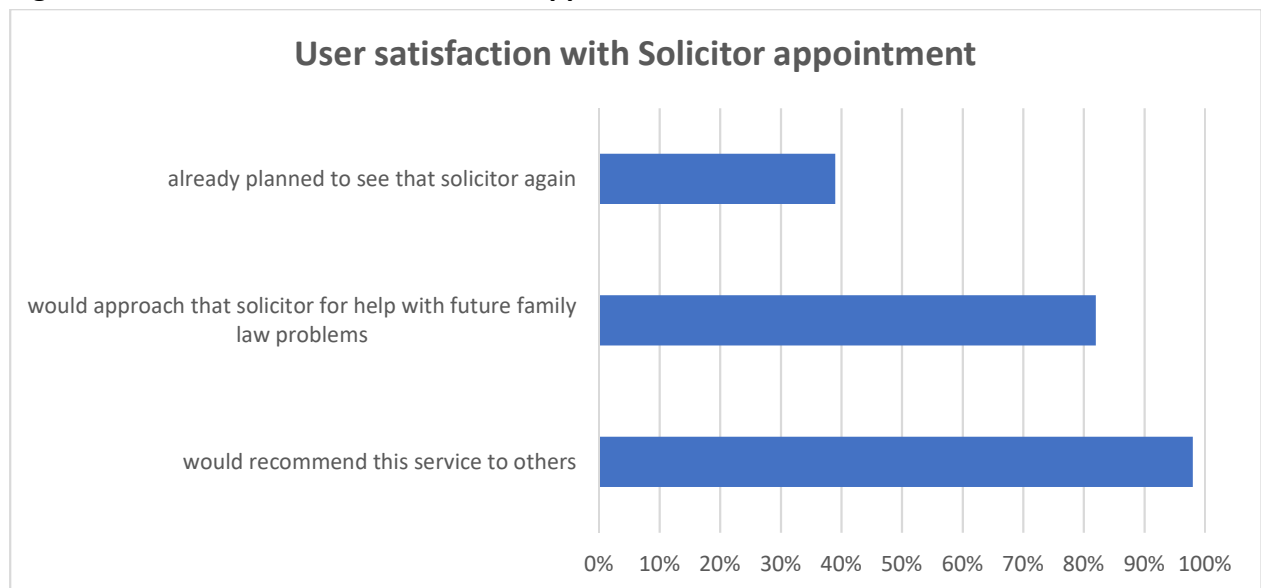
For user survey questions, see Appendix 4.

User satisfaction

When asked whether they had attended an appointment with a panel solicitor, 83% said that they had. Of those who had had a solicitor’s appointment through Affordable Advice:

- 98% said they would recommend this service to others
- 82% said they would approach that solicitor for help with future family law problems
- 39% said they already planned to see that solicitor again

Figure 5 User satisfaction with solicitor appointment



User quote

It provided clarity and context on many matters. Filling in the form that was provided helped form many of the questions I needed to be asking. The Advicenow booklet was also incredibly helpful.

Pricing and affordability

Advicenow users who made contact through the service (not just those who had an appointment) were also asked how they felt about the level of fee charged:

- 50% said they felt it was very good value

- 25% said it was good value
- 13% said it was about right
- 12% said it was still too expensive

When asked whether they could have afforded to pay more for the service:

- 75% said that they could not have afforded any more, and
- 25% said they could have paid a little more.

User quote

I think that the fee was more than just very good – it was amazing, and I was so relieved to know the amount I paid since I have no savings and have quite a lot of financial difficulties in this time in my life.

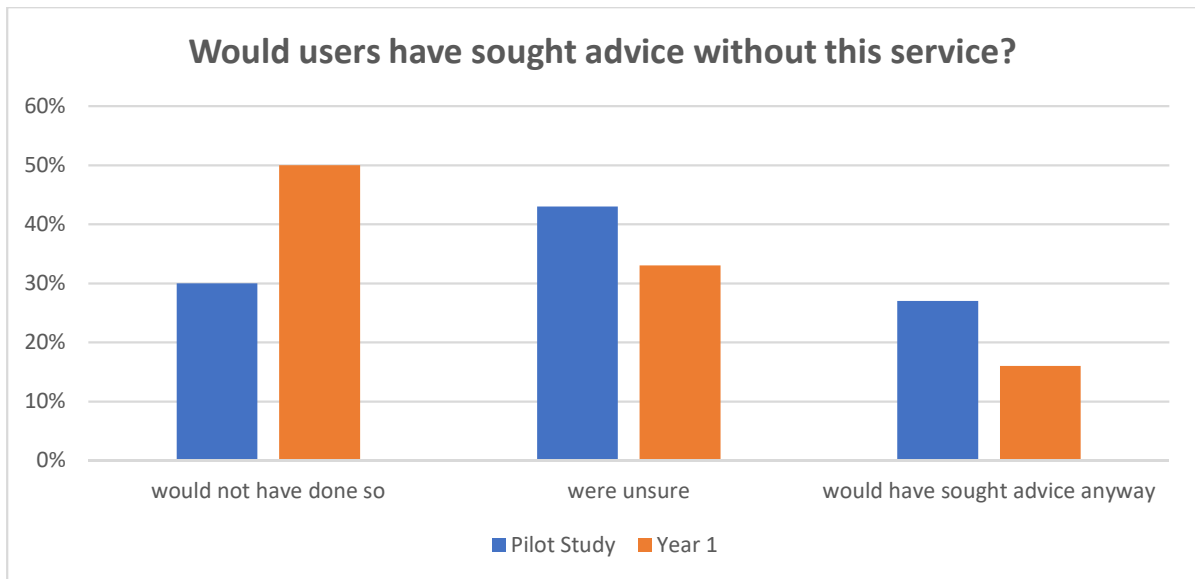
User reach

Evidence from online user surveys in Year 1 (supported by comments by interviews of users and panel solicitors – see 3.3) suggests that the project is continuing to meet the needs of a key group of under-served LiPs who need expert advice but are unable to afford a full family solicitor service.

When asked whether they would have sought advice without this service:

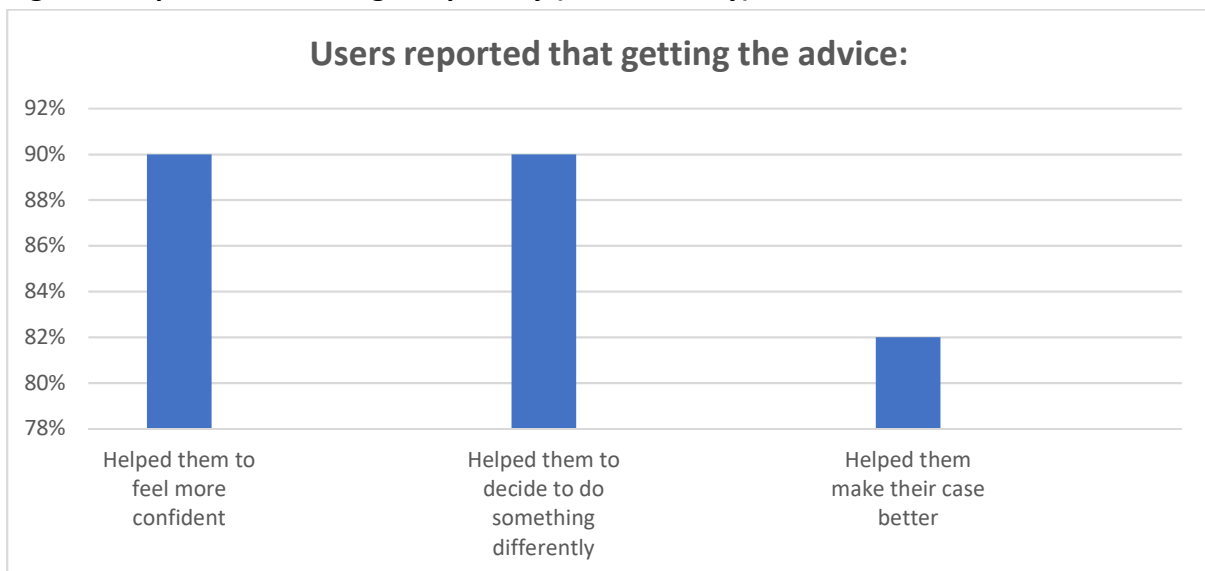
- 50% of respondents said that they would not have done so (an increase from 30% during the pilot period)
- 33% of respondents were unsure (a decrease from 43% in the pilot period)
- 16% of respondents said they would have sought advice (a decrease from 27% during the pilot period)

Figure 6 Would users have sought advice without the service (online survey)



Legal capability

Figure 7 Impact on users’ legal capability (online survey)



User feedback was sought to assess whether there was an increase in the awareness or understanding of the legal issue or process. In Year 1, we asked LiPs to complete a brief online survey, to help us to gauge whether there was any change in their understanding of legal capability. We asked whether, in their self-assessment, the advice given helped them to feel more confident or helped them decide to do something differently, and whether it had reduced their stress, or helped them better resolve their divorce. The responses show that the Affordable Advice service had a very positive impact on their legal capability.

3.3 Affordable Advice Service interview study

Semi-structured interviews were conducted in June 2022 via video call or telephone with 15 people who had used the service between December 2019 and August 2021 (to allow time for them to have made substantial progress in or complete their divorce cases). Users were recruited from those who requested details of panel solicitors in the scheme and offered a £30 e-gift card as compensation for their time.

Participants were sent an information sheet explaining how their personal details would be kept confidential and how their comments would be recorded and used. They were also asked to complete and return an online consent form. This is kept on the staff shared drive to comply with GDPR. Interviews were recorded using an automated transcription service and transcripts are kept on the staff shared drive, having had all identifying details removed. Participants were offered a copy of the transcript and the opportunity to amend any details.

The interview schedule can be found in Appendix 5.

3.4 Analysis of responses

1. How did you find out about Advicenow and the Affordable Advice service?

- Most service users found the service via Google, although one was referred by a mediation service and another by a friend. Virtually all interviewees recommended that a link to the service should be more widely available on relevant websites, e.g., on HMCTS Divorce Service Centre or Citizens Advice.

2. Why did you decide to use the service?

- Most interviewees were seeking help and support to pursue a divorce but stated that they were unable to instruct a solicitor because they could not afford it. Many feared that the cost would be prohibitive, particularly because their spouse was not being co-operative and was obstructing or prolonging the case.

3. At what stage were you in your divorce when you used the Advicenow guides and/or appointment with the solicitor? At what stage are you now?

- Most interviewees were at a comparatively early stage in their divorce case when they first used Affordable Advice, but had concluded the case, or were close to doing so by the time they were interviewed. The average time cases took to complete was approximately 2 years. However, some took considerably longer: one interviewee had been involved in protracted negotiations about financial arrangements for 6 years, having first separated in 2006. Her final hearing took place 2 weeks after the interview. Another is still in the middle of his case after 4 years.

4. Which of the Advicenow guides on divorce did you use?

How helpful did you find the guides? What was unhelpful or missing if anything?

- All interviewees had used the Survival guide to divorce or dissolution of a civil partnership; most had also consulted the Survival guide to sorting out your finances

when getting divorced; a few reported using the How to apply for a financial order without a lawyer.

- All interviewees reported that the guides were extremely helpful and supportive to them as LiPs because they were comprehensive, trustworthy, and accessible, and gave real world examples that they could relate to their case. Many commented that the guides helped them to successfully navigate through the process.
- 4 interviewees mentioned that they would have found a consent order template extremely useful.
- 3 were unaware of the Survival guide to pensions on divorce (which was first published in January 2021) but said they would have found it very helpful to their case.

User quote

It was like my textbook, if I'm honest with you, I put post-its all over it. Because I just felt like I used it as a go-to and actually I referenced it in court proceedings. And I asked directly to the judges and things I said, 'Well, I've read that I can do this.' Or if they're to do with bundle preparation, I cited it and said, 'Well, we're both litigants in person' or 'How is this working? Do we need to do a bundle?' So it was helpful for me to have that as a reference.

User quote

Well, the thing is, it breaks down the process for you, you're blinded by all of this because you just go for a lifetime thinking that this is not going to happen to you. And when all of a sudden it does, you haven't got a clue and you kind of feel blinded by it all and it is quite overwhelming and stuff and you know, there's so much you've got to take in and still some of it I did find a bit like, it was over my head but a lot of it was pretty straightforward. So, it does give you a good understanding or a good basis to know where you're starting and what the next steps are and what you're going to be expected to do and stuff like this.

5. When did you decide you might need expert advice rather than dealing with your particular issue yourself?

- Most interviewees stated that they sought unbundled advice from a panel solicitor because their circumstances lay outside those mentioned in the guides, to help them address a specific point in their case, or to provide reassurance that they were pursuing the case correctly. This included checking draft consent orders.

- The majority of interviewees could not afford to instruct a solicitor but recognised that they did not feel able to proceed without some legal advice.

User quote

Again, though, when you're speaking in sort of legal terminology, even when you're trying to simplify it, it is a bit frightening for those of us who have never spoken to a solicitor before in our lives. And so that was what led me to eventually decide that I needed a solicitor, just to some degree.

6. How easy was it to book an appointment with one of the panel solicitors? Were you able to arrange an appointment quickly? Did you attend the appointment? If not, was there a particular reason?

- All interviewees reported that the process of selecting and booking appointments with a panel solicitor was very easy and straightforward and the majority were able to arrange an appointment via video call or telephone within 2 weeks.
- All attended the appointment.

7. Which aspect of the process did you want advice from the solicitor on?

- Most interviewees only sought advice on financial arrangements; several specified that they needed help with obtaining a financial order.
- One interviewee sought advice on both child and financial arrangements.
- Several interviewees sought reassurance that they had a case, and it was worth going through the courts.

User quote

But I kind of realised while I'm doing that, that although I think I could get sort of 80% there, just for sort of assurance that I had done the correct thing, I thought it would be best to make an appointment with one of the team, just to kind of give me that assurance that I was doing it correctly. And that I had the right information in there, that it wasn't going to be rejected by the system. So it was just that sort of peace.

8. How helpful did you find the solicitor's advice? Were they able to answer all your questions on that aspect of your separation/divorce? What else could they have said/done to help?

- The majority of interviewees found the solicitor's advice to be very helpful, and in some cases, significantly improved their outcomes, e.g., one interviewee secured an increase in their share of the proceeds from selling the family house from 25% to 75%.
- Although the service was intended primarily for LiPs to access legal advice on a specific aspect of their case, several interviewees stated that they had built a rapport with the panel solicitor and a few returned to them for further appointments and a few had instructed the solicitor to complete a specific task not covered by Affordable Advice, e.g., drafting a consent order.
- In two cases, the solicitor was able to identify serious issues, such as potential coercive control or domestic abuse, and support those LiPs through the process of divorce in a way that online guidance would not be able to do.
- Some interviewees stated they would have liked a clearer option to obtain further advice from the panel solicitor under the Affordable Advice scheme, on a different aspect of their case. Some solicitors offered a 'social responsibility rate' for specific services outside the remit of Affordable Advice, e.g., writing consent orders, which enabled users to access that service for a reduced fee.

9. How would you describe your emotional state at the time of your appointment with the Affordable Advice solicitor? Did you feel you were ready to deal with the divorce process at that point? How did the Affordable Advice service help with that readiness? How else could the service have helped?

- Most interviewees reported that they found the divorce process mentally and emotionally draining, often exacerbated by having to represent themselves and negotiate with their ex-spouse.
- Several reported that the guides and the solicitor's appointment helped them cope better with the process, as it created a clear structure for them to follow that was outside the emotions generated by the case. Many found the panel solicitor to be supportive and encouraging as well as helpful in assisting them with their case.
- Most of the interviewees expressed frustration at the complexity of the court process and language, and the paucity of affordable legal advice available for LiPs.

User quote

I was very anxious. Distressed, I would say confused, frustrated that there's so little information for ordinary people to just explain the process. You know, I was looking for information just to let me know what the process could be like. And there seems to be such a reluctance to explain it, because solicitors want you to pay for their services, obviously. But that really wasn't what I was looking for. I was just looking for, you know, what kind of what are the steps I can expect to go through? And [the panel solicitor] was really good with that because she did really well.

10. How did the service help you decide what action you needed to take next (or when not to take action)? Did you feel able to return for more advice from the solicitor?

- Most interviewees reported that the combination of the guides and solicitor's advice helped them decide what to do next and gave them the impetus to follow it through.
- In one case, the interviewee and her husband decided to reconcile before proceeding to divorce, as a result of the advice provided by the guides and solicitor, and space to reflect on their situation.
- One interviewee reported that the solicitor's advice to hire a Direct Access barrister to represent her at hearings resulted in a financial outcome that turned significantly in her favour, which she was unlikely to have obtained if she had represented herself. A different interviewee was not advised to do this and said she felt overwhelmed by her ex-husband's barrister and settled for less than she felt she was entitled to. Interviewees expressed an increase in the level of empowerment in the context where power imbalances played out in the matter – for example:

User quote

To be honest, it helped me deal with the situation at the time. So I knew that I didn't have to give him the money because the account was in my name. And although I didn't feel comfortable with holding it, I knew that I was legally right to do that sort of thing, so I knew that I wasn't going against the law. So in that respect, yeah. That was good. And that made me stand up to him about the rest of it.

11. How did the Guides and solicitor's advice affect your confidence? How else could the service have helped? Would you have been able to access legal advice without the solicitor's appointment?

- The majority of interviewees reported that using the guides and solicitor's advice had increased their confidence in representing themselves in court and that they had been able to negotiate a better financial settlement as a result of the Affordable Advice service.

- Some acknowledged that they would have been able to access legal advice without the service, most were not in a financial position to do so and might have obtained a poorer outcome.
- In one or two cases, the solicitor was able to support an interviewee who was in a vulnerable situation and encourage them to take control of their case.

12. How did the Affordable Advice service help you understand the court processes and procedures? Did it help support you as a Litigant in Person in the court? What, if anything, would have helped support you better?

- Most interviewees reported that they obtained a clearer understanding and knowledge of court processes and procedures from the guides and the solicitor's appointment.
- One mentioned that she had found the video on the Advicenow website about representing yourself in the family court really helpful.

User quote

Yeah, I think it was in terms of knowing what was going to happen at the hearing and the longer-term process of you know, we got the first things initially, I think you think, oh, yeah, I'm going to court and that'll be done. But when you read through the guides, and again, okay, there's a longer view and I kind of read the guide initially. So I had an idea, and it was kind of each chapter that was relevant. I used it as my working document and the stage I was at, so I finished one stage, right now on to the next chapter.

13. What was the outcome of your case? Was that an outcome you were satisfied with? If not, what was the reason? What were you hoping would be the outcome? What difference did the advice you received in the Advicenow guides and/or solicitor's appointment make to your financial settlement (if at all)?

- All but two LiPs interviewed had secured outcomes and, in all cases, they were satisfied with the outcome of their case and the advice and support they had received through Affordable Advice.
- Two interviewees had not reached the conclusion of their cases but expressed satisfaction with the advice they had received from the Affordable Advice service thus far.
- In one case, the LiP decided not to proceed with the divorce as a result of the advice received from the panel solicitor.

- In some cases, interviewees reported that their financial outcomes had been significantly better than anticipated, as a direct result of the advice they received from the panel solicitor. One example of this was where the lawyer’s advice to hire a barrister resulted in the interviewee securing a financial outcome of three times the amount offered by their ex-spouse, which will enable them to start again with their children.

14. How has the solicitor’s appointment impacted on any stress caused by the divorce? Has it impacted on any conflict arising from the divorce? How else could the service have helped reduce any conflict?

- Many interviewees reported that the panel solicitor’s appointment went some way to reduce the stress cause by the divorce case, by offering tangible support and clear, structured advice.
- Several interviewees reported that just being listened to by a legal professional had a significant impact on their stress.
- In one case, the solicitor helped refer the interviewee to a mediator.

User quote

So actually, for me, personally, you know, my emotional state was quite good because finally I had someone to talk to, a professional. So I wasn't, you know, disheartened or anything like that I was actually quite enheartened, if that's a word, you know, that I was able to access a proper legal professional.

User quote

I actually remember more the second appointment with her where I was much more anxious and I needed to postpone it several times, until I was in a better state of mind to deal with it. She was very understanding and reassuring, and she didn't mind me kind of postponing the meeting a couple of times.

15. Are there any children involved in the divorce? How has the service affected the impact of the divorce on them? How else could the service have helped in this area?

- In most cases, the interviewees didn’t access legal advice about children because arrangements had either been agreed between the parents or resolved via a court hearing, with the help of CAFCASS or because the children were adults.

- Those interviewees with adult children reported that they sought advice on financial arrangements to safeguard the futures and stability of their children. In some cases, this was because the children were still living with them and their home was a key asset in the case; in others, the children had health conditions limiting their potential independence and this had implications for the financial aspects of the case.

User quote

I wanted to get things sorted for them because I felt like, you know, we had them and I don't care how old they are, they should still have a roof over their head. And that was my main thing. That although they're a certain age, it doesn't matter. I still need them to have a roof over their head. They didn't bring this on. It's not their fault. So, yeah, that was my concern as well.

User quote

My eldest daughter [aged 19] is autistic. So that's another thing that I like to bring up in court - she's got a disability, so she's gonna need additional care in terms of like, I can't just sell this house and live anywhere, as in somewhere where we're not basically.... she needs familiarity in her life.

3.5 Key Findings

Impact of the Affordable Advice service

Reach of the service

- The service reached people who were LiPs because they could not afford to instruct a solicitor to act for them but also those who were unsure of using professional legal advice because of the uncertainty of the final cost.
- Several interviewees mentioned that they were wary of engaging a lawyer because they feared that the cost would be prohibitive, particularly because their spouse was not being co-operative and was obstructing or prolonging the case.
- Service users interviewed also reported that their experience of appointments with panel solicitors had increased their trust in accessing legal advice.
- The service was used predominantly by females, and by people in the age group from 40-49. Most clients were British. 71% were on a salary, compared to other

sources of income such as benefits, and 49% earned below the average UK median monthly income of £2692 (although 38% did not disclose their income).

- The combined survey and interview data suggest that the service has mostly reached its target population in that most service users were unlikely to have sought legal advice elsewhere because of their financial situation.

Impact on LiPs' legal capabilities

- Most service users reported that they had increased their awareness and understanding of their legal issue and legal processes relating to it through the combination of the Advicenow guide and the solicitor's appointment.
- Many interviewees commented that the guides helped them to successfully navigate the process.
- Most interviewees reported that the combination of the guides and solicitor's advice helped them decide what to do next and gave them the impetus to follow it through.
- Most interviewees and survey respondents reported that using the service had increased their confidence in representing themselves in court and in negotiating a better settlement.

Impact on LiPs' socio-economic outcomes and health

- Most interviewees found the solicitor's advice to be very helpful, and in some cases, significantly improved their outcomes.
- Most interviewees reported that they found the divorce process mentally and emotionally draining, often exacerbated by having to represent themselves in court and negotiate with their ex-spouse. Several reported that the guides and the solicitor's appointment helped them cope better with the process, as it created a clear structure for them to follow that mitigated the emotions generated by the case. Many found the panel solicitor to be supportive and encouraging as well as helpful in assisting them with their case.
- Most of the interviewees expressed frustration at the complexity of the court process and language, and the paucity of affordable legal advice available for LiPs. They reported that using the guides and solicitor's appointments enabled them to understand complex legal terms and processes and make a better case.
- In two cases, the solicitor was able to identify serious issues, such as potential coercive control or domestic abuse, and support those LiPs through the process of divorce in a way that online guidance would not be able to do.

Impact on different groups

- The group reporting the most significant impact were those LiPs who were on lower incomes representing themselves against spouses who could afford to pay for legal advice. Affordable Advice levelled up the playing field by giving them access to high quality legal advice, particularly on financial arrangements, which made a difference to their financial outcomes. This links to equality before the law as an underpinning of the Rule of Law.
- Collecting data on specific demographic groups of Affordable Advice users relies predominantly on the panel solicitors, and in Year 1 this was limited to data they record as required by their case management systems. As a result, data on disability and ethnicity is not available, and data on nationality and monthly income depend on whether service users disclose it, e.g., 23% did not state their nationality and 38% didn't disclose their monthly income. This makes it more difficult to assess the impact on these groups.
- Interviewees were recruited via email from those who had requested an appointment, which resulted in fewer LiPs who had received unbundled advice about child arrangements coming forward for interview. Panel solicitor data indicates that 28% of service users attending appointments sought advice on child arrangements and 6% on both child and financial matters. However, the specific impact on this group was difficult to ascertain. This is because the sample of users interviewed was self-selecting, and fewer LiPs with an appointment for child arrangement issues were represented in the interview responses.

What can be learned from how the intervention was delivered?

Factors affecting service delivery

- The pandemic has encouraged individuals to seek legal advice and support online, which has changed the way they view that advice in a geographic sense – they are less likely to prioritise using solicitors based in their local area/region. This has implications for how Law for Life promotes its services to LiPs.
- As a result of the pandemic, all solicitor appointments were conducted via video call or telephone. Interviewees reported that this gave them more choice of solicitor and more flexibility in terms of arranging appointments.
- Early feedback from users led to the option for LiPs to contact more than one solicitor at a time, which improved response times - most users were able to arrange an appointment within 2 weeks.

- Users welcomed the development of a ‘Where do I stand?’ appointment, which enabled LiPs at an early stage in their legal journey to access advice on the legal process and helped inform them of how to proceed in their case.

Service user feedback

- Most LiPs surveyed were satisfied with their experience of the service and the way it was delivered and would recommend it to others.
- LiPs interviewed reported finding the Affordable Advice service to be high quality, value for money and extremely effective, in comparison with the ‘free introductory appointments’ offered by some solicitors, which they said did not provide any real advice but were merely advertising services.
- Most users surveyed reported that they were happy with the service they had received from the panel solicitor and would use them again for help with future family law problems.

What could be improved?

- Some interviewees stated they would like the option to obtain further advice from panel solicitors through Affordable Advice scheme to be made clearer.
- Some service users mentioned that they would have found a consent order template extremely useful.
- Interviewees commented that the service should be given a higher profile on court and other government websites, as well as links being provided via other advice agencies.
- One interviewee suggested setting up a small fund to assist LiPs on very low incomes but not eligible for legal aid to access the unbundled advice aspect of the service. This would be means-tested and limited to one appointment.

3.6 User Case Studies

The experiences of three of the service users interviewed have been detailed here, to illustrate how the Affordable Advice service has had an impact on their legal journeys.

Case Study 1

Julie, a single parent working part time on a low income, divorced several years ago but couldn’t afford to deal with the financial settlement at that time. Her ex-husband expected her to use his child maintenance payment to pay for the mortgage and utilities costs on the

family home, even though she still had some of their children living there, one of whom is vulnerable. She eventually decided to take her ex-husband to court. She initially used a solicitor but had a bad experience, so she found Advicenow's guides on divorce via Google. She couldn't afford to pay for the extended guide on 'How to apply for a financial order without the help of a lawyer', so Law for Life provided it free of charge:

"Whereas the credibility of Advicenow, the fact that they sent me the guide free, remember, it was quite clear that they were a lot more committed to helping people that really needed help, but couldn't necessarily access legal help. And also, I was quite clear from what they said that you are getting like, I'm not being rude, but like a really top-notch lawyer, but they were doing it at a very, very reduced rate. So for me that's better than going down a road like I did last time and getting crappy advice."

After using the guide, Julie realised she needed specific legal advice and asked for an Affordable Advice appointment. At her first appointment, she expressed how stressed she was by the situation:

"Well I burst into tears on the phone to her, I remember that. I was telling her. Because. I remember I said to her, 'look, my ex-husband's very...it's basically like financial abuse', I said 'you know, he's making me pay maintenance for the mortgage. My kids need to have a roof'. I said, 'he doesn't do anything extra for my kids. I ask him for things, he'll say no'. And yeah, just uh, yeah, I started crying. So yeah, my emotions were definitely all over the place."

The Affordable Advice panel lawyer advised her that she had a good case and should go to court, but that she would need to engage a Direct Access Barrister to represent her at the hearings to ensure that she had the best chance of obtaining a fair outcome (her ex-husband was able to afford representation for himself). She managed to borrow money to do so and the panel lawyer helped her instruct a good barrister to make her case within her very limited budget. She still had to prepare the bundle and negotiate with her ex-husband outside court and the case took over 2 years:

"I had a brilliant Direct Barrister (as advised by the solicitor, I knew nothing about Direct Access barristers until she explained) and she literally guided me through over 15 months of tough times... You know, I can email her now and again and ask her stuff and like the case is coming up in two and a half weeks now. I'm having to prepare a bundle, which is very stressful as you can imagine, but I'm getting there. I'm getting it done. And I've had to hire her again at a cost of - and she actually discounted it for me. That's a ridiculous idea. First of all, it was supposed to be £5600. Well, now I thought 'oh my god, I can't afford that'. And then she just, I don't know, she spoke to the clerk and the bill has been pared down at £4200."

At the final hearing, Julie's barrister persuaded Julie's ex-husband to settle for 25% of the joint assets (he had initially insisted on 75%). This will enable Julie and her children to move forward and start afresh.

“The catalyst to me battling for 2.5 years with a Covid-ridden court system which has pretty much collapsed at the Family Court was my advice from [the panel solicitor] – you [panel solicitor] were quite clear that [my husband] not meeting his mortgage liability and commitment for 13 years was not right...and this was the catalyst that spurred me on.”

Case Study 2

Patricia was a parent of a child who had separated from her husband and was concerned around his contact with their child. She sought guidance about that and financial matters relating to the divorce. She was referred by a family member to the link to Advicenow on the Cafcass website and used the ‘Survival guide to sorting out your finances when you get divorced’ and ‘Sorting out child arrangements’. She requested an appointment with one of the panel solicitors:

“And there didn't seem to be any other services that offered that and I think I kind of felt like between the gaps because, you know, there's this coercive control and other issues and some of the things that she spoke to me about was kind of the expectations from a legal standpoint about resilience with children, about keeping myself safe, about the kinds of arrangements that would be acceptable, and I don't really know where else you would get that information. So I think that's helpful for people to know that that is something that you can offer.”

The solicitor gave Patricia advice on managing her husband’s contact with their child:

“I would say it was a bit of a game changer for me really. It went from feeling that I was not in control of the situation and quite, you know, I was distressed, I was quite sort of anxious and frightened about what I should be doing. But the advice she gave me allowed me to take control of the situation and put things in place which actually safeguarded me - I think I felt so afraid of him, that I wasn't thinking clearly.”

Patricia was also concerned about financial matters relating to the divorce, as her husband had gambling issues:

“So one of the things that she told me to do for example was to get a valuation on my property so that when it came to divorcing, it made it easier because he could see that I had very little equity in the property, but he was less likely to pursue it and that strategy worked and it just made life so much easier.”

The solicitor also gave Patricia advice about the legal processes involved that enabled her to make key decisions about her situation and decide not to go to court to get a consent order:

“I was really quite terrified that I was going to lose my house and lose everything. And although she explained the way that the law worked, she helped me understand that if I did certain things that was quite unlikely. So although some of the answers may not have been black and white, it gave me all the information that I needed to

get the outcome I wanted.... I think at the time, I thought I needed to have this order. But that aside, yes, I got the outcome that I needed, but I just didn't need the order. That's the difference. It's never going to be a perfect situation. But I got my divorce. I got to keep my home, and, you know, I got the confidence that I needed to put in safety measures.”

The Affordable Advice service also reduced her stress in her situation and increased her confidence:

“It just gave me less stress because I suppose the processes were explained it took away some of the mystery and the anxiety if you like, and it just showed me what I needed to do. And it wasn't as hard as I'd imagined. And I think as well if you're making decisions if you've had qualified for this to tell you how the land lies, I feel a lot more confident in kind of taking action really and do what you need to do.”

Patricia was working, but said she couldn't have afforded to pay for legal advice, and would not have been eligible for legal aid:

“And the other thing as well, is I think it's such a good service, I kind of feel like not enough people know about it. And I think that's something that could help a lot of people because it's such a big gap, like you don't really get legal aid very easily do you, except for certain types of situations or certain incomes.

Case Study 3

Lesley was separated from her husband when they agreed to start divorce proceedings. Her husband had a solicitor, but she couldn't afford one and was trying to fill in the Form E (Financial statement for a financial order):

“I was just searching online for information about filling out the financial form (the form E) and I was desperate for information and it was so hard to find any because no one wants to give you any actual advice in case they become sort of liable for anything and so I actually found your Advicenow through that, and I could see that there was a guide available, and so had a look through the guide. And even though it was really well written and really helpful. I still felt a bit out of my depth and that was what kind of led me to get the initial interview with the solicitor at a reduced price. And the other reason was I'd spoken to some solicitors who said they give a free half hour but actually I didn't find it helpful at all.”

Lesley spoke to a panel solicitor who was able to give her information and explain the legal processes and language:

“She was amazing with absolutely everything. She was really helpful... When you're speaking in legal terminology, even when you're trying to simplify it, it is a bit

frightening for those of us who have never spoken to a solicitor before in our lives. And so that was what led me to eventually decide that I needed a solicitor.”

Lesley’s husband said she was delaying the divorce, so she decided to go back to the panel solicitor’s firm and engage a solicitor, which she’d been unwilling to do before:

“And I’m glad I did. Because I feel it made a difference to my husband. He was a bit taken aback because I couldn’t afford one so bless him, my dad paid for it. And just having a solicitor made a big difference... the solicitors I’d contacted for their so called ‘free half hour’ seemed to assume that I knew how it all worked. And I had no idea. I didn’t realise that you open a file and then things you know... you put a deposit down...nobody explained the process to me. And that would have been really helpful. Because I’d never had a solicitor so didn’t understand. I thought you got the first free half hour and then you could pay for advice as you got it. Which now I look at it is naive. I didn’t know.”

The information and advice that Lesley accessed through the Affordable Advice service helped mitigate some of the stress she experienced in her situation:

“I was very anxious. Distressed, I would say confused, frustrated that there’s so little information for ordinary people to just explain the process. You know, I was looking for information just to let me know what the process could be like. And there seems to be such a reluctance to explain it, because solicitors want you to pay for their services, obviously. But that really wasn’t what I was looking for. I was just looking for, you know, what kind of what are the steps I can expect to go through? And [the panel solicitor] was really good with that because she did really well.”

Having access to an experienced family lawyer through the Affordable Advice service also helped Lesley deal with her husband’s behaviour towards her:

“I spoke to a mediator that was put forward by my husband’s solicitor, and I was literally in tears in that initial appointment, and I realised I couldn’t go on with it because I could see that my husband would be able to immediately fool her into thinking he was a thoughtful, kind person. She didn’t ask any safeguarding questions, you know, when I was crying, when I said, ‘Do I have to see him?’ because it would have been online. She said ‘No, but we find it useful because you can gauge you know, how he’s accepting, you know, how he’s reacting, and he can gauge how you’re reacting’. I thought that’s incredibly unhelpful in this situation because he’s very manipulative. So, I did not go ahead with mediation, because I felt that he didn’t want the company I wanted because they were too expensive. This person, I felt, did not understand the sort of nuances of somebody who can be very manipulative. So I

think that's, you know, the fact that somebody could be dealing with someone who ostensibly looks great, but actually isn't, is something to bear in mind. And I do feel like [panel solicitor] really did that. I kind of gave her a couple of hints. Obviously, it wasn't something we focused on because I wanted all the legal information, but I kind of led...and also the second solicitor eventually really understood what I was trying to say that this person is not someone who has the capacity to feel sorry for me or to want the best for me.”

Affordable Advice enabled Lesley and her husband to come to an agreement on the financial settlement of their divorce:

“I got the house. He got the pension. My children have somewhere to live until they are ready to leave like the other three have. And you know, our situations are not easy. The disappointing thing throughout it all, sort of on a personal level has been that whereas I have come to terms with what's happened between us, the fact that we were very young, things were not great, our relationship was not okay, but neither of us realised. The outcome legally has been really good.”

4. Conclusions

The Affordable Advice service was developed to enable individuals seeking a divorce who cannot afford to pay for representation in the family courts to access high quality legal information and advice at an affordable price.

The research indicates that the service is meeting that need and that the demand for the service is increasing:

- 67% increase in the number of appointments requested by LiPs
- 88% increase in the number of individual LiPs requesting appointments
- 127% increase in the number of appointments held with panel lawyers

Affordable Advice enabled LiPs to get unbundled advice at a substantially reduced fixed fee, (a 70% reduction on average) and service users reported that it gave them a level of control over their costs.

Affordable Advice service users clearly identified that there was a gap in the provision of low-cost legal advice in this area of law. They also stated that information about the Affordable Advice service should be provided to LiPs in the family courts via the government's Get a Divorce online advice hub, as well as by other related organisations.

Most of the Affordable Advice users were from low-income, working households who were not eligible for legal aid but would not have been able to afford legal advice otherwise. The group reporting the most significant impact were those LiPs who were on lower incomes representing themselves against spouses who could afford to pay for legal advice.

Affordable Advice levelled up the playing field by giving them access to high quality legal advice, particularly on financial arrangements, which made a difference to their financial outcomes. This gives them more equality before the law and underpins the Rule of Law.

Users were extremely satisfied with the service – 98% said they would recommend it to others. 75% considered the service to be good or very good value, but 75% said they could not have afforded to pay more. Most of those interviewed said they could not afford to instruct a solicitor but recognised that they did not feel able to proceed without some legal advice, particularly because their spouse was not being co-operative and was obstructing or prolonging the case. The implications of this are significant for the present court system in that this will contribute to the current backlogs in the family court.

Affordable Advice users reported that the combination of Advicenow guides and access to an experienced solicitor increased their understanding of the complex legal processes and terminology they encountered in the courts and had helped them to make an informed decision on what action to take. This has implications for the provision of more advice and support at an early stage in the divorce process, as identified in the recent JUSTICE report.¹⁹ Affordable Advice had a significant impact on the legal capabilities of LiPs, increasing their confidence and knowledge, which gave them the impetus to take action and move their case forward, sometimes reducing the need to go to court.

Most interviewees reported that they found the divorce process mentally and emotionally draining, often exacerbated by having to represent themselves and negotiate with their ex-spouse. Users said that the Affordable Advice service helped mitigate the stress of going through a divorce as a LiP, because of increased knowledge about the process but also because of the understanding and support from the panel lawyer they saw, and the opportunity to be heard by a legal professional.

Some Affordable Advice users reported substantially improved financial outcomes (one interviewee secured an increase in their share of the proceeds from selling the family house from 25% to 75% because of taking the panel solicitor's advice to engage a Direct Access Barrister for the court hearings).

Some LiPs interviewed also indicated that access to an experienced family lawyer helped identify and provide professional advice and support to individuals at risk of domestic violence, abuse, and coercive control. This has significant implications for current court procedures that provide minimal safeguards for LiPs in this situation, as identified by the Ministry of Justice's Harm Panel Report in 2020.²⁰

¹⁹ Gillian Douglas et al, *Improving access to justice by separating families*, London: JUSTICE, 2022: 56 <https://files.justice.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/12154403/JUSTICE-Improving-Access-to-Justice-for-Separating-Families-October-2022.pdf>

²⁰ Rosemary Hunter, Mandy Burton and Liz Trinder, *Assessing Risk of Harm to Children and Parents in Private Law Children Cases*, London: Ministry of Justice, 2020 (the "MOJ Harm Panel Report")

The research provides insights into the changing landscape of legal advice provision after the Covid-19 pandemic, in that LiPs valued the flexibility of being able to access solicitor appointments remotely, via telephone or video call, and that this gave them the opportunity to use a solicitor from outside their immediate geographic location.

The research also highlighted the paucity of demographic data available about LiPs in the family courts, such as disabilities and ethnic background. This would provide vital insights into their characteristics and potential vulnerabilities and show where the gaps in the provision of advice and support lie.

This research shows the continuing value and significance of the Affordable Advice service for those LiPs on low incomes, enabling them to move their case forward in the family court and to improve the outcomes for themselves and their families. By embedding detailed evaluation of the impact of the service on the legal capabilities of service users, Affordable Advice also adds to our knowledge of the experiences of LiPs in the family courts and informs future service development to improve the quality of that experience.

5. Recommendations

Ministry of Justice/HMCTS

- 1) Public funding could increase access to the service by low-income LiPs. Clients meeting clear income-based criteria could have some or all the fee subsidised without financially disadvantaging panel solicitors.
- 2) To increase traffic to the Affordable Advice service, there should be links throughout the Get a Divorce process on GOV.UK and the new Prototype Citizen Hub flagging help from the earliest possible opportunity.
- 3) Awareness of the Affordable Advice service and its relevance to those sorting out arrangements for children needs to be raised by more prominent links on the Cafcass websites, Cafcass letters to families, the Notice of hearing, and family mediation websites.
- 4) Further research is needed into the impact of domestic violence and abuse (DVA) and coercive control on LiPs going through divorce and child arrangements cases in the family court, and the contribution that can be made by experienced panel solicitors to help.
- 5) The provision of wider national demographic data on those involved in cases in the family court is needed to better address the early legal needs of LiPs as

<https://consult.justice.gov.uk/digital-communications/assessing-harm-private-family-law-proceedings/results/assessing-risk-harm-children-parents-pl-childrens-cases-report.pdf>

recommended in the Justice Report 'Improving Access to Justice for Separating Families'.²¹

Law for Life and Resolution

- 1) The service should be scaled up to meet demand, with wider, targeted promotion and an increase in the recruitment of panel solicitors able to provide high quality legal advice.
- 2) Additional infrastructure funding should be sought to enable the further development of the service, to provide administration and support to clients and solicitors, and to promote the service to potential service users.
- 3) A mechanism for providing public funding assistance for low-income LiPs to access unbundled advice is required. Clients meeting clear income-based criteria would have some or all the fee subsidised without financially disadvantaging panel solicitors.
- 4) Further research is needed into demographics including disability and ethnicity. Further longitudinal research is required into whether the service reduces conflict and improves emotional preparedness. Links between service use and mediation also need further research.
- 5) Better support for creating legally binding agreements on finances, known as consent orders, is needed. LawTech funding for a Consent Order Tool should be sought as a priority, as identified by service users.
- 6) Panel solicitors should have a level of knowledge and expertise commensurate to the complexity of divorce cases and have had experience of working with clients who have experienced domestic violence and abuse.

²¹ Gillian Douglas et al, *Improving access to justice by separating families*, London: JUSTICE, 2022
<https://files.justice.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/12154403/JUSTICE-Improving-Access-to-Justice-for-Separating-Families-October-2022.pdf>

6. Appendices

Appendix 1. Advicenow pageview statistics 1st July 2021 – 30th June 2022

The Affordable Advice service is housed by Advicenow. Over the last year Advicenow attracted 3,462,317 pageviews.

PROTECTED CHARACTERISTICS: Advicenow		Number
1. AGE (data from Google Analytics)	18 - 24	84,119
	25 - 34	130,806
	35 - 44	97,497
	45 - 54	79,579
	55 - 64	54,948
	65 +	41,051
2. AGE (data from self-reporting survey on Advicenow)	Under 16	0
	16-24	1
	25-34	15
	35-44	34
	45-54	71
	55-64	82
	65-74	24
3. GENDER (data from Google Analytics)	Male	235,791
	Female	279,982
4. GENDER (data from self-reporting survey on Advicenow)	Male	82
	Female	152
	Non-binary	2
	Prefer not to say	11

5. DISABILITY (data from self-reporting survey on Advicenow)	Yes	83
	No	142
	Prefer not to say	20
ECONOMIC INEQUALITY		
1. HOUSEHOLD INCOME less than £1,540 [£1,110 up to Q3] per month (after tax)? (data from self-reporting survey on Advicenow)	Yes	79
	No	68
	Prefer not to say	9

Appendix 2. Affordable Advice Jumping Off Points

Please be aware that in order for the appointments to work and for the client to get all the advice described for the price described, the client has to have read the guide up to the section where they see the option of getting advice on that area. We have called these ‘jumping off points’ as they are points when the client can ‘jump off’ from the self-help information to access advice on how the law applies to their specific case.

[A survival guide to sorting out child arrangements](#)

Both the PDF and webpages are available for free for this guide. Printed copies can be purchased.

Number of Jumping Off Point	Title	Page # in PDF	Section number in free HTML version
0	Find out where you stand https://www.advicenow.org.uk/child-agreement-0	14	6
1	What and how to negotiate with your ex https://www.advicenow.org.uk/child-agreement-1	17 (left)	8

2	How to respond to your ex's suggestions https://www.advicenow.org.uk/child-agreement-2	17 (right)	9
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[How to apply for a court order about the arrangements for your children without the help of a lawyer](#)

Standard version is free to read online. Extended version can be purchased either as digital download or printed version.

Number of Jumping Off Point	Title	Page # in PDF	Section number in free HTML version
0	Find out where you stand https://www.advicenow.org.uk/children-0	p8	4
1	How and what to negotiate with your ex to avoid court https://www.advicenow.org.uk/content/how-negotiate-your-ex-avoid-court www.advicenow.org.uk/children-1	P12 (left)	5
2	How to respond to your ex's offer https://www.advicenow.org.uk/content/how-respond-your-ex-s-offer https://www.advicenow.org.uk/children-2	P12 (right)	6
3	How and when to prepare your application for a court order https://www.advicenow.org.uk/content/how-and-when-prepare-your-application-court-order	p26	10

	www.advicenow.org.uk/children-3		
4	Urgent hearings and help to draft pre-action letter https://www.advicenow.org.uk/content/urgent-hearings-and-help-draft-pre-action-letter www.advicenow.org.uk/children-4	p27	11
5	What to do next when you receive an application about your children https://www.advicenow.org.uk/content/what-do-next-when-you-receive-application-about-your-children www.advicenow.org.uk/children-5	p32	12
6	How to work well with Cafcass https://www.advicenow.org.uk/content/how-work-well-cafcass www.advicenow.org.uk/children-6	p36	13
7	How to prepare for the First Hearing Dispute Resolution Appointment https://www.advicenow.org.uk/how-prepare-first-hearing-dispute-resolution-appointment www.advicenow.org.uk/children-7	p39	14
8	What evidence to prepare to support your case https://www.advicenow.org.uk/content/what-evidence-prepare-support-your-case www.advicenow.org.uk/children-8	P43 (left)	16

9	<p>How to prepare for the Dispute Resolution Appointment</p> <p>https://www.advicenow.org.uk/content/how-prepare-dispute-resolution-appointment</p> <p>www.advicenow.org.uk/children-9</p>	P43 (right)	15
10	<p>How to prepare for the final hearing</p> <p>https://www.advicenow.org.uk/content/how-prepare-final-hearing</p> <p>www.advicenow.org.uk/children-10</p>	p46	17

[A survival guide to Sorting out your finances when you get divorced](#)

Both the PDF and webpages are available for free for this guide. Printed copies can be purchased.

Number of Jumping Off Point	Title	Page # in PDF	Section number in HTML
0	<p>Find out where you stand</p> <p>https://www.advicenow.org.uk/finances-0</p>	p9	2
1	<p>Reviewing a draft Consent Order</p> <p>https://www.advicenow.org.uk/content/reviewing-draft-consent-order</p> <p>www.advicenow.org.uk/finances-1</p>	p15	4
2	<p>Your ex's behaviour and how assets are divided</p> <p>https://www.advicenow.org.uk/content/might-your-ex-s-behaviour-affect-court-s-decision</p>	p20	5

	www.advicenow.org.uk/finances-2		
3	Clean break consent orders and maintenance https://www.advicenow.org.uk/content/clean-break-consent-orders-and-spousal-and-child-maintenance www.advicenow.org.uk/finances-3	p21	6
4	The family home if you own it https://www.advicenow.org.uk/content/family-home-if-you-own-it www.advicenow.org.uk/finances-4	p33	9
5	The family home if you rent it https://www.advicenow.org.uk/content/family-home-if-you-rent-it www.advicenow.org.uk/finances-5	p35	10

[How to apply for a Financial Order without the help of a lawyer](#)

Standard version is free to read online. Extended version can be purchased either as digital download or printed version.

Number of Jumping Off Point	Title	Page # in PDF	Section number in free HTML version
0	Find out where you stand https://www.advicenow.org.uk/financial-order-0	12	6
1	What financial order to apply for https://www.advicenow.org.uk/content/what-financial-order-apply www.advicenow.org.uk/financial-order-1	18	6

2	<p>Sorting things out through negotiation</p> <p>https://www.advicenow.org.uk/content/sorting-things-out-through-negotiation</p> <p>www.advicenow.org.uk/financial-order-2</p>	21	7
3	<p>Reviewing a draft Consent Order</p> <p>https://www.advicenow.org.uk/content/reviewing-draft-consent-order-0</p> <p>www.advicenow.org.uk/financial-order-3</p>	22	8
4	<p>Practicalities</p> <p>https://www.advicenow.org.uk/content/practicalities</p> <p>www.advicenow.org.uk/financial-order-4</p>	32	11
5	<p>Applying for a financial order - how to start process</p> <p>https://www.advicenow.org.uk/content/applying-financial-order-how-start-process</p> <p>www.advicenow.org.uk/financial-order-5</p>	34	12
6	<p>How to provide your financial information /Form E</p> <p>https://www.advicenow.org.uk/content/how-provide-your-financial-informationform-e</p> <p>www.advicenow.org.uk/financial-order-6</p>	57	13
6b	<p>Finalising Form E (Not offered on website. Only to be offered to clients seen for 6 if necessary)</p>		
7	<p>How to prepare for your First Directions Appointment / first hearing</p> <p>https://www.advicenow.org.uk/content/how-prepare-your-first-directions-appointmentfirst-hearing</p> <p>www.advicenow.org.uk/financial-order-7</p>	64	14
7b	<p>What to consider when answering your ex's questionnaire (Not offered on website. Only to be offered to clients seen for 7 if necessary)</p>		

8	<p>What to do after you have been to the First Directions Appointment / first hearing</p> <p>https://www.advicenow.org.uk/content/what-do-after-you-have-been-first-directions-appointment-first-hearing</p> <p>www.advicenow.org.uk/financial-order-8</p>	66	15
9	<p>How to prepare for the Financial Dispute Resolution hearing</p> <p>https://www.advicenow.org.uk/content/how-prepare-financial-dispute-resolution-hearing-fdr</p> <p>www.advicenow.org.uk/financial-order-9</p>	67	16
10	<p>How to negotiate and avoid a final hearing</p> <p>https://www.advicenow.org.uk/content/how-negotiate-and-avoid-final-hearing</p> <p>www.advicenow.org.uk/financial-order-10</p>	69	17
11	<p>How to prepare for your final hearing</p> <p>https://www.advicenow.org.uk/content/how-prepare-your-final-hearing</p> <p>www.advicenow.org.uk/financial-order-11</p>	75	18

Appendix 3. Affordable Advice take-up since Pilot Project

The Pilot Project lasted 19 months overall, from the soft launch in December 2019 to July 2021. However, to provide a comparison with the Pilot Project, the figures have been averaged over 12 months. Original figures in the Pilot Project study included data from July 2021, which has now been included in Year 1 statistics.

Affordable Advice Take-up	Number of contacts (appointment requests to lawyers)	Number of individual LiPs requesting appointments	Number of appointments with lawyers held
Pilot Project 12/2019 – 7/2021 (actual figures over 19 months)	311 (average of 16 per month)	195 (average of 10 per month)	99 (average of 5 per month)
Pilot Project 12/2019 – 6/2021 (averaged over 12 months)	196	123	63
Year 2 1/7/2021 - 30/6/2022 (actual figures)	328 (67% increase) (average of 27 per month = 69% increase)	231 (88% increase) (average of 19 per month – 90% increase)	143 (127% increase) (average of 12 per month = 130% increase)

Appendix 4. Questions for online survey Getting Advice from a solicitor on our panel

Q1 Did you go on to have an appointment with the solicitor on our panel?

Yes

No

Not yet

Q2 We have tried hard to make getting advice through the project more affordable, and the solicitors involved in the project have agreed to work for much lower fees than they would normally charge. Did you feel the fee was?

Very good value

Good value

About right

Still too expensive

Q3 Could you have afforded to pay any more?

Yes, a little more

No

Q4 Is there anything else you would like to tell us about the fee?

Q5 Did you feel that getting some expert advice on your case was

Extremely helpful

Very helpful

Moderately helpful

Not very helpful

Pointless

Q6 Do you feel that getting the advice:

Helped you to feel more confident

Helped you to decide to do something or do something differently

Reduced your stress

Helped you to make your case better

Q7 Did you, or do you intend to, get advice from the solicitor you saw again?

No, once

Yes, twice

Yes, three times or more

Yes, ongoing

Not sure

Q8 If you have further family law issues, would you approach that solicitor for their help again?

Yes

No

Not sure

Q9 Do you think you would have accessed legal advice if you hadn't used this service?

Yes

No

Don't know

Q10 Do you feel that getting advice helped you to get a better outcome?

Yes

No

Not applicable/Don't know yet

Q11 What was it that encouraged you to access it through us? (please choose all that apply)

Trust in Advicenow

Trust in Resolution

The fixed fee

The amount of the fee

That it was easy and convenient to ask for an appointment
That you could get the advice in person, by phone or via videoconference

Q12 Would you recommend this service to others?

Yes

No

Maybe

Q13 How easy or difficult was it to find the right advice appointment for where you are in your case?

Easy

A little tricky but OK

Difficult

Very difficult

Q14 Which guide are you using?

How to apply for a court order about the arrangements for your children without the help of a lawyer (go to Q15)

How to apply for a financial order without the help of a lawyer (Go to Q 16)

A survival guide to sorting out your finances when you get divorce (Go to Q 17)

A survival guide to sorting out arrangements for your children (Go to Q 18)

Q15 What did you get advice about? (How to apply for a court order about the arrangements for your children without the help of a lawyer)

Where you stand

How and what to negotiate with your ex to avoid court

How to respond to your ex's offer

How and when to prepare your application for a court order

Urgent hearings and help to draft pre-action letter

What to do next when you receive an application about your children

How to work well with Cafcass

How to prepare for the First Hearing Dispute Resolution Appointment or Dispute Resolution

Appointment How to prepare for the final hearing

Not sure

Q16 What did you get advice about? (How to apply for a financial order without the help of a lawyer)

Where you stand

What financial order(s) to apply for

Sorting things out by negotiation

Reviewing a draft Consent Order

Practicalities

Applying for a financial order

How to provide your financial information / help with Form E
How to prepare for your First Directions Appointment / first hearing
What to do after you have been to the First Directions Appointment / first hearing
How to prepare for the Financial Dispute Resolution hearing
How to negotiate and avoid a final hearing
How to prepare for your final hearing
Not sure

Q17 What did you get advice about? (How to apply for a financial order without the help of a lawyer)

Where you stand
Reviewing a draft Consent Order
Clean break consent orders and spousal and child maintenance
If your ex's behaviour might affect the court's decision
The family home if you own it
The family home if you rent it
Not sure

Q18 What did you get advice about? (A survival guide to sorting out arrangements for your children)

Where you stand
What and how to negotiate with your ex
How to respond to your ex's suggestion
Not sure

Q19 Is that because: (Please select all that apply)

You just changed your mind/didn't get round to it
You were put off by the form
You just didn't get round to it
You had second thoughts about whether you could afford it
You got advice about your case another way
The case ended/problem was resolved
The solicitor didn't get in touch with you
The solicitor could not offer you an appointment as soon as you would have liked
Other (please tell us more)

Q20 If you were advising a friend in the same position, would you advise them to use the service?

Yes
No
Maybe

Q21 What are your initial impressions of the service?

Positive
Negative

Neutral
Not sure

Q22 Is there anything about this service that puts you off?

Q23 If you were advising a friend in the same position, would you advise them to use the service?

Yes

No

Maybe

Q24 Is there anything else about this service or the way that it worked that you would like to share with us?

Appendix 5. Interview Schedule for Affordable Advice

Context	1. How did you find out about Advicenow and the Affordable Advice Service? Why did you decide to use the service?
Stage in divorce/separation	2. At what stage were you in your divorce/separation when you used the Advicenow guides and/or appointment with the solicitor? At what stage are you now?
Advicenow guides	3. Which of these Advicenow guides on divorce and separation did you use? How helpful did you find the guides? What was unhelpful or missing if anything?
Solicitor appointment	4. When did you decide you might need expert advice rather than dealing with your particular issue yourself?
	5. How easy was it to book an appointment with one of the panel solicitors? Were you able to arrange an appointment quickly? Did you attend the appointment? If not, was there a particular reason?
	6. Which aspect of the process did you want advice from the solicitor on? (broad categories/ jumping off points)
	7. How helpful did you find the solicitor's advice? Were they able to answer all your questions on that aspect of your separation/divorce? What else could they have said/done to help?
Emotional readiness	8. How would you describe your emotional state at the time of your appointment with the Affordable Advice solicitor? Did you feel you were ready to deal with the divorce/separation process at that point? How did the Affordable Advice service help with that readiness? How else could the service have helped?
Legal capabilities: Action	9. How did the service help you decide what action you needed to take next (or when not to take action)? Did you feel able to return for more advice from the solicitor?
Legal Capabilities: Confidence	10. How did the Guides and solicitor's advice affect your confidence? How else could the service have helped? Would you have been able to access legal advice without the solicitor's appointment?

Legal Capabilities: Knowledge	11. How did the Affordable Advice service help you understand the court processes and procedures? Did it help support you as a Litigant in Person in the court? What, if anything, would have helped support you better?
Outcomes	12. What was the outcome of your case? Was that an outcome you were satisfied with? If not, what was the reason? What were you hoping would be the outcome? What difference did the advice you received in the Advicenow guides and/or solicitor's appointment make to your financial settlement (if at all)?
Impact on stress/conflict	13. How has the solicitor's appointment impacted on any stress caused by the divorce/separation? Has it impacted on any conflict arising from the divorce/separation? How else could the service have helped reduce any conflict?
Impact on children	14. Are there any children involved in the divorce? How has the service affected the impact of the divorce on them? How else could the service have helped in this area?
Anything else?	15. Is there anything else you would like to say about the Affordable Advice service – the guides and/or the solicitor's appointment?