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## 9.6 Ensuring access to justice

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Access to justice is an essential part of a free society and a functioning legal system. In this Parliament we have had to make significant savings from the Legal Aid budget, but in the next Parliament our priority for delivering efficiency in the Ministry of Justice should be prison and court reform, using technology and innovation to reduce costs.

We will:

- ♦ Review the criminal Legal Aid market and ensure there are no further savings without an impact assessment as to the viability of a competitive and diverse market of Legal Aid providers.
- ♦ Reduce pressure on the criminal Legal Aid budget by requiring company directors to take out insurance against prosecution for fraud and permitting the use of restrained assets to pay reasonable legal bills.
- ♦ Carry out an immediate review of civil Legal Aid, judicial review and court fees, in consultation with the judiciary, to ensure Legal Aid is available to all those who need it, that those of modest means can bring applications for judicial review of allegedly unlawful government action and that court and tribunal fees will not put justice beyond the reach of those who seek it. This will mean reversing any recent rises in up-front court fees that make justice unaffordable for many, and instead spreading the fee burden more fairly.
- ♦ Retain access to recoverable success fees and insurance premiums in asbestosis claims and where an individual is suing the police; and also for both claimant and defendant in publication and data protection claims, except where one party is significantly better resourced than the other.
- ♦ Promote the use of alternative buildings for magistrates' courts and local dispute resolution programmes like Community Justice Panels to bring justice back into the community.
- ♦ Support innovation like the provision of civil justice online and expansion of alternative dispute resolution procedures.
- ♦ Encourage the widespread use of mediation for separating couples, while protecting access to the family courts where necessary
- ♦ Develop a strategy that will deliver advice and legal support to help people with everyday problems like personal debt and social welfare issues, working across government and involving non-profit advice agencies.