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# ***From Disparity to Fairness: Enhancing Legal Access in Newham (2024) - Executive Summary***

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**BY FIELDFISHER, THE PUBLIC LAW PROJECT, MP SIR  
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# THE KEY ISSUES IN NEWHAM

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The report was produced by Fieldfisher LLP and the Public Law Project on behalf of a Newham-based Steering Group led by the local MP Sir Stephen Timms. The report made the following key findings:

- **Advice Organisation Issues** - Newham advice organisations responding to a survey stated that the top categories of issue they advise on are housing and homelessness, welfare and benefits, and immigration.
- **Comparison to the UK and London** - Newham has a higher demand for immigration and housing advice than the rest of London and the UK. This is in line with public data, which points towards large migrant populations and high levels of deprivation and homelessness within Newham.
- **Key Categories of Caseworker Issues** - From our observations, legal issues, particularly those relating to housing and immigration, dominate constituent appointments. Out of 111 legal issues observed, 47% were housing-related and 17% were immigration-related. The main issues were the allocation of social housing (29% of housing issues), homelessness (24% of housing issues), citizenship (27% of immigration issues), and visa issues (20% of immigration issues).

# AVAILABILITY OF LEGAL ADVICE

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- **Services in Newham** - A preliminary survey of local advice organisations tallied the number of organisations providing advice. Welfare and Benefits advice is the most significant in the borough (24%), closely followed by Housing and Homelessness (22%) and then Immigration (17%).
- **Cost-of-Living Crisis Impact** - The cost-of-living crisis has exacerbated difficulties in affording essentials like food and housing. Citizens Advice witnessed a record demand for crisis support in January 2024, with ethnic minorities being disproportionately affected.
- **Caseworker Experiences** - 77% of the issues presented at constituent appointments were of a legal nature. All caseworkers interviewed stated they had concerns about the availability of free or affordable legal services in the area.
- **Advice Organisations** - When asked, 90% of responding advice organisations stated that they cannot meet the demand for legal advice, with 70% stating "a lot of help is needed". No organisation reported being able to easily meet this demand. Whilst the provision of advice in housing and homelessness and immigration is much higher in Newham than in other areas of law, advice organisations are still unable to meet demand.

# REFERRALS IN NEWHAM

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- **Referral Rates** - There are high referral rates in Newham, with nearly 50% of organisations "very often" referring cases. Most referrals are "signpost" referrals, where no work is carried out prior to referral, likely due to a lack of capacity. Some organisations are hesitant to refer because of the strain on other local advice providers.
- **Low Uptake** - Our research indicates a low uptake of referrals in Newham, likely due to a lack of capacity. One advice organisation commented on the inability for complex cases to be dealt with appropriately, indicating a potential service gap. Low uptake rates lead to "referral fatigue", where individuals stop seeking help after going between multiple organisations.
- **Confidence in Referrals** - Confidence from advice organisations in the referral process is low. Caseworkers rely on charities and organisations for complex cases but are concerned about their capacity. There is poor communication and awareness of capacity between organisations and caseworkers, which means that referrals are likely not going to the correct place.