

POLICY NOTE

THE LEGAL AID (MISCELLANEOUS AMENDMENT) (SCOTLAND) REGULATIONS 2024

SSI 2024/XXX

The above instrument was made in exercise of the powers conferred by sections 28C(3), 33(2)(a) and (3)(a), (b) and (f) of the Legal Aid (Scotland) Act 1986. The instrument is subject to affirmative procedure.

Purpose of the instrument.

This instrument makes provision to (i) provide for an uplift to counsel accommodation allowances, (ii) introduce counsel fees for written submissions when these are required by the court, and (iii) provide for automatic legal aid to be available to young people where a pre-hearing panel or children's hearing is considering whether or not to impose a Compulsory Supervision Order (CSO) with Movement Restriction Conditions (MRC).

EU Alignment Consideration

This instrument is not relevant to the Scottish Government's policy to maintain alignment with the EU.

Policy Objectives

Firstly, this instrument seeks to uplift the current counsel accommodation allowance.

Existing regulations provide that counsel who must travel to appear in cases may claim an accommodation allowance of £113.56. It has become apparent that in a number of instances this is insufficient for covering the costs of the hotel room. This SSI will raise the accommodation allowance to £125.14 for a hotel room and allow for the standard limit to be exceeded with prior approval of the Board. This will allow the Board the flexibility to approve hotel costs above the standard limit, although it is predicted that this would be a very rare occurrence.

Secondly, this instrument will introduce specific counsel fees for written submissions when these are required by the court. This SSI will amend the fee table to allow a fee of £350 for Junior Counsel and £500 for Senior Counsel (80% at Sheriff Court level) to be payable for criminal cases only where a written submission has been requested by the court *ex proprio motu*.

Finally, this instrument will provide for automatic legal aid to be available to young people where a pre-hearing panel or children's hearing is considering whether or not to impose a CSO with MRC. The Children (Care and Justice) (Scotland) Bill seeks to ensure that 16 and 17 year olds will not be sent to Young Offender's Institutions from 2024 onwards. In order to achieve this, it is likely that there will be an increased use of MRC. Legal aid is currently automatically available for children where a pre-hearing panel or children's hearing consider that it might be necessary to impose a CSO that will also include a Secure Accommodation

Authorisation (SAA), however it is not available where a CSO is considered alongside an MRC (in the absence of a SAA). This SSI amends the Legal Aid (Scotland) Act 1986 to ensure that automatic legal aid is available where a pre-hearing panel or children's hearing consider that it might be necessary to impose a CSO with an MRC.

Summary

This instrument provides for:

- Counsel accommodation allowances to be uplifted to from £113.56 to £125.14 with further allowance for the standard limit to be exceeded with prior approval of the Scottish Legal Aid Board if required.
- The introduction of counsel fees for written submissions when requested by the court of £350.00 for junior counsel proceedings in the High Court and £500.00 for senior counsel proceedings in the High Court (80% at Sheriff Court level).
- Automatic legal aid to be available for young people where a pre-hearing panel or children's hearing is considering whether or not to impose a CSO with MRC as set out in the Children (Care and Justice) (Scotland) Bill.

Consultation

No formal consultation has been conducted on these regulations, but the content is the result of extensive engagement with representatives of the Scottish Legal Aid Board and the Faculty of Advocates. Draft regulations have been shared with the Scottish Legal Aid Board, the Faculty of Advocates and Law Society of Scotland.

Impact Assessments

The following impact assessments were considered:

Child Rights & Wellbeing Impact Assessment – no negative impacts on children and young people.

Equality Impact Assessment – no negative impacts on groups with protected characteristics.

Business & Regulatory Impact Assessment – additional spend to the legal aid fund identified and a BRIA has been completed.

Fairer Scotland Duty – not required.

Strategic Environmental Assessment – not required.

Data Protection Impact assessment – not required.

Financial Effects

A Business and Regulatory Impact Assessment (BRIA) has been completed and is attached.

For financial impact:

SLAB has estimated that increasing the accommodation allowance will increase costs to the legal aid fund by not more than £25,000.

In terms of written submission fees, SLAB has estimated that this will cost will not exceed £10,000 per annum.

Finally, in respect of legal aid being made automatically available for pre-hearing panels or children's hearings where the imposition of a CSO with a MRC is considered, it is estimated that the number of these cases will be very low so the impact to the legal aid fund is likely to be negligible.

Scottish Government
Justice Directorate
February 2024