

Department of Justice Policy on Data Protection Impact Assessments

POLICY

October
2026

Record No.

DPIA Screening Template

Project Name: Legal Aid – A Simpler Fairer Approach to Means Testing

Business Area: Enabling Access to Justice

Information Asset Owner: Steven Allison

Date Completed: October 2026

Summary:

This is a review of an existing policy. The Enabling Access to Justice Reform Programme is a key priority for the Minister and is aimed at recalibrating the justice system to ensure delivery models aid the best possible outcomes, support efficient and effective resolution of disputes, reduce acrimony and stress, harness the benefits of technology and ensure the continued availability of expert advice and representation, particularly for the most vulnerable within civil society.

The reform opportunities within this policy will impact on how citizens apply for legal aid and the financial considerations and procedures adopted by LSANI in processing those applications.

The changes proposed will increase the number of people eligible for legal aid and therefore increase the amount of personal data retained by the LSA for their legitimate purposes.

Stakeholders:

Assisted parties: LSA has lawful reasons to hold and process personal data of individuals applying for and subsequently in receipt of legal aid - the personal data held does not impact on the financial eligibility proposals. There is, therefore, no impact upon the process of the personal data of assisted parties.

Legal representatives: The LSA has lawful reasons to hold and process personal data of legal representatives who deliver services through legal aid. The personal data held is not impacted by the changes within the reform of legal aid financial eligibility testing.

Nothing in the proposed changes alters how personal data, of recipients or providers of legal aid is processed.

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Description of Personal Data involved:

The proposals do not introduce any changes to the current arrangements in relation to the collection or processing of personal data.

While the Legal Services Agency Northern Ireland (LSANI) is responsible for collating and processing personal data for legal aid applications, the Department retains overall policy responsibility for legal aid. As such, the Department may require access to personal data relating to assisted persons for legitimate business purposes, in accordance with the UK GDPR and the Data Protection Act 2018.

Legal aid applications may involve the processing of special category personal data, including sensitive information relating to victims and survivors of domestic abuse. Such data is handled with the highest level of confidentiality and care, in accordance with Article 9 of the UK GDPR and the Data Protection Act 2018 and is processed only where necessary to support access to justice and safeguard the rights and wellbeing of the individuals concerned.

The Department collects and accesses personal data relating to assisted persons to fulfil its statutory and policy responsibilities in the administration and reform of legal aid. This includes using data to inform evidence-based decision-making, monitor service delivery, evaluate the effectiveness of legal aid schemes, and ensure that publicly funded legal services are fair, accessible, and responsive to the needs of individuals — particularly those who are vulnerable or facing disadvantage. All data processing is carried out in accordance with the UK GDPR and the Data Protection Act 2018.

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Privacy Assessment			
	Yes	No	Notes (please complete)
Information Management			
Change to existing policy, process or system that involves personal information (e.g. new legislation or policy that makes it compulsory to collect or disclose information)		No	The reform opportunities do not introduce changes to the methods by which personal information is collected, stored, or managed. Existing data handling practices remain in place, with no new systems or processes proposed that would alter the current approach to personal data management.
Change in location of business area or branch (e.g. move to centralised service, or office move)		No	The reform opportunities do not introduce changes to the methods by which personal information is collected, stored, or managed. Existing data handling practices remain in place, with no new systems or processes proposed that would alter the current approach to personal data management.
Identified as a risk on organisation's Risk Register		No	The reform opportunities do not introduce changes to the methods by which personal information is collected, stored, or managed. Existing data handling practices remain in place, with no new systems or processes proposed that would alter the current approach to personal data management.
Information Collection			
Collecting new information about individuals		No	While the reform opportunities do not introduce changes to the core methods by which personal information is collected, stored, or managed, they do include the proposed extension of legal aid eligibility to individuals with Special Educational Needs

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			(SEN). Any personal data associated with SEN will be processed using existing secure systems and in accordance with established data protection protocols, ensuring that sensitive information is handled lawfully, proportionately, and with appropriate safeguards under the UK GDPR.
Personal information collected in new way (e.g. move to online forms)		No	The reform opportunities do not introduce changes to the methods by which personal information is collected, stored, or managed. Existing data handling practices remain in place, with no new systems or processes proposed that would alter the current approach to personal data collection.
Storage, security & retention			
Change in how personal information is stored or secured (e.g. move to Cloud storage, offsite storage of paper records)		No	The reform opportunities do not introduce changes to the methods by which personal information is collected, stored, or managed. Existing data handling practices remain in place, with no new systems or processes proposed that would alter the current approach to the storage, security and retention of personal information.
Change on how sensitive information is managed (e.g. information migrated to new database)		No	The reform opportunities do not introduce changes to the methods by which personal information is collected, stored, or managed. Existing data handling practices remain in place, with no new systems or processes proposed that would alter the current approach to the

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			storage, security and retention of personal information.
Personal information transferred offshore (e.g. Cloud storage)		No	The reform opportunities do not introduce changes to the methods by which personal information is collected, stored, or managed. Existing data handling practices remain in place, with no new systems or processes proposed that would alter the current approach to the storage, security and retention of personal information.
Keeping personal data for longer than before (i.e. change to Retention & Disposal policy)		No	The reform opportunities do not introduce changes to the methods by which personal information is collected, stored, or managed. Existing data handling practices remain in place, with no new systems or processes proposed that would alter the current approach to the storage, security and retention of personal information.
Use & disclosure			
Personal information processed includes Sensitive data (e.g. health)		Yes	It is not the purpose of the reform programme to collect sensitive personal information. However, the Department acknowledges that there is potential for such data to be disclosed voluntarily by individuals—for example, an assisted person identifying themselves as a victim or survivor of domestic abuse during a public consultation. In such cases, any sensitive personal data will be handled in accordance with the UK GDPR, applying appropriate safeguards including data minimisation, secure storage, restricted

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			access, and clear protocols for onward sharing or retention.
Using previously collected personal data for new purpose		No	The reform opportunities do not introduce changes to the methods by which personal information is collected, stored, or managed. Existing data handling practices remain in place, with no new systems or processes proposed that would use previously collected personal data for a new purpose.
Disclosing information to a third party		No	The reform opportunities do not introduce changes to the methods by which personal information is collected, stored, or managed. Existing data handling practices remain in place, with no new systems or processes proposed that would alter the current approach to the disclosure of information to a third party.
Sharing or matching personal data held by different organisations or in different datasets (e.g. to provide services jointly)		No	The reform opportunities do not introduce changes to the methods by which personal information is collected, stored, or managed.
Individuals' access			
Change that results in people having less access to their personal data (e.g. earlier archiving)		No	The reform opportunities do not introduce changes to the methods by which personal information is collected, stored, or managed.
Identifying individuals			
Introducing a new way of identifying individuals (e.g. biometrics, or online authentication)		No	The reform opportunities do not introduce changes to the methods by which personal information is collected, stored, or managed.
New intrusions			

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Introducing new way to search people's property/ persons/ premises (e.g. new policy of searching laptops returned for servicing)		No	The reform opportunities do not introduce changes to the methods by which personal information is collected, stored, or managed.
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Surveillance/ monitoring of movements, behaviours or communications (e.g. new CCTV, monitoring email contents)		No	The reform opportunities do not introduce changes to the methods by which personal information is collected, stored, or managed.
Change to premises that could impact on privacy (e.g. moving sensitive process into open plan office)		No	The reform opportunities do not introduce changes to the methods by which personal information is collected, stored, or managed.
New regulatory requirement resulting in action against individuals (e.g. adding new medical condition to requirements for a licence)		No	The reform opportunities do not introduce changes to the methods by which personal information is collected, stored, or managed.
Other privacy intrusions (e.g. DNA swabs, body searches)		No	The reform opportunities do not introduce changes to the methods by which personal information is collected, stored, or managed.

Initial Risk Assessment		
Aspect	Level	Score
Volumes	Minimal personal data processed = 1	1
	Moderate volumes of personal data = 2	
	Significant volumes of personal data = 3	
Sensitivity	Not sensitive = 1	1
	Sensitive = 2	
	Highly sensitive = 3	
Change	Minor change to existing processing = 1	1
	Substantial change, or new processing = 2	
	Fundamental change, or radical new initiative = 3	
Third Parties	No interaction with other bodies = 1	1
	One or two other bodies = 2	
	Extensive interaction (multiple government bodies, or non-government bodies) = 3	
Impact	Minimal impact on business/ individuals = 1	1
	Possible concern to individuals, press or elected representatives = 2	

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	Major impact on individuals/ likely high degree of press/ political interest = 3	
Total		5

Total score of 5 or less	DPIA not required
Total score of 6 – 11	DPIA required
Total score of 12 – 15	Extensive DPIA required

DoJ DPO Advice provided	
Advice:	Date:
DoJ Information Asset Owner sign off	
Print name: Steven Allison	Date: 23/10/2026