

June 2024

## Recruitment of a Legal Assistant

Dear Applicant

Thank you very much for your interest in applying for the role of Legal Assistant at the Public Interest Law Centre. Since becoming independent in 2019, PILC has gone from strength to strength, registering as a charity in 2020 and gaining Lexcel accreditation the following year. We were awarded our first legal aid contracts in public law, claims against public authorities and housing in September 2023. We have grown by carefully expanding our strategic priorities. Our staff team is currently made up of seventeen colleagues, including eight solicitors. We are recruiting a Legal Assistant to provide administrative and legal support to PILC's Supervising Solicitor in Housing Law, who is an expert in Gypsy and Traveller Law.

In this pack you will find:

- Background information
- Role description
- Person specification
- Application form
- Equality & Diversity form

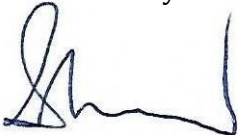
After reading the enclosed information should you have any further questions please visit our website or otherwise contact Dermot Morrow on 07727 609 682 or [dermot.morrow@pilc.org.uk](mailto:dermot.morrow@pilc.org.uk).

Make sure to address as many of the points listed in the person specification as you are able. If you need more space, please limit your personal statement to **no more than two additional supplementary pages**. Please do not send CVs as these are not considered. Your completed application form should be returned by email to [jobs@pilc.org.uk](mailto:jobs@pilc.org.uk).

The closing date for applications is **9am on Tuesday 9<sup>th</sup> July** and we anticipate holding interviews on Wednesday 17<sup>th</sup> July. We hope that the successful candidate will be available to join us from the beginning of September.

I wish you the very best of luck!

Yours sincerely



Dermot Morrow  
Operations Manager  
Encs.

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION



## PUBLIC LAW | HUMAN RIGHTS | LEGAL ACTION

The Public Interest Law Centre (PILC) was initially set up in 2016 as a project of Lambeth Law Centre and became independent in 2019. PILC has operated its own Legal Aid Contract since September 2023, enabling the Law Centre to act in Public Law, Claims against Public Authorities and Housing Law. PILC is registered as a Charitable Incorporated Organisation in England and Wales (No.1192355).

### **Mission**

The Public Interest Law Centre exists to challenge systemic injustice through legal education, strategic litigation, research and advocacy. We specialise in public law, actions against public authorities and public inquiries, bringing cases to court for individuals and grassroots groups who have been treated unfairly. We hold government and public bodies to account, challenging unlawful policies and practices. We see this work as vital in the context of austerity, Local Authority funding cuts, the expansion of the Hostile Environment and an increasingly authoritarian state. We will not rest until we see a fairer and more equal society.

### **Our Approach**

PILC is a legal organisation located at the grassroots. This is not a market choice: rather, it is where we come from and where we believe social change begins. This commitment forms the basis of our distinct identity as a Law Centre rooted in communities fighting for social justice.

We work in solidarity with people affected by systemic issues to build their power whilst highlighting their experience. Our priorities and the direction of our strategic litigation are set by these relationships. Strategy is formulated together with the individuals and groups we represent, whom we support through legal education to ensure that the process is transparent and meaningful throughout. Working this way implies a recognition that process and outcomes are not separate; we aim to integrate litigation within a broader movement for social justice.

We work in collaboration with grassroots groups, campaigns and frontline organisations through a legal hub model, building capacity through legal education and advocating through legal action in key priority areas: state accountability, housing and land, migrants' rights and racial justice.

## **Achievements & Activities**

PILC has achieved significant policy change through its litigation work: we quashed a Home Office policy detaining and removing EU nationals sleeping rough (2017), enabled settled migrants to access student finance (2018), prevented the sale of Southall Town Hall, an iconic building used by community groups (2018), forced the Home Office to provide destitute migrants on immigration bail a way to be supported (2019), ended Lambeth Council's deceitful housing scheme that pushed homeless families out of borough (2020), compelled government to release £76 million ring-fenced funding to the Violence Against Women & Girls sector during C-19 first lockdown (2020), successfully challenged LB Camden's use of mixed-gender accommodation for women escaping domestic abuse (2020) and LB Southwark housing allocations policy (2019 and 2022). In 2020-21, we also represented Ricky Tomlinson, Arthur Murray and Brian Williams (members of the Shrewsbury 24) in their Court of Appeal case, which saw their 47-year-old convictions quashed. In January 2024 with the support of PILC, campaigners against the demolition of the Aylesbury Estate won their Judicial Review claim in the High Court against Southwark Council and the developer Notting Hill Genesis. The victory recognised that developers working with local authorities cannot make 'drop-in' amendments to planning applications that go far beyond the scope of the original plans. We use civil claims to strategically secure justice for our clients.

PILC continues to represent a number of individuals and groups in the Undercover Policing Inquiry, including the Stop the War coalition and ex-members of the SWP. We have also been instructed to act as solicitors to the independent Inquiry into the collusion of Unite the Union officers or officials in the operation of blacklists in the construction industry. We have been instructed by a number of organisations in the Covid 19 Public Inquiry, where we are representing Southall Black Sisters, Solace Women's Aid, IWGB, UVW, Kanlungan, JCWI, Doctors of the World and Medact as Core Participants.

PILC also delivers its work through funded projects in key priority areas. These projects are not separate from PILC's legal representation and strategic litigation. In fact, they often provide additional resources to develop and maintain relationships with vulnerable individuals, grassroots groups and frontline organisations. They also enable us to deliver on some of the Legal Hub model which complement formal legal work, such as training, capacity-building and second-tier advice.

## **Our People**

PILC is co-led by Jean Demars (Director) who oversees strategic, operational and financial management and Paul Heron (Legal Director) who oversees legal matters, which includes Inquiries work, casework management, litigation strategy and Legal Aid contract management. He is supported by Helen Mowatt (Head of Legal Casework). Dermot Morrow (Operations Manager) completes the management team. PILC currently employs seventeen staff, including eight solicitors.

## **Gypsy and Traveller Law Project**

It is anticipated the new Legal Assistant will receive a full handover to the role by the incumbent, who leaves the position in early September to continue her progression towards becoming a barrister. This role will provide administrative and legal support to PILC's Supervising Solicitor in Housing Law, who is an expert in Gypsy and Traveller Law. Keith Coughtrie has represented Gypsies and Travellers for over 15 years and gained the trust and confidence of this underprivileged community alongside a formidable reputation. He is known for his tireless determination in high profile and smaller enforcement cases alike.

## **Legal Aid and funding**

Most of our legal work is funded by the Legal Aid Agency, though we also receive grant funding to enable our community lawyering approach and to fill the gap left by a broken public funding system. We were awarded our first contract with the Legal Aid Agency in September 2023, for matters in Public Law, Claims against Public Authorities and Housing Law. Prior to this we operated as an agent of Camden Community Law Centre, taking instructions under CCLC's Public Law and Claims against Public Authorities contracts. We retain a small number of legacy matters under this contract.

## **Quality Standards**

The Law Centre is accredited by the Law Society's Lexcel Quality Mark standard, and certified with the Cyber Essentials Plus scheme, providing PILC with protection against the most common cyber-attacks. A technical assessment for both standards is carried out on an annual basis.

## **Registrations and memberships**

PILC is registered with the Solicitors Regulation Authority and the Law Society. We are also a member of the Law Centres Network, AdviceUK and the Legal Aid Practitioners Group.

Doc Ref: 4.4  
JOB REFERENCE: PILC/4/2024



## ROLE DESCRIPTION

<b>JOB TITLE:</b>	Legal Assistant
<b>STARTING SALARY:</b>	£28,957 per annum (rising in annual increments)
<b>HOURS</b>	Full Time (35 hours per week)
<b>CONTRACT:</b>	Permanent
<b>BENEFITS:</b>	25 days holiday per year with 5% pension contribution
<b>LOCATION:</b>	Cambridge Heath E2 / Hybrid
<b>ACCOUNTABLE TO:</b>	Supervising Solicitor (Housing Law)
<b>DIRECT REPORTS:</b>	None
<b>PURPOSE:</b>	To support the Supervising Solicitor with administrative and legal assistance on PILC's Gypsies and Travellers Legal Advice project

### Introduction

The Public Interest Law Centre exists to challenge systemic injustice. We do this by holding government and public bodies to account and promoting access to justice for dispossessed and excluded groups. We work through legal representation, strategic litigation, research & advocacy and legal education.

The post holder will work at the direction of and under the supervision of PILC's Supervising Solicitor (Housing Law).

### About this role

There are around 300,000 Gypsies and Travellers in the United Kingdom, 100,000 of whom live in a caravan or other mobile structure, such as boat and van dwellers. Since the introduction of the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act (2022), there has also been an increase in enforcement action against nomadic ways of life without any balancing measures of support or provision. PILC's 'Gypsy and Traveller Legal Advice' project aims to defend and promote the rights of Gypsies and Travellers to pursue a nomadic way of life. We will mainly do this by way of legal representation in:

- Planning applications and appeals
- Evictions from rented/owned land
- Evictions from unauthorised encampments
- Possession proceedings
- Defending Injunction proceedings
- Mobile Home Act proceedings

**Please note:** the nature of PILC's litigation work may mean that longer hours may be required to be worked in particular weeks or at particular times. PILC has a flexible work hours policy which provides for this, offering time off in lieu of additional hours worked and monitoring the impact of workload on individual staff members.

**Specific duties for the role include:**

**1. Assistance to Solicitor**

- a) Work on files as directed by the Supervising Solicitor
- b) Initiate files as directed/approved by the Supervising Solicitor
- c) Assist with the preparation of documentation to include Public Funding and liaising with the Legal Aid Agency
- d) Assist with the preparation of documents for court hearings, administering arrangements for instructing medical and other experts, including recording and monitoring of disbursement payments
- e) Assist Supervising Solicitor in obtaining evidence of means for public funding
- f) Assist Supervising Solicitor in interviewing witnesses and clients to take statements and instructions
- g) Maintain files in a logical and orderly fashion
- h) Prepare case, evidence and submission bundles in litigation matters
- i) Prepare files for billing or audit reviews
- j) Attend or arrange attendance at conferences, consultations, or hearings
- k) Attend court to issue proceedings and file documentation.

**2. Team work and partnerships**

- a) Work with partner agencies to progress cases
- b) Maintain and develop excellent relationships with frontline agencies and grassroots groups to enable effective joint working
- c) Work effectively with non-legal staff including operations manager and finance officer.

**3. Social Policy**

- a) Remain alert to the social policy implications of issues presented by clients
- b) Contribute to taking appropriate action to influence social policy in regard to these issues.

**4. Other Duties and Responsibilities**

- a) Ensure that all advice, assistance and representation comply with Lexcel requirements whether undertaken under an LAA contract or not
- b) Keep clear, accurate and timely records of all work done, including reporting on activities and achievements where required
- c) Attend and contribute to regular and special team meetings and discussions
- d) Engage in regular managerial supervision
- e) Participate in training and CPD
- f) Carry out administrative tasks relevant to the post
- g) Any other duties that could reasonably be expected of a person holding this post.

**Organisational standards**

The post holder will be expected to meet the following organisational standards in how they undertake their work and conduct themselves in the post.

## **Professional Development**

The post holder will:

- participate in the PILC team review and supervision processes as appropriate
- attend courses on legal research, specialist skills and the use of information technology relevant to the role
- keep up to date with the changes in relevant legislation, in particular data protection laws and GDPR (UK)
- undertake such training as is necessary as to maintain the standards required.

## **Equality & Diversity**

The Law Centre's clients are largely on low incomes and come from a diverse range of minority ethnic groups. The post holder will be expected to show a particular interest in working with this type of client group and to show an understanding of equality & diversity issues.

The post holder will have regard at all times in the planning and execution of their duties to the Law Centre's Equality & Diversity Policy and will implement that policy faithfully.

### **Information Technology and Data Protection**

The post holder will be expected to use computers on a regular basis. S/he will also be expected to take responsibility for their own word processing, recording keeping, filing and case recording.

The post holder will be expected to follow the Law Centre's data protection policies and ensure the security of client and claimant data.

## **Review of this role**

This role description is to provide guidance and direction. It is not an inflexible document, nor is it intended to limit the range of duties which could reasonably be expected of the post-holder. The job description will be reviewed at each appraisal in accordance with the Staff Appraisal Policy.

Doc ref: 4.4

## PERSON SPECIFICATION

Job ref: PILC/4/2024

### LEGAL ASSISTANT

	Requirement	Essential	Desirable
1.	Knowledge of and/or interest in social issues and human rights, particularly those affecting Gypsies and Travellers	✓	
2.	Ability to work to instructions on cases at any stage of their development and/or on discrete aspects of cases	✓	
3.	Ability to deal sensitively with and communicate effectively with vulnerable clients	✓	
4.	Ability to summarise client statements and complex reports, clearly and accurately	✓	
5.	Good attention to detail, well organised and able to keep accurate records	✓	
6.	Excellent time management skills, demonstrated by an ability to organise and prioritise a complex workload and meet tight deadlines	✓	
7.	Good interpersonal skills, including excellent communication skills both verbal and written	✓	
8.	A demonstrable commitment to access to justice and an interest in PILC's key priority areas	✓	
9.	A commitment to the Public Interest Law Centre's Equality & Diversity Policy	✓	
10.	Ability to be self-servicing with competent use of the suite of Microsoft Office 365 apps as well as online-based case management systems	✓	
11.	Demonstrate willingness to work as part of the Law Centre's team and carry administrative and other duties shared amongst the staff	✓	
12.	A commitment to ongoing professional learning and development of personal professional practice	✓	
13.	A qualification in law – completed or commenced		✓
14.	Experience of working in a legal practice, advice centre or similar setting		✓
15.	Experience of participation in union, social justice or grassroots activism		✓