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Your voice in the justice system





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At Switalskis, we believe that access to the best legal advice and representation shouldn't depend on someone's ability to pay. This philosophy has driven us to become one of the UK's top legal aid providers with offices in six cities and towns across West Yorkshire.

We understand that legal problems often arise at stressful and difficult times, so we do our best to put our clients at ease. When you visit any of our offices, you'll find the welcome warm and friendly and the advice of our caring legal professionals clear, practical and straightforward.

In this booklet, you'll find information on the wide range of legal services Switalskis Solicitors offers under the legal aid scheme. If you'd like to find out more about how we can help you, the friendly staff at your local branch can arrange your free initial consultation with one of our expert legal professionals.

Lorrette J. Law
Senior Partner



Family law

Our family law solicitors are experts in their field, with many years of experience. Our team includes members of Resolution and the Solicitors Regulation Authority's Family and Children panels. They provide the specialist advice and support you need when facing the emotional strain of family disputes.

Whatever the problem, we can help. You may be considering divorce or separation, or you may need to resolve issues involving child contact or residence. Alternatively, your relationship may have broken down and you need to rearrange your financial affairs. You may even need urgent assistance to deal with domestic violence.

At Switalskis, we understand that problems involving your family can be extremely distressing. Our efficient and sympathetic service will help to reduce the emotional strain you may experience during any necessary legal proceedings.

Family mediation services

Our Family Mediation Service offers an alternative to the courts to resolve family disputes.

Mediation can work well in cases of divorce or separation. Situations like this can provoke disputes about property or finances, or disagreements about arrangements for children's residence or parental contact. A family mediator is an impartial third party who encourages both sides to engage in constructive discussions and will help you and your partner to work together to find a satisfactory resolution.

Our highly experienced team includes members of the UK College of Family Mediators and the Family Mediators Association; professional organisations dedicated to ensuring their members provide the best possible mediation service.



Child care law

Dealing with Social Services and the Courts can be complicated. In any case where children are the subject of care proceedings, expert legal advice is essential - both for parents or carers, and for the children themselves.

Our solicitors have years of experience in dealing with care proceedings and are sensitive to the emotional strain they can cause.

If you have parental responsibility for a child involved in care proceedings, Switalskis can offer expert advice and representation free of charge under the legal aid scheme. Legal aid may also be available for other relatives in some circumstances.

We can help you to understand your rights and responsibilities, and ensure that you are properly represented in court hearings, case conferences and negotiations with social workers.

Housing law

We know that housing problems like serious disrepair, the threat of eviction or even homelessness can be devastating. Our housing law experts will listen sympathetically to your difficulties and offer sensible, practical advice to help you resolve them.

The professionals at Switalskis are experts across the full range of housing law issues, including disrepair, possession, harassment, anti-social behaviour and illegal eviction cases. We can help you negotiate with your landlord or mortgage lender, or their solicitor. We can also act on your behalf in court.

We understand that people struggling to cope with a housing problem sometimes approach a solicitor for advice only when the situation has become quite serious. In cases like these, we can take the swift action that is often required to avoid the problem escalating into a crisis.



Community care law



Community care law usually involves challenging the decision of a public body, such as a Local Authority or health trust, about access to free nursing care or particular treatments, the adequacy of day care or home care, or where you receive the care you need.

The community care department at Switalskis is a Specialist Quality Mark provider in this field. Our team works with elderly and disabled people and their carers to challenge decisions that affect the quality of nursing care, day care or home care provision that they are entitled to receive.

Finding a remedy to these issues can involve using internal complaints procedures, using the local authority or health authority Ombudsman, or using the public law challenge of judicial review.

Welfare benefits law



The rules around the benefits system are complex and often confusing, which can make problems with benefits a nightmare for those involved. Our experts help people find their way through the benefits maze.

Our professionals have enormous experience in helping people who are experiencing social security problems.

We understand how important getting the right benefits can be for people on low incomes, or who are coping with physical or mental disability.

In cases where benefits have been refused, reduced or stopped, we can help you to appeal against the decision made by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP).

Immigration and asylum law



Entry into the UK can transform lives. It can reunite families, provide protection from persecution and offer the chance to start a new life.

However, seeking the right to asylum, or to live in this country as an immigrant, has become progressively more difficult as further controls have been introduced.

Our immigration and asylum team have extensive experience of helping clients to enter or remain in the UK. They can advise on:

- family reunion applications
- entry clearance or visa applications at non-EEA British Embassies
- applications for limited or indefinite leave to remain, or humanitarian leave to remain
- work permit, student visas, training and work experience permit applications
- appeals and deportation
- British citizenship - naturalisation and registration applications.

Our immigration and asylum team has all the necessary experience and specialist knowledge to advise clients on all aspects of the law.

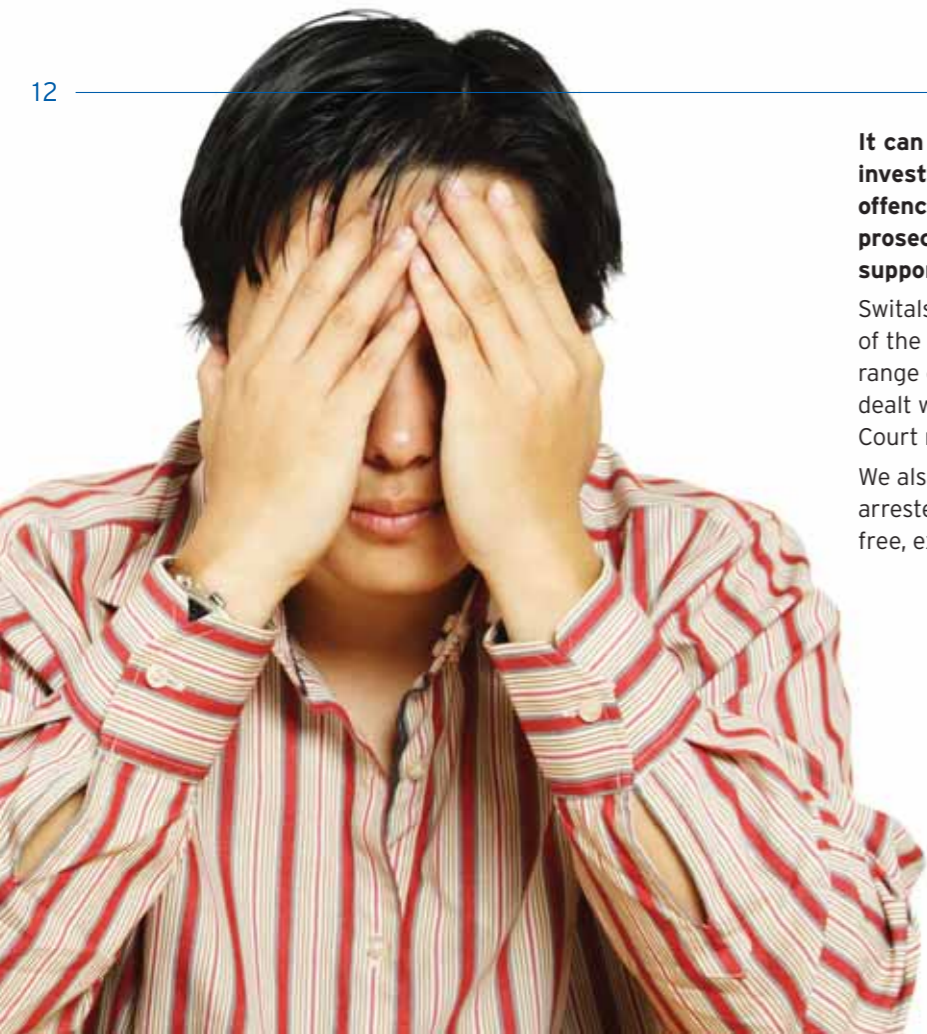
Mental health law

One in four people in the UK is affected by mental health problems at some point in their lives. Sometimes, psychiatric and social services can become involved and an admission to hospital is suggested. In these circumstances, our specialist mental health law solicitors can give you the advice and representation you need.

Our mental health law department is acknowledged by the Legal Services Commission as a Specialist Provider and many of our team are members of the Solicitors Regulation Authority's Mental Health Review Tribunal Panel. We are therefore qualified to provide specialist advice on a wide range of mental health law matters, as well as expert representation, particularly before hospital managers and mental health review tribunals.

In cases where a person is considered to lack capacity to make decisions for themselves, the Court of Protection can become involved to decide on what is in the person's best interests. In such situations, our team can also advise and assist regarding mental capacity law.





Criminal law

It can be extremely daunting and stressful to be investigated or prosecuted for any type of criminal offence. If you are arrested or about to be prosecuted, it is essential to have the advice and support of a specialist criminal solicitor.

Switalskis' criminal law team specialises in all aspects of the criminal justice system. We deal with the full range of criminal cases, ranging from minor offences dealt with by the Magistrates' Court through to Crown Court matters.

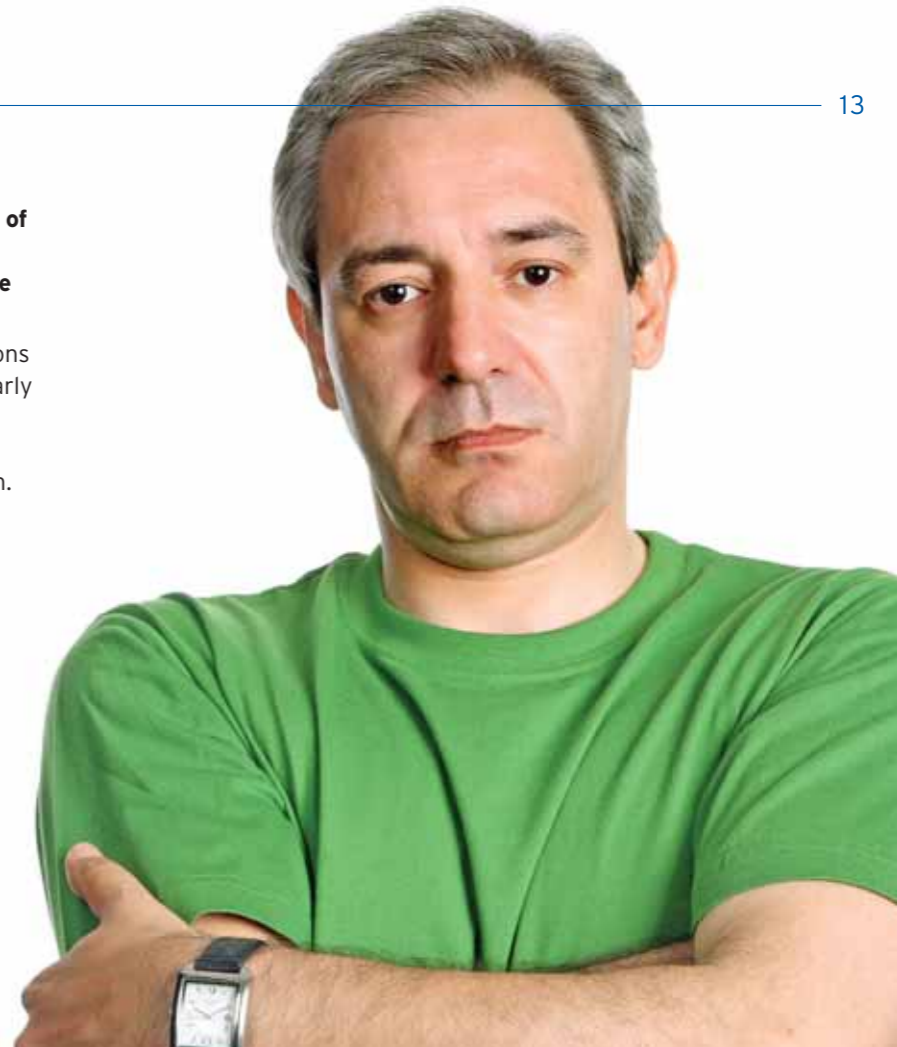
We also offer a 24-hour emergency service: if you are arrested, members of our criminal law team can offer free, expert advice at the police station.

Prison law

Switalskis can provide advice and assistance in all areas of prison law. Our specialist professionals attend client meetings at prisons across the North of England almost every day. There we provide advice on issues regarding all aspects of prison life and the difficulties encountered by serving prisoners.

We regularly make both written and oral representations to the parole board, representing prisoners seeking early release as well as persons recalled on licence. We also advise clients on home detention curfew (tagging) matters and can assist with appeals against conviction.

Our expert lawyers can advise clients on the prison discipline system and attend adjudication hearings to represent the interests of prisoners who have been reported for alleged breaches of prison rules.



Public law

Public law encompasses a wide range of legal decisions that can be challenged by judicial review. Our public law department has a Specialist Quality Mark from the Legal Services Commission. We focus particularly on public law challenges with a human rights or civil liberties component.

We take on cases across many different areas of public law. These may include challenging the lawfulness of a person's detention under the Mental Health Act or within the criminal justice system. Alternatively, we may be challenging the fairness of a tribunal hearing, of a local authority decision relating to care needs, or of any other policy which limits services.

We also provide advice and representation in cases relating to rights protected under the European Convention on Human Rights. These include: the right to life, the right not to be treated in a degrading manner and the right to respect for family life.

