



Press Release

26/1/2011

Civil Legal Assistance Office in awards final

The Scottish Legal Aid Board's, Civil Legal Assistance Office (CLAO) Highland and Islands, has been shortlisted as a finalist in the prestigious Scott and Co. Scottish Legal Awards, in the *Public Sector Law Team of the Year* category.

The winning finalist will be announced in Edinburgh on 17th March.

Lindsay Montgomery CBE, the Board's Chief Executive said, "Reaching the final four is a great achievement and recognises the work that this dedicated team have done throughout the year in delivering legal services to clients."

The CLAO office, opened in Inverness in 2008, and serves Highland, Moray, Western Isles, Orkney and Shetland.

In this past year, the small team has developed a special focus on mental health issues and legal services, delivering training and awareness information to fellow professionals on mental health representation and stigma issues as well as a service for people with mental health issues to access legal services from local solicitors. The office also provides support to Citizens Advice Bureaux and other agencies in the area.

The Inverness office is part of a small network of Civil Legal Assistance Offices (CLAOs - Highland and Islands, Edinburgh, Aberdeen, Argyll and Bute) set up by the Board around Scotland. The CLAOs bolster local legal assistance provision by complementing but not competing with private practice firms. Clients are referred to local solicitors where possible, and where referral is not possible the service will itself take clients on directly providing they are eligible for legal aid. There is joint working and referral of clients both ways between the offices and private legal firms, so improving access to justice. The network covers a wide range of civil work but has focus on family, housing, debt, employment, mental health and other areas of social welfare law.

The Inverness / Highland and Islands office can be contacted on 0845 123 235.

Ends

Journalists please contact:

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Notes for editors

Legal aid is help towards the costs of legal advice and representation, for those who qualify, paid for out of public funds. It is designed to help individuals on low and modest incomes gain access to the legal system. There are two main types of legal assistance: advice and assistance and legal aid. Together these are called legal assistance. Legal aid may be free, or someone may have to pay towards the cost of their case, for example through paying a contribution or from the money or property that they win or keep as a result of their legal action. Legal aid is accessed through a solicitor. Unlike most public expenditure, the legal aid fund is not cash limited. The Scottish Government will provide the Board with the funds required to meet the cost of cases which have been granted.