



# CORPORATE PLAN 2023-26

Making  
Scotland  
Fairer

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## Our Board's Commitment

As the organisation was developing this plan, I was struck by the emphasis that Board members placed on our role in advising Ministers.

**This reflects the Board's conviction that legislative change is necessary to deliver impactful reform of the legal aid system.**

Our role in advising Ministers is key in supporting them in their decision making on legal aid reform. The members of the Board work closely with the leadership team at the Scottish Legal Aid Board to steer the direction both of the organisation and the advice it provides to Ministers. We look forward to playing a full part in the development of this advice over the period of this plan and also engaging in the public debate that will no doubt accompany plans for change.

As a Board, we will also continue to oversee and support the organisation's continued focus on investing in its staff and business processes. This will ensure that the Scottish Legal Aid Board is ready to administer and deliver high quality services both now and as part of a reformed system, dependent on Ministers' decisions.

**Legal aid is a vital part of the Scottish Government's Vision for Justice aimed at a just, safe and resilient Scotland. The objectives set out in this plan directly complement that vision.**

Successful delivery of these objectives will put us in a stronger position to support publicly funded legal assistance in a way that meets the needs of 21st century Scotland and in so doing, help to make Scotland fairer.



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ray Macfarlane'.

**Ray Macfarlane - Chair**

## Our Organisation's Focus

The process of developing a new corporate plan provides a good opportunity to reflect on the achievements of the previous planning period. Looking back at the last three years, it is clear that - despite unprecedented challenges along the way - we have delivered much to be proud of.

**We delivered a high quality and user focused service through high levels of performance in our assessment of legal aid applications and accounts.**

**We also delivered new customer focused policies on how we respond to the support needs of those we communicate with and our customer service standards generally.**

We continued to embed ways of working across the organisation that enhance the quality, consistency and transparency of our decisions and delivery. We have made considerable progress in our work to review and impact assess a range of our operational and staff focused policies which will continue into this corporate planning cycle. We have also better equipped ourselves to understand the equalities impacts of our discretionary decision making and legal aid schemes generally.

**We prioritised engaging with users and delivery partners across the justice system to inform good design of our system and services.**

We consulted publicly on the approach to our assessment of accounts, the financial eligibility of those applying for civil legal aid, and our assessment of the Interest of Justice Test in summary criminal legal aid. The feedback from these have directly fed into changes being implemented or developed further in 2023.

The themes we pursued over the past three years have also driven our approach to this plan. Our achievements have demonstrated that we have moved on as an organisation. There has been less progress in taking forward the options for reform previously consulted on by the Scottish Government, many of which can only be delivered through legislative change. Whilst we hope that legislative change will happen in the near future, any implementation would not happen until after the end of this plan. This means that we will continue to perform our statutory functions of making legal assistance available to those that apply, administering the legal aid fund, and advising ministers whilst we prepare for a future post 2026.

I see the four corporate objectives in this plan falling into two complementary but distinct pairs. The first objective focuses on ensuring high quality administration of the current legal aid system. This focus on high quality is mirrored in our



delivery of our client legal services and targeted funding programmes. We firmly believe that a reformed legal aid system could deliver better outcomes, in a range of different ways.

**In the meantime, our emphasis on the quality of our core delivery functions under the current legislative arrangements makes the most of what today's system offers, delivering huge benefits for individuals and society by helping people access the legal support they need.**

The second pair of objectives has a strong future focus: investing in our staff to assist us in shaping tomorrow's legal aid system. By developing our leaders and managers and embedding workforce planning, we will be better placed not only to manage the budgetary challenges ahead but also to have the right people, with the right skills, to confidently and expertly shape and deliver the significant change to our functions that reform could bring.

As the Chair sets out in her introduction, our role in giving advice to Ministers will support their decisions on the future of legal aid delivery.

**Our advice will be driven by the vision in this plan and will be founded not on our own organisational interests but on the interests of the public and in support of a just, safe and resilient Scotland.**

The purpose, mission, vision, principles, and values set out in this plan are the foundations on which we will build the delivery of our objectives. As we engaged with our staff and Board members during the development of this plan, two consistent themes emerged: this planning period will shape the future of legal aid and of the Scottish Legal Aid Board, and that shape will determine for years to come **legal aid's role in making Scotland fairer.**



**Colin Lancaster - Chief Executive**

# Our Purpose

Guides us and sets out why our organisation exists.

To fund, deliver and advise on services that enable people to exercise their rights and live in a fair society that respects the rule of law.

# Our Mission

How we accomplish our Purpose. It's a direct path between our Purpose and our Vision.

Help people access the legal support they need by:

- Making timely, clear and consistent decisions on legal aid applications and accounts
- Delivering high quality and accessible information, advice and representation
- Providing insightful, evidence-based and outcome-focused advice to Ministers.

# Our Vision

Sets out where we aspire to be and is relevant, whatever the future holds.

Our values, principles and clarity of purpose empower our people to deliver and shape a legal aid system that supports a just, safe and resilient Scotland.

# Our Values and Principles

Our Principles are rules that govern the way we work.

**Our services are designed with our customers' needs in mind**



**We take an inclusive 'digital first' approach to service design**



**We seek continuous improvement in all our work**



**We promote equality, diversity and sustainability in our work**



**We value our people and support them to deliver their best and fulfil their potential**



**Our work is grounded in data and evidence**



**We work collaboratively, both internally and externally**



Our Values are the standards of behaviour that we will display.



Transparency	Impartiality	Trust & Respect	Accountability	Proportionality	Responsiveness
We are clear about rules and criteria that apply to any work we do. We take responsibility for making sure they are understandable.	We focus on objective criteria and avoid conscious or unconscious bias.	We value working with others, and act with honesty and integrity on the basis that others do too, unless there is evidence to the contrary.	We can demonstrate that we work within our stated policies and procedures, and apply them accurately and consistently.	We are mindful of the impact on ourselves and others of what we do and how we do it. We strive to find the balance between efficiency, accessibility, and effective management of risk.	We reflect on how our work affects others, encourage the identification of opportunities for change and innovate using established design principles that embody our values.



# Corporate Objective 1



## High Quality Administration

Our timely, clear and consistent decisions on legal aid applications and accounts deliver a positive customer experience.



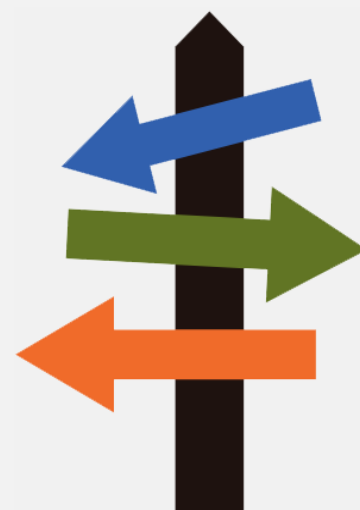
Maintaining and delivering high quality systems, guidance, policies and procedures.

The interests of our customers, fairness, and good governance practice will drive this. Work will be based on improving evidence and insight into our customers' needs and how best to meet them.

### How we will deliver this objective:



- Develop and launch a Customer Insight Strategy that will help us gain a better understanding of what customers want and expect from their interactions with us and the issues they face when doing so.
- Make changes to our internal systems to create more accessible and user friendly processes that enable quicker processing of decisions.
- Continue to review all of our applications and accounts decision making through our Guidance on the Administration of Legal Assistance project. We aim to complete this project during the period of this plan. This will include finalising all remaining decision-makers' guidance on accounts and certain decisions around financial assessment.



### How we will know we've done it:



- Future policy, procedures and performance management draw on insight obtained through our Customer Insight Strategy.
- Staff and customer feedback is reflected in the changes we make.
- The speed, accuracy and consistency of our administrative decision making is in line with our published benchmarks.



## Corporate Objective 2

2

### High Quality Delivery of Client Legal Services & Targeted Funding

Our Client Legal Services and targeted funding deliver high quality and accessible information, advice and representation.



Developing and delivering our Client Legal Services business plans, and targeted funding programmes as directed by Scottish Ministers.

#### How we will deliver this objective:



- Review the delivery models and operation of our client legal services to ensure they are aligned with our strategic priorities.
- Reflect our client groups' needs and respond to changes in our operating environment.



#### How we will know we've done it:



- Performance indicators and feedback from internal and external stakeholders demonstrates effective delivery and continuous improvement.

## Corporate Objective 3



### Investing in Our People

We support our people to develop the skills and ways of working needed to deliver our mission, both now and in the future.



Being a responsible, forward-thinking and supportive employer with high quality people policies, ample development opportunities and skills in planning our workforce.

### How we will deliver this objective:



- Carry out a review of our pay and grading structures. This will involve evaluating all jobs and aims to ensure that our pay and job evaluation systems are used consistently whilst working towards pay coherence with the Scottish Government.
- Deliver reforms to the SLAB pension scheme in line with the Public Services Pension Reform Act 2013. Dependent on Scottish Government decisions, we will consult with the union and staff on these reforms.
- Develop and deliver a leadership and management development programme as outlined within our People Strategy. This will ensure that our team has the skill sets needed to rise to external challenges and seize the opportunities that come with them.



### How we will know we've done it:



- Staff feedback.
- Legal compliance.
- Clarity for our staff on future pension arrangements.
- Staff performance and engagement metrics.

## Corporate Objective 4



### Shaping the Future

Our insightful, evidence-based and outcome-focused advice to Ministers supports their decision making on the future of legal aid and SLAB.



**By developing and delivering evidence based advice on how a reformed legal aid system could better deliver Scottish Government outcomes. By working with others and engaging positively in public debate about the future.**

### How we will deliver this objective:



- Develop and deliver a workforce plan, which will set out how we will seek to ensure we have a workforce of the right size and with the right skills to enable us to deliver our corporate objectives, taking account of our Long Term Financial Planning, the Scottish Government's response to the Legal Aid Review, projected trends in the wider justice system and our existing business plans and strategies.
- Contribute to the Scottish Government's Research Advisory Group on legal aid payments, which is the follow up to the previous Legal Aid Payment Advisory Panel. The group plans to commission and manage a research project to inform the development of future payment arrangements and review mechanisms for the delivery of publicly funded legal services.
- Contribute to the Scottish Government's planned reforms of legal aid, including potential legislation to reform the Legal Aid (Scotland) Act 1986. Based on the independent review of legal aid and the subsequent consultation, reform has the potential to change the current system of legal aid, and our role, significantly. We will assist the Scottish Government with policy development and give advice on preferred options for reform.
- Develop a corporate communications strategy.
- Develop a data analytics strategy that will consider how our data tools, structures, storage and analysis can better contribute to the delivery of our corporate objectives.

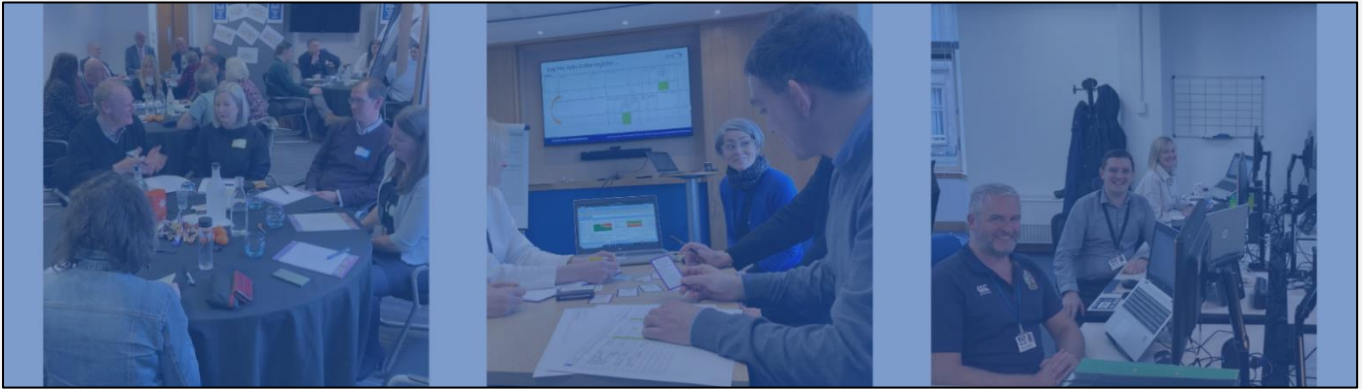
### How we will know we've done it:



- Our staffing structure is aligned with the delivery of our objectives.
- The reform process reflects our advice or is otherwise informed by our insight and evidence.
- Strategies in place and aligned with delivery of our objectives.

# Our People's Contribution

Our people are the heart of our organisation. They care about the jobs they do and how they add value to the positive outcomes that legal aid delivers for people and wider society. They are crucial to the delivery of this plan, both in the role they play in delivering the current system of legal aid but also in the shaping of its future.



The corporate objectives in this plan necessarily have a specific focus to engage specific areas of the organisation. For example:





- Our staff who assess applications and accounts will have a direct impact on our ability to deliver a positive experience for our customers through their decision making.
- Our employed solicitors and policy specialists will focus on the delivery of high quality direct advice and targeted funding.
- Our leadership and HR teams will consider the skills we will need to deliver in the future whilst ensuring we develop opportunities for our people to shape how we work both now and as we evolve as an organisation.
- Our operational staff, policy and research specialists and data analysts will help to shape advice for the Scottish Government on the future of legal aid.

But the successful delivery of this plan is dependent on so much more. All our people have a role in enabling our Mission. The fulfilment of that Mission engages the skills, knowledge and commitment of colleagues across the organisation. Our Mission focuses on helping people access legal advice. We cannot process applications and accounts without the support of our IT infrastructure. We cannot deliver high quality direct advice to clients without well managed, modern and fit for purpose premises. We cannot keep those premises running efficiently without the timely procurement of products and services and prompt payment for them. To keep the system running, we must manage within Scottish Government funding and we could not do that without effective financial management and forecasting. We must process legally the personal data we rely on to make legal aid available and our administration of the system is built upon strong systems of internal control, as overseen by our internal audit team.

# Our Contribution to wider Scottish Government Outcomes

Legal aid provides a vital service at both individual and societal level. It enables people to pursue or defend their rights or manage their personal affairs. This will often be at challenging times in their lives. The individual outcomes achieved with the legal assistance legal aid funds can be life changing.

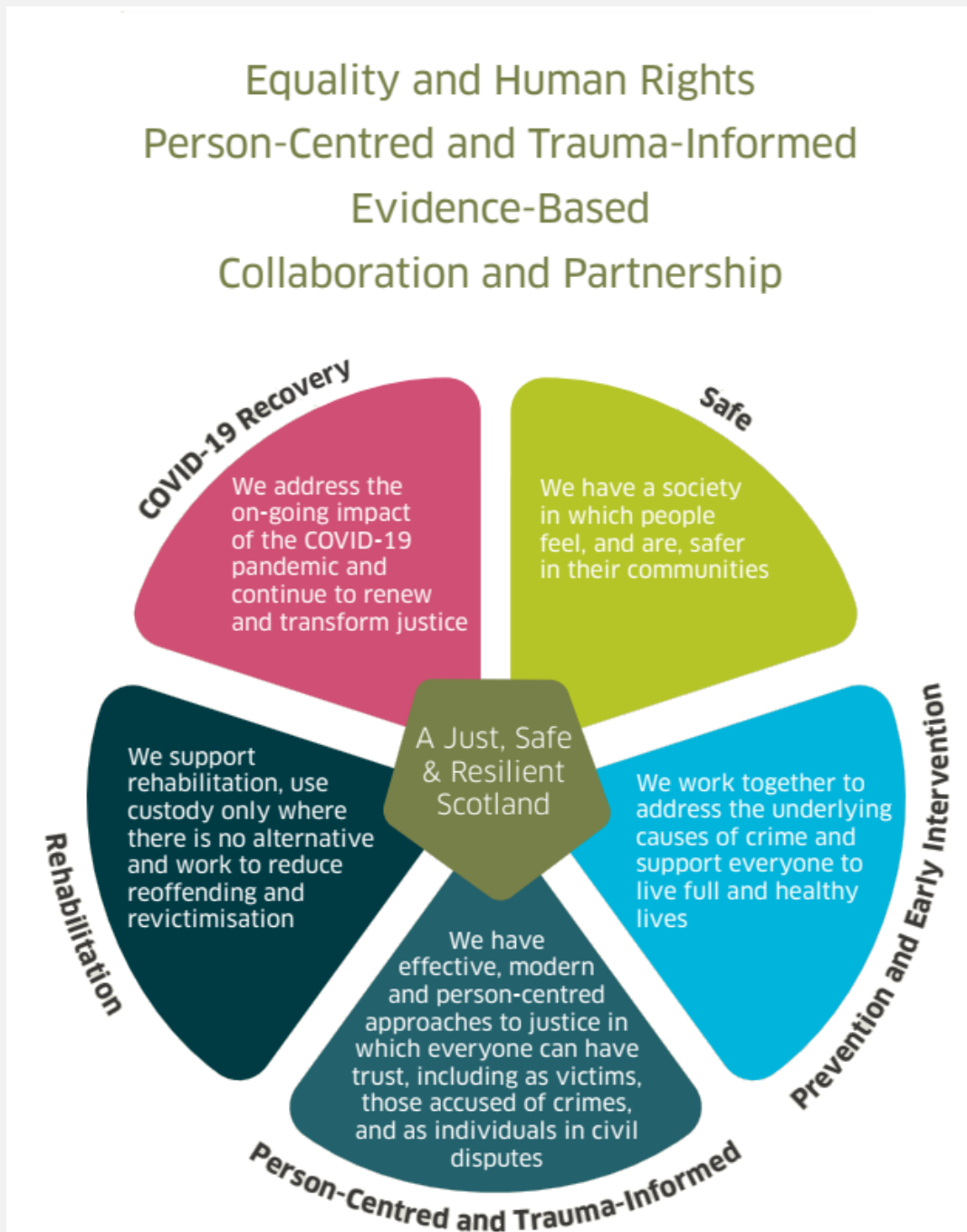
Beyond the positive impacts on those helped directly by legal aid, the services we fund also make an important and often under-recognised contribution to the wider outcomes pursued by the Scottish Government as set out in the National Performance Framework.

-  Legal aid enables people to pursue and protect their human rights and challenge discrimination.
-  Legal aid empowers people to challenge the state and institutions.
-  Legal aid is used for solicitors to represent children at children’s hearings.
-  Legal aid funds businesses to deliver legal services.





Legal aid also plays a vital role in the effective running of the justice system. In 2022 the Scottish Government set out its transformative vision of a future justice system for Scotland. Our role at SLAB contributes to this Vision, as does the work of the solicitors, advisers and advocates we fund.



**Covid-19 Recovery**  
Efficient processing of legal aid applications and accounts is assisting with clearing the backlog of cases caused by the pandemic.

**Person-Centred and Trauma-Informed**  
Legal aid is available for people to pursue or defend civil actions and to defend themselves from criminal prosecution.