



Biodiversity Duty Report 2021-23

October 2024

The Scottish Legal Aid Board

www.slab.org.uk

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The biodiversity duty

Under the [Nature Conservation \(Scotland\) Act 2004](#), all public bodies in Scotland have a duty to further the conservation of biodiversity when carrying out their responsibilities. This biodiversity duty is about taking care of nature all around us, not just in specific protected sites and for particular species.

The biodiversity duty can help deliver wider outcomes such as:

- helping Scotland halt biodiversity loss and address the climate emergency and contributing to a green recovery and a net zero future
- ensuring compliance with the legislation and helping Scotland to meet its national and international biodiversity targets
- contributing to sustainable development and the quality of life in Scotland
- demonstrating you are working in a socially responsible and ethical way, by safeguarding biodiversity and environmental assets for future generations.

The Scottish Legal Aid Board (SLAB) is a level two public body in that we engage directly or indirectly with communities, young people or the public but do not own or manage land, regulate land use, or have responsibilities linked to biodiversity.

Introduction

We are a Non-Departmental Public Body (NDPB) of the Scottish Government. We are the national funding body for most solicitor and advocate delivered publicly funded legal services and our primary roles are to assess applications for legal aid and then pay solicitors and advocates for their work. The Scottish Government is responsible for the overall direction of legal aid policy.

Legal aid in Scotland is primarily designed around case-by-case funding for services provided by solicitors and others instructed by them, such as advocates and experts.

Most services paid for through the Legal Aid Fund are delivered through the private sector. The third sector and our own in-house legal services also deliver case-by-case services but on a much smaller scale. Finally, a small amount of funding provides direct grants for projects to deliver targeted legal and advice services. The Legal Aid Fund also finances the quality assurance schemes we manage.

We do not have a role in providing public information, community engagement or learning around nature and the environment. We also have no role in providing activities to support young people in learning about and caring for nature.

There are no significant environmental impacts because of our administration of the legal aid schemes.

This report sets out the work that we have done between January 2021 and December 2023 in contribution to our biodiversity duty.

Actions to protect and enhance biodiversity

There are a wide range of initiatives across the organisation that have contributed in some way to the enhancement and protection of biodiversity.

Working practices

We were committed to more flexible working practices that allowed staff to work from home where it was possible to do so. We promoted active travel for our staff and a cycle to work scheme was, and remains, available.

A project called Designing a New Working Environment was established in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, which has had a significant impact on working practices. Subsequent staff survey results for September to November 2022 showed that 95% of those who responded had worked from home to some extent. This has had a dramatic effect on reducing the amount of commuting and associated environmental impacts.

Commuting methods were also surveyed as part of this project and found that a wide variety of methods were used with public transport, walking/wheeling and cycling as the preferred methods of commuting. 78% of staff travelled less than 20 miles to the workplace. Of those that travelled further, they were more likely to work from home and attend their main office location less, further reducing the environmental impact.

Environmentally beneficial infrastructure

We are committed to applying the principles of responsible environmental management in all aspects of our business operations. It has been, and continues to be, our policy to:

- continually improve the energy efficiency of our premises, to reduce both energy consumption and emissions
- focus on waste minimisation by introducing techniques to recover and reuse office materials
- work with suppliers to eliminate packaging, materials and components which generate waste
- manage the disposal of waste to minimise environmental harm
- inform and educate all our employees on environmental issues relevant to SLAB
- continually improve our environmental standards by setting objectives and targets and reviewing them annually.

The adoption of a hybrid working model created the opportunity to reuse and recycle surplus furniture from within our main building, Thistle House. We have managed the reutilisation of furniture across our estate and in partnership with Recycle Scotland to minimise the amount of furniture that requires to be disposed of in landfill while contributing towards the circular economy.

Our staff

Our People and Organisational Development team, through our staff wellbeing programme, have actively encouraged staff to engage with outdoor space and nature in a positive way to improve mental and physical wellbeing. An October 2022 article on SLAB's internal staff website emphasised the importance of taking time to step away from work and, among other things, get outdoors and enjoy nature. Links were provided to Visit Scotland and National Trust for Scotland articles, which provided suggestions for things to do.

SLAB also participated in the annual Earth Hour global switch off event organised by the Worldwide Fund for Nature and used this as a further opportunity to raise staff awareness of environmental and biodiversity issues. In March 2022 an internal website article promoted the 2022 Earth Hour and encouraged staff to see this as an opportunity to look at individual habits and assess if staff can make little changes that we know benefit the planet, such as cutting down on the consumption of meat, turning the tap off while brushing your teeth and completely switching off electrics rather than leaving them on standby. A September 2022 article to staff promoted Scots Climate Week and provided links to various awareness raising events and resources.

Mainstreaming biodiversity

Our procurement policies required that all tenders consider how sustainability, including carbon emissions, could be factored into the procurement process. Our policy is also to use central government collaborative frameworks wherever possible, as these will have considered suppliers' wider credentials and how sustainability can be built into the operating terms of the contract.

Our commitment to responsible environmental management means we have a robust carbon management plan in place which has required the implementation of several practical initiatives:

- A. We have a flexible work from home policy that has allowed us to greatly reduce the physical footprint in our building and substantially reduce staff travel and the associated environmental impact.
- B. We have recycling facilities available to staff and the use of single use plastics has been dramatically reduced with the introduction of reusable cups and the elimination of plastic cutlery in staff canteen areas.
- C. SLAB have purchased hybrid pool cars for business travel.
- D. Recycled paper is used throughout the business and comprises almost 100% of our paper purchases. We do not use non-white paper.
- E. Most of our functional processes related to the administration of legal aid are, wherever possible, digital, which reduces consumption of paper, related items and physical storage space.

Nature-based solutions, climate change and biodiversity

We have not used any nature based solutions during the reporting period. This is not within the scope of our core function.

Public engagement and workforce development

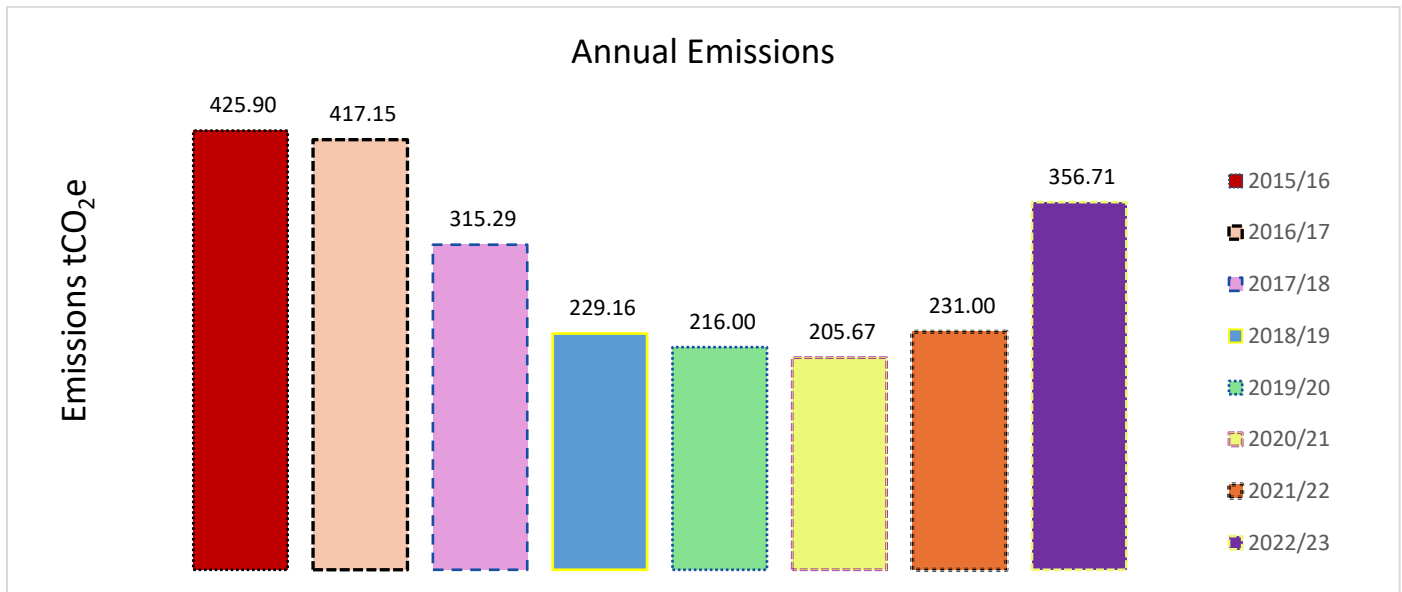
Due to our functions, we do not carry out public engagement work related to biodiversity. Workforce development is limited to raising awareness of environmental issues and implementation of policies and procedures that relate to sustainable use of resources.

Research and monitoring

Due to our functions, we do not carry out any monitoring or research activities related to biodiversity and nature.

We produced a Carbon Management Plan which set out our corporate carbon emission baseline, along with associated targets and projects, where the goal is to reduce emissions within our sphere of influence. This is [available on our website](#).

Since the 2015-16 reporting period, our carbon emissions have reduced substantially. The chart below illustrates this, but it must be noted that for the 2022-23 period we included the data for our entire building estate rather than just our main premises in Thistle House. Nevertheless, the combined total emissions are less than the baseline emissions for Thistle House alone.



We also produced a climate change report. The 2022-23 report can be viewed on the Sustainable Scotland Network website [here](#), along with previous years.

Highlights of the latest report include the progress made in upgrading our lighting to energy efficient LED lights. Over 50% of our lighting has now been upgraded.

Biodiversity highlights and challenges

At a corporate level, we have limited controls in relation to the protection of biodiversity, so the focus has been on reducing our organisation's environmental impact.

However, we are proud of the achievements we have made in reducing our carbon footprint and in introducing a range of practical measures such as the recycling initiatives, elimination of single use plastics, the move to digital work systems, and flexible working arrangements that have dramatically reduced staff travel.

Looking ahead to the next reporting period, we have been able to ensure some activities that have been directly relevant to the protection of biodiversity have been done through the staff charity committee. The charity committee gives us scope to widen the range of biodiversity related activities and there are plans in place to carry out more local community initiatives, such as the development of a sensory garden.

Staff have also chosen to direct some of the funds raised through the charity committee's work towards the Dingwall Community Woodland, which aims to promote biodiversity by rewilding 25 acres of former grazing land, providing more natural resources in the area to support wildlife and helping in the fight against climate change by planting native broadleaf species and shrubs which store carbon.