Media Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Tuesday 3 November 2026

Demand for legal aid underlines need for reform

The Scottish Legal Aid Board (SLAB) has today (Tuesday 3 November) restated its commitment to the transformational redesign of the legal aid system as it publishes its annual report.

Figures published in the SLAB Annual Report and Accounts for the financial year ending 31 March 2026 show there were 165,000 grants of legal assistance to fund cases that met eligibility criteria, with an annual expenditure of £167 million – the second highest investment on record, in cash terms.

The figures show a continued demand for legal aid in communities across the country whilst at the same time highlighting significant challenges presented by a system that was designed more than 70 years ago. Despite high levels of service in response to demand, the current legal aid system does not guarantee access to a solicitor for everyone who needs one.

Chief Executive of SLAB, Colin Lancaster, said:

“This has been a year of strong performance and positive delivery for SLAB. We have ensured that individuals continue to access legal assistance to uphold their rights, often in complex and challenging circumstances.

“This year has marked another important period of progress towards legal aid reform. The Scottish Government’s recent consultation paper on the reform of legal aid, alongside Parliamentary scrutiny and its committee inquiries, has reinforced the case for a system that is more flexible, user-focused and sustainable.

“We have contributed actively to this agenda through evidence to Parliament, ongoing engagement with stakeholders, and our advice to Scottish Government on options to design a system better aligned to user needs. We will continue to make the positive case for transformational change of the legal aid system.”

Chair of SLAB, Bill Moyes, said:

“Over the past year, legal aid in Scotland has continued to play a vital role in supporting access to justice and upholding the rights of people and communities across the country. Through the collective efforts of staff and our partners, we have remained focused on a high-quality approach to funding and delivering services that can be vital for people when they need them most.

“We welcome the growing cross-party recognition of the need for long-term structural reform of legal aid. Scottish Government’s commitment to reform, including the intention to introduce a Legal Aid Reform Bill in the first year of this parliament, represents a long-awaited opportunity for progress. We

look forward to supporting this work and continuing to collaborate with partners, including the Law Society of Scotland, Faculty of Advocates, advice sector and others across the system."

Key highlights

Key highlights from the SLAB 2025-26 annual report include:

- **Expenditure:** £167million spent on legal aid:
  - **Criminal:** £90million
  - **Civil:** £61million
  - **Direct Services:** £8.4million
  - **Children's:** £6million
  - **Grant funding:** £2.1million
  - **Miscellaneous:** £0.2million
- **Grants of assistance:** 165,000
- **Payments to legal professionals:** £136million paid to solicitors, advocates, and solicitor advocates
- **Legal aid fees:** In January, Scottish Ministers announced a 13% increase in solicitor legal aid fees with effect from September 2026
- **Operational performance:** Eight out of nine of SLAB's core projects, as set out in the Corporate Plan 2023-26, have been completed or progressed as planned.

The annual report and additional documents, including key statistics, are available on our website.

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Further information

For further information, please contact:

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