



Corporate Plan 2017-20

The Scottish Legal Aid Board

www.slab.org.uk

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INTRODUCTION TO OUR PLAN

We are pleased to introduce our first Corporate Plan as Scottish Legal Aid Board Chair and Chief Executive. This is also the first Corporate Plan since 2009 to include a **new Purpose and Strategic Objectives** for the organisation. We would like to thank the members of our board and our staff for their input into the setting of our new strategic framework. This Corporate Plan applies to the full range of our functions - administering the legal aid system, advising Ministers on its development and providing direct delivery services through our employed solicitors and grant funded projects.

It would seem amiss not to begin this Corporate Plan without first recognising the most significant thing that will take place during its reporting cycle - the independent review of legal aid announced recently by the Scottish Government, chaired by Martyn Evans.

Legal aid along the lines we know it today was first introduced in Scotland in 1950. Initially, this was only for civil cases. Legal aid for criminal proceedings followed in 1964. The Law Society of Scotland was responsible for managing legal aid for 37 years. In 1986, SLAB was set up as the statutory body to administer legal aid and advise Ministers on its strategic development.

The statute that created SLAB in the late 1980s largely maintained the statutory provisions from the post second world war system. Although it has been amended a number of times since then, primary legislation that dates back over 30 years still governs the provision of legal assistance in Scotland. There have been many relevant socio-economic developments in those years - the advancement of human rights legislation, devolution, and rapid changes in the digitisation of working practices and service delivery to name a few.

The Scottish Government, SLAB and the legal profession all agree that the current legislative framework presents a challenge to operating a legal aid system that is modern and flexible to change. The Minister for Community Safety and Legal Affairs accordingly announced to Parliament on 1 February 2017 an independent review of the legal aid system. SLAB is represented on the review's working group and we look forward to assisting with the review, and, dependent on recommendations and Ministerial decisions, the delivery of reform thereafter.

The fact that there is an independent review does not undermine the purpose and benefit of a three year planning cycle while the outcome of the review is awaited and any plans for implementation have been decided. We, and legal aid, will still develop in this period.

SLAB has a huge range of knowledge and experience in administering the legal aid system and it has delivered much to be proud of in recent years. Much of this has been delivered in collaboration with others. However, our new leadership has bought with it the opportunity to take a fresh look at the direction of SLAB and to examine what we do - to mark, consolidate and share what we do well but also consider what we can improve. We look forward to seeking feedback from a range of people and organisations to ensure our future service delivery is developed around those that use or deliver assistance in the legal aid system.

During the next three years we will focus on delivering our new Strategic Objectives, which centre on our continuous improvement as an organisation, further streamlining of the legal aid system and the formulation of a transparent performance framework. The framework will cover the full spectrum of our responsibilities and allows politicians and the suppliers and users of legal assistance to hold us to account. All

these things should enable us to transform the administration of the legal aid system.

Legal aid means that thousands of people every year who could otherwise not afford it can get access to justice.

Although for the vast majority of legal assistance we do not have a direct role in providing access to assistance, our administration of the system and funding of the private sector, law centres and advice sector enables this to happen.

Although this Corporate Plan necessarily has a focus on operational excellence, everything that we do in pursuance of it will contribute to the delivery of positive outcomes delivered for those seeking and accessing legal assistance.



Ray Macfarlane
Chair

There is no doubt that the independent review of legal aid brings with it the likelihood of further reforms to legal aid.

This Corporate Plan covers a period of transition until such time as we have to revisit our Purpose in light of Ministerial response to the review.

We believe that the vision and activity set out in this Corporate Plan will ensure that SLAB is in the best place to be able to adapt and respond to further change in the best interests of the legal aid system and society as a whole.

We look forward to working with our staff and stakeholders over the next three years.



Colin Lancaster
Chief Executive

OUR PURPOSE AND STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

With a new Chair and Chief Executive in place, we took the opportunity during 2016-17 to **review SLAB's Purpose and Strategic Objectives**.

A clear and well understood statement of purpose gives an organisation the direction it needs to work out its strategic objectives, organise its work and identify improvements.

The process for developing a revised strategic framework required us to **focus on what SLAB is here for**. That was crucial in agreeing what we should be spending our time doing and what outcomes we want to achieve.

Our revised purpose now concentrates more on our key statutory functions of

administering the legal aid system and advising Ministers on how the system could be improved.

Our revised Strategic Objectives are strongly weighted towards achieving excellence in the performance of these functions. They also make clear that effective delivery by SLAB of its objectives makes a real difference in people's lives and for society as whole. Legal aid does not exist in a vacuum. By fulfilling our Purpose and Strategic Objectives, both we and legal aid will better contribute to the achievement of Scottish Government aims, an efficient justice system and improved outcomes for those who need services supported by legal aid.

Our Purpose

To manage and improve continuously publicly funded legal assistance and to advise Scottish Ministers on its strategic development for the benefit of society

Our Strategic Objectives

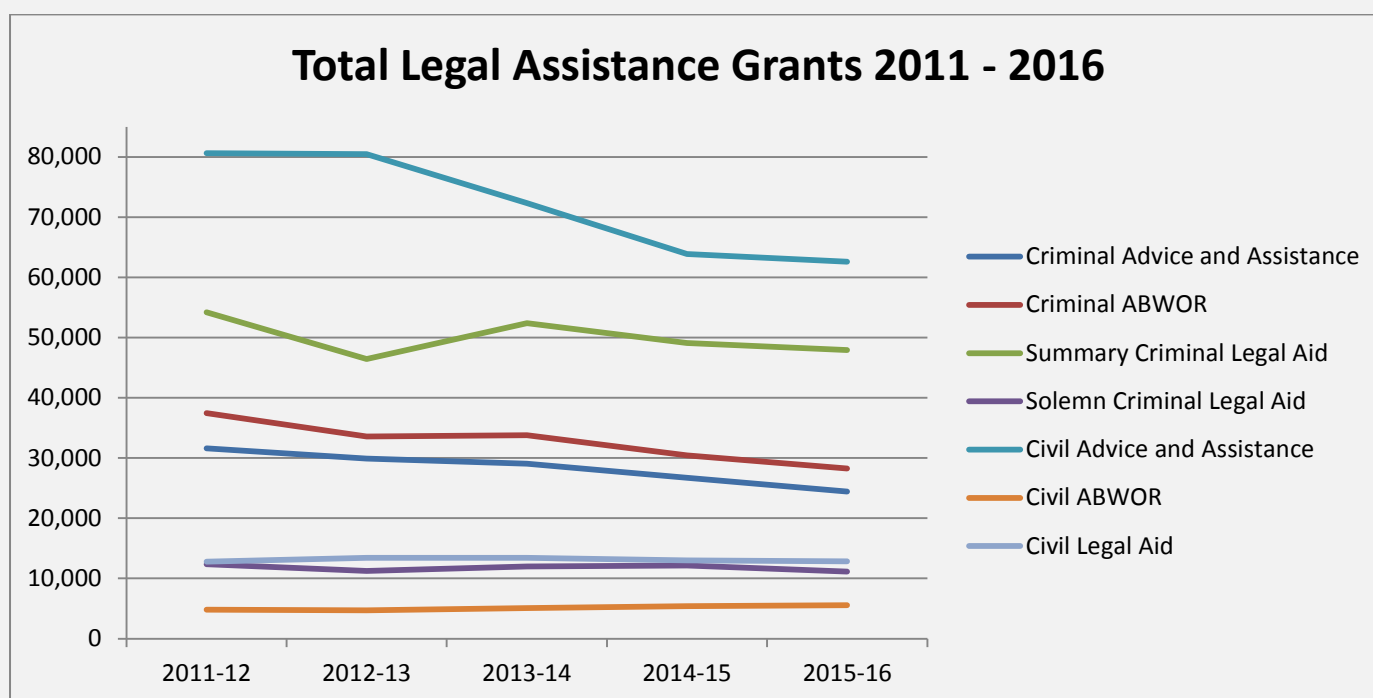
1. To deliver improvements to legal aid processes that increase efficiency and improve the experience of system users and customers
2. To advise Scottish Ministers on the strategic development of legal assistance and its contribution to a Scotland in which rights are supported and disputes are resolved fairly and swiftly
3. To ensure that our organisation has the culture and capability to be responsive to our customers, the justice system and developments in legal and advice services
4. To build and maintain effective and collaborative relationships with the legal and advice sector and our public sector partners as we seek to achieve our Purpose and contribute to wider Scottish Government aims

THE CURRENT OPERATING ENVIRONMENT

The environment in which SLAB and the legal aid system operates is continuously changing. Our challenge is to ensure that we are able to respond to political, social, economic and technological developments that impact on our administration of, or the demand for, legal assistance.

Legal aid supply and demand

2015-16 again saw a decrease in total demand for legal assistance. Total grants in 2015-16 were over 15% fewer than in 2011-12. We expect to report this trend continuing in 2016-17. While the overall trend in demand is a declining one, patterns of demand are also changing: we are seeing grants of assistance increase in certain pockets of civil cases such as adults with incapacity, mental health and immigration and asylum.



There are numerous drivers for decreasing demand. For criminal legal assistance, it is driven predominantly by reductions in cases going through the criminal courts. As the economy continues to improve slowly following the downturn of previous years, a number of the drivers for people seeking help for civil legal issues have also reduced. Our work to monitor the availability and accessibility of legal services has not produced evidence to suggest that falling demand is due to suppliers ceasing to offer legal assistance and therefore an inability to access services.

Decreasing demand for legal aid has a direct impact on legal aid expenditure, which is 12% lower than in 2011-12. However, while

demand has fallen, we have not seen significant reductions in the supply base for legal assistance. The number of firms and solicitors registered to provide legal aid work on the civil legal aid and criminal legal aid registers is similar to five years ago.

We expect that as the economy recovers, more solicitors practising in civil law particular may be able to increase the volume of private feeing work undertaken and become less reliant on legal aid. The longer term trends for changes in civil firms registered and criminal solicitors registered demonstrates this connection between both demand for and supply of legal aid services and wider economic conditions. In the absence of clear evidence about unmet

demand or a decline in positive outcomes for those experiencing legal problems, an actual or intended reduction in supply is not itself a cause for undue concern.

Falling demand has consequently led to falling legal aid incomes for some private sector firms. This has led to an increasing call from the legal profession for the rates of legal aid payments to be increased. This is both directly to compensate for the reduction in income due to falling demand and to maintain the relative profitability of legal aid work and private work as fee rates for the latter recover post-recession. It is our role to deliver changes to the legal aid system, and advise Ministers, on a range of ways in which the sustainability of the legal aid system can be improved. Some of this may be delivered through the development of fee reforms while other solutions may be found through legal aid firms reviewing and adapting their business models.

Legal aid budget

The legal aid system in Scotland is wide in the scope of its provision in terms of the areas of law which are covered. The Legal Aid Fund, which pays for the costs of legal aid cases, is uncapped. People in Scotland will not be refused legal aid due to lack of Scottish Government funds. If a case meets the relevant statutory tests concerning the merits of the case and an applicant's financial resources, they will be granted assistance. However, for financial management purposes, the Scottish Government does set a budget for the Legal Aid Fund.

The budget agreed by the Scottish Parliament in February 2017 is a one year settlement and therefore future budget settlements are as yet unknown and may well have an impact on the last two years of this plan. Following a reduction in 2016-17, the allocation for the Legal Aid Fund for 2017-18 remains unchanged at £126.1 million. The funding for SLAB's administration costs for 2017-18 is £11.1 million. This remains unchanged other than a consolidation within the budget of £300,000 for the granting of children's legal

assistance which has been separately added to our budget for the last three years.

If the budget allocation for the Legal Aid Fund is reduced, this will no doubt increase the focus on SLAB to deliver advice to Ministers on potential reforms to deliver further efficiencies in the system. What a reduction in allocation does not do, but which has been suggested by some in the legal profession, is directly impact on the ability of people to access legal aid services. The demand led nature of the funding prevents this.

Although it could be argued that the wide scope and availability of the legal aid system is one of its key strengths, it also introduces one of SLAB's key challenges. Within a continued environment of scarce public resources, we will need to ensure that we are delivering Ministers' expectations that the administration of the system in its current form is efficient and cost effective whilst ensuring that those who are entitled are given access to funding for the services they require.

The current legal aid system

The aim of Scottish Ministers is to have a sustainable legal aid system, one that enables people to access the right assistance at the right time but which is affordable and delivers value for money.

The relative lack of government or regulator interventions available to influence the current challenges facing the delivery of legal aid in Scotland highlights the weaknesses of a primary legislative framework that is around 30 years old. It only strengthens the need for a sustainable model to be found for the future funding and delivery of legal aid.

In recent years, Ministers have asked us to work towards their aim for legal aid by looking at options to modernise and streamline the current system and also propose changes that will simplify the current feeing arrangements across civil and criminal legal aid. We will continue to take

this work forward during this corporate planning period.

The longer term sustainability of the legal aid system will be considered by the independent review of legal aid.

DELIVERING OUTCOMES THROUGH JUSTICE SYSTEM REFORM

As a public body in Scotland, we must ensure we are acting as an enabler not just for legal aid and wider justice outcomes, but also for the overall strategy for the Scottish Government. Our work over the next three years should contribute to Scotland as a whole by contributing to a productive and sustainable economy and helping to transform the delivery of public services.

outward looking, user centred and collaborative approach.

The Scottish Government has for some time been pursuing an outcome based approach to the delivery of public sector services. The justice system has seen a number of positive outcomes delivered in recent years, most notably around youth justice and reoffending, falling crime rates and rising conviction rates.

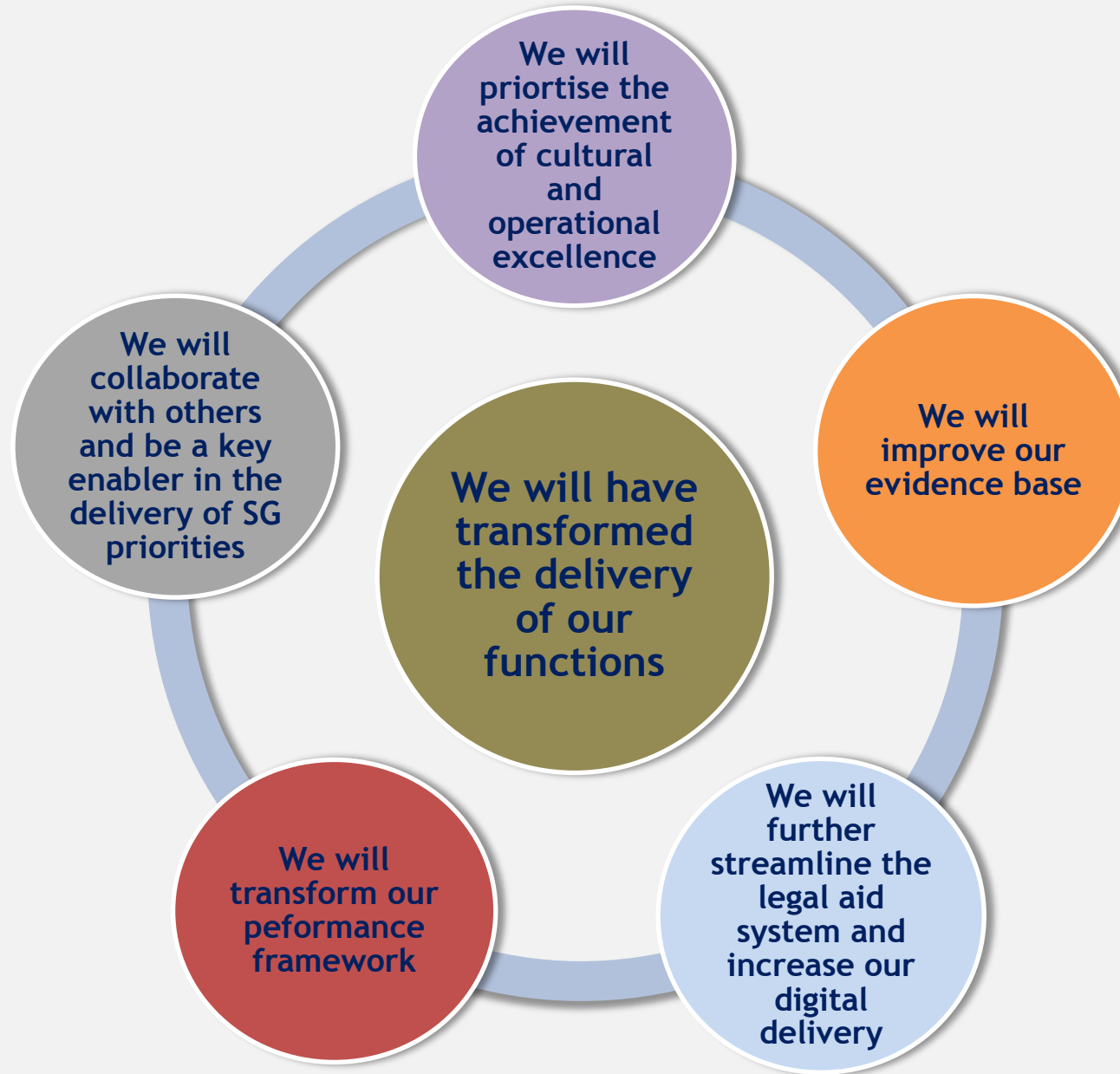
There are however, a number of challenges that remain. These include the geographic concentration of crime and civil law problems, the impact that the passage through the justice system can have on people, and the physical and mental health of those in contact with justice organisations. Scotland's Justice Strategy¹ will aim to deliver reforms that target prevention, early intervention and early resolution while improving people's life chances and tackling inequality.

The start of this corporate plan coincides with the start of an independent review of legal aid. The review will be an opportunity to consider how a modern, user and outcome focussed legal aid system can effectively contribute to both justice and wider strategic priorities such as those in the Justice Strategy.

Likewise, this corporate plan will directly contribute to and complement the Scottish Government's Justice Strategy through its

¹ <https://beta.gov.scot/publications/justice-scotland-vision-priorities/>

OUR VISION FOR 2020



PRIORITISING OUR VISION

We have set a number of key priorities for delivery from now until 2020. These priorities will deliver a number of outcomes which will enable us to deliver against our strategic objectives, and ultimately our vision for 2020.

These priorities apply to our core functions in administering the legal aid system but equally to our supply of direct services through the Civil Legal Assistance Office, Public Defence Solicitors' Office and the Solicitor Contact Line.

Priority 1 - Cultural and operational excellence

Throughout SLAB (including PDSO, SCL and CLAO direct services) our staff are our most important asset and are key to us delivering our Strategic Objectives.

In order to continuously improve as an organisation, we will ensure that we have the right people, in the right places, with the appropriate levels of skills and experience. We also want to have a diverse workforce that understands the needs of our users, including those with protected characteristics, and the impact of equalities and diversity more broadly in helping us manage and deliver our business.

We want our staff to be empowered to innovate and do what is necessary and possible within the legislative framework to improve our service and outcomes for our customers. We also want them to understand how their work contributes to the achievement of our purpose and wider Scottish Government objectives. We must also ensure that we are able to effectively

manage our workforce requirements, both now and in the future.

A key function of SLAB is to ensure that legal aid expenditure delivers value for money. This requires an element of checking and assurance of those accessing the system and those supplying legal assistance. We want to make sure that we are assessing and mitigating the right risks - not just the risk of fraud, or failure of a process, but also the things that might stop us achieving our strategic objectives or prevent those in need accessing services to which they are entitled.

We want to encourage a culture of innovation. This will enable us to become more customer focussed, improve customer service and user outcomes whilst living within tight public expenditure constraints. We want to ensure that we have the right balance between risk and assurance on the one hand and delivering improvements in service on the other.

Priority 2 - Improvements in evidence and understanding

SLAB has a highly developed understanding of the legislative framework in which the legal aid system operates. Most legal aid processes and procedures have become well established over a number of years.

As part of our process of self examination, we aim to fully understand the impact that key processes and procedures have on those that access the legal aid system and those that supply legal aid. We also aim to better

understand what those accessing legal aid expect from the process, particularly their interactions with us. We want to understand any barriers that may lead to a negative experience or opinion of the legal aid system. We want to ensure that there are no systems, processes or structures that stand in the way of eligible people getting appropriate help. We also want all protected groups, and minority ethnic people and disabled people in particular, to experience

equal access to quality accessible services and information about legal aid.

We have an important role in controlling access to and the cost of the legal aid system. This means that relationships with the legal profession and their representative bodies can be challenging. It is a priority for us that these relationships are informed by and based on mutual respect and understanding. We aim to better understand what it means to run a firm of legal aid solicitors in the current climate and to use that evidence to inform our service delivery.

We have an important role in advising Ministers on the operation of legal aid and any changes that could be beneficial. We want to ensure that this advice is based on an understanding of the needs of system users and also evidence of the strategies and methods that work in enabling people to resolve their problems and achieve access to justice.

All this will involve a range of research, consultation and engagement methods.

Priority 3 - Streamlining and digitisation

The current legal aid system involves, at its core, application processes, application of eligibility tests, and the submission and payment of accounts. This means that a certain amount of administrative procedures are unavoidable. SLAB also has a key function of managing legal aid expenditure and minimising fraud and abuse. This inevitably requires processes of control, risk management and assurance.

We will use the evidence we gather to inform the design of our business processes to deliver our services in ways that meet our customers' needs. What we want to ensure is that any bureaucratic burden on SLAB, solicitors and applicants is at the most appropriate level to the risk being managed. We also want to ensure that the outcomes of our administrative processes - accurate decisions - are delivered more quickly, or with fewer repeated stages.

Our programme of work on streamlining began in 2016-17 and we have implemented a number of streamlining changes in the past 18 months. This includes reducing the number of applications required in adoption and permanence order proceedings and removing the requirement for solicitors to report to SLAB at certain points throughout a case in receipt of civil legal aid. Our streamlining work will be developed further during this corporate planning period and will include further improvements to our

online accounting system, recommendations on streamlining of criminal legal aid fee processes and a major review of our legal aid handbooks which provide the profession with a range of guidance on the operation of the legal assistance schemes.

We live in an increasingly digital age in which users and suppliers of services are rightly expecting to benefit from digital solutions to their problems and access to services. We will look to pursue opportunities to develop the running of SLAB and the delivery of our services through the growth in technologies such as the cloud. Amongst other things, the cloud will provide a platform to develop, run, and manage our system applications without the complexity and cost associated with building and maintaining infrastructure.

We will also investigate the use of apps for mobile devices to help solicitors on the move, increase our use of social media to engage with a range of audiences and use high-speed broadband to better link the offices of our employed solicitors into our central systems. Other initiatives will include, for example, improvements to our case management and debt recovery systems.

We want to better understand the opportunities that digitally enabled transformation can bring both to the

operation of the legal aid system and as a means of enabling people to avoid problems or deal with them before they become costly crises.

We will seek to encourage an inclusive and open policy to the development and deployment of our digital service delivery by engaging with system users and the legal profession and investigating a range of technology options in order to deliver the best service possible. We want to ensure

that our customers are aware of why we collect equalities information and can conveniently disclose this information, including online. The solutions we implement will meet the needs of our customers and fully align with the wider justice system in Scotland.

Priority 4 - Development of our performance management system

The experience of both the public and private sectors has shown that performance systems can often encourage and lock in operational policies, processes and day to day practices. This can have the advantage that services are delivered consistently and set targets are met but it can also prevent staff in organisations providing what may be a more responsive, user-led service.

We have prioritised for a number of years the time it takes for decisions to be made on legal aid applications and accounts. This focus has seen us reduce our timescales for much of the work that we do to the point that urgent decisions are taken in a matter of hours.

In recent years, performance against our comprehensive suite of operational targets has been consistently very good, with close to 100% of cases in many areas meeting the set service standards.

We have been reviewing our operational targets and concluded that the timeliness measurements could better take into account the often multiple interactions between SLAB, solicitors and applicants that take place before a final decision or account payment is made. Our targets could also have a greater customer insight and currently present only a partial view of SLAB's delivery and performance.

With challenging financial settlements likely to continue it is essential that we are as

efficient as possible. With this in mind our operational measures must support an ethos of getting things right first time and not stand in the way of the changes necessary to improve operational efficiency.

Over the period of the corporate plan we aim to move to an approach that assesses our performance against a broader range of activity. This will allow us to better gauge our overall performance and delivery against expectations and better prioritise and manage resources to ensure optimal delivery against a range of measures. Our performance will be presented in a way that is more transparent, reflective of the customer experience and increases SLAB's accountability.

This process will begin from 1 April 2017 when we will change the way we measure and report our operational performance on decision-making. We will no longer be focusing only on the speed of our decisions based on time in our hands but will instead move to a duration measure which will be taken from the initial date received of an application or account until the final decision is taken or payment made.

We will also be introducing broader quality and customer satisfaction measures as well as retaining accuracy measures. These will be used to form a headline measure of customer experience. Further to this we will be starting to measure and review the number of interactions with customers and,

for accounts, the reasons for SLAB and solicitors negotiating the payments to be made on an account.

Further detail will be included in our annual business plans.

Priority 5 - Collaboration including wider Scottish Government priorities

The Scottish Government is aiming to publish a refreshed Justice Strategy for Scotland at the beginning of 2017-18. During this corporate plan period, SLAB aims to be a key agent for change in delivering a justice system that supports wider socio-economic outcomes for people and communities rather than focussing only on how well justice agencies or even the justice system as a whole delivers its own functions.

Collaboration with the other agencies that manage the justice system will continue to be a key priority for us between now and 2020. In particular, we will contribute to the Scottish Courts and Tribunal Service's review of summary criminal evidence and procedure

and also implement and monitor a range of legal aid reforms that are required for implementation of the Criminal Justice (Scotland) Act 2016.

Management of a funding mechanism on the size and scale of the Legal Aid Fund necessarily requires rules and procedures. However, much of this Corporate Plan is aimed at making the legal aid system easier for solicitors to work in. This includes how the system operates and how solicitors interact with us. We intend to work closely with the legal profession to ensure we fully understand their views to enable us to achieve this aim.

HIGH LEVEL DELIVERY PLAN

PRIORITY	KEY DELIVERABLES	DELIVERY PERIOD		
		YEAR 1	YEAR 2	YEAR 3
Cultural and operational excellence	We will develop and implement a SLAB People Strategy	✓	✓	✓
	We will use external expertise to carry out an extensive review of our risk management framework and implement recommendations for change	✓		
	We will review elements of our corporate governance framework	✓	✓	✓
Improvements in evidence and understanding	We will carry out a variety of research, survey, and consultation work	✓	✓	✓
Streamlining and digitisation	We will extensively review and deliver improvements to our suite of legal aid handbooks which are the primary source of guidance for suppliers of legal assistance	✓	✓	
	In our role of advising ministers, we will develop and deliver recommendations as requested on a range of reforms to the legal aid fee regimes across criminal and civil legal aid	✓	✓	
	We will implement a new SLAB Digital Strategy for 2017-20	✓	✓	✓

Development of our performance management system	We will develop and implement a new performance management system alongside a revised reporting mechanism. We will seek feedback from relevant stakeholders as we develop the new framework	✓	✓	
Justice system reform and wider Scottish Government priorities	We will develop and implement, dependent on ministerial decisions, a new legal aid regime to deliver the provisions of the Criminal Justice (Scotland) Act 2016	✓		
	We will work in collaboration with justice system partners on our contribution to the Evidence and Procedure Review	✓	✓	✓
	We will contribute to the independent review of legal aid and, subject to Ministerial decisions on the review's recommendations, develop and implement any subsequent changes to the legal aid system and our own functions	✓	✓	✓
	We will publish and deliver a new series of Equalities Outcomes	✓	✓	✓

MAPPING OUR PRIORITIES AGAINST OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOMES

Scottish Government National Outcomes

We have tackled inequalities in Scottish Society



We live our lives safe from crime and danger



We have strong, resilient and supportive communities



Our public services are high quality, responsive, and continually improving



Strategic Objectives

To deliver improvements to legal aid processes that increase efficiency and improve the experience of system users and customers



To advise Scottish Ministers on the strategic development of legal assistance and its contribution to a Scotland in which rights are supported and disputes are resolved fairly and swiftly



To ensure that our organisation has the culture and capability to be responsive to our customers, the justice system and developments in legal and advice services



To build and maintain effective and collaborative relationships with the legal and advice sector and our public sector partners as we seek to achieve our Purpose and contribute to wider Scottish Government aims



Outcomes to be delivered

Streamlined operational processes for applications and accounts benefit the legal profession and the general public and allow us to make better use of our resources



Our corporate governance and performance management framework effectively manages risk, provides assurance and promotes operational effectiveness while enabling innovation, continuous improvement and optimal use of resources



The experience of our customers is improved



We attract, develop and retain a knowledgeable, skilled and high performance workforce who are engaged with and committed to SLAB's purpose



Our operations and our strategic advice reflect a 'digital first' approach to public service delivery



We understand and fill skills gaps in our workforce and are able to effectively plan, prioritise and allocate our resources as required



Our service and our strategic advice are responsive to, and based on a sound understanding of, varied customer and system needs



Our relationships with stakeholders and delivery partners are strategic and collaborative



Our work reflects the pursuit of best value in the legal aid system and our own service delivery



We contribute effectively to the Strategy for Justice in Scotland, the independent legal aid review and wider Scottish Government objectives



Our direct delivery and grant funded services, and our advice on the development of the legal aid system, are aligned with our and Ministers' strategic objectives



SLAB Priority	SG National Outcome Contribution	SLAB Strategic Objective Delivered	Outcomes Delivered
Cultural and operational excellence	7 16	1 2 3	A B D E F G H I
Improvements in evidence and understanding	7 11 16	1 2 3 4	B D E I J
Streamlining and digitisation	7 16	1 3	A B C D E I
Development of our performance management system	7 16	1 3	B E G I J
Justice system reform and wider Scottish Government priorities	7 9 11 16	1 2 3 4	A B C D E F J K

MONITORING AND MEASURING THE PLAN

This Corporate Plan sets out SLAB's three year strategic direction as well as a high level delivery plan.

For each of the three years we will also publish an annual corporate Business Plan which will set out the full range of corporate activity that SLAB will pursue in each year in order to achieve change in line with our strategic objectives by 2020.

The corporate Business Plan will be monitored by our Board on a quarterly basis

and also by the Scottish Government as part of its regular performance monitoring of SLAB. We will publish on our website quarterly updates against our corporate Business Plans.

In terms of outcome measurement, we will develop and publish a range of corporate performance measures during 2017-18 as part our work to revise our performance management framework.

WHO WE ARE AND WHAT WE DO

SLAB was set up in 1987 under the Legal Aid (Scotland) Act 1986 and we are accountable to Scottish Ministers.

SLAB is responsible for doing a range of things, the key ones being:

- advising Scottish Ministers on the operation of legal aid, and ways to develop it.
- managing expenditure on legal assistance cases.
- deciding whether to grant applications for legal aid.
- assessing solicitors' and advocates' accounts for legal aid work, and paying them for the work they have done.
- investigating and minimising fraud and abuse of legal aid.
- operating and developing a network of SLAB employed solicitors who offer criminal and civil legal advice and representation.
- operating a police station duty scheme which gives suspects the right of access to a solicitor before and during police interview as well as running the 24 hours, 7 days a week solicitor contact line which is staffed by solicitors employed by SLAB to provide legal advice to suspects.
- providing grant funding for targeted legal advice and other services.

Our work is overseen by a non-executive board, the Chairman and members of which are appointed by Scottish Ministers. Our board currently consists of 12 members. The main responsibilities of the board are determining SLAB's strategic objectives and scrutinising expenditure, operations and organisational performance. We also have committees of the board to consider areas such as audit and risk; legal aid guidance and procedures; complex, sensitive or high profile legal aid cases; and remuneration and our pay arrangements.

Our Chief Executive, Colin Lancaster, is the Accountable Officer of the organisation and heads up an Executive Team made up of three directors responsible for the operational and administrative functions of SLAB, and the Principal Legal Adviser.

As a public body, SLAB also has a range of other obligations and commitments, including:

- **Monitoring of Access to Legal Services.** We have a statutory function of monitoring the availability and accessibility of legal services and reporting to Scottish Ministers. We assess whether there is an inability of potential clients to find or obtain the services of solicitors or advocates willing to act in particular areas of law or specific geographic areas. This function is not restricted to the accessibility or availability of legally aided services. It also includes privately funded services. Our assessment of access to services is based on both types. We report our findings annually to ministers and publish these reports.
- **Corporate Parenting.** On 1 April 2015, we became a Corporate Parent under the Children and Young Person (Scotland) Act 2014. The legislation introduces statutory duties on a range of public bodies, including SLAB, in regards to looked after children and care leavers. It places a number of responsibilities on SLAB in terms of how it deals with young people who experience the legal system.
- **Public Sector Equalities Duties.** We are committed to the promotion of equality and to tackling discrimination of any form, including in relation to age, disability, gender, gender reassignment, race, religion or belief and sexual orientation. Under the Equality Act 2010 we have a duty to consider equality in all our functions, including decision-making, in the design of internal and external policies and in the delivery of services, and for these issues to be kept under review.
- **Fair Work.** We are committed to the Scottish Government's Fair Work agenda and are an accredited Living Wage employer. We actively support trainees and work placements.
- **Public Bodies Climate Change Duties.** We have duties under the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009 that require us, in exercising our functions, to act in the way best calculated to contribute to the delivery of emissions reduction targets, in the way best calculated to help deliver any statutory climate change adaptation programme, and in a way we consider most sustainable. We have measured our organisation's carbon footprint since 2008 and now fully adopt the Carbon Trust's Management System. Reporting against this duty has now become mandatory from November 2016 and we will publish a report later in the year.
- **Duty to Publish Information.** The Public Services Reform (Scotland) Act 2010 requires public bodies to publish information on certain expenditure and activities. Under the Act, we have a duty to publish information regarding a range of different expenditure, a statement of the steps taken during the year to promote and increase sustainable growth, and a statement of the steps taken during the year to improve efficiency, economy and effectiveness. We publish this information on our website.