 **SLAB/2022/15**

 Agenda Item: **06**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Report to:** | The Board |
| **Meeting Date:** | 16 May 2022 |
| **Report Title** | Business Plan Update – 2021-22 Year End |
| **Report Category** | For Discussion |
| **Issue status:** | Business from a project |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Written by:** | Andrew McIntosh – Corporate Support Manager  |
| **Director responsible:** | Marie-Louise Fox |
| **Presented by:** | Andrew McIntosh  |
| **Contact details:** | mcintoshan@slab.org.uk |

|  |
| --- |
| **Delivery of Strategic Objectives** |
| Select the Strategic Objective(s) relevant to the issues  | 1. We deliver a high quality user focussed service2. We embed ways of working across the organisation that enhance the quality, consistency and transparency of our decisions and delivery3. We engage with users and delivery partners across the legal aid and justice system to inform good design of our system and services |

|  |
| --- |
| **Link to Board or Committee Remit** |
| The Board has reserved authority to approve SLAB’s annual business plan and is responsible for overseeing progress against its delivery. |

|  |
| --- |
| **Publication of the Paper** |
| We consider this paper is suitable for publication once we have been able to discuss relevant issues with the Equality and Human Rights Commission.  |

|  |
| --- |
| **Previous Consideration** |
| **Meeting** | **Detail** |
| August 2021 | The Board was presented with a snapshot of current progress against the plan Progress against the plan was generally good with no business critical issues at that time.The improved format of the report was noted and welcomed by the Board. |
| December 2021 | The Board was presented with a snapshot of current progress against the plan It was reported that although there had been an increase in the numbers of projects showing as amber since the previous report, the vast majority of projects were still generally on track. The ability to resource development and improvement work in tandem with operational duties remained a considerable challenge and was the key risk to projects not delivering outputs or outcomes as opposed to simply being delayed.The Board noted the report.  |

|  |
| --- |
| **Report** |

**High-level summary of progress**

1. The purpose of this report is to give Members a high-level assessment of delivery against business plan activity in 2021-22.
2. The term ‘delivered’ refers to general progress and issues – timescales, resources, external factors, risk etc. If a project is showing as amber, we are assuring the Board that there is a level of confidence that issues have not affected the overall success of the project. A relatively minor delay in overall timescales means the project can still be assessed as having delivered if there is no serious risk to the delivery of outputs or outcomes.
3. Equalities considerations are a key factor in the delivery of this business plan. We are now more closely aligning our reporting against our new Equalities Outcomes with our wider corporate reporting. Members can see in this report which projects are also the delivery mechanism for the [Equality Outcomes Plan 2021-23](https://www.slab.org.uk/app/uploads/2021/03/Equality-Outcomes-Plan-2021-23.pdf) and/or the action plan we have agreed with the Equality and Human Rights Commission, therefore also giving oversight on these key elements.
4. The project snapshots are presented in respect of the key strategic objective that they contribute to.
5. Overall, delivery has been positive, with the main setbacks being driven by external factors outwith our control.

**Delivery against the Business Plan at end March 2022**

*Strategic Objective 1 - We deliver a high quality user focussed service*

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **2021-22 Business Plan Workstream** | **Equality Project?** | **Delivered?** | **Comments** |
| WS1: Develop and implement a new SLAB customer service policy | Yes | Yes (slight delay) | Originally described as a customer services policy, this will in fact be a customer service charter that sets out a range of customer service standards. These standards have been informed by a consultation process carried out with managers and the Executive Team. It has also benefitted from input of Board member Sarah O’Neill. We have informed the Law Society that we have developed the standards and will offer to meet with them to discuss before implementation. Although we had originally planned to have the standards in place by April, we now consider it necessary to push this back for a short period of around three months. The consultation work has highlighted that it would be best to ensure that the standards are launched in conjunction with the charter’s supporting policies around unacceptable behaviour of customers and customer communication support needs. On the former, we have drafted a policy based on a model used by the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman that has been adopted by a number of other bodies. We are currently equality impact assessing this and will discuss with managers shortly. The Customer Communication Support Needs policy implementation is partly dependent on system changes – a deployment for which has been rescheduled to September. In the meantime, we are implementing other elements of the policy, including asking recipients of all our correspondence to tell us if they have communication support needs and putting training and processes in place for staff to put the necessary support services in place now.In addition to ensuring the enablers for the standards are in place, we now have two new Directors. It was therefore considered appropriate to get their views before the implementation phase. In addition, Adam Ford has extensive experience in the delivery of customer services. The standards will aim to increase the transparency of our performance, better align our service delivery with our Values and better enable customers to hold us to account. The standards aim to increase the likelihood that any failings in our service are learned from and put right. This will the draw together in one place access to information for our customers on:* Our customer service standards;
* Support for customers that have additional communication support needs;
* An unacceptable behaviour policy;
* Performance indicators that we will report on publicly on a quarterly basis;
* How people can complain;
* How people can challenge our decisions.

The charter as drafted includes a range of standards focussed on key categories of how we communicate, our performance, how we treat our customers, and how customers interact with us.We do not expect this delay to have a significant impact on the benefits to be delivered. |
| WS2: Review of template letters sent to applicants in civil legal aid | Yes | Yes | This project introduces improved and more accessible letters that we send to applicants and any named opponent(s) in a civil legal aid application. The new letters follow a review aimed at increasing the accessibility of letters to members of the public, including people with a sight disability or whose first language is not English. Among the accessible features used are a larger font size, plain English and improved formatting and layout. We have now issued 84 of the 88 civil system letters with a major system deployment successfully implemented in March. Feedback from staff has been positive since the letters have been in use. The remaining four letters will be issued by the end of May 2022. We will seek feedback from solicitors once all the template letters are in place, which will allow us to consider the full benefits delivered in due course. |
| WS3: Review of complaints policy | Yes | Yes | The focus of this project was to equality impact assess the policy and to improve the recording of complaints relating to equality issues. In April 2021, we adopted the standard template complaints policy advocated by the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman. We have carried out an Equality Impact Assessment, which we expect to publish in May. There were no significant issues highlighted by the EqIA. However, we have undertaken to improve the collection of data on complaints that feature an equalities aspect – this is an important part of the EHRC action plan. Guidance for staff on how to recognise and record an equality related complaint has been compiled and discussed with our Equalities Project Group. The guidance will be discussed with managers and issued before the end of May. |
| WS4: Tender for and deliver a new case management system for CLAO, PDSO and SCL  | Yes | Yes | This has been a complex project and a positive example of collaboration across our now aligned direct services functions. We successfully deployed Civica’s live iCasework system to all three Client Legal Services – Civil Legal Assistance Office, Public Defence Solicitors Office and Solicitor Contact Line on 31 March 2022.This was preceded by significant user testing and staff training. As is often the case with new software, a number of glitches have been highlighted since the system went live which were not found during testing. However, at the time of writing, the vast majority of these have been rectified. Budget allowing, we will also look to implement a number of system enhancements over the coming weeks. From 3rd May, we have moved to a ‘business as usual’ phase. The supplier’s service desk will now provide external support for any new issues arising.  |

*Strategic Objective 2 - We embed ways of working across the organisation that enhance the quality, consistency and transparency of our decisions and delivery*

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **2021-22 Business Plan Workstream** | **Equality Project?** | **Delivered?** | **Comments** |
| WS6, 7, 8: GALA Workstreams – Accounts, applications and financial eligibility | Yes | Yes. Carry overto 2022-23 | Elements of this project are now also an intrinsic part of the EHRC action plan. As advised previously we are making positive progress generally, in what is the most complex and cross cutting project we have undertaken. What we have learned so far is resulting in new reviews of policy becoming smoother in its operation. The project board met in April to take stock of progress and consider a project re-planning exercise that has just been undertaken. This has shown that risks remain around the hard deadline for the project in that the totality of the project may not be delivered in time for completion of the EHRC action plan. This is largely to do with greater certainty around the scope of the work involved in reviewing policies on financial eligibility and contributions. Additional resources are being allocated and further options being considered. There is time ahead to continue to manage this, and to engage with the EHRC in good time about the project and its delivery plan.This project will run until late 2023. |
| WS9: Designing a New Working Environment (DANWE) – covid-19 recovery | Yes | Yes. Carry overto 2022-23 | The work on this project in 2021-22 was focussed on planning for the return of staff to the office post Covid-19 lockdowns in line with the ongoing changes to Scottish Government guidance returning to the workplace. This has been delivered. As well as a finalised return to work policy published for staff following consultation with them, there has a been a range of guidance and support put in place to assist staff with returning to the office for the first time and on a more regular basis. This has included technological solutions to work effectively from home, and in recent weeks, to test hybrid-working arrangements. This should enable us to manage future Board and Committee meetings with a combination of office and home based (or otherwise remote) attendees.All Thistle House staff have been asked to arrange to work from the office for at least one day before the end of May for Business Continuity reasons. This is to enable all staff to have their laptop software updated so that they will be equipped to work from the office in the future or at short notice because of an issue with their hardware or home broadband.The numbers of staff coming in to the office has been increasing steadily in recent weeks and the last of the Scottish Government’s Covid19 restrictions have now ended. The office environment is now more inviting. The one-way system has gone, the plastic coverings on the chairs have all been removed and we have been setting up a range of additional flexible workspaces. Discussions continue between Directors, managers and staff about the best short-term mix of home and office working for their teams. As the Board were advised in December, this project will carry over to 2022-23 but with a revised focus linked to the consideration of SLAB’s future state, the longer-term working environment and workforce planning which the Board has been keen that we make progress on. |
| WS10: Review of people policies | Yes | Yes. Carry over to 2022-23 | This project is a significant thread of our action plan with the EHRC. The work is aimed at ensuring that our full suite of people policies are compliant with employment law and promote SLAB as an employer of choice.The project is made up of two phases. The first was to tender for an external consultant to review the full suite of 25 policies with recommendations for change. This has been delivered. Morton Fraser has now made recommendations on all policies. Four of these policies need an EQIA only. Three policies have now been fully reviewed by the Project Board and are ready for staff consultation. The second phase, which will be rolled forward into 2022-23 and run to December 2022 involves internal consideration of the consultant’s recommendations on the remaining policies, plus a programme of staff consultation. The best method of handling these consultations is currently being considered with the Union. |

*Strategic Objective 3 - We engage with users and delivery partners across the legal aid and justice system to inform good design of our system and services*

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **2021-22 Business Plan Workstream** | **Equality Project?** | **Delivered?** | **Comments** |
| WS11: Strategic Development – gathering and use of applicant equality data | Yes | Yes (slight delay) | This project had two tranches – (i) the development of an applicant module in the Legal Aid Online system and (ii) engagement with the profession on the importance of data collection with accompanying guidance for applicants and solicitors.Although the initial systems development has taken place, the full deployment planned for May has been pushed back to September due to resourcing difficulties and competing priorities that have impacted timescales. Deployment of the test system will happen in May and provide an opportunity to proactively engage with solicitors to test and feedback prior to full deployment in SeptemberIn terms of the customer angle, we have amended a range of documentation such as leaflets and the equality card that solicitors take their clients through when they meet. As solicitors play a key role in gathering equalities data from applicants, we have developed a communication strategy with clear messaging to encourage this to happen. This has included articulating the reasons why this data is required and the potential benefits that solicitors could see to their business and clients through improvement to service delivery. We have been directly engaging with the Law Society and solicitors on this in recent weeks and have sought the Society’s support in the project’s promotion. We have also directly engaged with solicitors on the potential barriers to collecting data and spoken to solicitors that have had success in collecting data so we can capture good practice. We have written directly to the Society’s Equality and Diversity Committee and offered to attend a meeting of the Committee to discuss this work.In support of the project, we have finalised a policy statement and associated Equality Impact Assessment.  |
| WS12: Grant funding policy development | No | No. Carry over to 2022-23 | This project was supposed to be delivered in the year but as we have advised Members previously, this has not been achieved. This has been caused by lack of internal resources and pressures on SG resources, in particularly in dealing with the ongoing dispute with the Law Society over legal aid remuneration and internal SG discussions on the use of grant funding projects within wider justice expenditure priorities.All current grant funded projects have now been rolled over for another 12 months via a ministerial determination and all renewed project governance and monitoring arrangements are in place.The work on a grant funding strategy will therefore need to roll over to 2022-23. We have begun developing a forward strategy for use of SLAB’s grant funding powers which will be progressed using elements of the our new policy toolkit and the full Equality Impact Assessment process. We will engage the Board in this work as it progresses. |
| WS13: Surveys and feedback work with solicitors and clients | No | Yes | The four client surveys begun in 2021-22 are either complete or nearing completion. The PDSO and private practice client surveys have been published on SLAB’s website. Comparisons with the previous surveys of these groups, suggest that both PDSO and private practice clients have a largely positive experience of their solicitor, SLAB (for the few that have direct contact) and the system overall. The pandemic does not seem to have made a significant difference to this group, in respect of issues raised through the survey.The CLAO client and contact survey, and the survey of civil legal aid applicants, are both in the report drafting stage. The SLAB staff survey is being readied for publication to staff, with different formats, including a short video, being used. There are notable improvements in feedback compared to the last survey. |
| WS14: Incorporation of UNCRC | No | No | We have advised the Board previously on the external issues that have prevented us from delivering this work in 2021-22. This has been impacted significantly by political issues. The Supreme Court ruled in October 2021 that certain parts of the UNCRC (Incorporation) (Scotland) Bill fell outwith the competence of the Scottish Parliament. Ministers announced in October that the Bill would not become law in the form which the Parliament agreed, but that they remained committed to the incorporation of the UNCRC to the maximum extent possible as soon as practicable. It is unclear at this stage when the Bill will be considered by the Scottish Parliament again and receive Royal Assent.The Scottish Government’s programme of implementation runs over a three-year period. Although the position on the legislation is unclear, some guidance is now starting to appear and we will now begin to consider that as well as continue to network with other bodies about how they are considering the issues.We have recently considered the need to carry out Child Rights and Wellbeing Impact Assessments (CRWIAs) to demonstrate our compliance with the UNCRC Bill. The bill only makes it obligatory for Scottish Government. CRWIAs are a voluntary tool for public authorities to demonstrate their compliance with UNCRC. There is no specific legal obligation to undertake CRWIAs. As part of their implementation programme, the Scottish Government has committed to guidance and support for public bodies and we will therefore await further guidance on CRWIAs and learning from other bodies that have used them.As well as considering our reporting on compliance, we will need to consider how our processes fit with the convention itself i.e. how child friendly our own operational policies and procedures are. |
| WS15: Develop a workforce plan | No | No | We have committed to the Board that this will be developed in 2022-23 and it will be a key interest for the External Auditors.We advised members previously that we have decided to begin developing the plan for a workface plan based on a possible model for legal aid reform that sees a continuation of our judicare functions alongside some movement towards a wider role in relation to the design, development and implementation of other models of delivery to meet a range of needs. The priority for the Project Manager in recent weeks has been the HR policy review work and GALA. However, now that Linda Ross has started in post, a meeting is to take place shortly to begin shaping the plan.The HR policy review and work to review our pay and grading structure will complement this work. |

**Detailed reporting on *outputs* delivered**

1. We are currently in the detailed phase of compiling our Annual Report and Accounts for 2021-22. We are taking a revised approach to content and design of the document this year following positive engagement with the External Auditor last year. This will be the means by which we set out more detailed evidence of outputs that we have delivered in the year in line with our project plans. This will be considered by Members of the Audit Committee and Board in the coming weeks.

**Reporting on *outcomes* delivered**

1. Our reporting of activity against the business plan and the resultant annual reporting is necessarily focussed on outputs. However, we are considering how we can improve our reporting of outcomes. This could result in us looking back over a whole corporate plan and reporting on outcomes delivered once the outputs have been given sufficient time to realise the outcomes envisaged. The Executive Team recently considered the organisation’s research priorities for 2021-22 and research resource will be used to help with development of this if other priorities allow.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | **Governance Links**  |
| 1 | Finance and ResourcesNothing additional to note.  |
| 2 | Risk Each project on the business plan considers risk to delivery of the project. Risks will be escalated as appropriate and significant risks flagged to the Board or relevant Committee. |
| 3 | Legal and ComplianceIt is a condition of our Framework Agreement with the Scottish Government that we publish our business plan. We will report to SG on progress through our corporate governance monitoring meetings. |
| 4 | PerformanceThe plan identifies some measures which will be reflected in reports to the Board and in the Annual Report. |
| 5 | Equalities ImpactEach project on the business plan will consider equalities impacts as appropriate and this has oversight by the Director of Strategic Development and the Chief Executive. The Business plan includes projects, aspects of which deliver our Equalities Outcomes and the EHRC action plan.  |
| 6 | Privacy Impact and Data ProtectionN/A |
| 7 | Communications and EngagementProgress against the plan is published via Board papers, dependent on sensitivity. Projects will consider engagement with stakeholders as appropriate.  |

|  |
| --- |
| **Conclusion and next steps** |
| The Board is asked to consider the paper and comment on any issues.  |

|  |
| --- |
| **Appendices/Further Reading** |
| **Appendix 1** – Details of business plan projects |

##  Appendix 1

## Strategic Objective 1: We deliver a high quality, user focussed service

|  |
| --- |
| **Workstream 1: Development and Implementation of a Corporate Customer Service Policy** |
| **Drivers**  | * Civil Finance teams in their interactions with applicants/ members of the public
* Mental Health Check survey and feedback from employees.
* Feedback from equality organisations during our external engagement process
* Internal research conducted during 2017-2020 outcomes cycle and finding that we tend to respond to communication support needs on an ad hoc basis
 |
| **Who will benefit?** | * All external customers
 |
| **Activity** | * Develop a corporate customer service policy based on research and current good practice
* Identify additional guidance and supporting policies that are required to ensure the policy can be effectively implemented.
* Publish the policy including in suitable formats including BSL video with audio and subtitles, and easy read format.
 |
| **Measures** | * Involvement of stakeholders in the development of the policy
* Monitoring of complaints
* Baselines from surveys of staff and applicants established 2021
 |
| **Owner** | Director of Strategic Development |
| **Duration** | * Implementation by April 2022
 |

|  |
| --- |
| **Workstream 2: Review of template letters** |
| **Drivers** | * Feedback from Civil Applicant survey 2016 that letters were too technical
* Several sources of evidence we reviewed cited accessible communication as important.
* SLAB commissioned research on our draft letters during 2017-2020 outcomes cycle that has informed the development of this work to date.
 |
| **Who will benefit?** | * People involved in the legal aid process
 |
| **Activity** | * Ongoing testing and launch of civil legal aid letters in stages
* Staff briefing sessions to coincide with staged launch
* Plan the review and launch letters across other aid types
 |
| **Measures** | * Ad hoc feedback via operational teams from people who receive the letters
* solicitor survey feedback
 |
| **Owner** | Director of Operations |
| **Duration** | * Civil Legal Aid letters will continue launch during 2021-22
* Review and launch of letters for other legal aid types expected in 2022-23 subject to planning process.
 |

|  |
| --- |
| **Workstream 3: Improved complaints recording and reporting and use of complaints, including equality related complaints**  |
| **Drivers** | * Our own experience of the limitations of the current way that we log complaints
* Recognition that this is a valuable source of evidence that we can better use in equality impact assessments.
 |
| **Who will benefit?** | * External customers including Legal Aid Applicants, Solicitors and members of the public
 |
| **Activity** | * Review logging of complaints to improve identification of equality related complaints
* Develop and review internal guidance and procedures to support the updated SPSO model complaints procedure and changes to logging process.
* Determine routine reporting
 |
| **Measures** | * Evidenced use of data in relevant equality impact assessments
* Reporting in place and evidenced
 |
| **Owner** | Director of Strategic Development |
| **Duration** | * By December 2021
 |

|  |
| --- |
| **Workstream 4 : Implementation of a new case management system for PDSO, CLAO and SCL services and development of key management metrics. This project is a precursor to full scale business plan review and will inform future design of services** |
| **Drivers** | * Our own experience of the limitations of current data in understanding the experiences of our customers throughout the legal aid process. This includes the amount and quality of data collected across relevant protected characteristics, how the data can be reported on and our communication about how we use the data.
* Case management limitations on efficiency and risk management of legal work
 |
| **Who will benefit?** | * Clients and contacts of our PDSO, CLAO and SCL services
* Staff in direct services
 |
| **Activity** | * Complete tender process for a new case management system
* Implement policies for data capture and reporting
* Direct services to develop relevant local procedures and guidance on collecting relevant data
* Set up management reports and key indicators
* Use data to inform business planning reviews
 |
| **Measures** | * Evidenced use of data in relevant equality impact assessments and service design
* Reporting in place and evidenced
* Improved % disclosure of relevant equality data
 |
| **Owner** | * Director of Strategic Development
* Director of PDSO
* Head of Service CLAO
* Manager of the Solicitor Contact Line
 |
| **Duration** | * By April 2022 (Year one)
 |

|  |
| --- |
| **Workstream 5: Applicants System Upgrade: IT Development to develop applicant module in SLAB case management systems.** **This work is a precursor to implementation of improved gathering and use of applicant data and to support the implementation of the customer communication support needs policy** |
| **Drivers** | * Our own experience of the limitations of current data in understanding the experiences of our customers throughout the legal aid process. This includes the amount and quality of data collected across relevant protected characteristics, how the data can be reported on, and our communication about how we use the data.

  |
| **Who will benefit?** | * Legal Aid Applicants
 |
| **Activity** | * Legal Aid online user experience captured
* IS development of a standard applicant module for each aid type
* Reordering of equalities monitoring data in LAOL
 |
| **Measures** | Outputs – new applicant module |
| **Owner** | Director of Corporate Services and Accounts (IS development) |
| **Duration** | Development of applicant module including monitoring questions is due to be complete by Spring 2022 |

## Strategic Objective 2: We embed ways of working across the organisation that enhance the quality, consistency and transparency of our decisions and delivery

|  |
| --- |
| **Workstream 6: GALA Project: Review of Taxation Standards and Accounts Assessment**  |
| **Drivers** | * Legal Aid Review tells us there is a desire for change
* Significant gaps in guidance for solicitors on accounts assessment
* Alignment to our corporate values by improving accountability and increasing transparency
* Evidence and experience of employees in our Accounts Teams
 |
| **Who will benefit?** | * Legal Aid applicants and Solicitors
 |
| **Activity** | * Review policy and develop decision makers guidance and solicitor guidance for the taxation standard
* Consultation where necessary
* Set out policy, decision makers guidance and solicitor guidance for all areas of accounts assessment
* Equality impact assessment for accounts policies carried out
 |
| **Measures** | * To be determined by the equality impact assessment
* Increase in Accounts satisfaction measures in solicitor micro-surveys.
 |
| **Owner** | Director of Operations and Director of Corporate Services and Accounts |
| **Duration** | Review and development of policy statements for all areas of accounts assessment will be complete by December 2021.Implementation staggered into next business planning period.  |

|  |
| --- |
| **Workstream 7: GALA Project: Applications General stream**  |
| **Drivers** | * Legal Aid Review tells us there is a desire for codified guidance
* Alignment to our corporate values by improving accountability and increasing transparency
 |
| **Who will benefit?** | * Legal Aid applicants and Solicitors
 |
| **Activity** | * Review policy and develop decision makers guidance and solicitor guidance Consultation where necessary
* Set out policy, decision makers guidance and solicitor guidance
* Equality impact assessment for applications policies carried out
 |
| **Measures** | * To be decided by the equality impact assessment
 |
| **Owner** | Director of Operations |
| **Duration** | 2022-23 |

|  |
| --- |
| **Workstream 8 : Guidance on Administration of Legal Aid (GALA) Project: Review of financial assessment**  |
| **Drivers** | * Legal Aid Review tells us there is a desire for change
* Significant gaps in guidance for solicitors and applicants
* Alignment to our corporate values by improving accountability and increasing transparency
* Evidence and experience of employees in our Civil Means Teams and CLAO
 |
| **Who will benefit?** | * Legal Aid applicants and Solicitors
 |
| **Activity** | SLAB operates the means assessment tests across each scheme under five different schedules* The Legal Aid (Scotland) Act 1986
* Advice and Assistance (Scotland) Regulations 1996
* Civil Legal Aid (Scotland) Regulations 2002
* Children’s Legal Aid (Scotland) Regulations 2013
* Criminal legal Aid (Scotland) Regulations 1996

The statutory framework varies in the degree to which means assessment is specified across the different schemes. Advice and Assistance, civil and children’s regulations set certain rules governing the calculations of disposable income and capital, while criminal does not. The rules differ between the schemes however and for civil and children’s, while set rules exist, wide discretion is also contained within the statute and regulations. This discretion means that a personalised assessment of each applicant is undertaken for the legal aid schemes, using information provided by the applicant and, as a consequence, limited by what information is provided as evidence. Options for reviewing the use and application of SLAB discretion will be developed in consultation with owners of alternative means of assessing income and groups representing users.  |
| **Measures** | Two key outputs: Development of new policy guidance for application of discretions Development of advice to Government for matters covered by statutory regulations, if required. |
| **Owner** | Director of Strategic Development  |
| **Duration** | Final quarter 2021-22 |

|  |
| --- |
| **Workstream 9: Designing a New Working Environment (DANWE) – covid-19 recovery** |
| **Drivers** |  SLAB (including PDSO, SCL and CLAO) have moved almost entirely to a working from home basis, subject to exceptions for some essential tasks. As the situation evolves, SLAB needs to plan and prepare for:* a limited return to offices and
* continued working from home for a significant number, and probable majority of staff in the medium term
* A phased return to office based work in accordance with public health guidance and good design of services balanced with employee preferences.

Specific attention is required to support staff wellbeing during this time and in the management of the return to office based operations.  |
| **Who will benefit** | * Employees
 |
| **Activity** | Several strands of work are already in place in response to the global pandemic and to enable a safe continuation of homeworking and return to ‘normal’.Work stream 1 - Thistle House, PDSO and CLAO office availability Work stream 2 - Staff Wellbeing Work stream 3 - Health and Safety. Thistle House, PDSO and CLAO office requirements, and Tenants of Thistle House Work stream 4 - External work protocols Work stream 5 - Long term Homeworking Work stream 6 - SLAB Policies Work Stream 7 - Equipment and Furniture  |
| **Measures** | * Improvement in staff survey indicator related to an inclusive workplace
* Maintenance or improvement of wellbeing indicators in staff survey
* Ongoing pulse surveys with equality groups captured to allow analysis
* Take up of health and wellbeing initiatives and impact of these for individuals
* Absence data
* Efficient space utilisation and configuration
 |
| **Owner** | Director of Corporate Services and Accounts |
| **Duration** | 2021-22 |

|  |
| --- |
| **Workstream 10: People policy review to deliver People Strategy Objectives**  |
| **Drivers** | We require a fundamental review of key people policies to drive the key themes from the People Strategy will guide our decision making as we seek to* Attract the right calibre of people to help us fulfil our purpose and deliver our strategic objectives
* Develop people with the right mix of hard and soft skills to meet the current and future opportunities and challenges facing SLAB
* Retain people to ensure continuity of service and the sharing of knowledge and expertise
* Reward people fairly through a combination of intrinsic and extrinsic benefits
* Empower our people to bring out the best in themselves and the best in SLAB.
 |
| **Who will benefit?** | Employees and SLAB  |
| **Activity** | Policy review, development and consultation on refreshed policies. The first tranche of policies for review 2020-22 are: * Special leave policy
* Flexible working
* Absence
* Parental leave
* Recruitment
* Dignity at work
 |
| **Measures** | Measures will be identified as part of policy development and equalities impacts assessment to include staff survey results, absence data, recruitment data.  |
| **Owner** | Director of Corporate Services and Accounts |
| **Duration** | 2022-23 |

## Strategic Objective 3: We engage with users and delivery partners across the legal aid and justice system to inform good design of our system and services

|  |
| --- |
| **Workstream 11: Strategic Development – gathering and use of applicant equality data** Full implementation dependent on applicant module This data would be used at a high level to understand trends at a strategic level and to inform strategic policy development, for example as part of the equality impact assessment process.  |
| Drivers | * EHRC Guidance – Evidence and the Public Sector Equality Duty
 |
| Who will benefit? | * People who go through the legal aid process
 |
| Activity | * Engagement with the Law Society of Scotland and the profession on their role in gathering this data from clients
* Development and publication of guidance for customers on the equality data we gather and how we use it.
 |
| Measures | * Improved % disclosure across the relevant protected characteristics
* Ad hoc feedback from solicitors
 |
| Owner | * Director of Strategic Development
 |
| Duration | * Engagement with the Law Society of Scotland to begin late 2021
* Development of guidance for customers will take place during year one
* Publication of guidance for customers will coincide with roll out of the applicant module which is planned for Spring 2022 (year two).
 |

|  |
| --- |
| **Workstream 12: Grant Funding Policy development**  |
| Drivers | The Legal Aid Review identified an objective of including user input into the design of services. Most services paid for through the Legal Aid Fund are judicare, case by services, and there are few opportunities to engage users in the design of services. It is an agreed objective with Scottish Government to test user design in a new grant funding programme for 2022-23. It is also an agreed objective to consider civil justice priorities as they relate to wider Scottish Government policies on social justice and tackling inequalities in the design of services.  |
| Who will benefit? | Users of advice and legal services in a grant funded programme |
| Activity | Policy development including: * Data analysis
* Stakeholder consultation
* User consultation
* Development of advice
* Submission of advice to Scottish Government
 |
| Measures | Output driven  |
| Owner | Director of Strategic Development  |
| Duration | Advice submitted last quarter 2021 |

|  |
| --- |
| **Workstream 13: Surveys of applicants and clients**  |
| Drivers | We carry out cyclical surveys of all our main client and applicant groups- across the PDSO, CLAO, criminal applicants and civil applicants. This will provide a useful baseline for this planning period and insight into user experience to underpin activity SO 1.  |
| Who will benefit? | Legal Aid Applicants and direct services of clients  |
| Activity | Survey of criminal applicants Survey of PDSO clients Survey of civil applicantsSurvey of CLAO clients  |
| Measures | Outputs Provides baseline for user experience  |
| Owner | Director of Strategic Development  |
| Duration | Quarters 1 &2, 2021-22 |

|  |
| --- |
| **Workstream 14:**  **Incorporation of UNCRC**  |
| Drivers  | The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Incorporation) (Scotland) Bill is currently at Stage 3, with implementation expected to be required within 6 months of Royal Assent  |
| Who will benefit? | Child applicants and those acting on behalf of children; clients in Direct Services  |
| Activity | The Bill is concerned with embedding the UNCRC rights into public services. As a public body we will need to consider changes to our impact assessment processes. Legal aid is currently available to allow children to enforce their rights, at present there is no indication that Scottish Government intend to change any of the tests in such cases.  |
| Measures | Refreshed impact assessmentsAdvice to SG on impact on existing legislation  |
| Owner | TBA:  |
| Duration | The Bill is expected to receive Royal Assent this parliament thereafter there is currently a six month period for implementation of the impact assessment duty.  |

Cross cutting Project

|  |
| --- |
| **Workstream 15**  **Workforce Planning** |
| Drivers  | Financial Sustainability: there is a risk that reliance on vacancy management may have an adverse impact on staff capacity and the quality of services. |
| Who will benefit? | Employees, customers and Board |
| Activity | Development of a workforce plan to support the delivery of the Corporate plan. |
| Measures | Outputs |
| Owner | Director of Corporate Services  |
| Duration | 1st Quarter 2021-22 |