

**Annual Assessment of Board Effectiveness**

**AGENDA ITEM: 10
REPORT NUMBER: SLAB/2023/36**

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| **Report to:** | The Board |
| **Meeting date:** | Monday 18 September 2023  |
| **Report title** | Annual Assessment of Board Effectiveness |
| **Report category** | For Information |
| **Issue status:** | Business as usual |

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| **Written by:** | Sarah Lynchehaun, Corporate Governance and Policy Officer |
| **Director responsible:** | Colin Lancaster |
| **Presented by:** | Sarah Lynchehaun, Corporate Governance and Policy Officer |
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| **Delivery of Strategic Objectives** |
| Select the Strategic Objective(s) relevant to the issues  | 1. Our timely, clear and consistent decisions on legal aid applications and accounts deliver a positive customer experience.
2. Our client legal services and targeted funding deliver high quality and accessible information, advice and representation.
3. We support our people to develop the skills and ways of working needed to deliver our mission, both now and in the future.
4. Our advice to Ministers supports their decision making on the future of legal aid and SLAB.

An effective Board who are engaged and informed will provide support and sound decision making which delivers improved outcomes aligned with the Corporate Plan and objectives. |

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| **Link to Board remit** |
| The approval of any assessment of the Board’s effectiveness is reserved to the Board. |

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| **Publication of the paper** |
| The Board has previously agreed that this paper should be published as a matter of course. It will be published on our website in due course. |

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| **Executive summary** |
| As part of our annual governance programme, an assessment of board effectiveness for 2022-23 was undertaken. A range of documentation was considered to analyse Board input, including board meeting papers and minutes. It is concluded that the Board functions effectively. |
| **Previous consideration** |
| **Meeting** | **Detail** |
| Board – December 2021 | Annual Board Effectiveness was last brought to the Board in December 2021. There were no actions arising. |

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| **Report** |
|  **Format of the assessment tool**The format of the report has remained relatively unchanged to the previous year’s document, with the performance category and performance indicators staying the same. It is noted that the Audit Committee were happy with the format of their annual report to the Board recognising and documenting where they had added value. We have tried to bring out the same kind of supporting evidence here.**Evidence****Evidence of effective oversight has included:**The contributions made by the Board have shown an understanding of the complex role of the organisation and responsibilities to customers. In particular, benchmarking discussions, civil legal aid applications and grant funding procedures. The Board have consistently requested updates in relation to the progression of the Equalities and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) action plan. When matters brought to the Board have required additional information or clarity, the Board have asked for details and for the subject to be brought to a following meeting to be revisited. The Board have taken an interest in the wellbeing of the staff and have raised questions in relation to the delayed pay award, arrangements for supporting staff with mental health issues and the results of the staff survey. During 2022 there was an Internal Audit report of best value where the Standing Orders of the Board were reviewed. It was reported that decision making was clear and transparent.There was significant collaborative engagement which took place at the Strategy Day in December 2022. It was felt that the groundwork for the new Corporate Plan presented an opportunity for the organisation and in turn a renewed focus for the Board. The Board discussed at length the anticipated challenges during the life span of the Corporate Plan and agreed that a different bold approach was required. The Board utilised the time to identify the plan as a mechanism to influence and to think and engage differently.  |

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|  | **Governance links** *Any relevant information linked to key heads of corporate governance* |
| 1. Finance and resources | N/A  |
| 2. Risk | This work contributes to mitigating a functional risk we have of there being a failure in board and committee governance. |
| 3. Legal and compliance | N/A |
| 4. Performance | This is directly linked to the measurement of performance. |
| 5. Equalities impact | Diversity of the Board is a performance measure in the effectiveness tool. |
| 6. Privacy impact and data protection | N/A |
| 7. Communications and engagement | N/A |

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| **Conclusion and next steps** |
| It is concluded that the Board is engaged, providing best value and are well supported by the Executive Team and Chief Executive’s Office. Next steps or possible action required for 2023-24 is set out in the assessment. The Board is asked to approve the assessment. |

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| **Appendix/further reading** |
| Board Effectiveness Tool |