



Corporate Plan 2026-29

Introduction from the Chair and Chief Executive

Legal aid plays a vital role in our communities. This can be through empowering people to defend or pursue their rights or by tackling difficult life situations they face. Legal aid is also critical to the wider justice system, including the operation of the courts, children's hearings, prisons and police custody. It contributes to the justice system's shared ambition to build a just and fairer Scotland.

Our annual reports highlight the scale and complexity of the system we manage. In 2024–25, legal aid spending reached £169 million, the highest level ever recorded, reflecting increasing demand and system pressures. Legal aid supported 170,000 grants of legal assistance, ensuring that people across Scotland continued to receive support when they needed it most. These figures tell a clear story: legal aid continues to occupy a vital place at the heart of a fair and accessible justice system.

We have an important multipurpose role. We must effectively administer and deliver today's legal aid services but also advise Ministers on the reforms required for tomorrow. We must ensure that the current system is the best it can be whilst setting out a vision for its future sustainability.

In terms of the here and now, we have delivered much to be proud of over the past three years. We have improved performance against many of our core operational decision-making benchmarks; we have modernised our internal systems to create more accessible and user-friendly procedures that enable quicker processing of applications and accounts; we have invested in leadership development, enhancing our capacity to manage change and deliver high quality services during a period of considerable uncertainty; and we have worked closely with Scottish Government to develop proposals for regulations that will simplify and streamline major elements of the legal aid landscape.

At the heart of this progress are our people. Their expertise, professionalism, and dedication ensure that we continue to deliver high quality services, whilst also contributing meaningfully to the development of a modernised system.



Colin Lancaster



Bill Moyes

The Board and Executive Team are immensely proud of the crucial work our staff undertake every day to facilitate access to justice – work that is often overlooked amongst criticism of an outdated legislative framework that constrains what the current system can deliver. Together, these efforts reinforce the vital role of legal aid in the justice system and position SLAB to play a pivotal role in shaping a reformed legal aid system for the future.

This plan sets out how we plan to build on this progress, refreshing our purpose and vision and establishing key strategic objectives to drive our delivery over the next three years. The Board will maintain a resolute focus on making the case for change and preparing our excellent team to be ready for that change. It is disappointing that new primary legislation has not been forthcoming over the past three years. However, we are pleased there is now an increasing recognition across the political spectrum that meaningful, lasting reform is essential to the delivery of modern, responsive and accessible legal aid services.

Systematic reform delivered through new primary legislation will not take effect the minute it is passed. It may take years to fully implement and bed in. That is why we will not stand still and wait for change to happen – we must and will redouble our efforts to improve the system we currently have while actively working to deliver the system Scotland needs.

We will continue to deal with the challenge of administering a post war funding scheme in the 21st century. Although the legal aid legislation may be feeling its age, we will expand our use of up-to-date approaches to enhancing our customer insight, data utilisation and automation to deliver the best possible experiences for those using our services.

Looking ahead, SLAB remains committed to working closely with government, the legal profession, and partners across the justice and advice sectors to help design a modern, responsive legal aid system that meets the needs of a changing society. We are pleased to introduce this 2026–29 plan which sets out the next stage of our journey. With a focus on **Service**, **People**, and **The Future**, we will continue to deliver for those who rely on legal aid whilst helping to build a more efficient and sustainable system for the future.

-- William Moyes, SLAB Board Chair

-- Colin Lancaster, Chief Executive and Accountable Officer



OUR PURPOSE: To fund, provide, and advise on services that secure access to justice.

OUR VISION: Our work transforms lives through modern, responsive, and accessible legal aid services.

Our Objectives are delivered through our themes:

Service

- 1 Customer experience
- 2 Data Utilisation
- 3 Automation & Simplification



People

- 4 Capability, Leadership & Resilience
- 5 Engagement, Wellbeing & Reward
- 6 Adaptability, Workforce Planning & Service Redesign



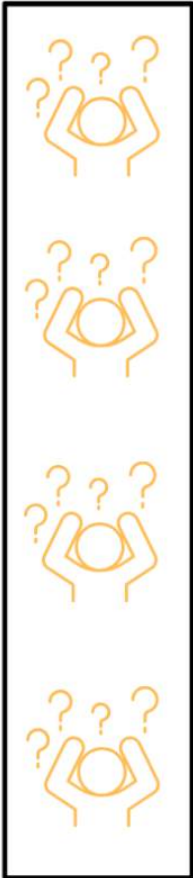
The Future

- 7 Change for the Better
- 8 Influencing Change
- 9 Legal Aid Reform



Scotland's legal aid model

Legal problem identified



Sources of help



Judicare
Monitored by SLAB.
Private solicitors registered to provide civil, criminal & children's legal assistance.

Client Legal Services
SLAB direct service.
National network of publicly employed solicitors providing civil, criminal & children's legal assistance.

Non-legal sources of advice
Not managed by SLAB.
Example: Citizens Advice Bureau.

Grant funding
Monitored by SLAB.
17 grant funded projects, mainly for debt & housing cases.



 **The Scottish Legal Aid Board**



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The legal aid process

Apply

1. Solicitors apply for legal aid
2. SLAB assess eligibility to:
 - a. Grant 
 - b. Refuse. 

Solicitors deliver

Deliver Advice & Assistance, ABWOR (assistance by way of representation), and Legal Aid.

Assess & pay

Accounts paid



Our Objectives and measuring success: Service

Objective 1: Customer Experience

We will deliver a consistent, accessible, and efficient experience across our services, making it easier for our customers to interact with us, building trust and satisfaction.

At the end of this plan:

- our Customer Insight Strategy and policy development will have led to improved customer experiences and service quality
- our work to support solicitors will mean they are better equipped to manage legal aid administration.

We will know we are on track through:

- ✓ our performance KPIs
- ✓ customer feedback and insight
- ✓ reviewing the impact of our policy changes
- ✓ the level of complaints we receive about our service
- ✓ the level and type of interactions we have with solicitors.

Objective 2: Data Utilisation

We will improve our data coverage and utilisation to enable confident, evidence-based decision-making.

At the end of this plan:

- data capability and skills will have improved across the organisation
- a revised measurement framework will allow us to better measure organisational performance and outcomes.

We will know we are on track through:

- ✓ reviewing against our baseline data maturity assessment how:
- ✓ we access, use, and share data across the organisation
- ✓ we have used data to support improvements
- ✓ our capability and skills have changed
- ✓ evidencing that our approach to data protection, security, and records management is robust and resilient.

Objective 3: Automation and Simplification

We will increase our administration automation and simplification to reduce manual and paper-based processes.

At the end of this plan:

- we will have fewer avoidable customer interactions, and remaining interactions will be more meaningful, productive, and efficient.

We will know we are on track through:

- ✓ customer feedback and insight
- ✓ showing how our processes and systems have changed.

Our Objectives and measuring success: People

Objective 4: Capability, Leadership and Resilience

We will ensure our people are skilled, supported, and equipped to meet current and future business needs.

At the end of this plan:

- our career pathways will be visible and clearly defined
- we will be better equipped and capable to manage organisational change
- we will have improved our resilience and leadership capability.

We will know we are on track through:

- ✓ feedback from our people
- ✓ evidence of the effectiveness and impact of corporate training.

Objective 5: Engagement, Wellbeing and Reward

We will strengthen our people engagement and wellbeing through a fair, inclusive, and supportive employee experience.

At the end of this plan:

- our people will have participated in and influenced our ongoing programme to review our people policies and supporting guidance
- Our staff will have benefited from the implementation of a wellbeing strategy

We will know we are on track through:

- ✓ feedback from our people
- ✓ evidence of employee input into policy and guidance changes.

Objective 6: Adaptability, Workforce Planning, and Service Redesign

We will utilise our people where and when they add the greatest value to develop efficient, future-ready, and responsive services.

At the end of this plan:

- we will be using workforce planning tools and techniques to anticipate skills, capacity and capability needs, and inform budget, resourcing, and development decisions
- we will have redesigned services to better align with customer needs, implement changes flowing from regulations or deliver against Ministerial priorities.

We will know we are on track through:

- ✓ feedback from our people
- ✓ alignment of our skills and resources with our business needs
- ✓ delivery of agreed service redesign initiatives aligned to corporate priorities.

Our Objectives and measuring success: The Future

Objective 7: Change for the Better

We will deliver a programme of continuous improvement to enhance service delivery and efficiency.

At the end of this plan:

- changes to judicare processes will have improved customer experience, service quality, and operational efficiency
- we will be better able to plan, prioritise, and measure the impact of our work.

We will know we are on track through:

- ✓ feedback from our people
- ✓ feedback and insight from our customers
- ✓ enhanced business planning and corporate governance.

Objective 8: Influencing Change

We will strengthen our position as a trusted independent authority on legal aid to deliver and shape reform that supports a just, safe, and resilient Scotland.

At the end of this plan:

- we will have contributed data, evidence, and insight to inform change and improvement across the justice system
- partners and stakeholders will have a wider appreciation of the role of legal aid, and our role in its operation and development.

We will know we are on track through:

- ✓ feedback from our stakeholders and partners
- ✓ evidence of the influence of our evidence and insight on justice delivery and reform.

Objective 9: Legal Aid Reform

We will provide clear and evidence-based advice to Ministers setting out our vision for a future legal aid system.

At the end of this plan:

- our support will have enabled Scottish Government to secure the passage of the primary and secondary legislation needed to deliver a reformed legal aid system
- we will be prepared for any changes to our functions contained in a new statutory framework.

We will know we are on track through:

- ✓ evidence of the influence of our advice on the direction and detail of legal aid reform.

Our external environment and wider contribution

Scottish Government outcomes

The services we fund make an important contribution to the wider outcomes pursued by Scottish Government. A revised National Performance Framework is expected to be launched soon after this plan is published, and we will show how we contribute to any revised National Outcomes through our annual business plans.

Justice Vision for Scotland

We will work closely with our Justice Board partners to secure senior leadership engagement in shaping a focused, collaborative approach that will deliver an ambitious cross-sector plan with clear and measurable outcomes. We will show how we contribute to the Justice Vision in our annual business plans.

Reform to legislation

A political cross-party consensus has emerged in recent months that reform of the legal aid system is both necessary and pressing. Scottish Parliament's Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee recommended that primary legislation should be a top priority for the next administration. Scottish Government's 2025 Legal Aid Reform Discussion Paper set out plans to simplify the current system, undertake a structured review of legal aid fees, and design a future system built around user needs and robust evidence. We will play a crucial role in this.

Finances

The 2026–27 Scottish Budget sought to provide stability for the wider justice system and delivers a 3% increase in the legal aid allocation. However, pressure on our administration budget is significant and so the pursuance of efficiencies and cost effective services is a key feature of this plan. Whilst some stakeholders have expressed concern that current legal aid funding does not fully reflect system pressures, the legal aid fund remains uncapped: if rising demand or increases in costs lead to rising expenditure, this will be met by Scottish Government. External factors may therefore continue to place significant pressure on public finances.

Public service reform

The scale of the fiscal sustainability challenge over the next decade requires strategic change across public services – to reduce demand, manage costs, and improve outcomes. Legal aid reform sits firmly within this wider agenda of system transformation: Scottish Government has been clear that legal aid reform will be central to delivering a modern, person centred, rights based justice system, aligned with the Vision for Justice. A more strategic statutory framework will better enable the legal aid system to support the kind of whole-system, preventative approach encapsulated in the public service reform agenda. SLAB will continue to play a key role in building a sustainable legal aid system that safeguards access to justice for the people of Scotland – supporting the next administration to deliver a justice system that is more inclusive, effective, and future ready.



Our Values

Our values guide everything we do.

They shape the way we make decisions, how we work with the public, partners and each other, and how we fulfil our responsibilities as stewards of public funds. They ensure that legal aid in Scotland is administered fairly, consistently, and in line with the governing legislation. Together, these values support our commitment to delivering modern, responsive, and accessible legal aid services that help transform lives.



Transparent

We are clear and open about how and why we make decisions.



Impartial

Our decisions are based on evidence and objective criteria.



Respect

We act honestly and with integrity, and trust others to do so too.



Accountable

We apply our policies and procedures accurately and consistently.



Proportionate

We balance efficiency, accessibility, and effective management of risk.



Responsive

We reflect on how our work affects people and strive to meet their needs.

Our key activity

Each year of this plan will be accompanied by an annual business plan.

These plans will set out the key activity that we will take forward each year to deliver the objectives set out in this Corporate Plan, and the resources that we have to do so.

