



Attorney
General's
Office

Business Plan

2016-17

Foreword

The AGO describes our unique contribution to public life as making law and politics work together at the heart of the UK constitution. We do that through our stewardship of the public interest in the rule of law, as a fundamental principle of our unwritten constitution and a guarantee of our historic democracy and liberties. This AGO Business Plan for 2016-17 sets out what that means for us in practice this year. We will remain focused on supporting delivery of the Government's manifesto, legislative programme and operational priorities; superintending the public prosecution authorities and supporting the continuing development of the Government Legal Department (GLD); delivering the Law Officers' public interest litigation and operational functions; and addressing the consequences for AGO of the 2015 spending review through the careful stewardship of the public resources entrusted to us. This year's Business Plan builds on our success in 2015-16 in achieving the challenging objectives we set ourselves, as set out in last year's [report](#).



At the time of writing, we await the result of the EU Referendum. This will be a major constitutional decision for the United Kingdom. The outcome will significantly affect the direction of Government, and therefore the work of the AGO, this year. But much of our work will go on unaffected, whatever the result. The Law Officers will continue to deliver Government policy and operational work by providing timely, problem-solving legal and constitutional advice across all areas of its programme, responding in particular to pressures on policies arising from litigation and other legal risks, and to the pressures of world events, politics and conflicts. We will continue to support the Attorney General's attendance at Cabinet and membership of its National Security Council. The Law Officers will continue to contribute to the work of the Parliamentary Business and Legislation Cabinet Committee, and to handle a wide variety of Parliamentary business in both Houses, including responding to Parliamentary Questions.

The Law Officers lead the Government legal profession, promote the independence, performance and accountability of the public prosecution organisations, and undertake a range of justice functions in the public interest. This is a busy and growing practice: for example, the number of sentences submitted annually to the Attorney General's Office for consideration of referral to the Court of Appeal for rectification of undue leniency has now more than doubled since 2010. Although still a very small minority of cases dealt with daily by our courts, ensuring that some of the most serious offenders are sentenced properly in accordance with what Parliament intended and the public is entitled to expect, is an increasingly valued contribution we make to the criminal justice system. We also have a busy practice in scrutinising applications for consent to prosecution in terrorism cases and cross-border drugs conspiracies. And like other Ministerial departments, we have a lively business in handling political and public correspondence, and in meeting our obligations to explain what we do.

The AGO is a small, high-performing, multi-disciplinary, engaged and resilient team with a reputation for legal professional excellence and creativity, sophisticated political and handling awareness, and smart and modern ways of working. We are proud to support the Law Officers in all that they do, and I am thankful to all our staff for the contribution they make, individually and collectively, to the delivery of our business. The engagement, productivity and resilience of our small workforce, despite being distributed across a large range of specialist functions, was publicly underlined last the autumn when AGO scored the highest results in the 2015 Civil Service People Survey of any ministerial department. We finished 2015-16 by securing new premises ahead of a planned office move necessitated by the expiry of our current lease; we are looking forward to preparing for the move together, and by the end of the summer to be starting to realise the prospects it holds out for new ways of working together for the benefit of our Ministers. It is a great privilege to be leading such a team, contributing to implementing the Government's manifesto programme, and supporting the Government's commitment to the Rule of Law in all that we do.

Rowena Collins Rice

Director-General of the Attorney General's Office and Legal Secretary to the Law Officers

The Attorney General's Office

The Attorney General's Office (AGO) is a ministerial department which supports the Attorney General and the Solicitor General (who are, together with the Advocate General for Scotland, the UK Law Officers) in their work.

Responsibilities

The role of the Attorney General and Solicitor General, working together with the Advocate General for Scotland, includes:

- promoting the rule of law at home and overseas;
- acting as Chief Legal Adviser to government, Parliament and the Crown, including through the Attorney General's attendance at Cabinet and membership of the National Security Council;
- superintending and having general oversight of public prosecutors and government litigation;
- working with the Justice Secretary and Home Secretary to provide a more efficient, effective and accountable justice system;
- maintaining the relationship between the executive and the judiciary;
- carrying out independent public interest litigation functions; and
- acting as leaders within the legal professional world including leadership of the Government legal profession.

The Attorney General also holds the separate office of Advocate General for Northern Ireland.

AGO Vision

The AGO is first and foremost a specialist ministerial department. At our best, the Law Officers want us to be a 'crack team of problem solvers', here to support them and the whole of government in the delivery of policy. Together we want to be a high-performing, multi-disciplinary, engaged and resilient team with a reputation for:

- legal professional excellence and creativity;
- sophisticated political and handling awareness; and
- smart and modern ways of working.

Our unique contribution to public life is to make law and politics work together at the heart of the UK constitution. We do that through our stewardship of the public interest in the rule of law, which is itself a fundamental principle of our unwritten constitution and a guarantee of our historic democracy and liberties. As a place to work we are proud of our:

- role and reputation;
- team spirit, ethos and values; and
- individual people's development and wellbeing.

Strategic Objectives

- A: Helping deliver Government policy in the context of the Law Officers' constitutional role in relation to the Rule of Law
- B. Defining and delivering the Law Officers' public interest functions in the interests of the administration of justice
- C. Performing a visible and effective role as a leader in the domestic and international legal community
- D. Effective sponsorship of the Law Officers' Departments
- E. Ensuring a high performing and efficient Attorney General's Office which meets its legal and performance obligations

A: Helping deliver Government policy in the context of the Law Officers' constitutional role in relation to the Rule of Law

Actions

1. Supporting the Attorney General's effective contribution to Cabinet and its committees (particularly PBL and NSC), including by engaging with Cabinet Office, and providing advice and briefing on attendance and correspondence
2. Supporting departments delivering HMG's wider domestic and international objectives, including by providing contextualised, accurate, constructive and timely risk-based Law Officer advice, and by promoting awareness and understanding of legal and constitutional issues, and their impact on government policymaking
3. In particular, working with relevant departments to support delivery of the Government's priorities in relation to the EU following the Referendum, and in taking forward proposals for a new Bill of Rights
4. Leadership of the Government Legal Profession, working in particular to enhance government lawyers' role as expert problem-solvers in the delivery of government policy
5. Stewardship of the Constitutional Convention supporting the Law Officers' Rule of Law function in the context of collective Cabinet responsibility

B. Defining and delivering the Law Officers' public interest functions in the interests of the administration of justice

Actions

1. Providing effective support for the Law Officers to deliver their statutory public interest functions, including as Advocate General for Northern Ireland
2. Supporting the Law Officers to deliver the Government's manifesto commitment to extend the unduly lenient sentence scheme
3. Completing and implementing a strategic review of casework functions including by engaging with external stakeholders, analysing pilot schemes and in particular continuing to work with the Charity Commission to reduce duplication of functions between the Attorney General and the Charity Commission
4. Implementing improved AGO casework systems improvements to ensure maximum efficiency

C. Performing a visible and effective role as a leader in the domestic and international legal community

Actions

1. Raising and maintaining the profile of the AGO through targeted engagement and outreach work so that the Law Officers' work is well-understood and supported
2. Maintaining and enhancing relations between the executive and the judiciary and courts, including through domestic and international advocacy by the Law Officers; and by promoting supportive engagement with the judicial leadership

3. Developing and implementing an international engagement strategy to promote the UK's distinct historical and contemporary leadership on the Rule of Law

D. Effective sponsorship of the Law Officers' Departments

Actions

1. Supporting the delivery of the Law Officers' statutory superintendence functions in relation to the public prosecution departments, including by securing their proper operational independence, and promoting their effectiveness, efficiency and Parliamentary and public accountability and reputations
2. Supporting HMCPSP to deliver its functions and to provide an effective contribution to the Law Officers' statutory superintendence functions
3. Overseeing the relationship between policymakers in government and the prosecutors so that the policies and actions of each reflect an appropriate understanding of the consequences for the justice system
4. Supporting the Law Officers' superintendence of the Government Legal Department, including by promoting its effectiveness, efficiency, accountability and reputation

E. Ensuring a high performing and efficient Attorney General's Office which meets its legal and performance obligations

Actions

1. Prioritising the effective and strategic leadership of the AGO by its Executive Board
2. Ensuring effective financial planning and management of AGO budgets (administrative and public interest) in accordance with Government Accounting rules and best practice
3. Completing AGO's move to new accommodation so as to minimise disruption to the business and maximise realisation of the opportunities it presents
4. Ensuring an effective people plan is in place to support staff engagement in all areas of the business, and the recruitment, induction, learning & development, leadership, diversity & inclusion of AGO people to meet our business needs
5. Designing and delivering an information management project to improve effectiveness and efficiency
6. Responding to all litigation & inquiries, and parliamentary, press and public correspondence in line with our published standards and legal obligations.

In order to measure progress against these objectives, the Business Plan will be supported by a risk register and management information systems, and reviewed at quarterly intervals by the AGO's Executive Board against appropriate criteria, such as time-frames, feedback and impact.

