



Attorney  
General's  
Office

# Business Plan

## 2015-16

## Foreword

15th June 2015 marked a solemn national celebration in Runnymede meadows of the signing of Magna Carta. The Great Charter of 1215 established the principle that everyone is subject to the law. 800 years on, it is still a byword for government according to the rule of law, a guarantee of individual freedoms, and of the right to justice and a fair trial.



The Law Officers are proud inheritors of that tradition, and the AGO in turn is proud to support them across the range of their work. 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, as a fundamental principle of our unwritten constitution and a guarantee of our historic democracy and liberties.

The AGO business plan for 2015-16 reflects our commitment to both the rule of law and the conscientious stewardship of public resources. We aim in supporting the Law Officers 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 focus is on the professional

quality of support we provide to the Law Officers, as they help the Prime Minister and the Cabinet to deliver Government policy, lead the Government legal profession, promote the independence and performance of the public prosecution organisations, and undertake a range of justice functions in the public interest.

Against a continuing backdrop of careful public finance restraint, our success in the delivery of our public interest justice functions has brought us a steadily climbing caseload. Last year we received a record number of 674 requests to look at sentences which might have been too low. Of those, we took 122 to the Court of Appeal which agreed that 95% were unduly lenient. The newly-elected Government's manifesto includes a recognition of the importance of this work to public confidence by including a pledge to look at extending the scope of the scheme to a wider range of offences.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all staff in the Attorney General's Office for the advice and support they provide to the Law Officers in everything that they do. In last year's people survey, the AGO came top with the most engaged team of staff of any government organisation. It is a great privilege to be leading such a team as the new Government takes forward its manifesto programme for the governance of the UK, and for our place in the world as exemplars of the rule of law.

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;
- 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,
- 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
- individual people's development and wellbeing.

## **Strategic Objectives**

- A. Providing high quality and timely legal advice to the Prime Minister and the Cabinet and helping to deliver Government policy in the context of the Law Officers' constitutional role in relation to the Rule of Law**
- B. Carrying out the Law Officers' public interest functions in the interests of the administration of justice**
- C. Performing a visible and effective role as a leader of the legal professions and superintendence of the Government legal profession in particular**
- D. Effective superintendence of the independent prosecuting authorities**
- E. Maintaining the relationship between the Executive and the Courts; and increasing the understanding within government of legal issues**
- F. Ensuring a high performing and efficient Attorney General's Office which meets its legal and performance obligations**

## **Plan for Delivering Strategic Objectives**

### **A: Providing high quality and timely legal advice to the Prime Minister and the Cabinet and helping to deliver Government policy in the context of the Law Officers' constitutional role in relation to the Rule of Law**

#### **Actions**

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1. Providing contextualised, accurate, constructive and timely risk-based advice across all departments that reflects and helps to shape HMG's wider domestic and international objectives
2. Ensuring the Attorney General makes an effective contribution as a member of the Constitutional Reform Committee, including by drawing together linkages between different aspects of constitutional reform and ensuring consistency, including in relation to the evolving devolution settlements.

### **B. Carrying out the Law Officers' public interest functions in the interests of the administration of justice**

#### **Actions**

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1. Providing effective support for the Law Officers in their public interest functions.
2. Identifying opportunities for strategic intervention in civil casework where there is a public interest case for it and intervening effectively, for example by making Vexatious Litigant orders.
3. Improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the civil casework functions by implementing the recommendations of the Casework Review.
4. Delivering the government's manifesto commitment to extend the unduly lenient sentence scheme.

### **C. Performing a visible and effective role as a leader of the legal professions and superintendence of the Government legal profession in particular**

#### **Actions**

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1. Raising and maintaining the profile of the AGO through engagement and outreach work so that the Law Officers' functions are well-understood and confidence in the Law Officers is maintained.
2. Superintending the Government Legal Department and wider government legal profession, working in particular to enhance government lawyers' role as problem-solvers in the delivery of government policy.

## **D. Effective superintendence of the independent prosecuting authorities**

### **Actions**

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1. Accounting to Parliament for the performance of the prosecution departments by answering questions in Parliament and dealing with Parliamentary correspondence.
2. Providing constructive challenge to the superintended prosecutors on their casework and corporate functions, including through regular superintendence meetings.
3. Ensuring the independent prosecutors are consulted on and represented in relevant justice policy areas.

## **E. Maintaining the relationship between the Executive and the Courts; and increasing the understanding within government of legal issues**

### **Actions**

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1. Taking a lead within government in maintaining a good relationship between the Executive and the Courts, including through a Law Officers' engagement plan.
2. Using ministerial meetings and correspondence to ensure ministerial colleagues are aware of and understand the legal implications of policies.
3. Engaging effectively on legal policy issues across government

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

### **Actions**

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1. Maintain confidence in the office and the justice system by providing timely and courteous responses to all forms of parliamentary, press and public correspondence, in line with our published standards and legal obligations.
2. Support a co-ordinated, strategic and corporate approach to decision making through effective advice and support to the Executive Board.
3. Ensure an effective people plan is in place for staff engagement, recruitment, learning and development, leadership and diversity.
4. Ensure staff engagement is considered in all areas of the business and supported through a Board sponsored Staff Engagement Group. Conduct 2 staff surveys per annum and produce an action plan based on the results (April and October).
5. Ensure effective financial planning and management of the AGO budgets (administrative and public interest) through effective planning, forecasting and monitoring by the Executive Board.

