



Legal Aid
Agency

Legal Aid Agency

Our Vision for 2020 and Business Plan 2017-18

Working with others to achieve excellence in the delivery of legal aid



Our vision for the Legal Aid Agency by 2020 Shaun McNally CBE

As an executive agency of the Ministry of Justice (MoJ), we play a pivotal role in protecting and advancing the principles of justice ensuring access to justice for some of the most vulnerable in our society. I took over as Chief Executive on the 1st April 2016. Since then we have worked hard to continue the journey of developing and improving as an organisation, transforming the way we work. Some of this is set out later in the Business Plan and in the Legal Aid Agency (LAA) Annual Report and Accounts 2016/17 which will be published later in the year.

The next three years will bring a number of new challenges for the LAA and like all parts of the public sector we expect to remain under strong pressure to reduce our budget. We will work within a unified MoJ embracing functional leadership. Working with our partners and stakeholders we will deliver efficiencies and we will become a simpler, smarter organisation. These challenges are reflected in our new strategic objectives for the LAA and they will impact and influence our day to day business, our portfolio of change and reform, our people and our culture and our relationships with others across the justice system.

As an Agency we'll say what we'll do and do what we say. We will deliver against our strategic objectives; working in partnership with providers we will simplify our processes to provide simple timely and reliable access to legal aid. Working within a unified MoJ we will build strong relationships across Government and the justice system securing value for money in all that we do. We will be seen as an employer of choice and enable our people to achieve their full potential through being fair, proud and supportive. I am so proud to be able to say that I work with a great team, lead our great organisation and celebrate the fact that we deliver in terms of people, performance and financial results.

Shaun McNally CBE



Our Strategic Objectives

Working with others to achieve excellence in the delivery of legal aid we will:

- Provide simple, timely and reliable access to legal aid
- Build strong relationships across Government and the justice system
- Secure value for money for the taxpayer in all that we do
- Achieve our full potential through being fair, proud and supportive

We employ over 
1,300 people
across all our offices and
our staff work flexibly
across our estates, in
MoJ commuter hubs
and from home

There are 
16 offices
across England
and Wales including
four Public Defender
Service offices

Our staff are at the heart of what we do

We are committed to improving wellbeing, finding the right work/life balance and providing a flexible work environment to make the LAA a better place to work. We are proud of our fair and supportive culture. This is demonstrated by our Civil Service People Survey scores which have been improving year on year. We remain focused on developing a flexible, committed workforce with the right skills, capability and knowledge. We remain committed to the values of equality, diversity and inclusion in both the delivery of legal aid and in our workplace. We are extremely proud of being in the top three Civil Service organisations for Inclusion and Fair Treatment and want to continue to improve in this area.



By 2020 we want to be widely recognised as a great place to work

This means we will have:

Engaged, valued and **high performing teams** that reflect the public we serve



Brilliant leaders, at all levels, who are confident, inspiring and empowering



Clear and attractive career paths; enabling us to be flexible and responsive



Invested in the **right skills and capability**; helping us to achieve our full potential



Lived up to our **shared culture and values**



The MoJ Strategy Protecting and advancing the principles of Justice

The vision of the Ministry of Justice is to deliver a world-class justice system that works for everyone in society:

- Upholding the rule of law and the role of the judiciary
- Providing open and accessible justice
- Protecting the public and keeping our communities safe
- Reforming offenders
- Protecting the vulnerable
- Standing up for victims



MoJ Strategy: our next 10 years



1 A prison and probation service that reforms offenders



2 A modern courts and justice system



3 A Global Britain that promotes the rule of law



4 A transformed department

The Legal Aid Agency will play its part in delivering those objectives,

We will continue to deliver legal aid effectively and efficiently for those whose life and liberty is at stake, where they face the loss of their home, in domestic violence cases, and where their children may be taken into care.

We will continue to deliver our business critical services

We will process applications and bills for legal aid making timely payments to providers. We will undertake the effective commissioning of services and contract management and provide a high quality Public Defender Service, whilst at the same time delivering our commitments to drive efficiencies across the Legal Aid Agency and simplify legal aid.

Over the last three years the Agency has delivered significant reform and change, including digitising over 90% of our external processes. Over the next four years we will build on this progress through delivering further transformational change to enhance the efficient delivery of legal aid services.



As an Agency we will continue to improve efficiency, automate and simplify

Every day we process approximately 2,500 applications for legal aid. We need to continue to find more efficient ways of doing things. This includes identifying further processes to be streamlined and simplified wherever possible. We will ensure that processes and systems work effectively to deliver timely and reliable access to legal aid, delivering the best possible value to recipients of legal aid and tax payers.

Our relationships with legal aid providers are central to the work of the Legal Aid Agency

Improving our systems and processes, streamlining wherever possible, will also reduce burdens on our providers, allowing them to focus on providing the best possible legal advice. We will seek to transform our operational processes, using data more effectively to automate more and reduce the burdens of our current control and assurance processes.

We are committed to increasing transparency and access to data wherever possible and we would want to be able to produce, for each provider, greater access to their performance data online.



Our achievements – LAA in 16/17

Processing / Delivery



We remained on target for processing our civil and criminal legal aid applications and bills



We renewed and re-tendered key business critical contracts and now work with over **2,300** legal aid providers to deliver civil and criminal legal advice





We provided **1,600,000** instances of legal aid



Our Client and Cost Management System (CCMS) a new IT system that processes legal aid applications and bills was made mandatory from 1 April 2016


Finance and efficiency

We completed two key reform programmes: Legal Aid Transformation (LAT) and the Crime Change Programme (CCP) which together are expected to reduce legal aid spend by over **£200m** by 2018/19* 

90%  of our submitted applications and bills were **completed online**. CCP provided the means for all crime providers to submit applications and bills online

Reputation

Our Customer Services Team received over **230,000**  phone calls to our call centres and maintained a high level of performance and customer satisfaction

We dealt with over **1,000,000**  pieces of correspondence and associated casework and we met our targets for responding to Freedom of Information and Data Protection Act requests

Our People

Our staff engagement score is **68%**  placing us 3rd across other government organisations of a similar size

We moved from 3rd to **2nd**  place overall in the Civil Service People Survey for fairness and inclusion

*We reduced spend on the administration of legal aid, and reduced fund spend, through the delivery of projects including: Future Initiatives Project - a series of digital enhancements and improvements to existing IT systems to enable the reduction of staff in Case Management through efficiency and process improvements. Crown Court Fee Scheme Reform - a series of changes to simplify and reform fee schemes and implement policy impacting legal aid.

Strategic Objective 1 –
Provide simple, timely and reliable
access to legal aid

In 2017/18 we will:

- Focus on our core purpose of providing reliable and timely access to legal aid
- Improve and enhance our business processes to ensure we maintain and build upon the excellent customer service we offer to our users and partners in the justice system
- Implement improvements to our business IT systems, increasing our digital offering for staff and users
- Procure new civil legal aid contracts for both face to face advice and specialist advice delivered through the Civil Legal Advice telephone helpline



**We will
measure this by:**

- Processing 90% of civil legal aid applications in 15 days except in the most complex cases
- Processing 90% of criminal legal aid applications in two days
- Paying 90% of crime and civil bills in one month
- Setting ourselves challenging targets for customer services, including responding to correspondence and resolving complaints quickly
- Setting ourselves challenging targets for the reliability of our IT systems



Strategic Objective 2 –
Build strong relationships across
Government and the justice system

In 2017/18 we will:

- Modernise the way we pay criminal defence advocates and criminal litigators through changes to the Advocates' and Litigators' Graduated Fee Schemes
- Make changes to support the introduction of Universal Credit (UC)
- Work with our justice partners to deliver Government priorities on domestic abuse
- Work with our partners across the justice system to deliver further efficiencies in our contact centres
- Work with our criminal justice partners to support further digitisation of the criminal justice system



We will measure this by:

- Delivering Crown Court fees changes
- Introducing changes to UC across our business processes
- Implementing amendments to domestic violence evidential requirements
- Working as part of the Common Platform Programme



Strategic Objective 3 –
Secure value for money for the
taxpayer in all that we do

In 2017/18 we will:

- Live within our means and reduce admin spend in 17/18
- Implement new Criminal Contracts which will commence in April 2017
- Support the longer-term focus of further simplifying and automating our services through our portfolio of change and reform
- Continue to commission legal aid services from quality assured providers



We will measure this by:

- Closely monitoring both fund and admin spend
- Maintaining net error below 1% through financial stewardship of the legal aid fund
- Monitoring and reporting on the performance of our portfolio of change and reform projects and programmes



Strategic Objective 4 –
Achieve our full potential through
being fair, proud and supportive

In 2017/18 we will:

- Develop and start to deliver our People Strategy
- Respond to the outcomes of the 2016 People Survey by strengthening leadership at all levels of the organisation through improved conversations, building the skills and capability of our people and being smarter about how we work together
- Continue to build an inclusive workplace, increase diversity and further embed the public sector equality duty in our design and delivery of legal aid




We will
measure this by:

- Monitoring our levels of staff engagement, including through the annual Civil Service People Survey, and regular Pulse Surveys
- Delivery of the 2017 National Engagement Action Plan and the Diversity and Inclusion Action Plan
- Monitoring staff absence and sickness rates across the organisation



In the first half of 17/18 we have successfully achieved the following:

 **Strategic Objective 1 – Provide simple, timely and reliable access to legal aid**

We continue to make IT improvements to both our crime and civil internally facing systems. This has included enhancements to our Client and Cost Management System (CCMS) to improve the efficiency of internal processes and reduce the time taken to process some categories of applications



We have transitioned our Exceptional and Complex Case Team calls to our Customer Services Team to improve the ability to contact us in high cost cases



We have increased the range of our training offered to providers by creating YouTube videos in addition to Quick Guides on subjects identified such as generating calls to the contact centre



We continue to increase our digital offering to users. For Crime Billing Online, now


60% of Advocate bills and **46%** of Litigator Bills are submitted online

39% of requests for 'Prior Authority' on Criminal Legal Aid cases are now submitted online in five weeks following implementation




We have commenced **Windows 10** rollout to staff within the LAA, to further improve the ability to work flexibly



 **Strategic Objective 2 – Build strong relationships across Government and the justice system**

Work remains ongoing and we continue to work collaboratively with MoJ policy colleagues on the design and implementation for future changes



 **Strategic Objective 3 – Secure value for money for the taxpayer in all that we do**

The 2017 Crime Contract was successfully implemented on 1 April following a procurement process which resulted in **1,299 organisations** contracted to deliver Criminal Legal Aid services under the new contract



A key change introduced in the 2017 Crime Contract was the introduction of new contract terms designed to tackle 'ghost' solicitors, who may be registered to firms but who carry out little or no Duty Solicitor work



The list of duty solicitors contains **5,500 members** which is a reduction of about **1,000 members** compared to the previous members list

This reduction reflects our joint work with the Law Society to ensure the list was refreshed to remove anyone not meeting the qualifying criteria

We published the LAA People Strategy in May 2017. It looks forward to 2020 and beyond and captures everything that we are doing for and with our staff as well as what more we want to achieve over the next **3-5 years**



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3-5 years

We launched our first Learning & Development (L&D) Strategy to provide a more structured and consistent approach to L&D across the LAA



We have taken forward our Fair and Included Campaign with awareness raising topics including age equality, LGBT discrimination and pride, what it means to observe Ramadan, awareness of mental health and disability, gender equality and the needs of carers and parents



We developed a new LAA Leaders intranet page for managers. We also held our annual LAA Leaders Event in June 2017. The theme was 'leading well' and incorporated live coaching, interactive action planning and building on our strengths



Appendices

Director of Legal Aid Casework

The LASPO Act 2012 ensured that the decision making process for legal aid remained independent from Ministers. The role of Director of Legal Aid Casework (DLAC), which was created as a result of the act, has sole responsibility for making decisions on individual cases. The LAA Board and the Central Legal Team support the Director to ensure that robust practices are in place to maintain the independence of the decision making process. The LAA's Chief Executive undertakes this role. The DLAC Report is published annually alongside the Annual Accounts.

Living within our means

As part of MoJ we will contribute to the overall required reduction in spend at departmental level as a result of the Spending Review both in the administration of legal aid and the remuneration paid for legal aid.

Our Fiscal Resource Departmental Expenditure Limit outturn for 16/17 and budget for 17/18 are set out below:

	Actuals 16/17	Budget 17/18
Fund	£1,553.9m	£1,534.1m
Admin	£74.4m	£70.0m
Change	£1.0m	£3.5m

These budgets will be updated during the year at the supplementary estimates to reflect functional leadership and any new policy initiatives. We have committed to reduce our administration budget by 18% by 19/20 (compared to 16/17). We will do this by continuing to drive improvement, make efficiencies and simplify legal aid.

Stewardship of taxpayers' money remains central to what we do. We will continue to drive improvements in the way we control expenditure and prevent fraud, to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of our spending on publicly funded cases and our payments to legal aid providers.

Managing our risks

The Agency's approach to risk management is supported by its Assurance Framework which follows HM Treasury best practice. The framework identifies three lines of defence to provide sufficient, continuous and reliable assurance on our organisational stewardship and management of the major risks to our organisational success and delivery of improved, cost effective, legal aid service. The three lines are:

1. Front line operational arrangements to manage risk
2. Second line assurance activities involving expert guidance, monitoring and compliance reviews to assure the effectiveness of front line arrangements on risk and control
3. Independent assurance of LAA's control processes, both from within MoJ (Internal Audit), and also outside (National Audit Office)

Further detail on our risks, and our financial performance can be found in the Annual Governance Statement which will be published as part of the LAA Annual Report and Accounts.





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