

**NEW**

**DIMENSIONS**

ANNUAL REVIEW  
**2022/23**



# **THE OPPOSITE OF POVERTY IS NOT WEALTH — IT'S JUSTICE**

Our society is unequal, but it does not have to be this way.  
We are at the heart of a movement for change.

We support and develop a network of Law Centres: local hubs across the country, that help people in poverty and disadvantage overcome legal problems.

We are a specialist support organisation: the only UK membership organisation dedicated to supporting legal assistance charities.

**WE ARE THE LAW CENTRES NETWORK.**



# CHAIR'S WELCOME

For 45 years, LCN has worked hand in hand with local Law Centres, making its own impact on the availability of legal assistance across the country. Our work helps Law Centres' resources go further and helps them provide more services that are more accessible to people who need them. We are also the collective voice of Law Centres, alongside the voices of each one.

We are not an aloof membership organisation; neither our small network nor our values would allow it. On the contrary, over the past year we have had our sleeves rolled up and have been working to counter the current challenges faced by our members, mainly as a result of the deepening crisis in the advice and voluntary sectors.

This year we engaged consultants Social Finance to review our performance against our strategic plan. They found that "The general consensus from all respondents was that LCN was offering **strong support** to the network, despite facing its own challenges and constraints. The offer from LCN was described as **'excellent'**, **'responsive'** and **'first rate'** and was evidently well valued and **appreciated**."

We can demonstrate our value as a membership organisation to our members, our funders and the sector as a whole. We provide a good return on investment: this year, Law Centres' membership fees made up **just 10% of our income, but 87% of our expenditure** was on our members, in a year when we helped Law Centres secure **nearly £3.5m in additional funding**.

It is a privilege to work with the LCN team and observe how hard they work to ensure representation of our members, as well as of regions, gender, ethnicity and experience. I would also like to thank our funders for their continued support, making our work possible.

This year, we welcomed two new members into the Network, North Yorkshire Citizens Advice and Law Centre, and Leicester's Community Advice and Law Service, and sadly have bid farewell to the Isle of Wight Law Centre. Law Centre excellence was recognised in three finalists at this year's Legal Aid Lawyer of the Year awards: Josie Hicklin of Greater Manchester Law Centre (legal aid newcomer); Jess Hale of Bristol Law Centre (social welfare law) and Central England Law Centre (legal aid firm/not-for-profit) – well done to all.

As always, I am grateful for the continued support and knowledge of my colleagues on the Executive Committee. Thanks to them and to all our members and supporters for their commitment to LCN over the past 12 months.

There is no doubt that the year ahead will be full of challenges as well as opportunities. While we continue to advocate tirelessly with politicians and officials for urgent change, the sector continues to operate in crisis mode. We sincerely hope that the coming election year will bring fresh dialogue and positive action, to move the dial in favour of Law Centres' work to support local communities.

**Helen Rogers**  
Chair of trustees



## DIRECTOR'S REPORT

# THE VALUE OF A NETWORK

Partway through 2022, we had a realisation: beyond the crisis of the pandemic, it seemed that life, and work life in particular, had shifted. What did it mean for our work and how did we need to adapt? Even as we were reverting to pre-pandemic ways of working, we felt we needed to explore this.

Thankfully, we had a record we could consult: six months into the pandemic, LCN began capturing the changes taking place and the lessons learned along the way. At the time, we assumed that most changes were to be temporary, but for some initiatives to be adopted for good. Now, though, it was important to be more deliberative about how we – LCN and the Network – work in the future.

To help us through this, we engaged consultants Social Finance. They talked to our members and external stakeholders about our performance and future direction. They used this to evaluate our progress against their previous review and our 2019 strategic plan. They found that most recommendations had been implemented despite the pandemic; that we adapted well and quickly to new circumstances; and that our members really appreciated our work.

Based on the review's findings, at our upcoming 2023 AGM, we will present our members with a new 5-year strategic plan and a revised 10-year vision.

One finding of concern was that some external stakeholders held outdated, and sometimes inaccurate, perceptions of both Law Centres and LCN. We clearly need to do more to showcase the ever-changing nature of our work and identity. This report seeks to do just that.

Another misconception has been that, as a membership organisation, LCN's core finances are well supported by membership fees. In fact, membership fees make up only a tenth of our budget, and it's a great effort each year to raise the remaining 90% – nearly all of which (87%) is spent back on Law Centres.

Given both our funding and functions, we had some tough questions to ask. Are we wasting resources that Law Centres could better use on their own? What difference would it make to them if LCN did not exist? Is there another membership body that they could buy services from on demand? And what is the value of infrastructure or backbone organisations anyway?

To answer these questions, we looked to both academic research and the recent review findings. The research certainly reflected a consensus on benefits of networked organisations. The Stanford Centre for Social Innovation identified some in particular:

- **Common Agenda:** a shared vision for change and a joint approach to achieving it
- **Shared Measurement:** Collecting data and measuring results consistently
- **Mutually Reinforcing Activities:** differentiated but still co-ordinated activities
- **Continuous Communication:** that is consistent and open across the membership
- **Backbone Support:** creating/managing collective impact requires a separate organisation

Our own consideration took into account the nature and needs of our members. Law Centres are complex organisations, both legal practices and charities working in the public interest. They vary in size, from teams of 6 to over 70. Their work has multiple regulators and funders, with their respective reporting requirements. They deliver legal aid, a public provision. They are accountable to their own members and their varied and complex local communities.

If LCN disappeared, where would it leave Law Centres? Overall, it would seem, worse off. Without LCN help to secure nearly £3.5m for them last year alone, they would have less funding. Without the free services and bulk deal services and products, their costs would increase. Without the development support tailored to their specific needs, their skills base would be poorer. Law Centres' ICT infrastructure would be less robust, their data less secure, and they would not have access to resources and digital tools designed for them.

If LCN were not there, Law Centres would not have the support they enjoy now, to meet their biggest challenge, of workforce recruitment and retention. Through LCN they have access to policymakers and an added authority in dealing with them. As a small network they can easily come together to develop new schemes and to support one another. Most importantly, through LCN, they can pursue their shared mission, to create a just and equal society.

This is what we do and, as the network of Law Centres, why we intend to continue in the coming years. We collaborate, share, discuss, debate, explore, lean on one another. It is as a network that we do not simply survive, but adapt, innovate, and grow. In fact, members tell us that they are particularly proud of what they can do and achieve together, as a network.

In a small network, we feel the loss of colleagues more keenly. This year, our heartfelt thanks go to two retiring colleagues for their longstanding, dedicated service: Richard Hazell of Wiltshire Law Centre and Tony McIlveen of Derbyshire Law Centre – we will miss you. Thanks also go to Mandy Groves of Ealing Law Centre who, along with colleagues, established our much-needed Junior Lawyers Network. Good luck with the next stage of your career!

The breadth of work in the annual review that follows is achieved only through the hard work of LCN's skilled and dedicated team, who give their all, every day, with good humour and care for their fellow team members. Thank you to each of you. Thanks also to our Executive Committee, to our partner organisations, to law firms that work alongside us and to our funders, for their ongoing support through times of challenges and change.

**Julie Bishop**  
Director

**"THE LCN IS SO IMPORTANT TO THE NETWORK OF LAW CENTRES BECAUSE THEY GLUE US TOGETHER: THEY ENABLE SHARING OF LEARNING, BEST PRACTICE AND COLLABORATION/PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN LAW CENTRES. THEIR INPUT HAS BEEN VITAL IN MAKING THE CASE FOR LAW CENTRES BEING ALLOCATED MORE RESOURCES WITH THE MINISTRY OF JUSTICE AND OTHER FUNDERS."**

Law Centre director

## OBJECTIVE

## 1

# HELPING LAW CENTRES TO THRIVE

Our small team has been working tirelessly to give Law Centres the means for not just surviving but also building up their strengths.

## END-TO-END SUPPORT THROUGH A BUMPER YEAR

As people struggle through the cost-of-living crisis, so do the organisations that are meant to help them through hardship. This year has been crucial for ensuring that Law Centres are able to continue to serve their communities.

We have been working in partnership with Law Centres, other community organisations and the London Legal Support Trust to fight the **cost-of-living crisis** across the capital. Backed by the Greater London Authority, the project aims to increase advice capacity to Londoners in hardship, and to deliver it in ways that respond to their needs. After a successful first year, when the project helped thousands access nearly £10m in additional support, the Mayor of London recently renewed its funding.

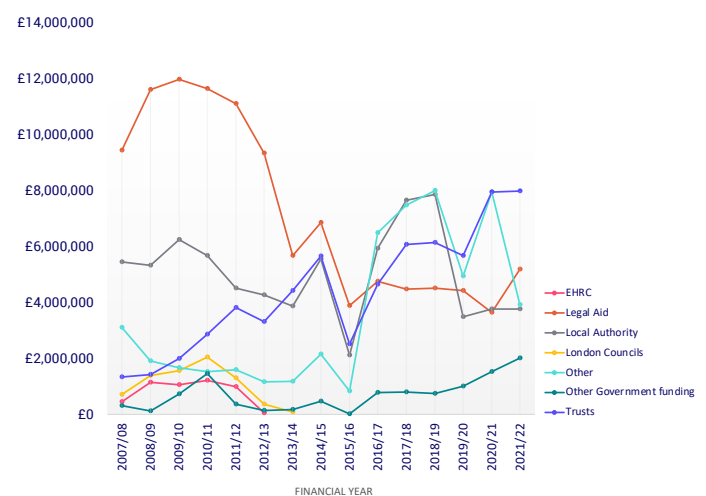
We have also mobilised our resources to help Law Centres nationwide meet this **fundraising** challenge. With our help to apply, 16 Law Centres were awarded over £2.7million for a period of nearly two years through the government-backed Improving Outcomes Through Legal Support (IOTLS) programme.

With another funding opportunity, we have supported Law Centres to apply for Improving Lives Through Advice (ILTA) grants, that promise five-year core funding. 22 of them have so far passed the first round and were invited to make a full application.

We have also helped Law Centres **bid for legal aid** contracts in not one but two tender exercises. Last winter, this covered the expanded Housing Loss Prevention Advice Service (HLPAS) as well as seizing opportunities for contracts in additional areas of practice.

These contracts were barely underway when the tender for their replacements opened earlier this autumn. Within a month, every Law Centre had to bid to replace each of the multiple legal aid contracts that it held and wanted to continue to deliver.

**"THANK YOU FOR A REALLY INFORMATIVE, PRAGMATIC, AND EXCELLENT TRAINING SESSION. IT WAS WELL WORTH INVESTING THE TIME"**



Years of austerity have squeezed Law Centres' funding. We play a key role in helping them secure more support for much-needed services.



## 1

Within the first week, we briefed Law Centres on the terms of the new contracts. In the second and third week, we delivered four workshops to guide them through writing their bids. In the fourth, we checked and fed back on bids before they were submitted.

In addition, for the first time in over a decade, the government decided to support the creation of new legal aid lawyers through a pilot **training grants** scheme. Teaming up with the company that administered the grants, we improved the selection criteria to get the best candidates for the job. We also helped Law Centres apply for the grants, assisting six of them to get the funding. With it, they will train up new legal aid lawyers in what we think is the best setting for it.

## HELPING LAW CENTRES TAKE ON DAILY CHALLENGES

Few realise the unique challenges that come with the Law Centre territory, such as running a small charity that is also a law practice; adhering to requirements from multiple regulators; and facing a sector-wide recruitment and retention crisis. Encountering this level of complexity can be daunting, so we provide member support in several key ways.

To begin with, members have an **online platform** at their disposal, where they can find many resources and use them 'off the shelf'. To complement our support with specific funding opportunities, we also curate and share over 300 grant funding opportunities relevant to our members. There are nearly 300 template documents and how-to guides on offer, on anything from office policies to wellbeing. The information exchange also includes sector updates, discussion groups, events and vacancies.

To resolve particular operations issues, we offer **coaching** to senior staff members in Law Centres. In the past year, we held over 55 one-on-one coaching sessions, that also enable us to identify and address

further support needs. We also facilitate **peer support** for Law Centre leaders, in part through popular weekly meetings when they can connect with colleagues across the network, share challenges and successes and seek advice.

We also continue to support over 25 themed **communities of practice** that allow practitioners from every Law Centre to engage with their peers in other Law Centres. In these groups, that from this year enjoy the integration of Office 365, colleagues can ask and answer questions, discuss challenges and opportunities and connect across the network. We are all the richer for this.

Where more help is required, LCN brokers and funds **consultancy** services for Law Centres to help them with a variety of issues. These span from managing people and finances, through operational policy or governance matters, to compliance and quality. We also help Law Centres look ahead, scope and develop projects and draw up and pursue funding strategies.

To encourage learning and contemplative practice, LCN runs regular themed **training** sessions on practical issues for staff and volunteers at Law Centres. This year we held 32 such sessions, attended by nearly 700 people from our members. Satisfaction levels are consistently high, with over two-thirds of attendees finding the sessions 'very good' or 'excellent'.

If running a Law Centre can be demanding for managers, it can baffle trustees, who steer Law Centres in a voluntary capacity. For this reason, a training highlight this year has been a five-session series on various aspects of Law Centre **governance**. New and experienced management committee members have considered how to understand local need and use it to shape services; how to approach data and reporting; the fundamentals of Law Centre funding; and understanding and managing risk.

**"I SPEND A LOT OF TIME TELLING PEOPLE WHY WE'RE A MEMBER OF THE NETWORK — I ALWAYS FEEL REALLY WELL SUPPORTED"**

**"I THOUGHT THE LEVEL OF SUPPORT AND GUIDANCE OFFERED IN THE WORKSHOP AND SUBSEQUENTLY COULD NOT HAVE BEEN BETTER"**

## 1

## NOURISHING VITAL LINKS TO COMMUNITIES

One of the great strengths of Law Centres is their connection to the communities which they serve. Each community is a unique ecosystem with its own peculiarities and specific challenges. We aim to help our members to better understand these and build lasting partnerships with local people and groups.

This year, our **engagement** community of practice continued to meet regularly, consider experiences and share learnings. We recruited a second team member to help develop this line of work. We supported the group to become peer-led and to explore connections with related areas of Law Centre work, such as campaigning and communications.

However, striving to meet as much as they can of the surging local demand has limited Law Centres' capacity to engage in non-advice work. We are acutely aware of this, so we currently focus on sharing best practice. In our spotlight sessions, we heard from colleagues around the country about campaigning with local residents about temporary housing, and about using lobbying to influence changes to benefits policy.

We have also launched a new project to explore the role of Law Centres as hub organisations in their communities. By 'hub organisations' we mean ones that collaborate with other civil society organisations, such as migrants' rights or disability rights or renters' rights groups, that offer support or campaign on issues. They help them recognise when, where and how taking legal action could be used as a tool to help them achieve the social change they seek.

## Law Centre Spotlight

Featuring

Kate Bradley from Greater Manchester Law Centre

Who: Law Centre Staff, Trustees & Volunteers

Making Policy Change Through Lobbying as Law Centres Using Benefits and the DWP

When: Thursday October 19th at 1:00-1:30pm

Where: Microsoft Teams



Our spotlight sessions encourage reflective practice and mutual learning that relate to the common theme of 'community in action'.

The **hub project**, supported by the Baring Foundation, began in March, and will run for three years. LCN will lead on the work, supporting three Law Centres in three separate regions – Vauxhall in Merseyside, Derbyshire in the Midlands, and Suffolk in East Anglia – to develop their respective approaches. Proceeding from mapping their communities and identifying potential partners, each Law Centre has set out its own theory of change.

As the work progresses, we look to outline just how Law Centres and similar organisations can use their legal skills to inform, advise and represent local groups, so together they can achieve meaningful change. The aggregate capacity to help individuals with their cases is not expected to grow significantly, so making common cause with other groups and stretching our legal skills in other directions is a timely project for these trying times.

### IN FIGURES

**£2.7m**

in IOLTS funding for Law Centre services raised with LCN support



**67%**

of attendees found our training 'very good' or 'excellent'



**6**

new public-funded training grants offered following LCN support



**55**

one-on-one coaching sessions offered to senior Law Centre staff members





## 2

# STRENGTHEN THE NETWORK

Beyond helping individual Law Centres, we work at scale to equip Law Centres with new resources and to address wider and systemic issues.

## BUILDING OUR DIGITAL CAPABILITIES

Our work on developing the network's digital capabilities allows Law Centres much more flexibility, while also freeing up vital time, effort and funds for helping more people in more ways. The **national IT upgrade project** has completed its fourth phase this year, bringing eight Law Centres right up to date, along with a North Wales organisation we support to become a Law Centre. They now enjoy a package of new hardware at discounted prices, Office365 cloud computing, training to make use of its many new features, and ongoing IT support.

To date, the project has bolstered the capabilities of over 1,000 staff members across 28 Law Centres in 33 sites. On top of the savings and flexibility, Law Centres tell us that the upgrade allows them to explore new ways of working, provide a better experience for clients, improve their teams' quality of life and make managers more confident about managing risks and business continuity.

The **digital development** that we had begun just before the pandemic continues as well, despite the increasing difficulty of securing continued funding for it. We are addressing very practical challenges and focus on delivering value for our members by

focusing on their needs.

As small charities, Law Centres lack resources to employ dedicated HR, volunteer co-ordination or grants and contracts management staff. Our **Back-Office project**, piloted this year with three Law Centres, configured the Salesforce platform to help them better manage these functions. Each Law Centre defined the functions it needed, enabling us to better meet expectations and staff involved got a sense of ownership and joy at a system that truly lightens their load. We are now working with the Justice Innovation Group on an advice sector Salesforce user group, to share our learnings more widely.

Demand for Law Centre services is so high now that they must reluctantly turn away many enquiries they receive. Their practical challenge here is to manage all enquiries centrally across all channels: telephone, email, in person or by text message. Our browser-based solution, **EnquiryDesk**, continues to serve LCN and two Law Centres beyond the initial pilot, and others are waiting to join in once we secure additional funding to roll out the system more widely.

**"LCN IS THE GLUE THAT MAKES LAW CENTRES MORE THAN JUST INDIVIDUAL ORGANISATIONS STRUGGLING TO IMPROVE ACCESS TO JUSTICE. BECAUSE WE CAN STICK TOGETHER, WE ARE STRONGER AND OUR COLLECTIVE VOICE IS LOUDER THAN ANY OF US COULD SPEAK ALONE."**

Law Centre director

2

"THANK YOU SO MUCH. YOU HAVE MADE US FEEL SO WELCOME AND A LOT LESS SCARED. MANY THANKS!"

Director of a newly admitted Law Centre

"SALESFORCE HAS HELPED MAKE ACCOUNTS PREPARATION SO MUCH EASIER... IT'S ALL IN THE ONE PLACE... WE MET WITH OUR ACCOUNTANT AND WERE ABLE TO PULL OFF ALL THE FINANCIAL INFO IN SECONDS, WHICH WAS REALLY HELPFUL."

## CHARTING OUR DATA JOURNEY AHEAD

We know that the better the data that Law Centres and LCN collect, the better insights it yields and the stronger the evidence to support our case for change. This year, we have developed a draft for a new three-year **data strategy** to build up our shared data maturity. We have enhanced LCN's data architecture, that underpins our digital development work, and streamlined our Salesforce database to make our data capture more efficient.

We aim to make our data more useful not just to our network but to the wider access to justice sector. For this, we have engaged with other organisations in initiatives to agree sector-wide **data standards**, and this has informed our own draft data standard for capturing Law Centre enquiries. We have gathered evidence on what hinders better data collection and produced new guides and templates for Law Centres to overcome this.

As each Law Centre can choose its own case management system, we have previously compared the main ones and endorsed **AdvicePro** as the one best suited for Law Centres' needs. This year, we followed it up, working with members and with AdvicePro to improve how it operates for them. We have developed workshops to help users make the most of the system, and have encouraged a community of AdvicePro 'champions' of ongoing learning.

To reflect our concern for the data we collect, we were proud to achieve a **Cyber Essentials Plus** accreditation for LCN and six Law Centres. The government accreditation, associated with the National Cyber Security Centre, consists of five controls that reduce the impact of common cyber attacks, verified through a technical IT audit. It is important to us as another reflection of the high standards we have, even as small charities, for our services to disadvantaged communities. We are already helping a further seven members follow suit.

## IN FIGURES

6

Law Centres and LCN have achieved **Cyber Essentials Plus accreditation**, with 7 more to join



8

Law Centres upgraded through our **national ICT infrastructure project**



2

new **Law Centres** created this year



6

organisations helped by LCN to work toward applying to become **Law Centres**



## STRIVING FOR BETTER SUPPORT

Data was also at the heart of another project of ours this year. With our Harrow Law Centre and Greater Manchester Law Centre, we have been looking at the particular hurdles that **victims of crime** face in the UK when English is not their mother tongue. While the Law Centres have continued delivering dedicated services directly, LCN's focus this year has been on the bigger picture.

We have set out to understand how police forces account for victims' language difficulties when they turn to them for help, specifically whether they understand English as a second language as a vulnerability that merits additional support. This is important because the victims' code recognises their right to be understood and to understand what is happening in their case.

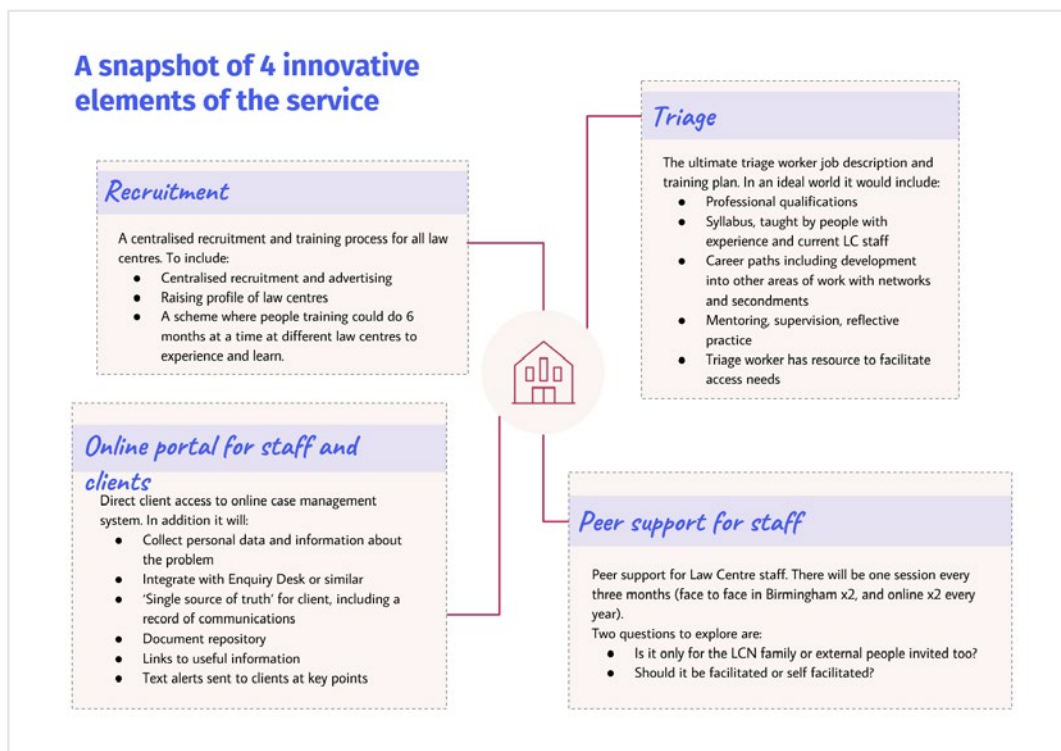
Teaming up with **pro bono** support from law firm Allen & Overy, we have sent Freedom of Information requests to every police force in the UK, analysed the responses and will soon publish our findings and recommendations. Working with project funder the Bell Foundation, we will use this report to further strengthen victims' rights by using it in advocacy around the government's Victims and Prisoners Bill.

The victims of crime project arose from local frontline casework and the difficulties of victims of hate crimes to report them and get support. The pattern is

not unique, as many of our projects arise organically from our members' practices. Last winter, we concluded another such project.

Law Centres have traditionally avoided practising in **family law**, preferring instead to help people against mightier opponents: the state, the council, the landlord or employer. A year ago, practitioners from 19 Law Centres got together with us to rectify this and develop a new family law service model. A series of service design workshops, supported by law firm Mishcon de Reya, helped us explore challenges and solutions. A broader outcome of this work has been Law Centres coming together to address a recognised need through a collaborative service approach, which they would be able to take forward as additional funding becomes available.

**THANK YOU FOR PAYING FOR OUR TIME TO DO (THE FAMILY LAW WORKSHOPS). THE PROCESS WAS VALUABLE AND SO MANY PLACES TAKE OUR FEEDBACK AND TIME TOTALLY FOR GRANTED. IT'S REALLY APPRECIATED!"**



Our service development workshops improved collaboration between members delivering family services, and identified key aspects for developing a future service

## 2

## ALL ABOUT THE PEOPLE

As the UK struggles through tough times, this is keenly felt in Law Centres, who help those worst affected. Our network-wide **employee assistance programme** reflects the toll this takes on Law Centre people. This year, nearly two-thirds of the colleagues who have used it have accessed counselling, with anxiety being the most common complaint, in 2 in 5 of cases. We are glad to be able to offer this resource, which also offers confidential advice, guidance and a wellbeing portal.

In these conditions, **workforce development** continues to be among our biggest challenges. Building on previous scoping work, this year we continued to explore it with Law Centres, sector colleagues, funders and the Legal Aid Agency. Thanks to the Propel programme, we have secured funding to work with five London Law Centres over the next three years. This will allow us to recruit and develop a cohort of trainee solicitors to increase access to justice in the capital, while testing new approaches to recruitment, training and retention. We will share our learnings nationwide as we continue to seek additional funding to address the different challenges of Law Centres outside of London.

Woven into these efforts is our work to strengthen the diversity of our movement and tackle systemic racism. Our **racial justice work plan**, which we presented to Law Centres for discussion in the spring, has five strands. These include improving work opportunities, extending services (for example, to fight discrimination), building partnerships, public advocacy and developing the evidence base through data. We are seeking dedicated funding for this

programme while continuing current LCN and Law Centres work, such as on justice for Windrush.

To make our intentions clear, we have for the first time dedicated our annual **conference** to a single theme: racial justice. We heard from prominent US attorneys Ben Crump and Jasmine Rand, and the programme included dedicated sessions on income, housing and health inequalities, dismantling systemic racism, campaigning and evidence gathering. 455 delegates have attended online sessions over two days, hosted through a conference platform newly redesigned by a co-operative of Black designers. More still have attended a third day in person. We have followed this up with general meeting speakers such as Windrush campaigner Patrick Vernon, and US activist Alvin Starks.

As a movement for change we seek to continue to grow, and this year has been particularly pleasing in this respect, as two **new members** have joined the fold. North Yorkshire Citizens Advice and Law Centre, which joined last winter, serves a vast area that has never had a local Law Centre through eight offices and a further 23 outreach locations. It was followed this autumn by Leicester's Community Advice and Legal Service, that will establish a Law Centre presence in the city again, after it lost its old Law Centre over a decade ago. We continue to work with six other organisations moving towards applying for membership in the coming year. We also welcome other groups considering joining in: operating legal advice services is not easy right now, but we are stronger together!



Our racial justice conference sustained focus on fighting systemic challenges. It is part of a wider plan of action that would include our workforce and services.





## 3

# STEP UP OUR PROFILE AND VOICE

LCN works hard to influence public policy to be fairer and more just, and to help Law Centres have their voices heard with government and in the media.

## PUSHING FOR MEANINGFUL ACCESS TO JUSTICE FOR ALL

Especially now, people in legal need deserve better support than the patchy under-resourced public provisions currently available. Therefore, our advocacy work this year related to bringing about more 'can-do' public-funded legal assistance, that would be responsive to changing needs. The aim, as one MP spoke of his local Law Centre, is that **"everybody is looked at as somebody that can be helped"**.

Our key policy and advocacy priority this year has been working toward a systemic overhaul of civil legal aid. Already in July 2021, Parliament's justice committee pronounced civil legal aid too far gone for minor tweaks, and in need of an overhaul – an imperative that Law Centres were glad was acknowledged. However, we have needed to wait until January 2023 for the **Review of Civil Legal Aid (RoCLA)** to be announced, and a further few months to see its terms of reference and have it begin in earnest. We have invested much work to contribute to each of the review's four workstreams, meeting with officials and researchers, marshalling Law Centres' input and feeding back on interim proposals.

The review, still ongoing, is due to report back in late March 2024. However, it is not the only current critical assessment of our access to justice policies. A much-awaited review of civil legal aid by the **National Audit Office (NAO)** has been underway since the spring. Here we have not only made LCN's contribution and encouraged Law Centres to make their own, but were invited by NAO to help shape the review's stakeholder survey. We attach special importance to this review, expected later this winter, because it is independent, whereas RoCLA is the Ministry of Justice's own review of its past performance.

As the parlous state of legal aid demonstrates, the government has been lacking an ambitious vision for access to justice today. We, however, are keen to introduce new and better ideas into currency that would be appropriate for contemporary challenges. Therefore, we have contributed to the development process of leading to the **Law Society's** green paper 'Proposals for a 21st Century Justice System', currently out for consultation. We have also contributed our thinking to a pamphlet, 'Towards a National Legal Service', by the **Society of Labour Lawyers**, aimed at influencing party lines in the run up to next year's general election.

In the meantime, we have seen progress in more specific policy work. Having advocated for some elements of the new **Home Loss Prevention Advice Service** – originally modelled on Law Centre duty desk services – this year we helped Law Centres bid for contracts, so they continue to operate 1 in 5 of the local schemes. In addition, the legal aid **Means Test Review**, on which we had been advocating for over three years, has finally begun to be rolled out. While the means test is still not as simple or inclusive as we would like it to be, it is nevertheless expected to make 2 million more people eligible for civil legal aid once it is fully in place.

**"YOU AND THE REST OF LCN MAKING MY JOB MUCH EASIER AS USUAL"**

LCN's engagement with officials is not just on policy but also on how it is delivered

## PROTECTING THE RIGHTS OF ORDINARY PEOPLE

LCN does not restrict its advocacy work only to justice policy. Law Centres' work gives us valuable insights into other policy areas, such as housing, immigration and human rights, where we have been advocating and campaigning, in what has been a busy year.

Despite initially dragging its feet, the government is going ahead with its long-promised Renters (Reform) Bill. We have been part of the Renters Reform Coalition on **housing rights** for three years, and our involvement in the joint campaign has intensified since the Bill was tabled. Our focus has been on private renters' access to justice and redress, be it for shoddy housing conditions or when defending their rented homes in possession proceedings. Along with our direct involvement in the campaign, which recently included giving evidence to Parliament, we have also supported Law Centres to get involved in it, as well as supporting their policy and community engagement work on renters' rights. We expect our involvement to continue at a high level, especially given the government's U-turn on a key measure in the Bill: scrapping section 21 ('no-fault') eviction.

This time last year, one of the menacing prospects before us was the government's Bill of Rights Bill, that threatened to repeal and replace the Human Rights Act and devalue **human rights** in the UK. We were therefore relieved to ease off our joint campaigning work on this when, following ministerial changes, the Bill was deprioritised and later dropped last summer. This is not quite an 'all clear', though: focus has shifted for some onto the UK's membership of the European Convention on Human Rights. In addition,



The Network's involvement in the Renters Reform Coalition arises from Law Centres' work and has included public communications, giving evidence to MPs, and campaigning events such as this Renters' Day of Action in Westminster.

the scrapped Bill's approach was still mirrored in other legislation instead.

This was most apparent in immigration legislation, such as the Nationality and Borders Act and more recently the Illegal Migration Act. Both promise migrants access to legal aid if (or rather, when) they face removal. However, there are not enough legal aid providers or capacity to meet the expected demand, making this a false promise – as we have been telling parliamentarians and officials alike. We also continue to contribute to other joint campaigns on **migrants' rights**. These relate to issues very familiar to Law Centres from their practices: pursuing more family-friendly immigration policies (in the Families Together campaign), and ending the ban on asylum seekers working as they wait for their cases to be decided (in the Lift the Ban campaign).

"Bringing a civil case, such as this one, in the small claims' court was stressful, daunting and hard work, particularly when faced with a defendant so much larger and more powerful than myself. I would not have been able to support this case without the support of Bristol Law Centre."

Aurial Britton, discrimination client  
Bristol Law Centre

Law Centres fight to make the UK a more equal society




"You have your worries and your fears and you need to adjust. Having a lot of professional, experienced and kind-hearted people around me really helped. I was able to settle in very quickly because of that, which I was not anticipating when I first arrived in the UK."

Sayed Muslimyan  
Office Manager  
Suffolk Law Centre

#RefugeeWeek 2023




"Nothing has been capable of filling the gap left by these cuts and the advice sector has significantly contracted. All of this has made it harder and more complex for people to resolve their problems and get justice."

Patrick Marples  
South West London Law Centres

A decade since #LegalAid cuts




"Grenfell families, the families of our community, have not seen justice. People are still suffering unsafe conditions, poor health and death as a result of their housing in the UK. This is the government's choice."

Franck Kiangala  
North Kensington Law Centre

6 years on from #Grenfell




We use our communications to amplify clients' and Law Centres' voices, reflecting the lived experience and concerns of people and communities.



## 3

## A STRONGER VOICE – AND AN UPDATED LOOK

Last year, LCN has bolstered its communications capabilities by recruiting our dedicated communications officer. This year, this has allowed us to achieve two things: to rationalise our communications work and to set more ambitious aims and priorities for it. In line with the previous section, we are developing a communications and policy dashboard on Salesforce, that would allow us to better capture our performance, analyse it and improve on it.

Our communications work is now guided by a **strategy** drawn from LCN's theory of change. Our purpose is to improve public understanding of Law Centres and their work, the injustices they fight and their beneficial impact. This would support their evidence and arguments for better policies. Where possible, we prioritise Law Centre **clients' voices** and experiences: this not only retains their agency but also allows people to see the diversity of people Law Centres work with and to identify with them. Alongside them, we look to represent the voices of Law Centre staff and bring their expertise to bear.

We have also been making changes to the kind of communications we produce. Across our **social media** channels, a new suite of branded media assets has supported our more concise storytelling and more visually engaging. Longer-form pieces, including interviews with Law Centre staff, have sought to improve understanding of LCN's collaborations and to support workforce development. In addition, we have changed the format of our **supporters newsletter**, replacing quarterly roundups with monthly single-item editions to showcase Law Centres' work in depth in a more easily digestible way.

**"IT WAS A REALLY POSITIVE EXPERIENCE THAT BEGAN WITH AN EMAIL FROM LCN. SO THANK YOU FOR THIS OPPORTUNITY"**

Law Centre community worker on news coverage brokered by LCN

LCN also supports Law Centres to undertake their own respective communications work, as many do not have dedicated role holders. For this we have developed our internal **communications network**, as one of the communities of practice we support, with its own email channel and online space for resources and updates. This year the network has met online six times with good attendance, helping colleagues get familiar with one another and with LCN. In turn, this has improved the way we work together to pitch stories or handle media requests, increasing our exposure. In the past year, Law Centres and LCN featured in the media 89 times collectively, a 39% increase on the previous year.

To meet the interest that we court, LCN is about to launch a new **website**, at the end of a long development process. The website will present a new approach to the way we present our content and manage it, taking a more semantic approach to our visuals and using no cookies. The website will also use LCN's refreshed **brand identity**, that this report showcases: a brighter extended colour palette; a clear, bolder look that makes use of unbalance; and an authentic, informed, independent feel. We hope you like it, too!

### IN FIGURES

6



ministers and shadow ministers met to **advocate for better policies**

14

oral and written **policy submissions** made



39%

increase in LCN and Law Centres **media appearances**



4 IN 5

media appearances were in **national** rather than **local** outlets



# LOOKING AHEAD: JUSTICE AGAINST POVERTY

Things have been pretty tough in the charity sector and there is yet no sign of this abating. As we write this, the National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) estimates that 1 in 5 small charities are not expected to survive the winter.

The relentless pace of events and repeatedly adjusting to them makes many wish for a respite break. There is no let up expected in the coming year which, as a general election year, is likely to be a tumultuous one, of unsettlement and change.

As this report shows, we have some ambitious plans and have had some important successes in the past year. However, at several points we have had to adjust our plans where we have been unable to secure sufficient dedicated funding for them. This experience, shared by many in the sector, attests to the importance of unrestricted core funding, that organisations can use to adapt to changing circumstances fast.

Looking ahead and thinking how to bolster the Network for more uncertain times, we are looking at three critical resources in particular: **people, funding** and **data**.

Earned income from legal aid work continues to be integral to the Law Centre funding mix. However, until it is significantly reformed, legal aid will continue to be a financial drain on Law Centres because in most cases it does not fully pay its way. While around us the amount of active legal aid providers declines, Law Centres keep up their commitment to legal aid. Law Centres' role within legal aid is of special importance: aiming to assist even where not specified by legal aid, they bring additionality to the service that commercial providers do not. We hope to see more recognition of this as it is reviewed.

We have also made progress on our workforce development programme, welcomed new members into our movement, and are heartened to see more people and groups wanting to join as well. In the year ahead, we plan work to target various career stages, such as studies, qualification and training. We will also further develop our strategy for expanding access to free legal assistance in new areas.

Our understanding of the importance of data to LCN's work continues to grow. It holds the key to a variety of factors, from better targeting services, through improving service design, to assessing whether outcomes were achieved as intended. It also gives us evidence to advocate for better policies, and insights for making the most of the promise that AI holds for legal services and human services. Our emphasis to date has been on how we collect and protect data. Looking ahead, we need to better harness data and digital technologies to better tell the story of Law Centres, to better evidence what we see, and to better maintain our focus on serving our communities.

**"THANK YOU SO MUCH ONCE AGAIN... IT WAS EXACTLY WHAT WE NEEDED"**

**Law Centre director**

We have opened this report by asserting that **the opposite of poverty is not wealth but justice**. This means two things. Firstly, widespread **poverty arises where justice is lacking**, as do other social ills. This is currently the case in the UK, where poverty is spreading and deepening: after housing costs, more than 1 in 6 of us in the UK live in absolute poverty. 1 in 12 of us live in persistent poverty they cannot seem to escape. This correlates with the UK's declining justice performance after over a decade of austerity. As the World Justice Project's Rule of Law Index records, the weakest aspects of our system are in civil justice: its accessibility and affordability, the status of fundamental rights and protection from discrimination.

Opposing poverty with justice also means that, where poverty occurs, it is not necessarily as a result of individual failure but due to **systemic injustice letting whole groups down**. One aspect of this is structural, as with racial injustice. Another aspect is institutional: by relying exclusively on courts as the places where justice 'happens', based on rules, terms and fees that many cannot access.

While having the knowledge to navigate the traditional justice system, Law Centres have always tried to adapt institutions and services to the needs of the people in poverty we have been aiming to serve. Creating high-street 'everyman's law firms' that shunned profit was one way. Developing services, like duty solicitor desks in court, that transform hostile settings into helpful ones is another way. Seeking to teach people about their rights and options, and taking a broader view of where their legal need meets other hardship is yet another.

These days, approaches like ours, that seek to understand how people's legal problems arise and to prevent them or help early, are called **'People-Centred Justice'**. They enjoy growing popularity around the world and are endorsed by bodies from the World Bank to the OECD. We hope that Whitehall lets them inform its justice policies. If it does, it will find willing partners in Law Centres, and we all stand to be this much the richer.

**"WORKING WITH LCN HAS BEEN SO ENCOURAGING. IT SEEMS YOU LEAD WITH BOLDNESS NOT RETICENCE OR FEAR. HOPE TO SEE MORE OF THIS APPROACH – DON'T THINK WE CAN AFFORD TO MINCE WORDS AND ACTIONS WITH THE WORLD AS IT IS."**

Designer working on our branding refresh

*"Before coming to the Law Centre, I had no idea whatsoever of my rights and the process I was supposed to go through. I don't think enough people do know, and so they go into legal proceedings ill-equipped. Some people end up homeless because they didn't have the support I had. I know 100% I'm in my home because of the support of the Law Centre."*

Emmanuel, housing client  
South West London Law Centres



Only 1 in 6 of us understands our legal problems as such, so many initially look for help in the wrong place. Law Centres take justice into the community, to better help people in need

Law Centres fight to keep  
people in their homes



# FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

These summarised financial statements contain information from both the Statement of Financial Activities and the Balance Sheet for the year ended 31 March 2023, but are not the full statutory report and accounts.

The summary financial information shows the income raised for our activities was £912,591. The cost of raising the income and the amounts spent on our charitable activities were £1,069,258. The information is taken from the full financial statements which were approved by the trustees on 16 October 2023.

In order to gain a full understanding of the financial affairs of the charity, the full annual financial statements, trustees' annual report and examiner's report should be consulted. Copies can be obtained from the Law Centres Network or on the Charity Commission website.

Signed on behalf of the trustees,



**Patrick Marples**  
Treasurer  
16 October 2023

## BALANCE SHEET

|  | 2023           | 2022           |
|--|----------------|----------------|
| <b>Fixed Assets</b>                            | £              | £              |
| Tangible Fixed Assets                          | 1,047          | 2,254          |
| <b>Current assets</b>                          |                |                |
| Debtors  | 144,063        | 163,970        |
| Cash at bank and in hand                       | 295,756        | 410,923        |
| <b>Total Current Assets</b>                    | <b>439,819</b> | <b>574,893</b> |
| Creditors: amounts falling due within one year | (160,051)      | (139,665)      |
| <b>Net current assets</b>                      | <b>279,768</b> | <b>435,228</b> |
| <b>Net Assets</b>                              | <b>280,815</b> | <b>437,482</b> |
| <b>Funds</b>                                   |                |                |
| <b>Restricted funds:</b>                       |                |                |
| In surplus                                     | 167,970        | 125,348        |
| <b>Unrestricted funds:</b>                     |                |                |
| General fund                                   | 112,845        | 312,134        |
| <i>of which designated</i>                     | 20,593         | 62,253         |
| <b>Total funds</b>                             | <b>280,815</b> | <b>437,482</b> |

## INCOME

|                                       | % of income | 2023 (£)       | 2022 (£)         |
|---------------------------------------|-------------|----------------|------------------|
| Baring Foundation                     | 20%         | 184,729        | -                |
| IT – Digital Transformation (TNLCF)   | 10%         | 91,250         | 170,000          |
| Subscriptions from Law Centre members | 10%         | 89,600         | 83,800           |
| IT National Project (TLEF)            | 9%          | 85,600         | 279,401          |
| Donations                             | 9%          | 79,644         | 76,047           |
| Esmee Fairbairn Foundation            | 9%          | 78,000         | -                |
| AB Charitable Trust                   | 5%          | 50,000         | 70,000           |
| John Ellerman Foundation              | 5%          | 49,000         | -                |
| Training Fee / Services to LCs        | 4%          | 39,738         | 37,050           |
| London Legal Support Trust            | 4%          | 33,350         | -                |
| Trust for London Post Brexit          | 3%          | 24,500         | 52,500           |
| Money for LC (TLEF)                   | 2%          | 20,000         | -                |
| Sustainability (TLEF)                 | 2%          | 16,667         | 66,666           |
| Sundry income                         | 2%          | 14,492         | 3,753            |
| Annual conference                     | 2%          | 13,876         | 8,812            |
| Access to Justice Foundation          | 1%          | 10,000         | -                |
| Gifts in Kind                         | 1%          | 9,470          | -                |
| Bell Foundation                       | 1%          | 8,020          | 6,666            |
| TLEF                                  | 1%          | 7,500          | -                |
| Comic Relief                          | 1%          | 6,986          | 62,876           |
| Investment                            |             | 169            | 37               |
| Allen & Overy Foundation              |             | -              | 25,000           |
| Freshfields Bruckhaus Deringer        |             |                | 20,000           |
| Paul Hamlyn Foundation                |             | -              | 40,000           |
| Philip King Charitable Trust          |             | -              | 25,000           |
| Public Interest Law Project           |             |                | 30,000           |
| <b>Total</b>                          |             | <b>912,591</b> | <b>1,057,608</b> |

This annual review covers the period from one AGM to another, November to November. The financial extract is from our latest accounts, covering the financial year to March 2023.

## EXPENDITURE

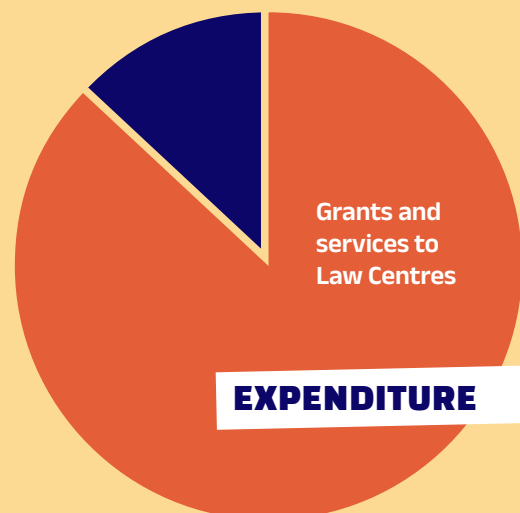
|   | % of expenditure | 2023 (£)         | 2022 (£)         |
|---|------------------|------------------|------------------|
| Staff costs   | 46%              | 494,636          | 523,561          |
| Project specific cost                                 | 22%              | 231,845          | 298,279          |
| Grants and Payments to Law Centres                    | 12%              | 128,482          | 242,509          |
| Services to Law Centres                               | 7%               | 77,776           | 75,071           |
| Premises costs  | 2%               | 25,967           | 23,284           |
| Website / Digital Development                         | 2%               | 24,936           | 8,700            |
| Annual Conference and Events                          | 2%               | 23,947           | 10,802           |
| Training and Course Costs                             | 1%               | 12,422           | 149              |
| Governance costs                                      | 1%               | 11,362           | 14,987           |
| Subscriptions and Journals                            | 1%               | 10,186           | 9,651            |
| Legal and Professional Fees                           | 1%               | 9,495            | 6,780            |
| Gifts in kind   | 1%               | 9,470            | -                |
| Office: Office costs, ICT, Insurance & Communications | 1%               | 8,735            | 13,344           |
| <b>Total expenditure</b>                              |                  | <b>1,069,258</b> | <b>1,227,117</b> |

## A GREAT RETURN ON INVESTMENT

**MEMBERSHIP FEES MADE UP  
10% OF LCN'S INCOME  
THIS YEAR.**



**BUT 87% OF OUR SPENDING  
HAS BEEN ON GRANTS AND  
SERVICES TO LAW CENTRES.**





# TRUSTEES AND STAFF

## TRUSTEES

Helen Bagley, Derbyshire Law Centre

Sara Chandler KC (Hon)

Michael Fawole, North East Law Centre

Vicky Fewkes, Ealing Law Centre – vice-chair

Najwa Hassan, Canolfan Gyfraith Speakeasy/Speakeasy Law Centre

Laura Hastie, Paddington Law Centre

Peter Kandler

Ngaryan Li (Higham), Vauxhall Law Centre – Secretary

Victor McAllister, Hackney Community Law Centre

Patrick Marples, South West London Law Centres – Treasurer

Lydia Nash, Central England Law Centre

Pamela Robotham

Helen Rogers – chair

Ursula O'Hare, Law Centre NI – vice-chair

Emma Stradling, Wiltshire Law Centre

Linda Summers, Kirklees Citizens Advice and Law Centre

## STAFF TEAM

Nimrod Ben-Cnaan, Head of Policy and Profile

Julie Bishop, Director

Simon Brown, Head of Service Development and Income Generation

Matthew Cary, Communications Officer

Alex Charles, Head of IT and Data

Laura Chilintan, Project Manager (maternity leave)

Max Gerber, Head of Product

Winnie Liguori, Finance Officer

Aristea Maundy, Administrative Assistant

Tehira Nash, Community Engagement Assistant

Patrycja Pinkowska, Community Engagement Officer

Cristina Porto, Administrator

## MANY THANKS TO OUR FUNDERS:

AB Charitable Trust

Allen & Overy Foundation

Baring Foundation

The Bell Foundation

Esmée Fairbairn Foundation

John Ellerman Foundation

Freshfields Bruckhaus Deringer

Legal Education Foundation

London Legal Support Trust

Paul Hamlyn Foundation



At our annual planning day in March, trustees discussed progress on our strategic plan and the way forward

**"I JUST WANT TO SAY AS A NEW MEMBER TO THE EC IT'S AMAZING HOW MUCH YOU ARE DOING AS A RELATIVELY SMALL TEAM."**

trustee

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Law Centres Network is a business name of the Law Centres Federation, a charity registered in England and Wales no. 1088588 and a company limited by guarantee no. 2433492.