FURTHER TOGETHER

ANNUAL REVIEW 2025/26

Law Centres Network

"THE CONCLUSIONS I HAVE REACHED ABOVE ARE THOSE WHICH WERE URGED ON THIS COURT BY THE LCN."

Sir Colin Birss, Chancellor of the High Court, in the Mazur appeal judgment, March 2026

Each Law Centre is rooted in its community, providing legal assistance to people who would otherwise go without. Some of what that work needs can be beyond the capacity of any one Law Centre: a legal challenge that protects how they all operate, evidence strong enough to reach Parliament, and funding and expertise on a scale no single organisation could secure alone.

That is where the network comes in. What one Law Centre learns, wins or proves can reach all 41. This year, 14 Law Centres contributed material that shaped LCN's intervention in the Mazur appeal, which protected the way every Law Centre works. Local experience became national evidence, and one funding push, or one instance of pro bono assistance, served the whole network.

The pressures are real, and some Law Centres have not survived them. That is exactly why the shared work matters: together, Law Centres can go further for the communities they serve.



REPORTING BACK

Last year I closed this foreword with three commitments on behalf of the network: to draw on its strength to counter division, to build an irrefutable argument for increased funding, and to support one another through the challenges ahead. Here I want to report back on each of them: what has been achieved, and where there is more to do.

What is needed for access to justice is bigger than any one Law Centre. LCN takes on that work, with and for the whole network, so that 41 independent Law Centres can do more in the communities they serve and together we can have a deeper impact.

The network's strength begins with its members' own decision. At the 2025 AGM they approved new Articles of Association and a new Membership Agreement, which every member signed. The network's unified voice was soon put to use. When the High Court's ruling in *Mazur v Charles Russell Speechlys LLP* put in question whether caseworkers could conduct cases under a solicitor's supervision – the way most Law Centre teams work – LCN intervened in CILEX's appeal on behalf of the network. The Court of Appeal's ruling in March brought much-needed clarity, enabling Law Centres to keep doing their vital work with confidence and unity, and without compromise.

Law Centres work in the communities where division is felt most sharply. Resolving people's legal problems fairly, for whoever comes through the door, is one of the quieter ways trust is rebuilt. With new funding from the Civic Power Fund, LCN will support Law Centres to develop that role over the coming year, and Julie Bishop, LCN's Director, reflects on it at the close of this review.

Over the past year, the pressures on Law Centres, and on the civil society organisations working alongside them, have continued.

The funding argument is of course the hardest of the three commitments to deliver. The case is not yet irrefutable, and the funding has not yet followed. But markers have been put down. The case for legal assistance as public infrastructure is now on the parliamentary record following submissions of evidence by LCN and others to the cross-party Justice Committee's inquiry into access to justice. The evidence of what legal assistance achieves is stronger, and our current data development work will strengthen it further. We will continue building it together and calling for the evidence to lead to implementation.

Our third commitment, to support one another, shows the network at its best. Hillingdon Law Centre closed this year. It was a real loss, and it underlines what is at stake. The network has stood by the Law Centre's staff and trustees, helping them work through issues and, when it came to it, perform an orderly closure. The experience has also informed our crisis support approach for any Law Centre facing that decision.

At the start of the year, I opened an email telling me that the co-founder of the first Law Centre in the UK, Peter Kandler, had been awarded an Honorary KC for transforming access to justice and inspiring the nationwide Law Centres movement. No one is more deserving of that award. More than 50 years on, Peter is still an inspiring trustee of LCN and remains entirely committed to the movement's founding principles, which are timeless. In Peter's words: "there should not be one law for the wealthy and another for everyone else". The network is driven to closing that justice gap.

We do not do this alone, and we are grateful to the allies and supporters who stand with Law Centres, including the firms and lawyers who give their expertise. My thanks to them, to our funders, to my fellow trustees, to LCN's staff and to colleagues in every Law Centre.

The pages that follow set out the year, and Julie's closing piece sets out the work ahead. We made those commitments together. We will keep them together.

Helen Rogers, Chair of Trustees

"THANK YOU SO MUCH FOR ALL THE SUPPORT OVER THE YEAR – EVERY SINGLE ONE OF YOU HAS MADE 2025 BETTER AND EASIER! IT WOULD BE IMPOSSIBLE TO SURVIVE WITHOUT YOU ALL BEHIND US AND WITH US."

Law Centre Director

STRENGTHEN: LAW CENTRES LEARN, ACT AND GROW TOGETHER – UNDERPINNED BY LCN

This year's work demonstrates the range of ways in which we support a stronger network of Law Centres. From onboarding new members that expand the network; through improving staff recruitment and retention and developing our data capabilities and community ties; to crisis intervention and closure support – LCN works hard to meet member needs.

41 Law Centres in **45** locations

9 out of **10** who responded said LCN can **help with the biggest challenges** they face *

* LCN Members Survey 2026; 48 responses from staff across member Law Centres.

Law Centres are part of this country's public infrastructure, alongside the courts and legal aid. They bring legal assistance into communities to protect people's homes, livelihoods and loved ones. Much of what keeps it working sits out of sight. Each Law Centre is independent, rooted in its own community – and answerable to it. Beneath their work sits a shared layer that LCN builds and maintains for the whole network: secure systems, skills, shared knowledge and partnerships. It stretches each Law Centre's resources further, carries what one Law Centre learns to all of them, and helps the people who come through their doors trust that their case and their information are in safe hands. This year it grew stronger: the network reached a new county, invested in its people, extended what it shares and held together when one of its members closed.



Law Centres from across the network, sharing experience and building skills together at LCN's June conference in Leicester.

GROWING THE NETWORK'S REACH

This year the network extended its reach to a county that had no Law Centre before. At the November 2025 AGM, members voted to admit North & West Kent Citizens Advice as a Law Centre, and its Law Centre service now covers all of Kent. LCN supported the application through the year, assessed it and brought the new member into the network's shared systems. It builds on LCN's work with Citizens Advice to bring advice and legal assistance together in one organisation. For people in Kent, it means advice and specialist legal assistance under one roof; for the new member, access to the network's shared systems, support and peers. The network now stands at 41 Law Centres in 45 locations.

One existing member also extended its reach: Wiltshire Law Centre became Southern England Law Centre, now serving Wiltshire, Gloucestershire and Hampshire, including Portsmouth and the Isle of Wight.

The route in is now clearer and simpler, with less paperwork and every application still assessed. Twelve organisations are currently exploring Law Centre status, two of which are likely to join the network in the next year. New Articles of Association and a new Membership Agreement, developed with members and drafted pro bono by A&O Shearman, were approved at the AGM and signed by every member, updating the terms between LCN and its members to keep pace with current requirements and challenges. They set out what membership asks of each Law Centre and what each can expect from LCN in return, while protecting their independence.

INVESTING IN THE PEOPLE WHO DO THE WORK

The legal aid system is only as strong as the people who run it. The Justice Committee reported this year that the number of legal aid solicitors fell by 12% between 2014–15 and 2021–22, and new entrants by 27%. This year we secured a further seven years of funding from Propel to help Law Centres recruit, develop and keep the people they need.

It is opening new routes into the work: apprenticeships, with the first solicitor apprentice having completed the programme and been admitted as a solicitor in 2026.

We are helping Law Centres recruit and keep supervisors and working to remove the barriers that keep people from historically excluded communities out of Law Centre careers. New peer communities for LGBTQ+ staff, legal executives and aspiring solicitors who are sitting the Solicitors Qualification Exam (SQE) now connect around 50 colleagues, and reflective practice groups now support supervisors or supervisors-to-be. And when a Law Centre is going through a difficult period, we stand alongside it, with tailored support on governance, operations and communications, and the experience of colleagues across the network who have been there.

7 years

of **new funding from Propel** to help Law Centres recruit, develop and keep the people they need

"THANK YOU SO MUCH FOR ALL THE HELP THAT YOU HAVE GIVEN US OVER THE LAST YEAR."

CEO, North West Kent Citizens Advice and Kent Law Centre



SHARING ACROSS THE NETWORK

Data apprenticeships do two things: they give Law Centre staff skills to use in their own roles and communities, and they help build a network that uses its data well. Rather than relying on a few specialists, LCN is growing data skills across the network. Apprentices from Law Centres trained with provider Corndel, while LCN ran a community of practice where they could work through problems together. More than 20 further sessions on data strategy, cybersecurity, data protection, storytelling and AI brought Law Centres together to learn from each other.

Eight apprentices have already qualified, and their work is changing how Law Centres run. At Derbyshire Law Centre, matching clients' postcodes to council wards once took days of manual checking; a spreadsheet the apprentice built now does it automatically. At Kirklees Citizens Advice and Law Centre, an apprentice replaced paper records with automated reporting and dashboards colleagues can use without specialist help.

"TASKS THAT USED TO TAKE WEEKS NOW TAKE MINUTES."

Data apprentice, first cohort

The aim is a network where every Law Centre can use its own data to target its services, spot the problems behind its cases, measure its impact and tell its story. A second cohort starts in December.

Law Centres record their work in different ways, which makes it hard to show what the network achieves together. With Law Centres and partners, we drafted a Common Data Framework and are now consulting on the categories, fields and definitions of data within it. This is laying the groundwork for a stronger collective evidence base: one that can show not only how many people Law Centres assist, but who is seeking assistance, where demand cannot be met, what support is provided and what changes for clients. It also gives LCN a stronger basis for engaging with government, funders and the wider advice sector as approaches to evidencing the impact of legal assistance develop.

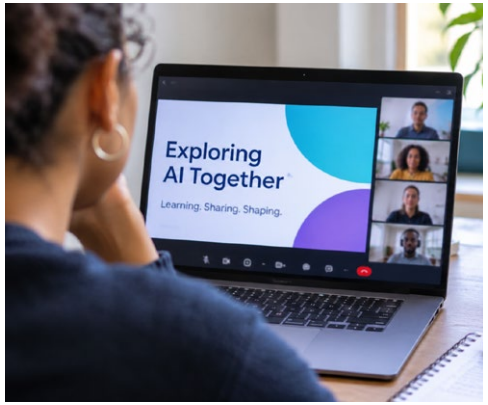


Illustration created with AI, depicting one of LCN's online learning sessions. No real people are shown.

38 Law Centres have taken part in LCN's data programme, building skills and helping develop a Common Data Framework for the network. A further 14 London advice organisations taking part in the project have attended data training this year. Their participation extends elements of our data work to support the wider access to justice sector. This allows all involved to make the most of overlaps, shared resources or opportunities to collaborate. More than half of Law Centres work inside LCN's national Microsoft 365 environment, so security, information governance and training are managed once for all of them. All are certified to Cyber Essentials or working towards certification or renewal.

AI is already changing how people look for advice, use services and even complain about them, raising real questions of accuracy, appropriateness and pressure on scarce resources. Law Centres now have an AI policy template so each can set clear rules for how its staff use these tools. Demand for support is high: 89 people joined our two Exploring AI Together sessions to share what they were trying and learning. LCN is seeking dedicated resource to track these developments and make sense of them for members.



Civic Power Fund grantees, including LCN, gather in Manchester to share how they are helping communities use their own power to make change.

LOCAL CASES CHANGING THINGS FOR MANY

Some problems need more than casework. Over three years, with The Baring Foundation-funded Hub Project, Law Centres in Suffolk, Derbyshire and Liverpool showed what changes when they work alongside local people on the systems behind their cases. In Liverpool, that work helped lead the council to create a Refugee Homelessness Team.

The next phase goes wider. Our Foundations of Power work is helping Law Centres work more participatively to use a wider range of tools for social change and learn from each other as they go. We are sharing what we learn with funders and partners across the sector. The aim is to show what organisations like LCN can do as catalysts, helping local people use their own power to make change.

ONE NETWORK, ALL YEAR ROUND

In June, 72 staff and trustees from 27 Law Centres came together in Leicester for our Annual Conference: Securing Tomorrow's Frontline Justice. Convening the network is one of LCN's core roles: making space for people doing the same work in different places to meet, learn from one another and build the relationships that hold the network together. Delegates said they most valued the time to compare experiences and make unexpected connections, something no single Law Centre could create on its own. We used the conference to host the launch of Central England Law Centre and Policy in Practice's research, which used Coventry City Council's own data to track what happened to people after they received legal assistance from the Law Centre, and found that it prevented problems from escalating, keeping people in their homes and protecting their incomes; and to discuss what it means for Law Centres across the network.

Between conferences, Law Centre managers meet weekly as a peer group and spotlight sessions share what is working. New peer communities now bring together legal executives, trainee solicitors and LGBTQ+ staff from across the network, and colleagues preparing for the SQE support each other through it.

"I LEFT FEELING ENERGISED AND BRIMMING WITH IDEAS OF WHAT WE CAN DO NEXT."

Conference delegate

"IT'S THOSE CONNECTIONS OR DISCUSSIONS THAT YOU DIDN'T EXPECT TO HAVE... THAT'S WHY FOR ME, IT'S VALUABLE TO GO YEAR ON YEAR."

Conference delegate

Delegates at the LCN Annual Conference, Leicester, June 2026.





Sam Pearce

Peter Kandler KC (Hon), co-founder of the first Law Centre in 1970, with his letters patent as an Honorary King's Counsel: recognition for more than five decades of community-based legal assistance.

RECOGNITION ACROSS THE NETWORK

Despite pressure on funding and the workforce and a constantly shifting policy environment, Law Centres' expertise continued to be recognised across the legal profession and beyond, a reminder of the breadth and quality of the work they do. At the Legal Aid Lawyer of the Year Awards, Bristol Law Centre was named Legal Aid Firm/Not-for-Profit Agency of the Year and Southwark Law Centre's Van Ferguson won Social Welfare Lawyer of the Year, with two further Law Centre finalists. Owen McCloskey of Law Centre NI was appointed to the Social Security Advisory Committee. LCN nominated Peter Kandler for the Honorary KC described in the Chair's foreword, and produced nomination guides to help Law Centres put forward outstanding staff and teams.

INFLUENCE: LOCAL EXPERIENCE, NATIONAL EVIDENCE



The Justice Committee's Access to Justice report, published 17 July 2026

Law Centres see how the law works in practice. LCN turns what they see into evidence and puts it in front of the policymakers: Parliament, government and regulators. We also bring Law Centre experience and perspectives into the public discourse.

We plan roads, schools and hospitals on evidence about who uses them and what they need. The legal assistance that makes access to justice possible is public infrastructure too, and it deserves the same. Law Centres hold that evidence in the work they do every day. No single Law Centre can give the national picture, so LCN brings their evidence together and takes it to where decisions about access to justice are made. This year we represented the network at a parliamentary inquiry, informed government policy work and contributed to national debate.

3% of civil legal aid providers overall are Law Centres

but they make up **53%** of welfare benefits advice providers

PUTTING FRONTLINE EVIDENCE ON THE RECORD

We gave written evidence to the Justice Committee's Access to Justice inquiry, followed by oral evidence to its members. Our case was that people's ability to get legal assistance depends on more than funding individual cases as legal aid does. It depends on what we called the "standing infrastructure of access to justice": the services, people and expertise that make justice reachable. We argued that this needs sustained investment, not short-term funding, and that it saves public money elsewhere. We have also called for a national access to justice strategy, covering the whole spectrum of assistance.

The Committee's first report in this inquiry, published on 17 July, found that access to justice has been severely eroded by the declining availability of legal aid. It quoted our evidence on civil legal aid fees and on the Legal Aid Agency's systems, and on both it reached similar conclusions to ours. It recommended regular independent review of civil legal aid fee rates and faster investment in the Agency's digital systems, with a published timeline for replacing the system providers use to manage cases and costs. We briefed the press ahead of publication, and the Law Society Gazette carried the network's voice on the day the report came out. We also briefed Law Centres on the Committee report for use in local advocacy.

The Government's response was published in November. It pointed to £200 million already allocated to Legal Aid Agency technology over the Spending Review period, though full replacement of the Agency's systems will run beyond this Parliament. It did not commit to an independent fee-review mechanism, wider civil fee uplifts or a civil workforce strategy, and it deferred wider decisions on the means test. The Committee called the response "highly disappointing, and an inadequate form of response", and concluded that legal aid is "a service in managed decline". With AdviceUK, AdviceNow and Manchester Justice Hub, who gave evidence alongside us, we responded publicly the same week, and the Law Society Gazette and Legal Futures both carried our response.

The Committee's second report, on the legal advice sector and its funding, was published just as this review went to print. It, too, has taken up LCN's evidence and arguments extensively, recommending a new National Legal Service, to be backed by stable investment that should add to current legal aid funding rather than displace it. Alongside this, we also continue to call for the regular uprating of legal aid's means threshold and its fee rates as part of the Law Society-led 'Legal Aid Means' campaign.

INFORMING HOW LEGAL SUPPORT IS DESIGNED

Alongside public advocacy, we directly engage with policymakers, not least in order to help them understand how Law Centres operate, in a provider base largely made up of firms. In the autumn, with South West London Law Centres, we welcomed five Ministry of Justice officials, including policy leads for civil, housing and immigration legal aid. They came to see how a Law Centre operates, and got an opportunity to ask about the challenges it faces, and the gaps between legal aid policy 'on paper' and in real-life practice, so this might shape future policy.

We also continue to advocate with Government on other access to justice priorities. As a member of the Ministry of Justice-led steering group on a Legal Support Strategy, we informed its development, weighing in on priorities and service models and, most extensively, on an outcomes framework for funded services. Our data work gave us much to contribute, and the exchange ran both ways: government's interest in outcomes across different forms of legal support also sharpened our own thinking.

In October, 11 Law Centres were successful in securing legal support grants, nearly one in four of all recipients. The funding is welcome in a financially difficult time, but it leaves other deserving Law Centres without support. Currently, the Legal Support Strategy remains incomplete, and the government has still not committed multi-year funding to it. We will continue to push for much-needed resources and clarity in the coming year.

"BROUGHT A BIG SMILE TO ME THIS MORNING TO READ [ABOUT THE VISIT]... MAY MORE OF THIS FOLLOW – SOMETHING NEEDS TO CHANGE."

Law Centre staff member

MAKING THE CASE FOR NEW FUNDING

If legal assistance is infrastructure, how it is funded matters. With partners, we made the case for two further sources of funding: interest earned on money held in some lawyers' client accounts, and money left undistributed after collective legal actions. We support an Interest on Lawyers' Client Accounts (ILCA) scheme in principle, provided that it follows common practice in over 60 jurisdictions around the world: that funds are independently managed, transparently governed, ring-fenced for access to justice and additional to state funding rather than assimilated into it. The model the Government has proposed does not offer this.

We set out that position in our response to the Government's consultation, in our evidence to the Justice Committee, in comment pieces in the Law Society Gazette, and at forums and events on the topic. We are also involved in the University of Oxford's research into new funding models, which is the most authoritative knowledge source on the matter. In September, with the Access to Justice Foundation, we asked the new Lord Chancellor to publish the consultation response, ring-fence the proceeds for access to justice and bring stakeholders together to co-design the scheme. By November, the Government had not published its response, and we expect an ILCA scheme to be a considerable issue for our advocacy efforts in the coming year.

Undistributed damages have already shown what this money can do as, unlike an ILCA scheme, this mechanism is already in place. Unclaimed damages from a class action funded the Access to Justice Foundation's £3.9 million Improving Lives Through Advice programme, and three Law Centres each received £300,000. Applicants sought more than £68.5 million, a measure of why longer-term funds are so desperately needed. This summer, the Government consulted on changes to the collective actions regime, including on whether the Access to Justice Foundation should continue to receive the damages that remain unclaimed. LCN has responded to the consultation in favour of the current arrangement, and has encouraged member Law Centres to do the same.



Nimrod Ben-Cnaan, Head of Policy and Profile, giving oral evidence to the Justice Committee, 10 February 2026.

CARRYING THE EVIDENCE INTO NATIONAL DEBATE

Last year, LCN invested in strategic communications capacity in order to enhance Law Centres' public profile and positioning, and make our communications more proactive. This year, a growing number of media appearances that LCN generated or facilitated demonstrate the difference this is making.

As the Renters' Rights Act's tenancy reforms took effect on 1 May, we brought together evidence from Law Centres and shared it with national journalists. They reported a pronounced rise in Section 21 notices in the final weeks before abolition, and mass cases affecting whole blocks and estates. At one development in Bermondsey, 188 households faced steep rent increases and had begun receiving notices. The i Paper reported on this evidence, and it informed our later work with the Law Society Gazette.

When a BBC investigation raised concerns about unregulated asylum advice, we published a statement setting out how regulated Law Centres work. Several Law Centres contributed to the statement, and it provided members with a clear account of the gap between the claims made and the reality we see, to share with funders and clients.

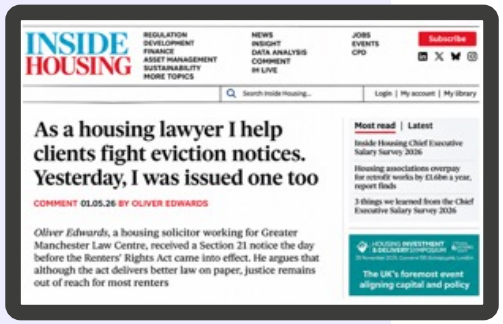
In July, the Law Society Gazette's feature 'Law Centres: The Rescuers', by Catherine Baksi, drew on voices from across the network and carried our argument that a government serious about prevention and justice should see Law Centres as "core social infrastructure". We worked with Law Centres on this four-page feature, coordinating evidence and quotes, supplying policy context and connecting the journalist with independent research by Policy in Practice. That research, on Central England Law Centre's work with Coventry City Council, found that 83% of social-housing tenants facing eviction kept their homes, and that households receiving support saw their income rise by £153 a month.

Media coverage is not policy change, but it makes space for Law Centres' perspectives and public advocacy. It puts frontline evidence in front of those who fund, regulate and shape the system. This dovetails with our direct advocacy with policymakers and other stakeholders to amplify our messages. In the coming year, as public discussions turn to preventative public spending, our advocacy and communications work will play a key role in making the economic case for legal assistance and for funding Law Centres.

Oliver Edwards is a public law and housing solicitor at Greater Manchester Law Centre, and a private tenant. On 30 April, the last day landlords could serve a Section 21 notice, one arrived for his own house share. He knew how to check it for defects, and he had savings if he needed to move. Many of the families he represents have neither, he wrote, and few can reach a legal aid lawyer at all. We saw what his story said about the new law and placed it in Inside Housing, where it reached the housing sector on the day the old law ended.

"THE LAST THREE CLIENTS ON MY BOOKS WERE FACED WITH THE SAME NOTICE IN THEIR HANDS AS THE ONE I RECEIVED."

Oliver Edwards, Greater Manchester Law Centre


INSIDE HOUSING

As a housing lawyer I help clients fight eviction notices. Yesterday, I was issued one too

COMMENT 01.05.26 BY OLIVER EDWARDS

Oliver Edwards, a housing solicitor working for Greater Manchester Law Centre, received a Section 21 notice the day before the Renters' Rights Act came into effect. He argues that although the act delivers better law on paper, justice remains out of reach for most renters


FEATURE LAW CENTRES

THE LOW DOWN

FEATURE LAW CENTRES

THE RESCUERS

In July, the Law Society Gazette dedicated a feature to Law Centres, capturing their resilience and the urgent need for better funding for their work.

SECURE: THE RULES THAT LET LAW CENTRES DO THE WORK

This year, LCN helped protect the way Law Centres deliver legal services. When a High Court ruling threatened the established model of supervised casework, we acted on behalf of the network, securing a King's Counsel's opinion and intervening in the appeal.

The Court of Appeal accepted the position we argued for, confirming that staff can carry out litigation tasks for an authorised lawyer who remains responsible and supervises them properly. We then worked to ensure Law Centres had the guidance and regulatory clarity they needed to continue serving their communities with confidence.

Law Centres turn rights on paper into practical help. The legal services they provide are governed by clear rules, defining who is permitted to do the work, who supervises them and who is responsible. In every Law Centre, clients are helped by teams of solicitors, caseworkers, paralegals and chartered legal executives, many with years of specialist experience. Each team works together, dividing tasks among professionals under the watchful eye of authorised supervisors. In an advice sector reduced by years of cuts, this is how scarce legal expertise can be made to reach more people.

"JUST WANTED TO SEND A BIG THANK YOU TO YOU, JULIE AND EVERYBODY AT LCN FOR TAKING THIS ON – AND WINNING IT TOO! THIS WILL HAVE A BIG IMPACT ON THE NETWORK AND BEYOND."

Law Centre Director

WHEN A RULING PUT THAT IN QUESTION

In September 2025, a High Court judgment in the case of *Mazur* suggested that these colleagues could assist a solicitor with litigation but could not conduct it, even under supervision. The line was hard to draw, and everyday steps such as issuing proceedings or filing documents could carry professional, even criminal, consequences. Law Centres were forced to reorganise work, restricting what experienced staff could do and passing more work to the small number of authorised lawyers, which reduced the amount of work that teams could take on. To clarify what was allowed under the new circumstances, in November we provided Law Centres with a King's Counsel's opinion and practical guidance. However, more was needed.

PUTTING THE LAW CENTRE MODEL BEFORE THE COURT

In December, we found out that professional body CILEX had appealed the judgment. We reached out to them, applied for permission to intervene in the appeal and were granted it in January. With Law Centres' help, we marshalled evidence that helped us put Law Centres' way of working before the court: how teams operate, the supervision that legal aid contracts already require, and what it would mean for access to justice if solicitors had to perform most litigation tasks themselves. Without clarity, we argued, there is a real risk that people will find it harder to access legal assistance, not because their case lacks merit but because of how regulation is interpreted in practice.

The stakes were high and the appeal was followed across the profession throughout the hearing in February. One report suggested that "defeat could slam the door on the next generation" of legal executives, paralegals and trainees, and "ultimately decide who receives access to justice".



Our legal action was accompanied by public messaging in social and news media, explaining the significance of the case.

We were fortunate to benefit from a skilled legal team from A&O Shearman and Gatehouse Chambers, who acted for us on a pro bono basis. Ultimately, we were successful and the Court of Appeal ruled in March that staff who are not authorised to conduct litigation can carry out litigation tasks for an authorised lawyer – provided that lawyer remains responsible and supervises them properly.

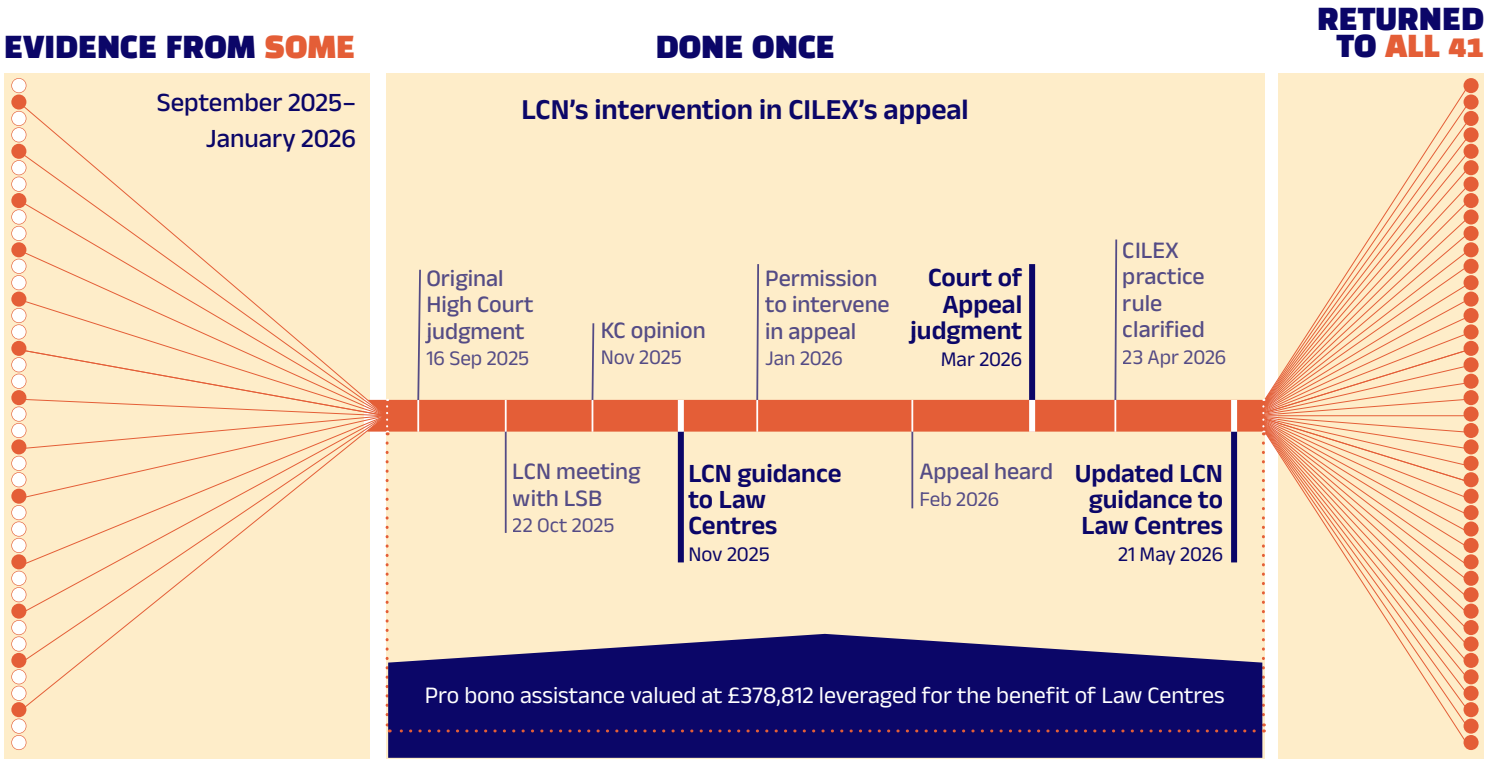
CLEARER AND CLEARER STILL

Ending six months of uncertainty, the judgment was not quite an 'as you were' moment. It required professional bodies and regulators to sharpen their professional guidance, which they did in May and July. Following this, we updated our own guidance to Law Centres, reviewed again by our legal team, so they could get on with their work with confidence. Beyond the scope of the judgment, we were also alerted to an omission in CILEX rules that affected chartered legal executives working in Law Centres. Responding to this, we advocated with the regulator for those practice rights to be formally recognised and documented. In April, CILEX Regulation amended its handbooks to confirm that people working for not-for-profit bodies may indeed litigate.

Practice rules continue to change with new circumstances, such as the spread of AI. We monitor these changes and other, broader reviews, and update Law Centre guidance where needed, to preserve certainty for their working environment.

ACTING FOR EVERY LAW CENTRE

A YEAR OF UNTANGLING A KEY ISSUE FOR OUR MEMBERS



SUSTAIN: INVESTING IN THE FUTURE OF ACCESS TO JUSTICE

Faced with a challenging financial outlook, Law Centres need to be able to plan ahead beyond the next funding round. The network addresses this by bringing in investment, expertise and services that individual Law Centres might not be able to access on their own and makes the case for the long-term investment that lets Law Centres plan ahead.

Law Centres have always drawn on a mix of legal aid, local authority grants and charitable trusts, and over the past fifteen years each of those has been weakened in turn. This year, the Justice Committee found civil legal aid rates uneconomical for providers, and grant funding is harder to plan around as funders' priorities shift.

No single Law Centre can solve these problems on its own. Working together, with LCN at its heart, the network has secured new funding, drawn in expertise and shared services at a scale no Law Centre could reach alone, and continued to build the evidence for lasting investment.

OPENING ROUTES TO INVESTMENT

When significant funding becomes available, LCN moves quickly to help Law Centres seize the opportunity. This year, we alerted Law Centres early to the Access to Justice Foundation's Improving Lives Through Advice round and supported them to apply. Three Law Centres each secured £300,000, making up almost one in five of the organisations funded.

BRINGING EXPERTISE INTO THE NETWORK

One of the most valuable resources that we draw on is pro bono assistance. Thanks to our allies in the profession, we can leverage significant and highly valuable help: in the last financial year, law firms gave LCN pro bono legal assistance valued at £470,659. This support benefits Law Centres, too: it covered legal advice and representation in our *Mazur* intervention; our new Articles of Association and Membership Agreement; employment law advice for the workforce development project; an AI policy for Law Centres; and responding to many other requests for assistance.

We are grateful for their generosity and acknowledge that the impact LCN is able to achieve is deepened through their collaboration.

£470,659

of pro bono legal support from law firms and chambers in the year to 31 March 2026



Law Centres from across the network meet to plan, share what's working and agree how to respond together to the pressures they face. That shared thinking is part of what keeps independent Law Centres strong.

MAKING EVERY POUND GO FURTHER

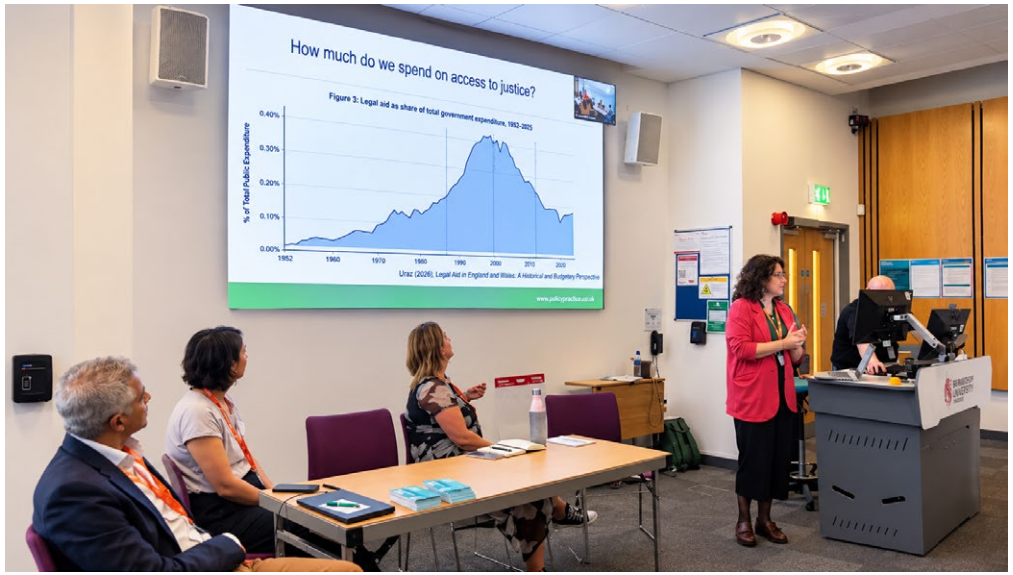
Negotiating on behalf of the whole network, LCN secures terms no single Law Centre could get alone, so each member's money stretches further. This year, we renegotiated the network's collective professional indemnity insurance policy, cutting the excess on each claim by a third and doubling the limit of indemnity, while reducing the average premium. Law Centres also share access, collectively bargained to reduced rates, to legal resource portals LexisNexis and RightsNet. Further, more than half of Law Centres work inside our national Microsoft 365 environment.

BUILDING THE ECONOMIC CASE

The case for investment rests on what legal assistance returns, particularly on public investment. Across the advice sector as a whole, research by Pragmatix Advisory, cited by Parliament's Justice Committee, suggests that every £1 spent on free specialist legal advice saves government £2.71. Central England Law Centre's work with Coventry City Council and Policy in Practice has shown how outcomes can be tracked using council data. This is equally important at national and local levels: this year, LCN has included such figures in our resources for Law Centres, for example, to help them lobby councils for contracts to deliver local Community Resilience Fund services. Building a Law Centre-specific picture is part of the work ahead, and the Common Data Framework, which will move into testing with Law Centres in 2027, is the next step ahead.

WHAT IS AT STAKE

LCN can unlock this investment, expertise and services for Law Centres through its capacity as their shared vehicle, alongside their respective capacities. Without it, each Law Centre would face these pressures alone. Investment in the network strengthens every Law Centre within it, so that together they can go further for the communities they serve.



Central England Law Centre and Policy in Practice present their research to Law Centres from across the network. Legal aid's share of government spending has fallen steeply from its peak.

Excess **CUT BY A THIRD**

indemnity limits **DOUBLED**

when LCN renegotiated Law Centres'
professional indemnity insurance policy

THE WORK AHEAD



This has been a year of real progress for the network, made against strong headwinds. Legal aid continues to decline: the Justice Committee concluded that access to justice has been severely eroded, and the Government's response leaves many of its concerns unresolved. Law Centres are also still living with the effects of earlier shocks. The 2025 cyber attack and data breach at the Legal Aid Agency, through no fault of their own, disrupted payments, and some Law Centres are still recovering. Many are working hard simply to keep their services running, because the people who rely on them have nowhere else to go.

Last year, we wrote that the rule of law is in recession. Its health is measured in courtrooms, but also in whether a tenant facing eviction can find legal assistance in time, and in communities that recession is already doing damage. Across the country, people are angry, often with good reason: a home falling into disrepair, a benefit wrongly stopped, a job lost unfairly. Grievances left unanswered harden, and they are too easily turned against neighbours, and migrants above all. Local charities are feeling the consequences, including a rise in threats against organisations and their staff. Doing this work can now carry risk for the people who do it.

This year, some Law Centres and their staff faced hostile scrutiny, intimidation and threats. LCN brought Law Centre managers together to understand what was happening, began gathering intelligence across the network to identify common risks, and strengthened practical support on security, communications and staff wellbeing. We have also developed guidance so that Law Centres know what to do if they or their staff are targeted, including how to flag concerns to LCN. We are turning what had been a case-by-case response into shared support, helping Law Centres prepare, protect their staff and clients, and look after one another.

Against that, the network has held, and the shared work has proved its worth. One intervention in the Mazur appeal protected the way every Law Centre works. Evidence from Law Centres reached Parliament, and the Justice Committee's findings echoed it. Renegotiating the network's insurance improved cover and reduced the average premium for every member. And Law Centres keep putting problems right: in Newcastle, North East Law Centre secured £11,804 for a person with severe health conditions who had been wrongly denied Personal Independence Payment (PIP). And in the south of the country, at Bristol Law Centre, a client whose benefits had been wrongly stopped recovered nearly £17,000 that should have been paid to them. Each problem put right helps repair the trust that holds a place together. That is the strength of a network: Law Centres share what they learn, see each other through hard times and speak with one voice when it counts.

In the coming year, that shared work continues. A second cohort of data apprentices starts in December, workforce development enters the first full year of seven-year funding, and the Common Data Framework will be tested with members. Last year we also said we would develop

continued overleaf

"LAW CENTRES, FROM THE WORK TO THE MISSION TO THE PEOPLE, IS A SACRED AND POWERFUL MOVEMENT."

Former Law Centre staff member

a monitoring, evaluation and learning framework, a new communications strategy and a members' platform: our communications strategy is in place, built around two objectives: establishing LCN as a leading voice on access to justice, and making the Law Centre movement visible and valued, with a shared messaging framework the network can use to tell its story consistently. Our new Members Hub will soon be launched, giving Law Centres one place to find LCN's guidance, resources and peer networks. Our monitoring, evaluation and learning framework is being tested, and will measure the difference LCN's work makes to Law Centres. The Justice Committee's second report, on the legal advice sector and how it is funded, was published as this review went to print. We will study its recommendations with Law Centres and press for the Government to act on them.

Across the voluntary sector, there is growing concern about what is lost when the organisations that support frontline charities close. Shared infrastructure is easy to overlook until it has gone: the systems, guidance, negotiation and advocacy behind each Law Centre are rarely seen until a Law Centre has to face a crisis without them. Investment in that shared work is investment in every Law Centre that relies on it.

Law Centres are now in their sixth decade. The challenges ahead are serious, and we do not underplay them. But this year the network has shown what it can do together, and we are working with Law Centres to make sure they can do more in the decades ahead.

This review shows what Law Centres can achieve together that none could achieve alone. Keeping that going depends on more than LCN.

If you work in a Law Centre, share your evidence and your stories with us. Some of this year's strongest work started with what one Law Centre was seeing in its community. The more we hear, the further that evidence can travel.

If you fund legal assistance, we'd welcome a conversation about supporting the shared work every Law Centre draws on, alongside the frontline services you already fund.

If you are a policymaker, we will continue to share what Law Centres are seeing on the ground, as part of a constructive dialogue on shared aims.

Over more than 50 years, Law Centres turn being heard into power. By enforcing rights, challenging injustice and helping communities act for themselves, they show that speaking up matters, powerful institutions can be held to account and change is possible. They turn fear into hope, isolation into collective strength and daily struggles into lasting change, so people can live with greater security and dignity, communities can stand stronger together and society becomes fairer for everyone.

Julie Bishop, Director, Law Centres Network

GET IN TOUCH

LAW CENTRES: support@lawcentres.org.uk
FUNDERS, POLICYMAKERS AND PARTNERS: info@lawcentres.org.uk
MEDIA: media@lawcentres.org.uk

FINANCIAL EXTRACTS

These summarised financial statements contain information from both the Statement of Financial Activities and the Balance Sheet for the year ended 31 March 2026, but are not the full statutory report and accounts.

The summary financial information shows the income raised for our activities was £1,397,463. The cost of raising the income and the amounts spent on our charitable activities were £1,584,625. The information is taken from the full financial statements which were approved by the trustees on 12 October 2026.

In order to gain a full understanding of the financial affairs of the charity, the full audited financial statements, trustees' annual report and auditor'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,



Victor McAllister
Treasurer
12 October 2026

BALANCE SHEET

	2026	2025
Fixed Assets	**£**	**£**
Tangible Fixed Assets	1,273	–
	1,273	–
Current assets		
Debtors	81,066	101,010
Cash at bank and in hand	261,584	397,763
Total Current Assets	**342,650**	**498,773**
Creditors: amounts falling due within one year	(169,010)	(136,698)
Net current assets	**173,640**	**362,075**
Net Assets	**174,913**	**362,075**
Funds		
Restricted funds:		
In surplus	87,788	272,643
Unrestricted funds*:		
General fund	87,125	89,432
Total funds	**174,913**	**362,075**

* For full details of LCN's reserves, see the Trustees' Annual Report 2025–26.

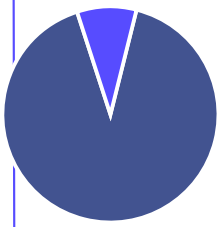
INCOME

	% of income	2026 (£)	2025 (£)
Gifts in Kind**	33.68%	**470,659**	7,683
City Bridge Foundation	16.49%	**230,475**	88,275
LLST – Propel	10.02%	**140,000**	225,000
Services to Law Centres	9.57%	**133,726**	135,116
Subscriptions – Law Centre members	8.64%	**120,700**	115,100
AB Charitable Trust	4.65%	**65,000**	69,000
The Legal Education Foundation	4.29%	**60,000**	65,000
Paul Hamlyn Foundation	3.58%	**50,000**	–
Donations	2.09%	**29,147**	37,119
The Access to Justice Foundation	1.79%	**25,000**	–
Awards for All	1.43%	**20,000**	19,700
LLST – Cost of Living	1.39%	**19,400**	38,675
Annual conference	1.03%	**14,395**	6,848
Talent Fund	0.50%	**7,000**	10,000
Sundry income	0.37%	**5,156**	26,854
Bell Foundation	0.36%	**5,000**	16,679
Bank Interest	0.13%	**1,805**	520
Baring Foundation	–	**–**	191,206
John Ellerman Foundation	–	**–**	48,000
Law Society	–	**–**	22,500
Total		**1,397,463**	**1,123,275**

EXPENDITURE

	% of expenditure	2026 (£)	2025 (£)
Staff costs	31.91%	**505,723**	486,483
Gifts in Kind**	29.70%	**470,659**	7,682
Grants and Payments to Law Centres	17.01%	**269,607**	323,795
Services to Law Centres	7.62%	**120,673**	128,986
Project specific cost	4.91%	**77,773**	26,815
Premises costs	1.91%	**30,319**	28,237
Staff Travel, Training, Recruitment and Meetings	1.24%	**19,687**	7,728
Annual Conference and Events	1.15%	**18,266**	14,054
Legal and Professional Fees	1.10%	**17,408**	3,089
Governance costs	0.87%	**13,739**	14,173
Office costs, ICT, Insurance and Comms	0.85%	**13,526**	12,666
Subscriptions and Journals	0.68%	**10,727**	7,712
Website / Digital Development	0.56%	**8,821**	11,157
Training and Course Costs	0.49%	**7,697**	1,824
Total		**1,584,625**	**1,074,401**

** Gifts in kind are the value of pro bono support received by LCN, including legal assistance for LCN's intervention in the Mazur appeal, rewriting LCN's Articles of Association and Membership Agreement, AI policy for Law Centres, hosting events and other pro bono advice.



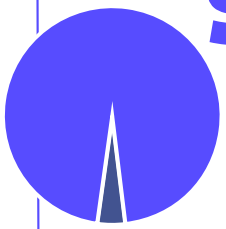
9%

of LCN's income comes from membership fees

£9

for every **£1** paid in membership fees, Law Centres received **£9** in grants, services and other benefits.





96%

of LCN's spending this year was on grants, services and other benefits to members

STAFF AND TRUSTEES

STAFF TEAM

Nimrod Ben-Cnaan, Head of Policy and Profile

Julie Bishop, Director

Simon Brown, Head of Service Development

Matthew Cary, Communications Officer (until October 2026)

Alex Charles, Head of IT, Systems and Data

Laura Chilintan, Strategic Projects and Policy Officer

Helen Dagley, Strategic Communications Lead

Noella Gooden, Workforce Development and EDI Lead

Jack Huzzey, Data Project Officer

Winnie Liguori, Finance Officer

Aristea Maundy, Administrative Assistant

Cristina Porto, Administrator

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

TRUSTEES

Officers

Helen Rogers, Chair

Nick Whittingham, Vice Chair

Michael Fawole, Vice Chair

Victor McAllister, Treasurer

Committee members

Andrew Allan

Hilton von Herbert

David Jackson

Vanessa Logan

Lydia Nash

Sagar Shah

Thomas Stephens

Sara Taylor

Gareth Thomas

Mark Weights

Observers

Sara Chandler KC (Hon)

Peter Kandler KC (Hon)

Pamela Robotham

FUNDERS AND SUPPORTERS Financial year 2025/2026

Our funders

AB Charitable Trust

The Access to Justice Foundation

The Baring Foundation

The Bell Foundation

City Bridge Foundation

John Ellerman Foundation

Law Society

The Legal Education Foundation

London Legal Support Trust

National Lottery Awards for All

Paul Hamlyn Foundation

Talent Fund

Our supporters

A&O Shearman

Akin

Ashurst Perkins Coie

Charles Russell Speechlys

Clyde & Co

Dechert

Eversheds Sutherland

Farrer & Co

Fieldfisher

Freshfields Bruckhaus Deringer

Gatehouse Chambers

Herbert Smith Freehills Kramer

Hogan Lovells Cadwalader

Kingsley Napley

Norton Rose Fulbright

Simmons & Simmons

UK Collaborative Plan for Pro Bono

With thanks also to

Our **member Law Centres**, whose subscriptions sustain the network; **everyone who donated to LCN** this year; **organisations that provided pro bono or in-kind support**; and organisations and friends that **collaborated with LCN** throughout the year on our many projects.



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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.