Report from the co-chairs

The past year saw attacks on access to justice for hundreds of thousands of the most vulnerable people in England and Wales.

The year was largely dominated by the campaign against the Government’s Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders (LASPO) Bill. This proposed major cuts to legal aid and a vast reduction in access to legal advice. Working independently and through the Justice For All coalition LCN and Law Centres throughout the country pulled out all the stops to fight the cuts and protect our clients.

Although the Bill eventually became law several amendments were secured which mitigated some of its worst aspects and kept some areas of law within scope of legal aid. The campaign brought LCN into partnership with a large number of other organisations and has initiated relationships across the sectors which can be built on in the future.

As if this were not enough, changes to the role and structure of the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) have led to the total removal of funding from frontline advice organisations, including 27 Law Centres, which provided legal casework and representation to the public on behalf of the EHRC. The EHRC advice line will be replaced by an information only telephone service. Many people needing legal advice on Equality and Human Rights matters will be left high and dry.

The cuts in funds provided from central government has meant that many Local Authorities have felt forced to make cuts in their own services and funding to Law Centres and other advice agencies. This, along with the other cuts, has left some Law Centres with significantly reduced income. Like Law Centres, LCN itself is faced with reduced funding. Some projects have come to the end of their life and can’t be renewed and other funding streams have been cut by the government. This will continue into the coming year and LCN, like other charities, is faced with coping with increased demand with fewer resources.

But we are not defeatist. Law Centres and LCN have been coming together throughout the year, working on ways to continue our service to our communities as they are faced with major challenges such as the impact of welfare reform. We can be proud of the new funding for new projects, our dynamic presence in the social media sphere and the commitment of our staff who continue to take on more and more work.

Sadly, due to cuts in our funding, three members of staff had to be made redundant. We thank them for all that they have contributed to the Law Centre’s movement and wish them well for the future.

Sadly too, Oldham Law Centre closed but Ealing Law Centre is getting ready to open and the RAD Deaf Law Centre officially launched in July.

Most importantly, a warm thank you must go to all our funders and sponsors, without which we could not survive. We are particularly grateful to Freshfields Bruckhaus Deringer LLP for providing our premises for the last three years.
Director’s report
During the past year LCN has focused on doing everything possible to secure the survival of Law Centres and a future service for our clients and the communities in which they live.

We have continued to fight for access to justice in line with our strategic goals. Fundraising has been a key priority, both for LCN itself and helping Law Centres to obtain funding from a range of sources. Despite the imminent cuts to legal aid, several Law Centres have successfully attracted other funding to enable them to develop new services. For example, Avon & Bristol Law Centre was awarded funding to extend their legal advice service to community groups throughout the South West.

Working with Law Centres, our Young People’s Programme has attracted a range of new funding to increase access to justice for children and young people, and is encouraging young people into Law Centres’ staff groups through an apprentice scheme.

Further funding was also achieved for Law Centres by helping them with information and advice in applying for funds from the Cabinet Office Transitional Fund and Advice Fund programmes. Several Law Centres were also awarded Local Authority funding.

Having to do more with less has been the challenge for LCN and our member Law Centres. We have restructured the LCN staff team to target our resources at our top priorities. Sadly three members of staff had to take redundancy while others will have their hours reduced or have taken on additional responsibilities. I am grateful for the patience and commitment shown by all concerned.

An important milestone was our rebranding and the change of name from the Law Centres Federation (LCF) to the Law Centres Network (LCN). Part of this has been the launch of our new website.

The Law Centre brand is now consistent at national and local level as Law Centres adopt the new logo. We hope this will enhance the reputation of the Law Centres’ movement and will help us to be recognised by the community as a quality free legal service for those in need.

It has been gratifying to see how the profile of LCN and Law Centres has increased in the national and regional press. Our presence on social media is growing rapidly and has attracted many positive comments.

All this and more is explained in more detail in this Report.

We approach the next year with baited breath but we are clear on what we have to do. Together we can make sure Law Centre clients get the services they need as we develop new ways to do justice.

Julie Bishop
Law Centres Network Director
Working towards our goals

LCN had four strategic goals to work towards in the period covered by this Annual Report.

**Independent, sustainable and effective Law Centres** equipped with the knowledge to effectively manage the increase in demand at the same time as restriction in funding. Substantial work was undertaken to provide funding advice and assistance to Law Centres faced with reductions in grant funding particularly from London Councils and other Local Authorities. Key areas of work with Law Centres were; sustainability and partnership working – including commissioning, coaching for Law Centre staff and Management Committees, business planning and facilitating individual Law Centre strategic planning events.

Assisting Law Centres in exploring ways of generating their own income – for example, creating New Business Models, formed a large part of the Development Team’s work throughout the year. Negotiation with the Solicitors Regulation Authority and the Legal Services Board resulted in Law Centres being accepted for waivers of the Solicitors Practice Framework that had previously prevented them from charging fees under the Solicitors Regulation Authority and the Legal Services Board resulted in Law Centres being accepted for waivers of the Solicitors Practice Framework that had previously prevented them from charging fees under the Solicitors Practice Framework.

We have worked with Law Centres to explore more effective collaborative working arrangements – for example, based on a Strategic Planning Committee model, and facilitating individual Law Centre strategic planning events.

Successful securing of Social Welfare Law Aid contracts resulted in a great deal of work assisting Law Centres to manage the contracts and maximise related income. At the time of writing we are in the midst of assisting Law Centres to secure further tenders for the provision of face to face Social Welfare Law post implementation of LASPO.

Further funding was achieved for Law Centres by assisting them with information and advice in applying for funds from the Cabinet Office Transitional Fund and Advice Fund programmes. We represented Law Centres by attending meetings with the Legal Services Commission, Ministry of Justice and other advice providers. Detailed work was undertaken on the new Civil Legal Aid contract in partnership with the Specialist Practitioners Group under the aegis of the Law Society. This work fed through representative bodies to the main Consultative Groups at the MoJ. In London work funded by London Councils provided

**Policy & Voice in partnership with Advice UK.** Our London Councils grant to provide Second Tier Support to London Law Centres had to end in September 2011 when funding was cut.

The London Advice Forum on which LCN represents London Law Centres held a successful Annual Conference in partnership with Advice UK, Citizens Advice and LASA in July 2012.

The Barings Foundation grant for Strengthening Specialist Advice provided a series of guides covering a range of topics relevant to Law Centre work. These included guides to the Code of Conduct, Audit, Quality Marks etc. A complete Quality Manual was also written to enable Law Centres to meet their quality standards. Training to accompany the guides was provided at various times throughout the year culminating in the LCN Annual Conference. The Young Peoples Programme (YPP) funded by the John Ellerman Foundation and Paul Hamlyn Foundation continued with its work to protect children and young people by raising awareness of their rights and assisting Law Centres to provide tailored and dedicated services for young people.

Following the successful implementation of the YPP in London the project was able to expand nationally and increased staffing by a further post.

The number of Law Centres participating in this important area increased significantly during the year. This has resulted in more young people being housed, the realisation of their entitlements and the reinstatement in school of pupils excluded due to the failure of schools to obtain statement for special needs. The YPP has also commissioned research and strategic policy work on areas of law affecting young people.

In partnership with LawWorks and funded by Unbound Philanthropy, the Sustainable & Pro Bono Immigration Legal Services project, started in October 2011, aims to develop mechanisms for the continuing provision of free immigration legal services for disadvantaged people.

It has two parts – the first is to work with ten Law Centres that currently provide Immigration legal assistance to ensure that they are financially sustainable and able to continue providing Immigration legal assistance to vulnerable people. The second is to work with the Pro Bono legal community to find effective ways to provide free immigration services with pro bono assistance.

The Equalities and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) funded LCN to provide second tier support to Law Centres and other agencies that were funded for a final year. The successful strategic case helpline continued, staffed by legal experts in the areas of Employment Discrimination and Discrimination arising from the delivery of Goods and Services. Law Centres and other agencies referred to the helpline to identify and run cases of strategic importance.

Quarterly forums brought together practitioners in this area of law to share experience and expertise, to identify trends arising from the casework and discuss responses to the trends. The quarterly forums were also used to undertake training.

Materials and training were developed and delivered to assist organisations and help them to comply with the Equalities Act.

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| Making the most of Local Media 29 06 12 | 130 |
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A sustainable and effective Law Centres Network that extends and develops the shared vision of member Law Centres.

Regional Network Meetings enabled Law Centres to meet regularly and are the main forum for collaboration, sharing of ideas and resources, and networking.

In addition to our Annual Conference we held two General Meetings at which representatives from Law Centres came together with the Executive Committee and LCN staff in order to discuss progress and to develop policy.

The Executive Committee has met at least every quarter to steer the work and make sure goals are met.

The LCN staff team has had to reduce in size in recognition of the fact that, like Law Centres, LCN has to work within its means. This will clearly have an impact on the services we can provide both to and for Law Centres.

National recognition of the role and impact of Law Centres as a quality legal resource for local communities.

Raising the profile of LCN and Law Centres has been a priority this year.

The amount of coverage in local and national press and radio has significantly increased.

We are running a programme of media skills training for Law Centres to help them to become more confident in working with their local media.

Our presence on social media has increased dramatically. We now have almost 1,500 followers on Twitter and nearly 300 Facebook followers.

We have almost completed the rebranding exercise and will be launching our new identity as the Law Centres Network (LCN) and our new website in the autumn.

Influence public policy in the interests of Law Centres’ clients and communities.

In addition to providing support and development services to individual Law Centres, LCN worked to address the issues arising from Law Centre work and to respond to national policy developments, particularly in relation to legal aid and access to justice for low income and disadvantaged people.

The future of legal aid has preoccupied LCN since the political settlement following the 2010 general election, first through a consultation on legal aid reform proposals in the winter of 2010-11 and again with the introduction of the LASPO Bill in the spring of 2011.

LCN and Law Centres campaigned vigorously against the adverse measures in the Bill, both independently and as part of the ‘Justice for All’ coalition, a collaborative campaign which LCN had helped set up.

LCN also continuously engaged with the parliamentary process, giving oral and written evidence to the Public Bill Committee, briefing MPs and peers in writing and in person, lobbying influencers, suggesting amendments and raising public awareness of the dangers of the Bill’s measures.

“I think that it is generally agreed by noble Lords and those outside this Committee that the Federation does a fantastic job on very small resources. It gives poor people and others a chance to have access to justice to sort out their legal problems.” Lord Bach

Although the Bill eventually became law, eleven amendments were secured which mitigated some of its worst aspects and extended the proposed access to legal aid for disadvantaged people.

Owing in part to these efforts, the public profile of access to justice has risen and its links with social justice were strengthened. Another outcome of LCN’s campaigning work was a significant rise in the profile of Law Centres as distinct from the larger advice sector – in the eyes of Whitley officials, the press and the public. LCN’s high profile during the campaign has also led to LCN being recognised as a leading authority in the field.

Our attempts to influence public policy on access to justice were not restricted to the Ministry of Justice domain. LCN contributed to the debate over the future of funding for legal aid through papers and to responses from the House of Commons Justice Committee. LCN also participated in a comprehensive review of the advice sector in England and Wales, conducted by the Cabinet Office.
Equality and Human rights
The past year has seen dramatic changes in the political and policy approach to the delivery of legal casework in equality and discrimination.

Major changes to the role and structure of the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) led to the total removal of funding from frontline advice organisations, including 27 Law Centres, which provided legal casework and representation on behalf of the EHRC. Recent changes to tribunal procedures and equality legislation also present a challenge for practitioners and raise issues of access to justice for the public. The EHRC helpline has been replaced by a non-legal advisory service provided by telephone and other technology. While legal advice for discrimination will be funded through legal aid, without legal aid for employment and new, more stringent legal aid eligibility criteria, many people experiencing discrimination or human rights abuses will be left without assistance.

Second tier support
LCN supported discrimination caseworkers in Law Centres by providing expert counsel advice on discrimination cases in employment and goods, facilities and services. Some 50 enquiries were recorded.

We also provided caseworkers with specialist training on human rights and discrimination, alternative dispute resolution in discrimination and using equality duties to support discrimination in housing.

Collaborative working
LCN worked collaboratively with other non-governmental organisations and equality networks to anticipate and respond to the changing environment including the consultation on the Bill of Rights and changes to the EHRC.

Equality training
A very successful area of work during the year was the development and delivery of bespoke Equality and Diversity training for Law Centres. We delivered 14 sessions to 154 delegates from Law Centres and other voluntary groups. 99% of delegates found the course very useful, pitched at the right level and well presented.

The immediate future
The contract for the Government Equality Office (GEO) Equality Advisory and Support Service was recently awarded to the Sitel-led consortium of which LCN is a minor sub-contractor. While LCN will not be directly involved in the delivery of the new service, we will have an important role. We will provide legal expertise and training on specific areas and work with the service, wherever possible, to refer clients to appropriate legal representation.

Victory for all women working at Royal Mail
Royal Mail worker Janet Healy from Bristol found herself and two other female colleagues facing unplanned retirement when they turned 65. She was shocked to be told that she had to retire whereas male colleagues could carry on working after 65.

After a lot of internet research Janet represented herself and her colleagues at Tribunal where the case was found in her favour. The Royal Mail appealed against the decision and Janet was faced with an Employment Appeal Tribunal hearing in London.

“By this stage it had got too complicated for me,” said Janet. “We couldn’t afford to pay a barrister as we weren’t working. I thought I’d try the Avon & Bristol Law Centre. I’d gone past it on the bus and seen its slogan, “Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.”

Law Centre solicitor Will Stone took up the case and at the door of the Tribunal the Royal Mail withdrew its case and agreed to pay compensation to the women.

“It was a great victory – not just for us but for all the women working at the Royal Mail,” said Janet. “From then on they had to be treated the same as men and be able to choose when they retire. A few months later the Government changed the law to make this apply to everyone.”

This case was funded by the EHRC money which has been discontinued by the Government.
Hackney – Home Office
Delayed Decision for 12 years
Mrs Abena Ama and her son Kwasi (23), who come from West Africa, arrived in the UK in 2000. Mrs Ama applied for leave to remain in the UK on compassionate grounds but her application was refused. It then turned out that the Home Office would delay dealing with her appeal for 12 years!

Mrs Ama’s son is autistic, has mental health problems and learning difficulties. Despite his biological age, his impairment is such that he requires the same intensive care and support as a six year old.

After nine years of fighting for the right to appeal, and after taking her case to four other law firms, Mrs Ama finally turned to Hackney Community Law Centre in despair. The Law Centre then spent three years fighting the case, making numerous legal representations on Mrs Ama’s behalf to the Home Office and finally lodging a new appeal.

In January the Home Office withdrew its decision not to grant leave to remain to Mrs Ama and her disabled son. They were told that they were being granted indefinite leave to remain in the UK.

Mrs Ama said: “I was in Tesco when the Law Centre rang with the news. I was jumping up and down. I left all the shopping in the queue and just went home. It was such a big relief. I couldn’t believe it. I was so happy.”

Mrs Ama and her son can now get on with their lives, safe and secure in the knowledge that Hackney – where they have now lived for many years – will continue to be their home.

After April 2013 this type of case will no longer be eligible for legal aid.

Young People’s Programme
The year has been extremely busy for the Young People’s Programme. Holly Padfield-Paine hit the ground sprinting in November 2011.

“We enjoyed working with Law Centres rising to the challenge of meeting the needs of vulnerable children and young people in increasingly difficult circumstances. We are in awe of the commitment of Law Centres and inspired by the hundreds of stories of young people’s lives being turned around by legal advice and intervention.” – Mandy Wilkins, Manager, Young People’s Programme.

Some highlights:
Meeting the needs of vulnerable children and young people in increasingly difficult circumstances.

- Cumbria, Harehills and Chapeltown, Rochdale and Bury Law Centres are offering new outreach services for young people
- Chesterfield, Birmingham, Bristol, Luton and Surrey Law Centres are developing plans to set up young people’s services.
- Streetwise, Southwark, Lambeth, Plumstead, Cross Street, South West London, Islington, Hackney and Tower Hamlets Law Centres continue to deliver the Youth Homelessness service.

In West London; Harrow, Brent and Hammersmith and Fulham Law Centres are delivering support to young people. The new Ealing Law Centre will have a specific focus on young people. Brent Law Centre is planning to open a new young people’s Law Centre, run by young people, for young people.

Troubled Families
The Young People’s Programme is working with Rochdale Law Centre to evidence the contribution that social welfare legal advice can make to achieving the government’s outcomes for ‘Troubled Families’. We will share the information with Law Centres to use in negotiations with Local Authorities. In a telephone survey of young clients 100% reported that their understanding of their rights had improved.

RAD Deaf Law Centre: We commissioned RAD Deaf Law Centre to write ‘Making the Law Work for Young Deaf People’ – a report about and with young deaf people – their needs for advice, knowledge of rights and views about how to access services. The Report was launched at the Law Society and was featured in Children and Young People Now and the Report can be accessed on the LCN website.

Apprenticeships: We developed a new programme of apprenticeship for young people in Law Centres producing a guide for Law Centres in taking on apprentices. We provided small grants to enable Law Centres, to kick start the programme via an application process with final decisions being made by experts in the advice field. Awards of £5000 went to six Law Centres: Hammersmith &
Asylum and Immigration: Principles to Practice Project: The YPP has been awarded funding from three charitable trusts to run a project around the implementation of child-centred principles in asylum decision making. The project involves:

- production of a report on child-centred principles (written by a leading academic)
- creating and implementing an audit tool to test implementation of principles
- working closely with ten Law Centres delivering asylum advice
- offering training and support to Law Centres
- consulting with children and young people
- engaging sector stakeholders.

Special Initiative-Young Undocumented Migrants – Paul Hamlyn Foundation (PHF) Coventry and Islington Law Centres have been awarded grants to support young people with irregular immigration status. Both are using innovative approaches to support this highly vulnerable group. Islington Law Centre has created a multi-disciplinary in-house team to provide holistic casework. Coventry Law Centre has partnered with local organisations to set up support networks for young people.

PHF Social Innovation Camp: As part of the initiative, PHF hosted an Innovation Camp to develop ideas about using technology to support young people. Three ideas were awarded seed funding. Law Centre staff were involved two of them so watch this space!

Youth Homelessness Policy Project

Following evidence from Law Centre housing caseworkers about the problems homeless young people face in accessing Local Authority support, we have been working to bring about strategic change. We wrote a Freedom of Information Act request to every Local Authority in England asking for their joint working protocols between Children’s Services and Housing Departments for dealing with homeless 16 and 17 year olds. With the assistance of solicitors Freshfields Bruckhaus Deringer, we have reviewed over 100 protocols to ascertain whether they correctly reflect case law and statutory guidance aimed at protecting children. We will publish a report at the end of 2012 which will highlight the varying quality of the protocols and the risk that this imposes on vulnerable and homeless young people who may not access the services that they are entitled to and need. We will also highlight the examples of best practice, and work with Local Authorities where possible to change policy and practice.

Ealing Law Centre

Setting up a new Law Centre in the current climate is no mean feat. But in Ealing a steering group is doing precisely this. With seed funding from the London Legal Support Trust, the new Law Centre is already offering outreach advice sessions. It is focusing on partnerships with local community-based organisations to provide legal advice alongside their existing services, deep in the communities they serve. They are now able to apply for contracts with their Local Authority and the LSC.

Most of the steering group has lived in the borough for more than 20 years. “We knew there was a real need and a gaping hole in provision.” said Trustee Sue James. “Ealing is a large borough with diverse needs and significant pockets of deprivation. Its leafy image masks the areas of intense deprivation in the east and west. We felt that to effectively deal with the polarised nature of need it was necessary to actually deliver the advice in the community, using the reach and resources of community based organisations and their premises. If we can deliver advice together with key partners we can save money, access hard to reach communities and deliver a better service”.

DELIVERING ADVICE

Deliver advice with key partners, access hard-to-reach communities and deliver better services. Offer outreach/advice sessions, focus on partnerships with community organisations and provide legal advice alongside existing services.

SEED FUNDING

Seed funding awarded by the London Legal Support Trust.

SERVING THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

Deliver advice to local communities and defend the legal rights of people who cannot afford a lawyer. We’re now in a position to apply for contracts with our Local authority and the LSC.
Anisa Begum (19) from Barking in Essex has been an apprentice at Tower Hamlets Law Centre since November, after taking ‘A’ levels in Government & Politics, IT and Business Studies.

“When young people call in asking about volunteering opportunities they are comfortable about talking to me because I’m the same age. It makes it less daunting for them,” she said. “I really enjoy working at Tower Hamlets Law Centre. This is a better alternative to university because I’ll get my qualification more quickly. After my time as an apprentice I’d like to stay on at the Law Centre if I can. If this isn’t possible I’d like to find reception work elsewhere.”

Anisa carries out administration and finance duties as well as working front of house on reception. She recently achieved her NVQ Business Level 2.

Amongst these figures are some very vulnerable and disadvantaged young people. There are currently just under a million 16-24 year olds in the UK not in employment, education or training, one of the highest rates since 2000. The Young People’s Programme ran a focus group, in which young people were asked the best way for them to get involved with their local Law Centre. The group unanimously chose apprenticeships.

Several Law Centres had already recruited apprentices and more were looking to do so in the near future. To enable more Law Centres to recruit apprentices, existing funding from the Paul Hamlyn Foundation was used to give £5,000 seed money each to Law Centres in Hammersmith and Fulham, Tower Hamlets, Luton, Bury, South West London and Islington to help them recruit young people and set up apprenticeship schemes.

We hope this scheme will help young people gain the necessary skills and experience to secure full time employment, or go on to further education, as well as encourage young people to see the Law Centre as a place to seek advice as well as a place to work or volunteer.

Undertaking an apprenticeship at a Law Centre can offer a wide range of experiences, from legal, financial and human resources activities to working with volunteers, administration and even the beginnings of a career in the legal profession. As part of a larger network, Law Centres can offer a broad range of training and post placement employment opportunities. The Law Centre itself benefits from having the perspective of a local young person and their links with the community, as well as having an enthusiastic extra pair of hands.

During their time in a Law Centre the apprentices will undertake an NVQ qualification, usually in Business Administration. At the end of the placement the Law Centre will continue to help the young person to find work or further training.

“Law Centres are an essential part of community life and are the first port of call for many people experiencing social and civil legal problems.” Virendra Sharma MP (Labour, Ealing Southall)
Social Enterprise
Several Law Centres have responded to the cuts in legal aid and Local Authority funding by setting up paid for advice services using social enterprise models to maintain access for clients.

Whilst certainly not replacements for legal aid the new services protect the right to advice for people on modest incomes. They also help to retain professionally qualified staff. They hope to generate a small income for their local Law Centre by donating any profits to it.

Rochdale Legal Enterprise (RLE) is a Community Interest Company (CIC). It was officially launched by the former legal aid minister, Lord Bach, in April. With seed funding from the Baring Foundation, it provides legal advice in immigration and employment at a fair price. Discussions are underway with local organisations to explore the possibility of their helping to fund vulnerable people who can’t pay for advice.

Islington Law Centre has also established a CIC, owned by the Law Centre, and are applying for Alternative Business Structure (ABS) status. It will offer paid-for services initially focusing on immigration, education and employment. It is also considering mediation and arbitration services. It plans to trial ‘supporter’ rates for higher income clients who want to spend their money where it will do good.

Islington has had substantial pro bono support in setting this up, and has secured grants and donations to meet the initial costs. Hopefully the CIC will be financially sustainable from year three.

Their ultimate aim is to find a mechanism to maintain quality and expert legal services for people who cannot afford standard legal fees in areas that are being removed from legal aid. Both CICs are separately branded to the Law Centres and are housed elsewhere to make it clear that Law Centre services are not charged for.

“It is not necessary for me to praise the Law Centres movement yet again in the House; the House has a very strong feeling that it has done a fantastic job over the past 40 or 50 years.” Lord Bach
Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Bill campaign

Background
It contained proposals for swingeing cuts to civil legal aid which would leave some 725,000 people in England and Wales without access to free legal advice in social welfare and family law. Not only will this have a drastic effect on access to justice for clients but the proposals will impact heavily on Law Centres, with 18 generating over 60% of their funds from legal aid contracts.

Intensive campaign
The legal aid Green Paper triggered an intensive campaign to fight the proposed cuts. It engaged Law Centres and LCN along with a wide range of other organisations inside and outside the legal sector, and lasted until the Bill’s enactment in May 2012. The campaign included Days of Action, frequent appearances on news media, ongoing messaging through social media, extensive lobbying of MPs and peers, giving evidence to parliamentary committees and influencing party agendas. The aim was not only to mitigate the Bill’s proposals but also to raise the profile of legal advice and create a climate where opposition MPs would commit to restoring access to legal services, so people could get professional help to resolve their everyday problems in the future.

Record defeat for government Bill
The campaign against legal aid cuts was heightened as the bill reached the House of Lords, where eleven mitigating amendments were carried, a record number of defeats for a government bill for thirty years. It was gratifying to see time and time again peers and bishops referring to the value of Law Centres and quoting the information we had provided. Several bishops also wrote to Justice Secretary Kenneth Clarke with concerns about the impending cuts.

Far-reaching adverse implications for people seeking legal advice
These concerns are justified. The LASPO Act, which will come into force from April 2013, will have far-reaching adverse implications for people seeking legal advice. To begin with, some of the core areas of law in which people need help will no longer be covered by legal aid. This will include practically all welfare benefits advice and non-asylum immigration matters, as well as much of housing law, family law and employment law (except where discrimination is involved). This will also make it very hard for legal advice agencies to provide complete solutions to people’s problems. Many Law Centre clients are in complex situations that need combined help such as where an employment issue has pushed a family into debt, also putting their housing in danger.

Predatory lenders – Philip’s story
Predatory lenders seek to benefit from vulnerable people’s misfortune.
It’s an unfortunate reality that, as economic times get harder, unscrupulous ‘businesses’ are more able to exploit vulnerable people. Avon & Bristol Law Centre are using the law to protect individuals’ rights and help reduce or possibly write off their debts. If it can be shown that a lender has created an ‘unfair relationship’ by for example misleading, pressuring, overcharging or exploiting a vulnerable borrower, the ensuing liability can be challenged.

Philip contacted the Law Centre after he had entered into a secured loan agreement for £2,950 at an interest rate of 3.5% per month to pay mortgage arrears and avoid imminent repossession.

The court commented on the flagrant breaches of consumer legislation and ordered that the amount paid to date of £353 be treated as capital repayments and that the outstanding balance of £3,016 be paid over five years with an interest rate fixed at 8% with no additional fees.

As already vulnerable people become increasingly desperate to make ends meet, even before the government implements welfare reform, predatory lenders will continue seeking to gain from their misfortune. Once the LASPO provisions come into effect in April 2013 legal aid contracts and associated drop in income after April 2013. Nevertheless, we are resolved to harness the awareness raised in the past two years and to continue the struggle to ensure access to justice for all.

Continue the struggle
We are grateful to everyone who campaigned so energetically to protect legal aid, in particular the friends of legal aid in both Houses of Parliament. LASPO may now be on the statute book but we know that the profile of legal advice, and Law Centres in particular, is higher than ever before. Sadly, many Law Centres will struggle to adjust to the limited legal aid contracts and associated drop in income after April 2013. Nevertheless, we are resolved to harness the awareness raised in the past two years and to continue the struggle to ensure access to justice for all.
Raising our profile in the media

This was the final year of the Law Centre Model project, funded by the Barings Foundation, to raise the profile of LCN and Law Centres and their unique contribution to their communities.

Amongst other things it involved establishing a consistent national and local brand.

One of our priorities was achieving media coverage for Law Centres in their local press. Another was developing a powerful presence on social media.

In the past twelve months coverage about Law Centres appeared in local and national press, legal publications and websites on average three times a week, an increase on previous years.

Julie Bishop regularly writes for the new Legal Voice website along with several contributors from Law Centres. We have shaped the debates in the legal community through articles and letters in Law Society publications and by participating in Law Society conferences.

We are currently running a programme of media skills training for Law Centres to encourage them to raise their profiles through their local press and radio to help them promote their services to their local communities.

Over the past year, LCN has made a real splash on social media. It raises the public profile of Law Centres; builds up public interest in them and what they stand for. This can be harnessed for campaigning and fundraising and establishes another line of communication with news media and policy makers to influence the public agenda.

LCN’s Facebook page has almost 300 regular followers, who can potentially share our stories with up to 100,000 of their contacts.

LCN’s Twitter feed, set up in November 2011, reached 1,000 followers within six months. It is currently followed by some 1,600 people including most of the relevant journalists and bloggers, politicians, organisations and campaign groups. Twitter activity, in particular, was buoyed up by public interest in LASPO and has kept increasing steadily after its enactment in May 2012.

Our new website, enabled in part by the Big Lottery’s Awards for All programme, was launched in October.

It promotes the new Law Centres Network brand and will be a versatile channel for communicating with our stakeholders. It will also help Law Centres that do not yet have their own websites.

Thanks in part to these activities we have seen an increase in the number of requests for interviews, contributions to live and on-line debates and other forums.

Raising our profile in this way has gone a long way to establishing Law Centres as vital providers of independent legal advice in their communities and to position LCN as an organisation with a great deal to offer to the development of legal advice services to vulnerable communities.
Sheffield – Improving Access for disabled customers across the city

Michelle Turner, who uses a wheelchair due to MS, struggled to get into a concert at Sheffield City Hall because stage crew vehicles were blocking kerbs and access to outer doors. She couldn’t use the accessible toilet because it was blocked off by a stack of speakers and the door was locked.

Michelle sought advice from Sheffield Law Centre whose staff helped her to put her case to the venue’s management. The City Hall responded by improving its access for disabled customers at the tills, reviewed its operating procedures, checked signs and improved disabled toilet access.

Michelle said: “I’m really glad I could get legal aid to find out the legal position. The way Sheffield Law Centre put my case meant the City Hall management understood my problem and addressed it. I’m glad I don’t have to start legal proceedings.”

“Not enough has been said today about the 60-odd law centres and the 100-odd independent legal advice centres. Together with the 200 CABs that have a specialist adviser, they deliver value for money which I suspect you could not find in virtually any other part of our nation state.” Lord Phillips of Sudbury

Statement of financial activities
As at 31 March 2012

These summarised financial statements contain information from both the Statement of Financial Activities and the Balance Sheet for the year ended 31 March 2012, but are not the full statutory report and accounts.

The summary financial information shows the income raised for our activities was £1,007,781, the cost of raising the income and the amounts spent on our charitable activities was £1,065,067.

The information is taken from the full financial statements which were approved by the trustees on 15 October 2012.

In order to gain a full understanding of the financial affairs of the charity, the full audited financial statements, trustees’ annual report and auditors’ report should be consulted.

Copies can be obtained from the Law Centres Network.

Signed on behalf of the trustees.

Nick Whittingham
Treasurer
15 October 2012

Balance sheet

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>(£) 2012</th>
<th>(£) 2011</th>
<th>(£) 2010</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tangible fixed assets</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Current assets</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Debtors</td>
<td>403,017</td>
<td>104,773</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cash at bank and in hand</td>
<td>189,228</td>
<td>489,691</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total current assets</strong></td>
<td>592,245</td>
<td>594,464</td>
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<tr>
<td>Creditors: amounts falling due within one year</td>
<td>226,640</td>
<td>171,573</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Net current assets</strong></td>
<td>365,605</td>
<td>422,891</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Net assets</strong></td>
<td>365,605</td>
<td>422,891</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Funds</strong></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restricted funds</td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>In surplus</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>161,856</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In deficit</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(13,676)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Unrestricted funds</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>General fund</td>
<td>203,749</td>
<td>190,929</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total funds</strong></td>
<td>365,605</td>
<td>422,891</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Income and expenditure
#### 2011/12

#### Income

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>2012 (£)</th>
<th>2011 (£)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Member Subscriptions – 10%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subscriptions from Law Centre members</td>
<td>95,261</td>
<td>99,360</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Law Centre Donations</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>2,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donated facilities</td>
<td>20,000</td>
<td>37,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal Services Commission</td>
<td>166,000</td>
<td>166,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>London Councils</td>
<td>307,903</td>
<td>329,778</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working Together for Advice – Big Lottery Fund</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>154,320</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young Peoples’ Programme</td>
<td>98,613</td>
<td>124,837</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equalities and Human Rights</td>
<td>69,000</td>
<td>54,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BASIS – Big Lottery Fund</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>7,295</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Law Centre Model Project – Baring Foundation</td>
<td>50,000</td>
<td>50,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strengthening Specialist Advice – Baring Foundation</td>
<td>74,750</td>
<td>104,650</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unbound Philanthropy</td>
<td>15,000</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training fees</td>
<td>3,400</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sundry income and small grants</td>
<td>52,214</td>
<td>38,831</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gifts in kind</td>
<td>41,870</td>
<td>19,168</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online legal resources</td>
<td>4,458</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annual conference</td>
<td>9,265</td>
<td>9,064</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Income</td>
<td>1,007,524</td>
<td>1,196,103</td>
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#### Expenditure

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>2012 (£)</th>
<th>2011 (£)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Staff costs</td>
<td>492,461</td>
<td>536,926</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training and Other staff costs</td>
<td>16,918</td>
<td>24,957</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Premises costs</td>
<td>27,817</td>
<td>33,608</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication &amp; office costs</td>
<td>40,661</td>
<td>44,079</td>
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<td>41,670</td>
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<td>Legal and professional fees</td>
<td>125,581</td>
<td>29,229</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audit and other fees</td>
<td>11,709</td>
<td>9,085</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Publications</td>
<td>12,415</td>
<td>14,951</td>
</tr>
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<td>Publicity</td>
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<td>Conferences</td>
<td>17,022</td>
<td>14,215</td>
</tr>
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<td>Management and other meetings</td>
<td>4,271</td>
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<td>8,413</td>
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<td>Website Development</td>
<td>420</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment Tribuness payments to Law Centres</td>
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<tr>
<td>Project costs</td>
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<td>21,011</td>
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<td>660</td>
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<td>1,009,060</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

#### Breakdown of Expenditure

- **Staff costs** – 51%
- **Legal and professional fees** – 14%
- **Publications & publicity** – 2%
- **Conferences** – 2%
- **Training for Law Centres** – 1%
- **Payments to Law Centres** – 22%
- **Project & Other costs** – 1%
- **EC & Membership Meetings** – 7%
- **Legal Services Commission** – 18%
- **London Councils Grants** – 33%
- **Young Peoples’ Programme** – 11%
- **Equalities and Human Rights** – 7%
- **Law Centre Model Project** – 5%
- **Strengthening Specialist Advice** – 8%
- **Sundry income and small grants** – 7%
- **Total Income** – 100%

#### Income and Expenditure

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Our funders and supporters

The Legal Services Commission
The Baring Foundation
BIG – the Big Lottery Fund
London Councils
London Legal Support Trust
Paul Hamlyn Foundation
John Ellerman Foundation
The Access to Justice Foundation
Unbound Philanthropy
The Equalities and Human Rights Commission
The European Commission

We raise additional income through Law Centre Network annual membership fees and are grateful for contributions from several law firms – most prominently Allen & Overy LLP and Freshfields Bruckhaus Deringer LLP.

“...My language skills meant that I was not comfortable talking about my case on the phone. I saw an employment specialist at the Law Centre who wrote letters on my behalf. We managed to resolve my grievance and made an agreement with my employer. ...”

Lord Clement-Jones

“...I became involved in politics largely as a result of my experience volunteering in the early 1970s at the first Law Centre.”

Lord Clement-Jones

“Southwark – Accessible legal advice on Employment Law

“I can’t give my name, as I want to keep what happened confidential. I can tell you my story and why I feel it is so important to have accessible legal advice on employment law. I was in a desperate situation at work, was pregnant and my employer was not respecting me and my baby. I was being made to do things that put both of us at risk. My risk assessment was late, I was asked to lift heavy things up the stairs, given all of the busy shifts and made to use chemicals to do the cleaning that I believed put me at risk due to my pregnancy. My manager was rude and unsympathetic. I had to go off sick with stress. Then I had trouble with my maternity pay and my holiday rights leaving me with no money and bills to pay and my pregnancy to worry about.

“I found out about Southwark Law Centre from a friend of a friend, after I had searched for hours to find someone who could provide employment advice. My language skills meant that I was not comfortable talking about my case on the phone. I saw an employment specialist at the Law Centre who wrote letters on my behalf. We managed to resolve my grievance and made an agreement with my employer.

“I now know what my rights are and I can make sure my employer is doing things correctly. My adviser made sure my maternity leave was properly implemented and I am off work on maternity leave now. It feels great being able to focus on my family and to know I have support at work when I need it.”

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Executive Committee and staff

Appointed 25th November 2011

LCN Staff
Noeleen Adams
Director of Development and Support
Nimrod Ben-Cnaan
Head of Public Affairs and Governance
Julie Bishop
Director
Alex Charles
Administrator
Cathy Gallagher
Regional Development Consultant (North)
Pamela Judge
Communications Manager
Vicki Leaver
Project Assistant
Holly Padfield-Paine
Young People’s Project Development Consultant
Stella Russell
Regional Development Consultant (South)
Flora Williams
Equality and Diversity Manager
Mandy Wilkins
Young People’s Project Manager

Executive Committee
Sue Bent
Coventry Law Centre manager
Ruth Hayes
Co-Chair
(Islington Law Centre manager)
Matt Howgate
Trustee of Hackney Community Law Centre
Gwen Innis
Caseworker at Luton Law Centre
Sue Martin
Trustee of Surrey Law Centre
Kevin Miles
Bury Law Centre manager and solicitor
John Oke
Trustee of Camden Community Law Centre
Graham Partridge
Honorary Secretary
(Community Groups Development Consultant at Avon and Bristol Law Centre)
Ian Rajaaratnam
Trustee of Cross Street Law Centre
Helen Rogers
Solicitor and Pro Bono Manager
at Allen & Overy LLP
Gillian Sharp
Co-Chair
(Luton Law Centre manager)
Paul Im Thurn
Co-Chair
(Cumbria Law Centre manager and solicitor)
Cheryl Weston
Nottingham Law Centre manager
Nick Whittingham
Treasurer
(Kirklees Law Centre manager)

Farewells – and thank you!

Thank you and farewell to three valued staff members this year. We miss each of them, thank them sincerely for their dedication and commitment to the work of Law Centres and wish them well.

Victor Adetiba, Financial Officer, worked with LCN for 14 years. Victor managed the growth in LCN funds over that time, handled the financial complexity of the period when LCN developed and managed several new Law Centres, and helped steer us through the recent drop in funds. Victor always worked with integrity and loyalty over the last 14 years and made a significant contribution to the work of LCN.

Jennifer Ball, Training and Conference Coordinator, worked with LCN for the past 4 years. Jen is well known to most Law Centres through her role at LCN and her previous work at Camden Law Centre. Jen is deservedly recognised for her organisational skills, good humour and patience regardless of the size or complexity of the event she was managing.

Sarah Duvigneau, Information and Monitoring Officer, worked at LCN for 3 years. Sarah’s IT and database skills were put to good use at LCN. London Law Centres worked most directly with Sarah and appreciated her gentle approach. Regardless of the amount of work on her desk, Sarah was always willing to lend a hand and offer a new idea with a smile.

In fond memory of:

Steve Brookes
Died 14th July 2012
Steve Brookes was the bookkeeper/financial officer at Paddington Law Centre for many years. Steve carried on working at the Centre until one month before his death even though he was ill with cancer. He was a lovely man and hugely supportive and loyal to the Law Centre and its survival.

Beverley Reid
Died 23rd October 2012
Beverley joined the London discrimination unit at Lambeth Law Centre in March 2006 as an Employment and Discrimination Law Solicitor and Caseworker. She was very committed to her clients, thorough in preparing her cases, and passionate and keen to motivate young people to take up the legal profession. She will be missed by colleagues and work associates alike.
Law Centres

Avon and Bristol Law Centre
Barnet Law Service
Birmingham Law Centre
Bradford Law Centre
Brent Community Law Centre
Bury Law Centre
Cambridge House Law Centre
Camden Community Law Centre
Cardiff Law Centre
Central London Law Centre
Chesterfield Law Centre
Coventry Law Centre
Cross Street Law Centre
(formerly Thamesmead Law Centre)
Croydon Law Centre
(part of South West London Law Centres)
Cumbria Law Centre
Derby Citizens Advice and Law Centre
Gloucester Law Centre
Greenwich Community Law Centre
Hackney Community Law Centre
Hammersmith and Fulham Law Centre
Harehills and Chapeltown Law Centre (Leeds Law Centre)
Haringey Law Centre
Harrow Law Centre
Hillingdon Law Centre
Isle of Wight Law Centre
Islington Law Centre
Kingston and Richmond Law Centre
(part of South West London Law Centres)
Kirklees Law Centre
Lambeth Law Centre
Law Centre (Northern Ireland) Western Area
Luton Law Centre
Merton and Sutton Law Centre
(part of South West London Law Centres)
Newcastle Law Centre
North Kensington Law Centre
Nottingham Law Centre
Paddington Law Centre
Plumstead Community Law Centre
RAD (Royal Association for Deaf People) Law Centre
Rochdale Law Centre
Sheffield Law Centre
South Manchester Law Centre
Southwark Law Centre
Springfield Law Centre
Streetwise Community Law Centre
Surrey Law Centre
Tower Hamlets Law Centre
Trafford Law Centre
Vauxhall Law Centre
Vauxhall Law and Information Centre
Wythenshawe Law Centre
Wandsworth Law Centre
(part of South West London Law Centres)