It has not been an easy year for Law Centres, as austerity measures have resulted in many councils cutting back on funding for advice. However, Law Centres have been resourceful in accessing alternative funding and successfully bidding for local and regional contracts. The Law Centres Network has supported this work by providing funding consultants to support Law Centres in their bid writing.

Law Centres have continued to provide cutting edge, inspiring work, often in partnership with other organisations. Islington Law Centre were nominated and shortlisted for the Legal Aid Lawyer of the Year awards. This was primarily for their work on the Safe Passage project that assisted children in the ‘jungle’ camp in Calais who have relatives in the UK whose rights to claim asylum had been delayed causing them psychological damage.

The Law Centres Network has continued to represent Law Centres at all levels of government and in national forums. We have continued to work hard to influence key decision makers and lobby regarding public policy relating to funding for advice and issues affecting our clients and communities. We have also worked with regulatory bodies to ensure that Law Centres are not adversely affected by changes to regulations.

In August, the Law Centres Network decided to legally challenge the award of the contract for the national equalities helpline (EASS) to corporation G4S, out of concern arising from their record in other public services. We asked the Court for permission to judicially review the Government’s decision and appealed for pledges to cover the legal costs through social media. On the day before the G4S contract was due to start, the Judge refused us permission. We could have appealed the decision but decided on balance not to do so and press for a parliamentary inquiry instead.

Throughout this report you will see examples of the amazing work that Law Centres do, tirelessly working for their clients and communities on a daily basis.
Major public policy and funding changes over the last five years have led LCN, like many charities, to rethink how best to achieve their charitable purpose. As reported in our previous Annual Review, Take a Fresh Look, we have been reviewing relevant research from funders and policy makers across the broader charitable and academic sectors to inform our thinking. Direct input from Law Centres and the promising results of more multi-disciplinary projects, particularly those based at Law Centres, have also helped us develop a new strategic focus for LCN in 2016.

LCN’s work over the past year has looked particularly to securing the future for Law Centres based on this new strategic focus. This is despite the continued provision of free legal services to those without means remaining an unrelenting challenge. The Annual Review before you will highlight the resulting work.

Law Centres, too, have been prepared to rethink and refocus, to take on new projects, new partners and new ways of working. In fact, the survival of so many Law Centres, against the odds, is testimony to their success in this regard. This daring and strength of purpose has renewed a positive focus on Law Centres and enhanced understanding of the particular role they play. It has improved understanding of their unique combination of legal skills, values and place. It has also helped highlight their role in strengthening people and communities by employing their skills to find resolutions and create pathways to allow people to move forward.

Throughout the year, LCN has been working to strengthen the recognition of the power of the law as a tool for positive change, and of the impact of Law Centres’ work in achieving this change. We have been engaging with policymakers, commissioners and funders to inform their thinking about this. This will continue to be an important area of work for LCN in 2017. Alongside this, we have been working on other elements required to support Law Centres to move into and occupy this space, as agents of change. This includes:

- Training, skills development, sharing of best practice, both face-to-face and through the extension of our online Learning Hub with new resources such as a revised quality manual
- Developing a national Public Indemnity Insurance policy to provide all Law Centres with appropriate coverage at an affordable price
- Provision of up-to-date legal resources through a LexisNexis group licence
- Continued development of Law Centres’ basic digital infrastructure, to enable them to take up opportunities for new ways of working, as well as in preparation for courts and tribunals digitisation and other digital initiatives
- Regulation monitoring and provision of regular input to the multiple regulators of Law Centres, to ensure that regulation protects those we serve without impeding services
• Pro bono remains a focus, with the aim of leveraging additional resources to extend Law Centres’ reach, and to help develop the next generation of social justice lawyers
• Extensive fundraising assistance provided to help access funds for Law Centres’ work from UK and European sources
• Bringing Law Centres together to share information and best practice and to open up new horizons. We do this through the annual conference, weekly bulletin, regional forums and specialist networks in areas such as housing, immigration and discrimination
• Representing Law Centres through evidence to policymakers, written and oral submissions, responding to consultations and telling the story of both Law Centres and the communities they serve
• Fighting poor decisions and public policy with detrimental impact on our clients. Law Centres lead the way on this work and, where appropriate, LCN joins as their national voice: we have recently done so in our legal challenge to the awarding of the the national equalities helpline to G4S.

More detail about this work and its impact follows. These achievements are the product of a combined effort across the network. For this, I would like to thank Law Centres for their continued support of our work at the national office. Sincere thanks go to LCN’s staff team for their flexibility, good will and uncomplaining hard work. This year we have also lost our colleague and friend, Flora Williams, in late July. A tribute to her appears later, but words cannot express our sadness at losing her.

Thank you to the Executive Committee for finding time in their already overcommitted days and to our co-opted members who bring added skills to the LCN board. Enormous thanks go to Cheryl Weston, our much respected Chair, who steps down at this AGM after nearly twenty years at Nottingham Law Centre and five years on the Executive Committee. Particular thanks are due to all of LCN’s funders and supporters, for their continued belief in the importance of our work.

Our outlook for 2017 looks bright, with so much bubbling up at the moment. After 46 years of fruitful engagement within their communities, and having survived rocky patches along the way, Law Centres stand refreshed, with a renewed sense of purpose. The coming years hold much promise for the work of Law Centres to continue doing good. Through these turbulent times, LCN is dedicated to supporting Law Centres to be agents of change for their communities, to help turn the tide of adversity, and to push back against the inhumanity we are currently seeing.
It's a thumbs up from Team HCLC to all the fantastic coders at @wearelegalgeek lawforgood hackathon. Thank you!
In March, Hackney Community Law Centre held London’s first legal hackathon with tech entrepreneurs LegalGeek and high-calibre judges. Ten teams from all over the world have produced a new digital tool for the Law Centre, that is now being further developed for use.

image: LegalGeek
Diminished funding after six years of austerity cuts continues to challenge Law Centres, with the general economic outlook for Brexit offering no hope of respite. How does LCN help Law Centres to preserve as much of their frontline services as possible?

We take a three-pronged approach to this objective. First, we carry on offering Law Centres targeted consultancy and support when specific needs arise. Second, we invest in increasing Law Centres’ learning opportunities, through us or from one another. Since the legal aid cuts we have also devoted special efforts to helping Law Centres maximise their resources, be it through grant fundraising, income generation schemes or economies of scale in group purchase schemes.

**Grant fundraising:** LCN provides regular assistance to Law Centres and their partner agencies on improving the quality of their applications and increase their chances of success. We update Law Centres with regular funding opportunity updates; digest and share updates on changes in funding strategies of large funders, such as Big Lottery Fund; and collect and share knowledge on advice-health partnerships, which has already led to a successful bid. A successful application to the to the European Commission has yielded over 400,000 Euros for the timely Living Rights project (details below), involving five Law Centres and five additional partners. Other UK fundraising support has helped raise £2,806,238 for Law Centres and their partners.

**Income generation schemes:** Charging fees for some services is still a recent development for Law Centres, and it is important to get right. LCN develops guides and other resources – on fees and rates, client care, marketing and business plans – to help Law Centres develop their own schemes. We share these publicly on our website, and to date they have been downloaded nearly 500 times. We follow this up with guidance on managing risk and on the multiple regulation frameworks, such as SRA and OISC, which apply to Law Centres. We share these through a facilitated e-forum for relevant Law Centres staff, along with other guidance on using Contingency Fee Agreements or household insurance policies to pay for legal advice. While not all Law Centres have chosen to develop such schemes, 82% of them were given advice about them. A more significant intervention was in supporting the three South West Law Centres (Bristol, Wiltshire and Gloucester) to set up a trading company to generate income, including a business plan and financial model.

**Accessing EU funding:** The European Union funds a wide range of transnational partnerships including information exchange, training, public legal education and strategic work aimed at policy or practice change.
LCN has been researching EU funding sources and sharing insights with members, along with developing links with potential European experts and partner agencies, which in turn provide yet more potential partners and opportunities. Currently 12 Law Centres are engaged in EU-funded projects, along with 7 partner agencies. Last year alone, LCN developed four EU funding applications, of which one has already been successful. Through projects like Triple A for Citizens, a European and Western Balkans legal advice network, and Living Rights, supporting the integration and fundamental rights of EU citizens in the UK – Law Centres are reaching new communities and can build on collaborations with strategic stakeholders here and abroad.

**Volunteers and pro bono schemes:** Since the civil legal aid cuts, Law Centres have expanded their reliance on legal (pro bono) and non-legal volunteers to augment their in-house services. LCN has a programme that supports Law Centres with volunteer lawyer schemes and helps extend these to other Law Centres. We actively collaborate with the legal sector – law firms, national pro bono organisations and law schools – to build and develop volunteer lawyer schemes. In particular, five Law Centres are taking part in new targeted pro bono clinics in London. These are targeted at more complex interventions with defined groups: returning withheld rental deposits, releasing unpaid wages, challenging benefits sanctions and naturalising residents from Commonwealth countries.

**Group purchase schemes:** Maximising resources includes not only increasing income but also reducing spending. We have already put in place a group licence for LexisNexis online legal resources for all Law Centres, recently extended for another 3 years. The scheme is taking root, with usage doubling last year, and we have also negotiated a 35% discount for Law Centres on LexisNexis printed material as well. A second group purchase scheme in development is a national professional indemnity insurance policy, aimed at reducing the cost to Law Centres as well as better managing risk. The third and most ambitious project is a national upgrade of Law Centres’ ICT infrastructure, aimed at increasing capacity, strengthening support and reducing cost. Based on a comprehensive audit of Law Centres’ current arrangements and needs, this will tailor upgrade programmes for each member, enabling them to operate in an increasingly digital environment.

**Law Centres learning:** LCN provides a comprehensive training programme, which last year included 23 sessions serving 229 participants, with 95% of Law Centres taking advantage of at least one session. Fees are intentionally low but the aim is to make this a self-sustaining line of activity. Training covers a range of topics, from fundraising, legal aid contract management and law
updates to subject specific sessions in housing or community care law. In the year when the Legal Aid Agency’s Client and Cost Management System (CCMS) was rolled out, we have also arranged for dedicated sessions for Law Centres, with 140 places booked. Material relating to LCN training is then shared via a standing online Learning Hub, a themed resource library, updated regularly, addressing all areas of Law Centres’ practice.

Consultancy and support: We help Law Centres on a daily basis with a wide range of issues, from negotiating with funders and commissioners, through HR advice to managing funding crises. This includes one-to-one or group guidance and assistance, along with structured discussions for knowledge sharing and peer support. In London, two additional projects support targeted interventions. Stronger Organisations Benefiting Londoners (SOBEL), delivered in partnership with Advice UK, focuses on increasing sustainability, fostering cross-sector collaboration and strengthening equalities supports. The London Legal Support Trust also funds LCN to assist our London members to meet its ‘MoT” health checks, which assess planning, management and finances and are a precondition for LLST grants. Ten London Law Centres were directly helped through this scheme, but the insights arising from it benefit all Law Centres as they help us identify and address common issues.

95% of Law Centres have gone on at least one training session we offered last year
82% of Law Centres have received advice on setting up income generation schemes
100% rise last year in take-up of our group licence for LexisNexis legal resources
12 Law Centres (and 7 partners) assisted to access EU funding last year
The Law Centres Network helps Law Centres to generate income for them and their partners to deliver local services to disadvantaged people. We take a load off Law Centres by doing some of the initial groundwork of finding and sifting through relevant opportunities.

When a Law Centre wants to apply, we connect them with fundraising and development consultants to optimise their proposals. We also seek to learn and share lessons from recent experience across the network, to improve future bids and services.
OBJECTIVE

2

TO STRENGTHEN THE LAW CENTRE NETWORK’S CORE CAPABILITIES

The Law Centres Network has a special role as the membership organisation for Law Centres. Traditionally, we would be termed an ‘infrastructure body’: however, a recent report from London Funders prefers the term ‘Civil Society Support’ organisation. We agree: this better reflects the independence of our members and emphasises the public benefit of our work, even at one remove from service users.

LCN is here to support civil society. One primary function of ours is what London Funders call ‘triage and connect’: we help diagnose issues faced by our members and their partners, and match them with appropriate support, our own or otherwise. Another primary function of LCN is in identifying and responding to emerging needs, and sharing what we have learned. A third function, no less important, is driving quality and improvement, as critical friends to Law Centres.

To bring this about, we place a premium on bringing Law Centres together, fostering peer support and collaboration. We lead some of that collaboration through strategic projects that we initiate, to address current needs. We also make sure that Law Centres keep abreast of changes to regulation or quality frameworks; and we have been working to improve the collection and management of data relating to Law Centres’ work.

Bringing Law Centres together: LCN uses a variety of channels to facilitate communication and collaboration among Law Centres. These include a weekly members bulletin with current updates; a range of dedicated email discussion groups by areas of practice; and a central Learning Hub as the main resource repository. Meeting face-to-face is just as important to us. LCN holds its national conference to coincide with our Annual General Meeting, as our prime network event. Last year it was hosted by law firm DLA Piper in London and attended by 74% of members and a growing group of other stakeholders. Beyond this, we continue to hold periodic regional forum meetings, as well as developing and convening new special interest forums. Last year 87% of Law Centres have taken part in these meetings, sending some 83 staff members or trustees to attend at least one meeting.

Principles to Practice Project: This year saw the project conclude, but it continues to provide enduring value to lawyers, clients and policymakers. The project brought together 12 Law Centres that represented separated asylum-seeking children, capturing and analysing in minute detail a sample of 60 cases, with the aim of recording the children’s experience of the asylum process and formulating a framework for child-centred principles to improve it. The final report, Put Yourself in Our Shoes, was designed to serve as a handbook.
Successful bedroom tax appeal after 3 year fight over box room – getting to tribunal is often the hard bit.

Since its launch in November 2015, it was distributed to key influencers, was downloaded in summary or in full over 600 times and has reached over 38,000 people on social media. To date, at least 150 children benefited from casework following the report’s guidelines.

**Living Rights Project:** This project was developed in response to poor, uncoordinated services provided to EU citizens living in the UK. Often working in low-skilled and precarious jobs, with little knowledge of their rights and in social isolation, these people face destitution and unacceptable living conditions, aggravated by hostile media rhetoric. Involving 5 Law Centres and 5 other support organisations, the project targets help at people with limited knowledge of English, with 12 guides in plain English and several other European languages; numerous engagement events nationwide; and a network of local community champions. Starting in December 2015, months before the EU referendum was called, the project has proved a prescient initiative. Uncertainty following the referendum has increased need for clarity, and page views for the project have more than doubled.

**Equality and Human Rights Work:** Even though funding for discrimination and human rights casework has become fairly scarce, LCN and Law Centres are keen to keep up this important work and preserve their competency in these areas of law. LCN continued to co-ordinate an employment and discrimination caseworkers group, tracking case law and policy developments. The group meetings have also allowed us to identify regional trends, which in turn have informed our strategic planning. We continued to provide second-tier support to the Equality Advisory and Support Service (EASS), the only nationwide equalities services outside of legal aid, in order to maintain its quality of service. All of this experience has fed into written and oral evidence, co-ordinated by LCN, to the House of Lords Select Committee on the Equality Act and Disability. The committee has taken up many of our points, which were cited 42 times in its report and helped shape its recommendations.

**South West of England Law Centres:** LCN supports regional development and integration among Law Centres, and has helped three of them – Avon & Bristol, Wiltshire and Gloucester – to set up a regional community interest company (CIC) that could extend their services throughout the South West of England, beyond areas already covered. The CIC would also serve as a vehicle for generating income to increasing the Law Centres’ sustainability. A project manager is now in place to further develop the CIC’s services.
Ensuring quality: We continue to represent the interests of Law Centres and their clients with regulators and professional bodies. The extent of this can easily be underestimated, but Law Centres must comply with seven different regulatory frameworks, so it is important to keep abreast of their combined and changing requirements. For this, LCN assists where needed with compliance matters, as well as providing training and awareness raising to Law Centres’ staff, trustees and volunteers. Along with this, good quality assurance measures and risk management help improve protection for Law Centre clients. This year we have provided direct assistance about the main quality standards (SQM and Lexcel) and updated the Law Centres Quality Manual to ensure their continued adherence to Lexcel 6 requirements.

Better data, better communicated: To better understand Law Centres’ work in aggregate, and to better represent it, we have been seeking to improve our central data collection and analysis. We have researched and shared insights on demonstrating impact and better use of service data in social policy work. To inform this we have joined NESTA’s Alliance for Useful Evidence as well as the Advice Services Alliance’s new Standing Committee on Advice Research and Evaluation. We have identified and tailored appropriate software for a new LCN database and are busy populating it with current and legacy data. As part of the national ICT infrastructure project we will recommend a preferred Client Management System for Law Centres, that would help make their data collection easier to collect and dissect. We have also been developing a data analysis pilot project for London, where many Law Centres cluster, with obvious benefits for the rest of the network. We have liaised with data analysis specialists and fundraised to resource this initiative, which we hope to report on in next year’s report.
Law Centres have been seeing EU migrant workers, especially in low-paid and precarious jobs, being exploited because they did not know their rights. This project, which began in December 2015, started out as a response to this problem. However, following the EU referendum it has taken on a much wider significance for all EU nationals in the UK.
This has been a year of growth and diversification in LCN’s public profile, building on the work and successes of the previous year. It has been a busy year with some political change following the 2015 general election, but we have made headway on several important fronts, including policy and influencing, collective representation of the Law Centres movement, profile development and forging new partnerships.

An overriding concern for us over the past year has been the preservation and protection of people’s rights, at a time when they are challenged by harsh economic and political realities. This had us join forces with numerous other organisations in the Human Rights Alliance, which will fight against the proposed repeal of the Human Rights Act. In addition, preserving safeguards from discrimination has guided our work on equalities, and strengthening the right to access to justice and redress continues to be central to what we do – and indeed to our vision of citizenship and the state.

**Direct influencing:** Reflecting the range of Law Centres’ work, we have been seeking to contribute from our experience to several areas of public policymaking. Addressing the treatment of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, we have gained the support of the deputy president of the UK Supreme Court for our report Put Yourself in Our Shoes. Well received by parliamentarians and the media, the report is now cited as a useful resource by at least 9 online platforms in the migrant support sector. Our evidence on disability discrimination and obstacles to redress was taken up by the House of Lords Equality Act and Disability Select Committee, which cited it 42 time throughout its final report. We have also sought to highlight the terrible ease with which loss of benefits, primarily through sanctions, drives destitution. Asked by the chair of the Work and Pensions Committee to give evidence, we were glad to see it incorporated into the second report of the all-party parliamentary group on hunger. Last but not least, we have been engaging with civil servants and political parties on the issue of broadening access to justice, so severely hit by swinging cuts to civil legal aid. Beyond giving evidence to the Bach Commission on the future of access to justice, LCN’s director has been serving as a commissioner, to be even more intimately involved in debates.

**Indirect influencing:** As a small organisation, LCN tries to use its limited resources to greatest impact; in policy and advocacy, this means trying to shape the professional discourse upstream, by interacting with thought-influencers. To strengthen the association of social welfare legal advice with poverty alleviation, we have been liaising with researchers to inform the legal aid section of the Joseph Rowntree Foundation’s annual report Monitoring Poverty and Social Exclusion. To better evidence the health benefits of social welfare
legal advice, we have been involved on the steering committee of the Advice Services Alliance/Low Commission report The Role of Advice Services in Health Outcomes. The report, endorsed by health inequalities doyen Prof Sir Michael Marmot, would help legal advice organisations better integrate with healthcare services. More broadly, we have sought to position access to legal advice as a driver of community wellbeing. To do so, we have contributed to the scoping work of the national What Works Centre for Wellbeing, set up to provide authoritative evidence to help public bodies make service and spending choices. We have also been highlighting to Oxford research centre COMPAS the importance of legal advice to regularising migrants’ status as a gateway to preventing their destitution; and provided ample evidence on the damage caused by legal aid cuts to Amnesty UK’s recent report, Cuts That Hurt.

Representing Law Centres: LCN is the national collective voice of Law Centres, and represents their interests and those of their clients in a variety of professional and decision-making forums. As before, we have continued to liaise with government, meeting with the legal aid minister and the Solicitor General, along with their officials at the Ministry of Justice and the Legal Aid Agency. We also continued our productive relations with the Law Society and other lawyer bodies, as well as with regulators like the Legal Services Board, Bar Standards Board and Solicitors Regulation Authority, feeding into several consultations on regulatory changes to legal services. We have presented evidence from Law Centres to several public inquiries, such as the Bach Commission on the future of access to justice, the all-party parliamentary group on hunger and the Equality Act and Disability Select Committee. We have also represented Law Centres in new forums concerned with widening access to justice, such as the Litigants In Person Support Strategy, the Civil Justice Council’s task group on early legal advice, and the all-party parliamentary group on public legal education.

Profile development: It is important to us that the public, and not just professional bodies, recognise Law Centres and their contribution to social justice. To this end we have put yet more effort into our communications work, with some success: our current social media reach exceeds 150,000 people per month; website hits were up 6% on previous year with an 8% increase in sessions; and there has been a marked increase in approaches to us from journalists and broadcast productions. We have initiated new channels for engaging yet more people: a new LinkedIn organisation page, updated regularly; and a new bite-sized supporter newsletter for people not active on social media. Through these channels we inform the public about Law Centres and celebrate their achievements and successes. To better distinguish Law Centres we have been developing our common brand identity, which now
encompasses 75% of our members, and extending it through variants for Law Centres-badged joint projects. We also help Law Centres gain professional acknowledgment, nominating and endorsing them for awards: last year saw 7 Law Centre award nominations and one winner.

**New partnerships:** The deliberative, exploratory nature of some of LCN’s policy and profile-raising work dovetails with our objective of increasing Law Centres’ efficacy and sustainability. Our external relations work enables us to spot new ideas and potential partners, and to foster new service partnerships for Law Centres, in particular with non-legal agencies. We have been facilitating knowledge sharing with agencies operating alternative service models, such as the Bromley-by-Boy Centre, whose Director of Knowledge and Innovation spoke at our last annual conference. For their novelty, these relations take time to build, especially across areas of practice. Still, we have been approaching health trusts to explore local advice-health partnerships; the British Red Cross on supporting refugee family reunions; and a number of other national agencies to explore collaboration on helping Law Centres toward a more multi-disciplined service model.

**Challenging government in the public interest:** Late this summer, LCN was in a unique position to bring a legal challenge to government’s decision, to award the national equalities helpline (EASS) contract to corporation G4S. We had expressed our concerns, along with 40 other organisations, about G4S’ human right record in previous public contracts, and their suitability for delivering such a sensitive service. This issue has clearly struck a note with people: over 68,000 people endorsed a SumOfUs petition; over 80,000 people signed up to a 38 Degrees petition; and over 200 donors backed our crowdfunding drive. While the judge recognised the ‘serious public concern’ we had raised in the public interest, she refused us permission. This was frustrating but we are glad to have taken this challenge: our legal action highlighted a wrong and drew public attention to it, introducing us to new supporters and partners and strengthening existing ties. Moreover, it has equipped us with material to continue the struggle against this decision with Parliament and the public.

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£6,695

pledged by 204 people in just over a week, to support our G4S legal challenge

7

Law Centres award shortlistings – and one award winner

57%

increase in the social reach of LCN’s Facebook page

26%

increase in followers of LCN’s Twitter account

@NewcastleLC

Our Family Solicitor Roiya is at the @NorthLawAwards tonight. We’re finalists in the Pro Bono category. Good luck to all nominees!
THIS YEAR WE...

SPOKE OUT ABOUT

- Benefits sanctions
- Access to justice
- Children seeking asylum
- Disability discrimination
- Equality & human rights advice
- Reflecting real public concern

INFORMED RESEARCH AND DISCUSSIONS ABOUT

- Advice and health partnerships
- Legal advice and community wellbeing
- Legal advice addressing poverty
- Legal advice and migrant support

EXTENDED OUR REACH

- More visitors: 6%
- More sessions: 8%
- On Twitter: 26% more followers, 79% more impressions
- On Facebook: 41% more likes, 57% more people reached

WE CURRENTLY REACH OVER

150,000 people a month on social media

NOW ALSO ON LINKEDIN AND WITH A MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

A NATIONAL VOICE FOR LAW CENTRES AND THEIR CLIENTS
LOOKING AHEAD

THIS YEAR HAS BEEN A BUSY AND PRODUCTIVE YEAR FOR LAW CENTRES AND FOR THE NETWORK. AS WE LOOK AHEAD TO 2017 AND BEYOND, IT STILL SEEMS, THOUGH, THAT WE HAVE GOT OUR WORK CUT OUT FOR US.

Six years of austerity measures have wreaked havoc with social protections for the poorest and most disadvantaged people. The public health and care systems are under existential threat. The social security system is arguably no longer fit for purpose, with arbitrary measures such as the benefit cap severing the link between need and support. Cuts to local government settlements increasingly bind councils’ hands in dealing with growing local crises. Homelessness and evictions are increasing, as is the use of food banks, which even the state takes as integral to the welfare system. At the same time, access to justice has been curtailed through a combination of additional hurdles, such as higher court or tribunal fees, and removal of tried-and-true supports for redress, such as legal aid.

If this were not bad enough, a process of encroachment on people’s rights is unfolding before us. Most fundamentally, the present government is intent to repeal the Human Rights Act and replace it with a British Bill of Rights of yet-unknown character. This substitute seems at best redundant, at worst a downgrade of the UK’s basic standards and safeguards. The result of the EU referendum and the government’s management of the situation so far suggest lingering uncertainties for EU migrants in the UK, also offering little hope for the current wave of hate crime to abate. Changes to the administration of justice, such as online tribunals and removing experts from most panels, raise fresh concerns about the fairness of hearings, for example for disabled claimants.

In public debates after the EU referendum, much was made of the mandate for change that 17 million Leave voters bestowed on the government. By a similar token, should we not be saying that 13.5 million people – the 21% of the UK population living in poverty – are also a mandate for change? And is that mandate not strengthened by people who may not live in poverty but are at the thin end of the wedge, discriminated against regularly, sometimes systemically, like people with disabilities, ethnic minorities or LGBT people?

‘Law Centres even more important than they were before’

Paul Lewis (@paullewismoney), presenter of Radio 4’s Money Box programme, tweets about our work helping benefits claimants appeal bad decisions
British society today is unequal – economically and socially. Law Centres are firmly committed to address this with the variety of tools at our disposal, some of which are unique to Law Centres.

First, we will continue to apply our expertise to secure people’s rights and seek to expand them. The Law Centres Network will continue to support the establishment of Law Centres, the expansion of Law Centres’ services, and maintaining and improving professional quality standards to better serve our clients. Building on work to date, we will continue to roll out our flagship national ICT infrastructure project. This will increase Law Centres’ capacity to help more people and to collaborate – among themselves and with other agencies – for the benefit of local communities.

Second, we will continue to expose injustice and seek to make government – central and local – more accountable. Public policy affects disadvantaged people more because they are more reliant on support from public bodies. We will keep making the case for improvements to law and policy in the interests of social justice. This means that we will continue our advocacy work on widening access to justice, on welfare reform and on discrimination, as well as on legal support as a key instrument for alleviating poverty. We will also increase our campaigning work in defence of the Human Rights Act, working to ensure that these rights remain universal and are meaningfully upheld.

Law Centres do not just provide services to the public but help others do so too: in Northern Ireland, they train up MLAs’ constituency caseworkers; in Croydon, they help carers understand their patients’ rights as well as their own; and in Birmingham they help clarify the law so services do not discriminate against migrants.
Overall, we will continue to act as agents of change for good. The independence of Law Centres and their communities’ hard-won trust in them are such valuable assets. We must leverage them in order to gain wider recognition that the law can be – and should be – a tool for social change. The law reflects our values as a society; it helps us steer a course from the kind of society we are to the kind of society we want to be. We do this not just by improving and clarifying the law itself, but also by giving effect to it so disadvantaged people see it work for them, rather than just feeling that it is used against them.

Faith in the justice system strengthens faith in the rule of law in the UK as fundamentally equal, accessible and fair. Rather than feeling alienated and switching off, Law Centres can help people get justice for themselves but also gain an active stake in justice – by supporting their Law Centre and its campaigning work, by volunteering in it, by becoming a local trustee, by qualifying as lawyers themselves. Much of this is already happening, but it is under continued threat, which must be overcome. This is our challenge and, with your help, we will master it.

@HarrowLawCentre

We frequently have clients break down & cry in our office when they realise we can help them, we believe them & we treat them with respect.

Impressive though it was, our bake sale for access to justice may not have netted high sums – but it has helped us start useful conversations with neighbour organisations.
These summarised financial statements contain information from both the Statement of Financial Activities and the Balance Sheet for the year ended 31 March 2016, but are not the full statutory report and accounts.

The summary financial information shows the income raised for our activities was £735,542, the cost of raising the income and the amounts spent on our charitable activity was £615,456. The information is taken from the full financial statements which were approved by the trustees on 10 October 2016.

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 or on the Charities Commission website.

Signed on behalf of the trustees.

Nick Whittingham
Treasurer
10 October 2016

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<th>Balance Sheet</th>
<th>2016 (£)</th>
<th>2015 (£)</th>
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<td>Cash at bank and in hand</td>
<td>395,365</td>
<td>227,394</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Current assets</strong></td>
<td>505,766</td>
<td>347,691</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creditors: amounts falling due within one year</td>
<td>115,898</td>
<td>81,985</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Net current assets</strong></td>
<td>389,868</td>
<td>265,706</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Net assets</strong></td>
<td>389,868</td>
<td>265,706</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Funds</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restricted funds</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In surplus</td>
<td>207,860</td>
<td>97,035</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unrestricted funds</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General fund</td>
<td>182,008</td>
<td>168,671</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total funds</strong></td>
<td>389,868</td>
<td>265,706</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## INCOME

**AS AT 31 MARCH 2016**

### 2016 INCOME HIGHLIGHTS %

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fund</th>
<th>2016 (%)</th>
<th>2015 (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>European Commission</td>
<td>34.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Legal Education Foundation</td>
<td>12.9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subscriptions from Law Centre members</td>
<td>10.3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principles to Practice project – 3 funders</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contracts</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>London Councils</td>
<td>7.6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gifts in Kind</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>London Legal Support Trust</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust for London</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access to Justice Foundation</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Income

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Income</th>
<th>2016 (£)</th>
<th>2015 (£)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Subscriptions from Law Centre members</td>
<td>75,900</td>
<td>77,400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donations</td>
<td>2,525</td>
<td>14,997</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SOBeL / London Councils</td>
<td>56,487</td>
<td>56,487</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access to Justice Foundation</td>
<td>10,000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baring Foundation</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>50,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Legal Education Foundation</td>
<td>95,553</td>
<td>42,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>European Commission</td>
<td>255,449</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>London Legal Support Trust</td>
<td>20,000</td>
<td>10,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principles to Practice: Metropolitan Migration Foundation</td>
<td>22,780</td>
<td>24,590</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principles to Practice – Samuel Seba Charitable Trust</td>
<td>25,000</td>
<td>25,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unbound Philanthropy</td>
<td>25,000</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust for London</td>
<td>18,750</td>
<td>22,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Goldsmiths’ Company</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>3,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JP Getty Jr Charitable Trust</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>75,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small Grants and other</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>15,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contract Service – WBUT</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>31,744</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contract Service – Equality Advisory Support Service</td>
<td>58,992</td>
<td>58,992</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contract Service – ECAS Triple A Project</td>
<td>7,694</td>
<td>19,527</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contract Service – ECAS MMM Project</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>12,767</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training fees</td>
<td>1,978</td>
<td>2,560</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gifts in Kind</td>
<td>31,459</td>
<td>18,368</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online legal resources</td>
<td>23,683</td>
<td>20,863</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annual conference</td>
<td>4,292</td>
<td>6,025</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>4,076</td>
<td>473</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>739,618</strong></td>
<td><strong>587,293</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## EXPENDITURE
### AS AT 31 MARCH 2016

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2016 EXPENDITURE HIGHLIGHTS %</th>
<th>2016 (£)</th>
<th>2015 (£)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Staff costs</td>
<td>283,705</td>
<td>242,236</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff Travel, Training, Recruitment and Meetings</td>
<td>14,103</td>
<td>11,309</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management and Other Meetings</td>
<td>5,117</td>
<td>2,406</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audit and other fees</td>
<td>9,503</td>
<td>9,490</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Premises costs</td>
<td>18,278</td>
<td>17,702</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Office: ICT, Insurance and Communications</td>
<td>18,947</td>
<td>26,968</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal and Professional Fees</td>
<td>118,425</td>
<td>108,128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grants to Law Centres</td>
<td>79,441</td>
<td>32,306</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annual Conference</td>
<td>7,666</td>
<td>5,937</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Publication design and print</td>
<td>14,514</td>
<td>13,043</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subscriptions and Journals</td>
<td>3,647</td>
<td>4,842</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training and Course Costs</td>
<td>4,612</td>
<td>4,515</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Website Development</td>
<td>1,344</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bad debts expense</td>
<td>-2,907</td>
<td>2,345</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gifts in kind</td>
<td>31,459</td>
<td>18,369</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>7,602</td>
<td>8,431</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>615,456</strong></td>
<td><strong>508,027</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

Amazing outcome for a client today – £31,000 child benefit overpayment overturned and continuing entitlement established!
Incredibly proud to see our logo up there at #LibertyAwards2016. Incredible people doing amazing work. Ajmal and Moataz you did us proud!!
Hello from the award-winning team at Central England Law Centre, now also winners of the Coventry Cohesion Award!

image: CELC
THANKS TO YOU

Staff team
Nimrod Ben-Cnaan – Head of Policy and Profile
Julie Bishop – Director
Alex Charles – Finance and ICT Officer
Laura Chilintan – Project Officer
Rosa Coleman – Project Assistant
   (until March 2016)
Cathy Gallagher – Solicitor Regulation and Pro Bono Development
Helen Johnson – Principles to Practice Project Manager (until March 2016)
Vicki Leaver – Office Manager
Stella Russell – Development Consultant
Funders and supporters
AB Charitable Trust
The Access to Justice Foundation
Akin Gump
Allen & Overy
Baring Foundation
DLA Piper UK
The European Commission
Eversheds
Freshfields Bruckhaus Deringer
Future Advice Fund
The Goldsmiths’ Company
JP Getty Jr Charitable Trust
The Law Society Charity
Legal Education Foundation
LexisNexis
London Councils
London Legal Support Trust
Metropolitan Migration Foundation
Trust for London
Unbound Philanthropy

Trustees
Cheryl Weston – Chair
Nottingham Law Centre
Pamela Fitzpatrick – Vice-Chair
Harrow Law Centre
Ruth Hayes – Vice-Chair
Islington Law Centre
Nick Whittingham – Treasurer
Kirklees Citizens Advice and Law Centre
Sue Bent – Secretary
Central England Law Centre
Clare Carter
Avon & Bristol Law Centre
Jayne Edwards – until June 2016
Newcastle Law Centre
Patrick Marples
South West London Law Centres
Martha Osamor
Haringey Law Centre)
Ian Rajaratnam (co-opted)
Helen Rogers (co-opted)
Sarah Scott (co-opted)
David Slater – from July 2016
Newcastle Law Centre
Michael Tarnoky
Lambeth Law Centre
Roger Smith (co-opted)
Maureen Vincent
Brent Community Law Centre
Darren Webber – until May 2016
Derbyshire Law Centre
IN MEMORIAM

THIS YEAR WE HAVE LOST TWO KEY PEOPLE WHO WERE COMMITTED TO LAW CENTRES. WE ARE GRATEFUL FOR THEIR LIFE’S WORK AND CHERISH THEIR MEMORY.

Olaronke Flora Williams (1963 – 2016)
Flora, as many of us knew her, was LCN’s Equality and Diversity Manager since 2008. In 2015 she fell ill and, until her death, we had always hoped that she would recover. Flora was a passionate fighter against discrimination and prejudice, ready to fiercely challenge injustice where she encountered it. A consummate professional also widely respected and loved, she had been working in the advice sector for many years.

At LCN, Flora co-ordinated the work of discrimination law practitioners in Law Centres, and has initiated several projects during her tenure. She pioneered LCN’s EU-backed work to raise awareness and increase understanding of equalities matters; to help advance access to justice in Europe; and to improve the integration of EU migrants in the UK.

Flora’s private life reflected her characteristic determination, too. She overcame the challenges of migration, having been born in Nigeria and moved to the UK in her twenties. Constantly striving to learn and develop, in her late forties she completed a Masters’ degree alongside her full-time job. She was also a single mother and is survived by her daughter, Faith, a talented artist.

To us, Flora was a reliable and fun person, with a vibrant presence, strong opinions and a big caring heart. She was taken from us so prematurely and we miss her greatly.

Darren Webber (1967 – 2016)
We were sad at Darren Webber’s untimely death at only 49 years old. A local activist and Chesterfield councillor, Darren has been involved with Derbyshire Law Centre as trustee for many years. Since 2013, he also represented his Law Centre on LCN’s Executive Committee. In fact, his dedication had him step down from the role only weeks before his passing, and that was the first time that we have learned of his illness. Our thoughts go out to his family, friends and colleagues at Derbyshire Law Centre.

Olaronke Flora Williams.

Darren receiving an award on behalf of Derbyshire Law Centre from former LCN chair, Gillie Sharp.