A Law Centre is an independent not-for-profit law practice. Law Centres want everyone to have equal access to justice. They target their services at the poorest and most disadvantaged people in their communities. For this reason, each Law Centre’s core services are free of charge. Law Centres seek to tackle the root causes of poverty and disadvantage.

We are the Law Centres Network (LCN), the national membership body for Law Centres. We support existing Law Centres to develop their services, so they can help more people in more ways. We assist Law Centres to work together, with one another and with other agencies. We are also the collective national voice of Law Centres.

Together, we use the law and advocacy to bring about social change for our communities.

We strive for a just and equal society where everyone’s rights are valued and protected.
The past year has seen many of the issues that Law Centres deal with daily hit the headlines: the Windrush scandal, Universal Credit, increasing homelessness. As the pressures on the legal aid system are highlighted by a range of reports, and the long-awaited government review of the impact of legal aid cuts is underway, it is vital that the Law Centre movement can demonstrate the crucial importance of good quality, independent and specialist free legal assistance.

The Law Centres Network plays a crucial role, often behind the scenes: providing technical support and training, making connections, helping to secure funding and undertaking social policy work.

This year, we also took the more public step of challenging the way in which the government tendered and wanted to run court duty desks for people at risk of home loss. Duty desks are important in reaching people in need at a crisis point who have not sought help prior to it. This would have lost them vital local connections to help resolve the underlying problems that triggered crisis – problems that legal aid no longer covers. We were pleased and relieved to see this challenge succeed and the changes dropped.

LCN has also been at the forefront of thinking about new ways of delivering services, and how digital innovation can help services better meet the needs of local communities.

It has been a real honour to be able to chair LCN’s trustee board this year. I would like to thank the staff team for their hard work and outstanding commitment, as well as the Executive Committee, who have been extremely generous with their time and expertise, and member Law Centres who have worked tirelessly to support their clients.

There have been some sad points during the year. We were very sorry that Central London Law Centre closed and that other agencies have had to reduce services. We were also sorry to say farewell to longstanding team members Cathy Gallagher, Stella Russell and Vicki Leaver. Many Law Centres owe a huge debt to Cathy and Stella for their support over many years. We wish them all well for the future.

We were also delighted to welcome Klara Holdstock, Raluca David, Cristina Porto and Anna Joy Runco-Farrands to the LCN team, and a new Law Centre in Suffolk to the network.

As we enter a challenging period with Brexit now just months away, I am sure that LCN will continue to punch above its weight, articulating a bold, brave vision of what access to justice can be for local communities, and how we can work together to make that a reality.

The courts as a whole acknowledge and value the work you do. Those of us who have worked with you... can’t help but be inspired.

Mrs Justice Andrews DBE, during our legal challenge hearing
Recently I attended Camden Community Law Centre’s 45th anniversary celebration. I met many of its founders who went on to fight for justice through illustrious careers in law, politics and academia. All have said that their time at the Law Centre is the part of their career of which they are most proud.

Also present were many others who have shaped Law Centres’ history, such as Michael Zander, whose seminal articles from 1968 onwards established the case for Law Centres, and Peter Kandler, co-founder of the first Law Centre at North Kensington. Speeches were amusing and moving. Several speakers wondered whether working in Law Centres was still such fun; the number of significant recent legal victories by Law Centres made them guess that it was. From the outside, as most are now, their shared view was that Law Centres are on the up.

In particular, there was discussion of the recent victory in the LCN-led judicial review that challenged the way the Ministry of Justice tendered the Housing Possession Court Duty Scheme contracts. People noted that this was Law Centres at their best, working together through LCN to challenge a real threat to access to justice, in an area that Law Centres had pioneered. After all, it was Camden, Paddington and North Kensington Law Centres that first established the housing duty scheme at county courts.

On LCN’s own fortieth anniversary, we do not only celebrate Law Centres’ and LCN’s many achievements over the years; we also reassert that Law Centres are needed now more than ever. Indicators show rising legal need: as I write this it was reported that three quarters of the population do not receive the same pay each week; 4.2m people with disabilities in the UK live in poverty; the Trussell Trust gave out 586,000 food parcels in the first half of this year, up 13% on the previous 6 months - while at the same time, legal aid acts of assistance have dropped by over 60% since the LASPO cuts.

Added to this is the impact of eight years of austerity, now so deep that it will take years to reverse. Every day we see the cruelty of poor decisions enabled by the introduction of inhumane government policies: to even countenance a policy called ‘Hostile Environment’ says it all. In several communities, Law Centres are the only agencies left that can challenge this unjust treatment and the daily denial of people’s rights.

If Law Centres are needed now more than ever, so too is LCN. What brought Law Centres together in 1978 to establish the Law Centres Working Group (as was then) is even more pertinent today. LCN’s core objectives have remained similar over the years: to support and develop Law Centres, to support and develop the network, and to be the voice of Law Centres. Still, we now work in closer partnership with Law Centres. We take on and coordinate national service provision projects. We learn from the daily work of Law Centres countrywide and use this to design new approaches and to identify issues that
Law Centres Network Annual Review 2017/18

This year we have been developing a new digital app to help Law Centres communicate with their clients. It’s exciting, creative work that we look to do more of.

What brought Law Centres together in 1978 is even more relevant today.

are better addressed nationally through policy and advocacy work; we negotiate national bulk purchase deals to save Law Centres money and strengthen their infrastructure; we introduced common Law Centre branding; and when LCN is best placed to do so, we run legal challenges, too.

Yet financial sustainability remains a key concern for Law Centres and LCN. Short term grants allow immediate work to be undertaken but make long term planning difficult, and embedded change takes time. We were buoyed by the recent Labour Party pledge to provide funding for Law Centres if the party is in power, but we cannot rely on promises. LCN is currently undertaking a strategic review of its work, with a view to becoming more sustainable, to work better alongside the growing network of Law Centres and to be here to celebrate its centenary.

Law Centres’ very survival is substantial, as is the impact of the assistance they provide daily, which was recognised again this year. In July, Ealing Law Centre, which blossomed in a former west London advice desert five years ago, won the Legal Aid Lawyer of the Year award for best firm/not-for-profit. One of its runners-up, Greater Manchester Law Centre, is an even more recent outfit. South West London Law Centre won the Team London award for volunteering for its pro bono clinics. Two Avon and Bristol Law Centre team members, one of them a recent Justice First Fellow, won Bristol Law Society awards.

These are not LCN’s awards, but I mention them here as we are all so proud of our colleagues. This extends also to our most recent members in Derby and Ipswich, whom we welcomed this year. Suffolk Law Centre is a particularly proud achievement being a real pioneer in a large rural community that has traditionally been an advice desert.

This collective spirit of enterprise and excellence strengthens the collaborative ethos of Law Centres. Together with our shared values and the courage to take on challenges that others might not, it makes the network of Law Centres as much fun to work in today as it was forty years ago.

I would like to give my sincere thanks to all who have worked at LCN and were associated with it over our forty-year history. I would particularly like to thank those I have personally worked with over the last ten years at LCN: Executive Committee members, all our friends and allies, and my colleagues in the national office.

Together with Law Centres, LCN continues to fight for the dignified and fair treatment of each person in the UK and for a just and equal society – the vision that guided us when Law Centres first came together forty years ago.

I am sure that the following pages will impress you with our small team’s hard work and solid achievements this year.
ENSURING THAT LAW CENTRES ARE RESILIENT AND EFFECTIVE IN A FAST-CHANGING, COMPLEX ENVIRONMENT

Law Centres are unusual organisations operating in complex circumstances. When introduced, their model of a law practice, that is a registered charity, was pioneering in the UK. LCN remains the only membership body that caters for the specialist support needs of Law Centres, and this makes up a considerable part of our work.

In a tough funding environment for the voluntary sector, one of LCN’s key aims is to help Law Centres to maximise their resources. To begin with, this means providing fundraising assistance to Law Centres. Last year we have had a good success rate with our grant applications, securing £1 of every £3 we applied for and raised some £1,318,000 for Law Centres from UK foundations, benefiting 14 Law Centres.

We have also helped Law Centres access funding from European Union sources. In the three years to December, LCN had been supported to do so by the Future Advice Fund. In the last year of the project alone we submitted three bids to EU programmes, totalling €1.5m and involving 20 partners. One bid successful so far raised €450,000 for four Law Centres and two partners, more on which later in this report. In all, over three years we secured €1.1m for 25 Law Centres and 8 other agencies, gaining not just a good 44% success rate but valuable experience in delivering multi-agency projects. Having these resources has also enabled us to rise to the challenge of assisting mostly vulnerable EU citizens in the UK through Brexit.

A more traditional source of Law Centre income is legal aid and the past year has been particularly busy on this front as we supported Law Centres to bid for new contracts, that commenced in the autumn. This involved four group training sessions as well as direct assistance...
with preparing tenders and then support through contract verification. Along with this we continued to assist Law Centres in managing their existing contracts, and we liaised with the Legal Aid Agency on their behalf directly and through consultations.

Augmenting legal aid is pro bono, which has helped extend Law Centre resources since the legal aid cuts five years ago. With support from the Access to Justice Foundation, we have been developing national pro bono projects with Law Centres. This year we focused on collaborations with university law schools and clinical programmes, resulting in a dedicated one-day symposium and in three new schemes. Other work sought to increase the collaboration of Law Centres outside of London with pro bono schemes of local law firms and regional Law Societies.

Another legacy of the legal aid cuts has been experimentation with income generation schemes through fee-charging services. With Trust for London support, LCN reviewed such services offered by Law Centres and other London advice agencies. We analysed the findings, highlighted the schemes’ strengths and weaknesses and made recommendations for developing this work. We will follow this up with a roundtable event to develop ideas from this research, a pricing tool for Law Centres and template business models, and will publicly share all resources online.

As a network, Law Centres can benefit from some economies of scale and we have been working on achieving them through group purchase schemes. Our first, an enterprise subscription to LexisNexis online legal resources, gives each Law Centre affordable access to the latest legal resources. It is now bundled into our membership offer and will be renegotiated this year. A second scheme, to establish a national professional indemnity insurance policy for Law Centres, made considerable progress this year with help from law firm Akin Gump. Consolidating all Law Centre policies, this would ensure suitable cover and set up a national risk management scheme. Currently under negotiation, we expect this policy to be implemented next year. A third scheme will likely be group provision of human resources and finance services.

Law Centres are required to comply with up to seven regulatory bodies, so it is critical that LCN keep abreast of regulatory changes, updating and supporting Law Centres to remain compliant. It is also important that LCN inform regulatory bodies about our unique situation to ensure that our work is not held back by new barriers. This year, LCN has discussed Law Centres’ position as Special Bodies with the Solicitors Regulation Authority regarding insurance and pro bono work, contributing to a review of insurance requirements for legal aid contracts. We also began work toward the Law Centres risk management scheme, which we hope will not just lower costs but also promote consumer confidence and protection.

We emphasise learning and knowledge sharing with and among Law Centres and have had a successful year with this. We held 22 learning events throughout the year, involving 254 Law Centre participants and making increased use of digital platforms alongside face-to-face delivery. We were
heartened to have 95% of Law Centres participate, with 92% of them rating events ‘excellent’ or ‘very good’. Our challenge, and plan for next year, will be to surpass this by better identifying lessons learned and better supporting their uptake among Law Centres.

Our **2020 Digital Vision for Law Centres** is an exciting area of work being developed at minimum cost with funding from the Legal Education Foundation and the generosity of law firms and other companies. The pioneer programme saw nine Law Centres successfully upgrade their IT: replacing all old hardware, installing fast broadband, re-organising data along national guidelines, migrating mail and data from local servers to the cloud, training in Office 365 and Sharepoint (the Microsoft cloud-based systems) and switching to centralised IT support. Currently, the project’s second phase involves five Law Centres, including two of our largest members.

To complement this, LCN has been developing digital tools to support Law Centres’ work with the Centre for Acceleration of Social Technology (CAST). A CAST digital accelerator has developed a digital tool that uses text messaging to improve communication with clients and minimise missed lawyer appointments. Currently in pilot stage, it will be rolled out to interested Law Centres in the coming months.

Another tool was developed through the CAST digital fellowship. This tool would help LCN collect local data from Law Centres and share national aggregated data with them. We expect to roll it out to members next year. We are also developing with LexisNexis an automated document generation tool for housing lawyers, as well as researching several other ideas in this field.

Our work on developing digital tools has attracted attention from other charities engaged in similar processes, as well as from ‘tech for good’ outfits like Doteveryone and LegalGeek, that are keen to showcase digital’s use to widen access to justice. Sharing this knowledge is important to us because it shows how prioritising face-to-face services need not rule out embracing digital tools.

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**WHAT WE PLAN**

- **MORE FUNDRAISING ASSISTANCE** especially to help replace European funding
- **EXPANDING GROUP PURCHASE SCHEMES**: securing national insurance policy, exploring HR and finance assistance
- **DEVELOPING NEW STUDENT PRO BONO INITIATIVES** at university clinics and at Law Centres
- **EQUIPPING LAW CENTRES** with a new pricing tool for fee-charging services
- **INCREASING DIGITAL CAPACITY** at Law Centres through developing new products and collaboration

Keeping specialist organisations like Law Centres trained and up to date on the essentials is a year-round affair. Here expert consultant Matt Howgate delivers a session on practice management as part of our national conference.
THAT WAS THEN

Supporting Law Centre sustainability over the years

MAKING THE CASE FOR COMMUNITY LAW CENTRES

One night in Birmingham in 1987, a group of young artists volunteered their talents to a Law Centres fundraiser. Where are they now, we wonder.
HOW WE HELPED

MAINTAINING A SUSTAINABLE, EFFECTIVE NATIONAL ORGANISATION THAT PROMOTES MEMBER COLLABORATION

For LCN to be an effective support for Law Centres, it must be effective in its own right. To do so, we ensure that LCN’s governance – drawn largely from our members – is robust and benefits from all the needed skills and support.

We regularly monitor changes to charity regulation and guidance and update both trustees and Law Centres. To ensure that the team has appropriate resources to implement our strategic plan we have a comprehensive fundraising strategy in place. We have also greatly improved our data collection and impact reporting through our Salesforce system, and are working on a national data set and client management system for Law Centres. Several recent scandals involving charities have shown the importance of keeping our own house in order. This is more important to us because, as a specialist support organisation, we ensure our own effectiveness as well as that of our member Law Centres.

Sharing expertise and extending best practice across the network is something that our members turn to us for. Having identified a need for doing this more effectively, we have created a new position of Learning and Transformation Lead. This role links our learning program, described earlier, with our aim to improve practice across the network. We are currently looking to learn from other organisations’ experience and this will inform ongoing work. In the meantime, we continue in our convening role: keeping Law Centres up to date on news, events, jobs and funding through weekly bulletins; supporting practitioners to communicate among themselves through discussion groups; holding regional meetings year round; and holding a well-regarded national conference and AGM in Glasgow at the invitation of our Scottish counterparts.

It is a great joy to us that, from one conference to another, more Law Centres come into being, extending our national coverage. Despite an adverse funding and policy situation, or because of it, local groups want to strengthen their communities with...
Law Centres and come to us for guidance and support. This year we have welcomed Direct Help and Advice (DHA), which joined us to become the Derby Law Centre, and the Ipswich and Suffolk Council on Racial Equality (ISCRE), which set up Suffolk Law Centre. This is a particularly prized achievement: Suffolk is a large, mostly rural county that has traditionally been an ‘advice desert’. We have also supported two existing Law Centres to extend their services into new geographical areas with no such services. Three other organisations are working with us to develop local Law Centres, and we hope to report on those next year.

Beyond supporting Law Centres in their routine work, LCN uses their accumulated insights to initiate and then co-ordinate new collaborative strategic projects. This year we concluded our Living Rights Project, funded by the European Commission to inform EU citizens living in the UK of their rights and help them access local services. Nearly 4,000 EU citizens participated in events up and down the country, and nearly 6,000 have accessed our online content, including 15 guides, some of which were translated into 7 EU languages. 880 professionals supporting EU migrants were trained on EU rights in two conferences we held. 90% of them said this improved their understanding.

Living Rights has successfully engaged and informed marginalised EU citizens in the UK at a time of great uncertainty, anxiety and misinformation. 88% of participants told us they better understood their rights in the UK and felt more confident to take action to protect them. 80% of them realised that it was easier than they had thought to get help from local services. Most impressively, the 10 project partners have established and cemented relationships of trust with migrant groups that until then had considered lawyers to be part of officialdom and therefore inherently untrustworthy – thus removing a major barrier to establishing their rights.

Key to this success were the project’s 33 Community Champions, trusted local intermediaries working with grassroots EU migrant communities who, importantly, helped project partners to better understand and meet user needs. They were also

Feedback from local organiser of EU rights information meeting

Our Executive Committee is our board of trustees, and is almost entirely made up of Law Centre staff members or trustees. This ensures that LCN is truly representative and member-led.
instrumental in conveying on-the-ground experience to policymakers, public officials and other NGOs, informing them about EU migrants’ rights and influencing better support measures. As lead body, LCN has taken these insights to public bodies like the Greater London Authority, the Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner and the Gangmasters and Labour Abuse Authority; to government departments including the Treasury, DWP and DExEU; and to Brussels, alerting European NGOs and EU negotiators about key issues for vulnerable EU migrants in the UK.

Three new LCN projects are now building on Living Rights’ success. The EULAMP Project, funded by the European Commission, involves four Law Centres and two other agencies to assist Latin Americans, living in the UK with Spanish or Portuguese citizenship, assert their rights and access services to which they are entitled. The PreBrexit project, funded by Trust for London, assists EU nationals living in London navigate their way through Brexit. It focuses on providing legal and rights information to established community organisations assisting vulnerable European migrants. Most recently, the EU Citizens’ Rights Information Service is a collaboration with the European Commission Representation to the UK, which invites local migrant groups around the country request a Law Centre lawyer to speak about EU citizen rights through Brexit at their public events.

Our work to uphold workers’ rights and migrants’ rights is not restricted to EU citizens. The Human Rights-Based Approaches project, funded by the Baring Foundation, aims to help all migrant workers in the UK. Bringing together LCN, member Law Centres and their local non-advice agencies, the project seeks to build capacity among advisors and organisations to tackle discrimination against migrant workers. We want to integrate into practice approaches based on human rights, also raising awareness among frontline agencies of these rights and their real-life effect. Ultimately, we want to introduce a rights-based rather than needs-based approach, to encourage earlier intervention, and to foster greater collaboration between non-advice agencies and their local Law Centres. So far we have delivered three ‘theory and practice’ training sessions across the UK, targeting professionals supporting victims of labour abuse and exploitation. Complementing these is a handbook for practitioners, publicly available online, that is already proving popular.

WHAT WE PLAN

REFINING HOW WE LEARN from our work and how to better put these insights into practice

DEVELOPING OUR INTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS to engage even more Law Centre people

UPDATING OUR MEMBERSHIP OFFER to make benefits clearer to new applicants

IMPROVING OUR DATA COLLECTION and identifying what more of it could be shared publicly

INITIATING NEW JOINT PROJECTS for Law Centres to respond to emerging need
THAT WAS THEN

Getting our message heard

RECOGNISED BY GOVERNMENT

Having (sometimes difficult) conversations with successive governments on justice policy has always been LCN’s role. Pictured (clockwise from top left): ministers Lord Mackay, Lady Scotland, Lord Bach and Sir Oliver Heald.

CAMPAIGNING TOGETHER FOR CHANGE

Two Bob: LCN former chair Bob Nightingale (R) with Sir Bob Geldof - both great campaigners, both very good at persuading you to chip in.

At Downing Street or outside the Royal Courts of Justice, Law Centres have always coupled legal work with campaigning.
A politically topsy-turvy year has had obvious bearing on LCN’s policy and advocacy work. A January cabinet reshuffle has ushered in the seventh Justice Secretary in as many years, an unfortunate reflection of the brief’s position within government. The policy environment continues to be adverse: not ringfenced, the justice budget will have shrunk by 40% in the decade to 2020.

Still, this year also presented us with several unplanned opportunities to advocate for access to justice. The aftermath of the Grenfell disaster has shown the role that social justice lawyering can play in supporting communities. The Windrush scandal demonstrated belatedly how access to legal assistance could have prevented the worst effects of government’s Hostile Environment policies. The detention and removal of homeless EEA nationals were ruled unlawful thanks to strategic litigation from Lambeth Law Centre combined with grassroots campaigning.

Our policy objectives this year were to challenge legal aid cuts and promote access to justice, to capture and demonstrate Law Centres’ impact, and to continue to develop their public profile. In pursuing these, we recognise our strengths and limitations as a small organisation and aim to work extensively with other agencies, contributing to their interventions if they are better placed or better resourced. We are keen to build up a broad movement for social justice in the UK, working across policy fields like migration, housing

WHAT WE ACHIEVED

SUCCESSFULLY CHALLENGED AND CHANGED

LEGAL AID POLICY ON PREVENTING HOMELESSNESS

INVITED BY GOVERNMENT AND PARLIAMENT TO PRESENT EVIDENCE AND ARGUE FOR BETTER ACCESS TO LEGAL ASSISTANCE
Shadow justice secretary Richard Burgon MP (R) visited his nearby Kirklees Citizens Advice and Law Centre, and discussed using the law to help communities overcome austerity policies with director Nick Whittingham (L).

and poverty. We believe we need to fight for both people’s rights and the means of enforcing them, such as legal assistance.

The review of the Legal Aid Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders (LASPO) Act 2012 finally began in earnest earlier this year. By then, we had co-ordinated our intelligence and actions with other stakeholders and made a joint approach to the Justice Select Committee chair, Bob Neill MP, to set the scene with our shared approach to the LASPO review. We have liaised with the National Audit Office and the Public Accounts Committee to ask them to revisit their previous reports on LASPO. We have also been extensively involved in the review itself, meeting and corresponding with the minister and the review team, taking part in the official consultative panels, delivering a session in the one-day conference dedicated to the review in June, and even arranging an official visit to a Law Centre. Several prominent stakeholders have approached us and we were happy to share our knowledge with them and inform their review contributions.

We also continue to work with any party that is serious about securing sustainable access to legal assistance for the future. In September talks with the Opposition resulted in a pledge from the shadow justice secretary, Richard Burgon MP, to increase support for existing and prospective Law Centres as ‘agents of empowerment’, and to fund more training positions in Law Centres, through which to develop the legal advice sector’s next generation. Mr Burgon has also committed to working with LCN to develop his plans to bolster access to justice.

A third way in which we have advocated for greater access to legal assistance this year has been through Parliament. We were
invited by Parliament’s Joint Committee on Human Rights to give evidence as part of its ‘Human Rights: Attitudes to Enforcement’ inquiry. We have made two written submissions as well as giving oral evidence, which was very well received. The committee has taken up several of our arguments in its final report, which primarily addresses the lack of legal aid to adequately uphold human rights in the UK, thus being instrumental with the LASPO review as well. Positive feedback also suggests that our intervention has made a positive impact and strengthened the identification of Law Centres with the defence of fundamental rights.

Beyond legal aid proper, LCN continued advocating on other issues spanning the breadth of access to justice. Our engagement with HM Courts and Tribunals Service’s (HMCTS) court reform programme enabled us to comment on planned changes and to connect reform programme user researchers with Law Centres, to provide deeper input on specific changes from their lawyers and clients. We relayed Law Centres’ insights on the needs of vulnerable people using legal services through the Competition and Markets Authority legal services forum and the Legal Choices stakeholders group. We also worked with regulators Legal Services Board and Bar Standards Board on improving protections for vulnerable clients. Already members of the Attorney General’s Pro Bono Group, we were also invited by the Solicitor General to join his Public Legal Education (PLE) Forum.

Sometimes, though, influencing and advocacy are not enough to affect policy change and another approach is needed. For this reason, at the behest of Law Centres, we mounted a legal challenge to the Ministry of Justice’s policy change on the Housing Possession Court Duty Scheme (HPCDS). Based on poor evidence and going against most consultation responses, MoJ chose to massively consolidate duty solicitor desks, which prevent evictions and homelessness, to a third of current schemes and to commission them through price competition, unlike the rest of legal aid. Law Centres and other providers were concerned that fewer, larger schemes would disadvantage smaller providers, especially ones with strong local ties that could connect clients with follow-on advice to improve their outcomes. The challenge was a resounding success, stopping the ill-conceived changes and boosting morale among beleaguered social justice lawyers.

As the collective national voice of Law Centres, LCN is well positioned to demonstrate Law Centres’ work and its impact to a wide range of stakeholders, be they political and policy circles as described above; legal professional bodies and regulators; current and potential funders of both LCN and Law Centres; and stakeholders in the London arena, where over a third of Law Centres cluster. Here we served on the advisory group for London Plus, the new city-wide civil society infrastructure body, and contributed to Greater London Authority consultations on equality, data use and civil society strategy. We have also continued our

The Government recognises the work that Law Centres do in the local community... [Their insights] are crucial to understanding the experience of individuals as they progress through the justice system.

Justice minister Lucy Frazer QC MP

We are committed to boosting the role of Law Centres throughout the country so that communities can have better access to legal support. That means not only more staff for existing Law Centres but setting up new Law Centres.

Shadow justice secretary Richard Burgon MP
indirect influencing work through contributions to the work of others: New Policy Institute, Equality and Diversity Forum, and Justice’s work on face-to-face legal service innovation and Assisted Digital Services.

Acting on the recommendations of LCN’s 360 review last year, we focused on foregrounding member Law Centres and clients; being responsive and flexible; and distinguishing LCN’s role, narrative and impact from those of Law Centres. Our social media reach has grown by 10% on Twitter, 19% on Facebook and 50% on LinkedIn, meaning we reach an average of 160,000 people a month, with some months reaching as many as 250,000 people. The network received 124 news media appearances, up 14% from the previous year, including 10 pieces about LCN and 114 about Law Centres. Of those, 4 in 5 were in national media, where LCN normally connects journalists to Law Centres.

LCN’s website is the main online platform for Law Centres and continues to perform markedly better than UK sector benchmarks for its volume and cause categories. Users return to it more frequently, staying longer per visit and browsing more pages. To help Law Centres get greater recognition, we have helped our latest Law Centres adopt our shared branding and submitted nominations for professional accolades. We also develop Law Centres’ capacity to promote themselves, through training on profile building and communications planning. Where needed, we supported Law Centres with crisis communications. All in a day’s work!

You can’t underestimate how important such victories are for keeping us all going. Thank you!

Diane Astin, housing and public law solicitor, commenting on the success of our legal challenge

WHAT WE PLAN

CONTINUE TO INFLUENCE government for better access to justice policy after LASPO

INCREASE CAMPAIGNING on wider social justice issues, applying a rights-based approach to policy areas such as welfare reform and housing

IMPROVE COLLECTION of Law Centre insights and their use in advocacy

FURTHER INCREASE network profile, better integrating communications and fundraising

UPGRADING THE LCN WEBSITE for better accessibility and new features
To many people, turning forty conjures up expectations of a midlife crisis: achievements seem to plateau, the passion is not quite what it used to be, life seems to settle into a rut and an anxious, uneasy resentment sets in. Thankfully, this is far from being the case for us at the Law Centres Network.

For one, we have endured an actual crisis earlier, some five years ago. Just at the time when member Law Centres needed additional support to cope with the effects of legal aid cuts that wiped out nearly 40% of their income, LCN also lost a major government grant that it had held, in one form or another, since 1980. This loss was a financial body blow to us but, to paraphrase the late Queen Mother about the bombed out East End, now we could look our members in the eye. Then, patting off the dust and rubble, we continued to work our hardest to minimise the damage to Law Centres, meaning that the 11 we lost in the initial wake of the cuts were not as many as the 18 we had anticipated losing earlier.

That crisis led to necessary soul-searching and reconnecting with our values and mission to see, like Law Centres, how we might be able to reallocate now-fewer resources to maintain services where possible and to greatest effect. We have had to increase our fundraising efforts for LCN itself, rather than just for Law Centres. Thankfully, being a membership organisation and not a law practice means that we do not compete with our members for funding. Still, we continue to explore ways of strengthening LCN’s core functions, to free us to dedicate even more of our work to supporting Law Centres and the wider sector.

In part because of this reckoning, LCN has lacked in neither passion nor achievements. Recent projects have been prescient. Principles to Practice (P2P) started analysing the treatment of separated migrant children nearly two years before the eruption of the Mediterranean migrant crisis and the Calais ‘Jungle’. Living Rights supported EU migrants to understand their rights and access services and quickly responded to the European referendum by expanding its scope to help them adapt to Brexit. We have also mobilised public support and challenged government decisions in the courts, once on the selection of provider for the national human rights helpline, and again successfully on legal aid’s housing duty desk scheme.

This sense of purpose is even more the case for our wider network. Five years after the LASPO cuts, Law Centres as a movement are not just surviving but thriving. Last year, Law Centres have helped over 250,000 people between them – specialist help that would otherwise be hard to come by, connected with other local support services. Among these clients were people, such as Windrush migrants, whose lives were upended by Hostile Environment policies; many affected by welfare reforms, denied PIP and ESA or struggling with Universal Credit; and many affected by the UK’s housing crisis. Central England Law Centre also continues to lead KIND-UK, a nationwide...
Hammersmith and Fulham Law Centre moved into the building also housing Hammersmith’s central public library – two key local services now in the same place. Patron and president of the Supreme Court, Lady Hale (c), came to give her blessing to managing solicitor Sue James (l) and LCN director Julie Bishop (r).

Last year, Law Centres have helped over 250,000 people

project involving Law Centres, other agencies and pro bono volunteers to help migrant children in the UK establish their residence rights and citizenship.

Law Centres have also been successful in their strategic litigation, clarifying the law and changing public policies. In December, Lambeth Law Centre convinced the High Court to halt Home Office detention and removal of homeless EEA nationals. In July, Islington Law Centre’s work with the Children’s Society over five years resulted in government once again providing legal aid to separated migrant children for immigration matters – the first time since LASPO that the Lord Chancellor reinstated legal aid for a certain group. Camden Community Law Centre is bringing a Judicial Review of the government’s Right to Rent policy, a key plank of the Hostile Environment, to be heard in December.

In the coming years, you can expect LCN and the network to continue to develop. We are already making changes to the way we use our legal skills and other resources. This is to respond to external changes, such as the decimation of the advice sector and court digitisation; to make use of new technologies and emerging practices; and to further diversify the ways in which Law Centres do their work.

Law Centres want to better involve users in designing services that they need, which would position legal assistance in a variety of non-legal settings, where they already come for help, making integrated or wrap-around services. Law Centres want to deepen their engagement with people seeking their help, to better understand what drives demand and better cater for it. They also want to advocate for their communities more extensively, not only helping individuals but also assisting groups to make their voices heard, on local planning or national policies, or through challenging the actions of public bodies in court.

LCN’s support is integral to these developments. Helping adapt to local need and replicating successful new services, we will assist local efforts to tackle challenges, and share best practice to improve them. New ways of working already require us to find new ways and sources of funding them, as well as capturing their impact and analysing and communicating the intelligence they generate. This would also strengthen our advocacy work, helping client voices to be heard along with Law Centres’ expert insights.

As we look ahead to the next forty years, our vision continues to be of a just society, in which rights are valued and upheld, where the law works for all, leaving no-one behind. Years of austerity policies have hit ordinary people hard and weakened their ability to challenge everyday injustices. There is a need, then, for reducing inequality and disadvantage and rebuilding communities. The Law Centres Network has a unique role to play in this, and we are up for the challenge!
TRUSTEES’ REPORT

Statement of financial activities

These summarised financial statements contain information from both the Statement of Financial Activities and the Balance Sheet for the year ended 31 March 2018, but are not the full statutory report and accounts.

The summary financial information shows the income raised for our activities was £845,693. The cost of raising the income and the amounts spent on our charitable activities were £849,202. The information is taken from the full financial statements which were approved by the trustees on 8 October 2018.

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 Charity Commission website.

Signed on behalf of the trustees,

Nick Whittingham
Treasurer
8 October 2018

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BALANCE SHEET</th>
<th>2018 (£)</th>
<th>2017 (£)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fixed Assets</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tangible Fixed Assets</td>
<td>3,828</td>
<td>5,358</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Current assets</strong></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Debtors</td>
<td>170,129</td>
<td>147,997</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cash at bank and in hand</td>
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<td>188,428</td>
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<td></td>
<td>430,262</td>
<td>336,425</td>
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<tr>
<td>Creditors: amounts falling due within 1 year</td>
<td>-165,767</td>
<td>-70,836</td>
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<tr>
<td>Net current assets</td>
<td>264,495</td>
<td>265,589</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Net Assets</strong></td>
<td>268,323</td>
<td>270,947</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Funds</strong></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restricted funds</td>
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<tr>
<td>In surplus</td>
<td>214,112</td>
<td>140,852</td>
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<tr>
<td>Unrestricted funds</td>
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<td>General fund</td>
<td>54,211</td>
<td>130,095</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total funds</td>
<td>268,323</td>
<td>270,947</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
### INCOME

As at 31 March 2018

### INCOME 2017-18

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>2018 (£)</th>
<th>2017 (£)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>IT National Project Phase 1 (Legal Education Foundation)</td>
<td>223,630</td>
<td>93,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>European Union Latin American Project (European Commission)</td>
<td>156,548</td>
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<tr>
<td>Living Rights Project (European Commission)</td>
<td>73,510</td>
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<tr>
<td>Subscriptions from Law Centre members</td>
<td>72,380</td>
<td>78,540</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Way Ahead (City Bridge Trust)</td>
<td>50,000</td>
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<td>PRE Brexit (Trust for London)</td>
<td>39,050</td>
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<td>John Ellerman Foundation</td>
<td>30,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other income</td>
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<td>26,387</td>
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<td>Law Centre Training</td>
<td>25,354</td>
<td>28,982</td>
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<td>Future Advice Fund (TLEF)</td>
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<td>50,000</td>
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<td>IT Licensing</td>
<td>23,451</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gifts in Kind</td>
<td>21,261</td>
<td>31,488</td>
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<tr>
<td>Small Grants and Donations</td>
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<td>Strengthening the Voluntary Sector (Baring Foundation)</td>
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<td>Developing New Models (Trust for London)</td>
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<td>39,000</td>
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<td>Social Finance (TLEF)</td>
<td>10,000</td>
<td>–</td>
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<tr>
<td>Law Society</td>
<td>8,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Annual conference</td>
<td>6,760</td>
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<td>Access to Justice Foundation</td>
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<td>15,000</td>
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<td>Contract Services</td>
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<td>25,708</td>
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<tr>
<td>Freshfields Bruckhaus Deringer</td>
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<td>10,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>London Legal Support Trust</td>
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<td>10,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>SOBEL - London Councils</td>
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<td>56,487</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other small grants</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>845,693</strong></td>
<td><strong>503,250</strong></td>
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</table>

### EXPENDITURE

As at 31 March 2018

### EXPENDITURE 2017-18

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>2018 (£)</th>
<th>2017 (£)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Staff costs</td>
<td>300,037</td>
<td>286,116</td>
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<tr>
<td>Grants &amp; Payments to Law Centres</td>
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<tr>
<td>Services to Law Centres</td>
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<tr>
<td>Legal and Professional Fees</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other (Travel &amp; Project Specific costs)</td>
<td>27,131</td>
<td>23,693</td>
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<tr>
<td>Annual Conference and Events</td>
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<td>13,645</td>
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<td>Gifts in kind</td>
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<td>31,488</td>
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<tr>
<td>Premises costs</td>
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<tr>
<td>Office: ICT, Insuranceand&amp; Comms</td>
<td>17,741</td>
<td>21,532</td>
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<tr>
<td>Governance costs*</td>
<td>17,044</td>
<td>17,827</td>
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<tr>
<td>Digital Development</td>
<td>11,718</td>
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<tr>
<td>Training and Course Costs</td>
<td>5,454</td>
<td>5,311</td>
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<tr>
<td>Subscriptions and Journals</td>
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<td>Bad debts expense</td>
<td>1,294</td>
<td>3,942</td>
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<tr>
<td>Publication design and print</td>
<td>442</td>
<td>8,591</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>849,202</strong></td>
<td><strong>622,345</strong></td>
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*Analysis of governance costs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>2018 (£)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Audit</td>
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<tr>
<td>Annual Report</td>
<td>5,167</td>
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<tr>
<td>EC travel (reimbursed)</td>
<td>1,637</td>
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<tr>
<td>Governance meetings</td>
<td>1,298</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trustee liability insurance</td>
<td>542</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
TRUSTEES

Sean Canning, Hackney Community Law Centre (Vice Chair)
Sally Causer, Southwark Law Centre (Vice Chair)
Sharon Challands, Derbyshire Law Centre
Ruth Hayes, Islington Law Centre (Chair)
Elyane Hill, Central England Law Centre (Secretary)
Sue James, Hammersmith and Fulham Law Centre
Muhammad Khan, Paddington Law Centre
Martha Osamor, Haringey Law Centre
Ian Rajaratnam (co-opted)
Pamela Robotham, Cambridge House Law Centre
Helen Rogers (co-opted)
Michele Rigby, Luton Law Centre
Sarah Scott, Camden Community Law Centre
David Slater, North East Law Centre
Maureen Vincent, Brent Community Law Centre
Nick Whittingham, Kirklees Citizens Advice and Law Centre (Treasurer)

STAFF TEAM

Nimrod Ben-Cnaan, Head of Policy and Profile
Julie Bishop, Director
Alex Charles, Finance and IT Officer
Laura Chilintan, Project Officer – on maternity leave
Raluca David, Project Officer – maternity cover
Helen Gazzi, Innovation Lead
Klara Holdstock, Learning and Development Lead
Cristina Porto, Administrator
Anna-Joy Runco-Farrands, Project Assistant

FUNDERS

AB Charitable Trust
Allen & Overy
Baring Foundation
CAST – Centre for the Acceleration of Social Technology
City Bridge Trust
European Commission Representation to the UK
European Commission – Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme
Freshfields Bruckhaus Deringer
The John Ellerman Foundation
The Law Society of England and Wales
The Legal Education Foundation
Trust for London
In the past year, three longstanding members of our team have left to pursue new challenges. Together they represent decades of accumulated experience, as each has also worked at a local Law Centre before joining LCN.

Cathy Gallagher, formerly of Rochdale Law Centre, was an LCN development consultant and has until May led on solicitor regulation and pro bono development. She continues to serve as a member of the Legal Services Consumer Panel.

Stella Russell, formerly of Avon and Bristol Law Centre, has until recently been an LCN development consultant, leading on training for Law Centres.

Vicki Leaver, formerly of Streetwise Law Centre, has been our Office Manager for several years, and has now joined law practice YESS.

We thank them all for their dedicated contribution to the network through some tough years, and wish them all every success.