

Law Centres Network
Annual Review 2018/19

DOING JUSTICE IN DARK TIMES

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 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.

**“They not only save...
livelihoods; they help
uphold our human and
democratic rights.”**

Katharine Viner, editor-in-chief, The Guardian



On legal aid's 70th year, it is a mere shadow of its original form. As such, Law Centres face dark times and need boundless resilience and determination to keep going — to fight the injustices of austerity on behalf of their clients whilst fighting for funding to do their work.

In this context, the work of LCN's dedicated team is vital. It makes sure that Law Centre lawyers are supported with training and governance advice, and the views of Law Centres and their clients are heard widely.

LCN's selection for the Guardian Christmas appeal shone a light on the great work of Law Centres representing Windrush clients. Bringing Law Centre client stories to the public domain was as important as the funding that followed. As ugly displays of nationalism and self-interest dominate headlines, Guardian readers' generous support exceeded expectations and reminded that many people are still interested in their neighbours and communities and will actively support them.

In a tough funding environment, devoting expertise to funding applications paid off again this year. In July, we were awarded substantial National Lottery funding to transform the digital capabilities of Law Centres across the country. Building on existing work, the funds will help us devise new, practical tools to enhance Law Centres' client services. This award is vital and means Law Centres will be able to keep step with the rapid pace of digital change in the justice sector.

The Law Centres movement itself continues to develop through mixed fortunes. Despite our best efforts to sustain it, we have lost Lambeth Law Centre after nearly 40 years serving its community. However, we were delighted to welcome new member Speakeasy Law Centre, meaning that Cardiff and Wales have a Law Centre once more. Looking ahead, we are curious to see the imprint of LCN's new Junior Lawyers Network, our 'young guard', on the movement's future.

In my first year as chair of trustees, it has been a privilege to work with the staff team and observe their professionalism and commitment to the Law Centre movement close up. The impact made by this small team is truly impressive. As the first LCN chair not representing a Law Centre, I am grateful for the generous support, knowledge and openness of my colleagues on the Executive Committee.

I trust that you will share our appreciation of LCN's achievements reported here.

Helen Rogers
Chair of Trustees

"LCN is a small but impactful organisation, providing real value to its member Law Centres... In our conversations with members and stakeholders it was clear how important people find LCN's work to be and how essential it is to the legal advice landscape."

From Strategic Review 2019



In mid-2018, exhausted by the impact of ceaseless changes to the political and funding landscape, we decided that LCN needed a more sustainable business model. We asked Social Finance to review our effectiveness as an organisation and, looking ahead 3 and 10 years, to make recommendations about how we might achieve this more secure business model.

“With a ten-year vision and now with funds for the first three, we can give it a go. It’s an exciting prospect.”

After interviews with internal and external stakeholders, reviewing LCN's funding and activities and surveying our wider work landscape, Social Finance presented their report to our Board. It found that:

- “LCN is a small but impactful organisation, providing real value to its member Law Centres, who effect real change for the most vulnerable in society every day.”

- “It is a well-run and well-respected organisation... We do not think a dramatic overhaul in operations is necessary or appropriate for LCN.”

It recommended that:

- “LCN concentrates on focusing its activities into those that are most effective and well-received by members and ensure LCN's relevance for Law Centres and within the wider advice landscape.”

- “In the longer term (over the next ten years), LCN considers the implications of the development of a hub and spoke model of Law Centres, with LCN as convener at the centre and Law Centres as either larger regional hubs or smaller 'spokes'.”

Adopting the recommendations, we developed a new strategic and operational plan. Two of our funders, the Legal Education Foundation (LEF) and the AB Charitable Trust, have generously granted funds to enable us to implement resulting initiatives. While we will still depend on grant funding, in three years' time we anticipate establishing a more sustainable financial model for our core services; expanding the network and helping members collaborate more extensively and easily; and increasing our reach and leverage as the collective voice of Law Centres.

The new plan builds on work already in progress. For three years we have been carrying out our

ambitious 2020 Digital Vision for Law Centres: upgrading their ICT infrastructure, moving to a national client management system and developing digital tools to improve client services. Through LEF's generous support of this plan, as well as support from the Centre for Acceleration of Social Technology (CAST), we also received a 3-year grant from the National Lottery Community Fund to further develop digital ways of working in Law Centres.

This support allows LCN to try out some big ideas that we did not have funding to pursue before.

With a 10-year vision and now funds for the first three, we can give it a go. It is an exciting prospect: if successful, we will improve the experience of Law Centre staff and volunteers, as well as their services to clients.

The unexpected closure of Lambeth Law Centre in July was a real loss and low point, and we are careful to learn and share lessons from it among Law Centres. I would like to pay tribute to the extraordinary work and wonderful outcomes for clients achieved over the Law Centre's 38-year history. As it was being packed up, an elderly client arrived at the door seeking assistance. When told of the closure, visibly shaken and upset, he said, **“what will happen to me now?”** We have him and thousands others in mind as we look to re-establish a future Law Centre service in Lambeth. For now, we are still picking up the pieces.

Without diminishing the impact of the Lambeth closure, 2019 was otherwise a good year for LCN. It started with receiving over £300,000 for Law Centres from the Guardian and Observer Appeal, in recognition of their work fighting the Hostile Environment. 22 Law Centres received funds to continue

the work, which is not covered by legal aid. The funds were needed and enormously appreciated, but we were particularly moved by the public acknowledgement of the value of this work. It was a humbling, surprising, proud moment, and we sincerely thank Patrick Butler, Amelia Gentleman, Katherine Viner, all at the Guardian and Observer and, last but not least, their generous readers.

Sincere thanks also go to our chair, Helen Rogers; our Treasurer for the past 5 years, Nick Whittingham, who is stepping down; and to all Executive Committee members. Thanks also to the LCN team for continued hard work, perseverance and good humour. As the Strategic Review noted, **“The work done by LCN staff is impressive, especially given their number.”**

2020 will see the 50th anniversary of the first Law Centres and our movement. We will mark it by inaugurating a fund for Law Centres to draw on, for otherwise unfunded cases. We will also celebrate. More importantly, we will continue to work alongside Law Centres in their communities and together challenge inhumane public policies and practices that punish citizens. We will fight to assert rights, demand fair treatment, and continue to do justice.

Julie Bishop
LCN director

Helping Law Centres be resilient and effective in a complex environment



Increasing the leverage of our casework: a strategic litigation workshop at our Newcastle conference, November 2018

We are using data to shape our next moves, analysing Law Centres' business intelligence in order to control risk, increase productivity, improve services and demonstrate impact.

INNOVATION

SMS tool has already helped 1,610 clients in 5 Law Centres, reducing missed appointments and increasing efficiency

SMS

“I honestly can’t thank you enough for the support and encouragement that you have given me... it’s been a pleasure working with you as you have always provided passion, enthusiasm and commitment.”

Law Centre director

FUNDRAISING

6 in 10 applications were successful, raising £1,563,000 for LCN and Law Centres



The Law Centres movement is facing an immense challenge. Nearly a decade of austerity policies has driven up legal need and therefore demand for our services, while hitting our funding sources hard. As Law Centres’ specialist support organisation, it falls to us to help them do more with less and, most importantly, preserve as much of their resources as possible for delivering legal assistance to their communities.

A key support we provide is through **fundraising assistance**, whose focus this year has been to transition away from European Union funding, where this would cease after Brexit. To do so we have successfully bid for a Home Office support contract under the EU Settlement Scheme. This has been paying for 16 Law Centres across the country to advise EU citizens struggling to secure their rights by applying for Settled Status.

Another fundraising opportunity has come through the Law Centres Network’s selection as one of the beneficiaries of the Guardian and the Observer’s annual appeal at Christmas. Last year’s appeal was focused on pushing back against government’s Hostile Environment policies. It raised some £330,000, distributed between 22 Law Centres to increase their capacity to keep fighting these inhumane policies.

A third fundraising achievement was in securing further backing for our expanding IT-related work. This included funds for further stages of the Law Centres ICT infrastructure project, as well as a three-year, half-million-Pound grant for developing new digital tools for Law Centres. These would improve communication with clients and services to them, and help make the most of specialist lawyers’ time, our most precious resource [more on this in the next section].

Along with increasing income, we are continuing to help Law Centres reduce their expenditure through **group purchase schemes** to benefit from economies of scale. This year we negotiated the renewal of our oldest such scheme, with the online legal resource company LexisNexis. To it were added enterprise licences to social welfare news and discussion resource RightsNet and to NCVO’s Funding Central grants database.

Quantitative changes like these are necessary for the maintenance of Law Centres, but they are not enough. In order to really take things further, we are using data to shape our next moves. Having analysed business intelligence from across the network, we have produced a **pricing tool** that each Law Centre can apply to its own

setting, to set viable fees for legal services that it must charge for because legal aid is no longer available for them. We are accompanying the tool with training on making the most of it and will be studying the uptake among Law Centres in order to develop this further.

We are also getting better at exploiting data by **increasing our digital capacity**. Our ICT infrastructure upgrade is already yielding enough data to support its own business case, saving time equivalent to 1 full-time post just through efficiencies made to the 135 users upgraded in phase 2 last year. Phase 3 got underway in July and is expected to deliver even greater efficiencies. We are also making strides on data collection through the new SMS texting tool for Law Centres to communicate with clients, and by identifying a Client Record Management system, AdvicePro, that would be the Law Centre standard and where client data would be collected and aggregated.

These new developments do not replace traditional services that we continue to offer Law Centres. By providing timely information, targeted training, direct support and follow-on assistance, we helped Law Centres to take on new **civil legal aid contracts**, expand into new areas of practice or provision, or rejoin legal aid after several years' hiatus. This included the standard civil contract tenders last autumn and this summer; and the first ever face-to-face discrimination contracts this autumn, nearly half of which are now held by Law Centres.

LCN is also traditionally concerned with maintaining Law Centres' qualitative edge. In terms of excellence in legal practice, this takes the shape of periodic guidance updates and, most readily, **bespoke training** for Law Centre circumstances. This spans anything from new SRA regulations, through legal aid contract management and supervision, to specific topics like supporting migrant workers and making the most of the Equal Treatment Bench Book (guidance to judges on making court processes more accessible). Our very high satisfaction rate suggests that we are hitting the right note there.

This year we have also pursued a Law Centre **governance project**, aiming to support the trustees of Law Centres to better perform their role of steering not just any local charity, but one that is a law practice. Having surveyed chairs of trustees across the movement, we have updated our governance manual and backed this up with in-person and online training, aimed at reaching every trustee.

The challenge we face remains immense, but with foresight and preparation, with steady improvement and development, and with diligence and skill, we are doing our best to rise up to it.



PRODUCTIVITY

Saving 15 minutes per user per day for the 135 users upgraded this year (phase 2) saved one full-time staff member's time across 4 Law Centres

"Members are generally happy with the support they receive from LCN and supportive of the organisation, and recognised the strength of the leadership of its team."

From Strategic Review 2019



TRAINING

11 workshops with 94 attendees from 29 Law Centres, 90% finding them excellent or very good

"100% of respondents said that their LCN subscription fee is good value for money, which is a strong indication that LCN is providing value for members."

From Strategic Review 2019

WHAT WE DO: BUILDING UP THE LAW CENTRES MOVEMENT

Despite the harsh economic and policy climate in recent years, or maybe because of it, we have seen steady interest in setting up Law Centres.

Over the six years since the legal aid cuts of 2013, six new Law Centres have opened: some in areas that had lost their local Law Centres, others in areas that have never had one.



A new Law Centre shop front appeared this summer on the streets of Cardiff. Presenting Speakeasy Law Centre!

Our most recent member is Speakeasy Law Centre in Cardiff, that replaced one of our oldest Law Centres there after its closure in 2014. Speakeasy had been a local advice organisation but wanted to refocus its work on legal assistance and benefit from the specialist support that we provide. It is now the only Law Centre in Wales, although we hope to find it good company before long.

Groups that want to set up Law Centres, either from scratch or by converting an existing organisation, are welcome to get in touch. We can advise on the requirements

they would need to meet and guide them through the process of change, until our members admit them.

On joining, an organisation takes on the name 'Law Centre', which is protected by a trade mark, and our common brand identity. It can take part in all of our member benefits and services, from online legal resources through IT support and training to advocacy and communications. We can match them with fellow Law Centres for mentoring, and include them in joint projects that we plan and launch.

A resilient, effective membership organisation that initiates national projects



Learning from national as well as international experience: Lenny Abramowicz of the Association of Community Legal Clinics of Ontario talks impact

QUALITY

1 in 3 Law Centres already covered by our Public Indemnity Insurance, with the rest joining next year, in a scheme to assure quality and protect clients

“Convening the community of Law Centres is a core function of LCN... There was a strong sense that LCN members valued being able to connect.”

From Strategic Review 2019



DIRECT HELP
In EU Citizen Rights Project alone worked with 66 community groups to deliver 111 info sessions, attended by 4,500 people and watched online 10,000 times

“The ongoing Salesforce development, and our expansion into digital tools like Communities, is what I am most proud of. Automating certain tasks frees up more of our time for other work. The improved business intelligence we get means we better understand members’ specific needs, so we can provide them with a more focused and connected support offering.”

Alex Charles, Finance and IT Officer



GROWTH
1 new Law Centre and work with 6 organisations interested in joining

LCN strives to deliver a whole, being the network of Law Centres and LCN, that is greater than the sum of its parts. Providing services to Law Centres that complement what they do is one way in which we have traditionally approached this.

Key to this is our role in **convening the movement** and leading it in collective action. We know how easy it can be to get bogged down in the local workaday routine, so we try to make the wider movement more evident to every Law Centre. We hold national and regional meetings, as well as meetings by interest group, such as chairs of trustees, or housing specialists, or admin and finance workers. So far, we have supplemented these with email discussion groups, and we are about to make these more accessible and interactive by introducing online forums through Salesforce Communities.

Communities is a natural next step in LCN’s journey of building **more robust data** structures, primarily through the business Client Record Management system Salesforce. The data that LCN collects about our members and the services we provide them is helping us better target support where it is most needed and ensure that no-one is overlooked or inadvertently left behind. For the small and busy LCN team, this focus and increased efficiency are a big help.

We are about to take this learning from our practice a step further. Regulatory changes have exempted Special Bodies such as Law Centres from having the same **public indemnity insurance (PII)** – a requirement of every law practice – as regulated firms. This has enabled us to finalise a national PII scheme for all Law Centres, in which a third of members are already signed up on a price match basis. On its full roll-out next April, our ‘umbrella’ PII policy would be co-ordinated by a data-driven risk management group, that would monitor and respond to practice trends to ensure quality for all clients.

However, unlike many second-tier or ‘umbrella’ organisations, LCN has increasingly been involved in **direct service delivery** to the public. This continues to expand further while we also observe the principle of subsidiarity: leaving local delivery to Law Centres and stepping in where LCN has a particular advantage – for example, in pursuing opportunities only available to national bodies.

It is through opportunities like these that LCN has successfully taken on the **EU Settlement Scheme** project mentioned earlier, as well as our main Brexit-related project of the past year, the **EU Citizen Rights Information Service**. The one-year project, delivered with the European Commission Representation to the UK, involved Law Centres in delivering over a hundred information sessions across the country with over sixty community organisations. These have reached thousands of people, many of them vulnerable, at a crucial time for them to take action to secure their status. For its part, LCN managed the project, collecting data and sharing insights to inform our other work on this front.

This additional Brexit-related work has included three targeted projects. The first, **EULAMP**, was a collaboration with four partner organisations to assist nearly 400 Latin Americans living in the UK with EU citizenship to assert their rights and access services. The second project, **PRE-Brexit**, targets European Londoners and their families, while also building capacity among non-lawyer professionals who support them. In its first year alone, it raised awareness with over 600 EU citizens and directly advised 347 EU citizens, not only about immigration matters but on their 'right to reside' entitlements to housing and benefits.

These collaborative projects, involving Law Centres and other organisations, allow LCN to expand its reach and demonstrate the way it works with members. This, in turn, attracts more inquiries from interested agencies about **membership**, and we are currently exploring this with a handful of them. This year we have also welcomed a new member in Speakeasy Law Centre of Cardiff, which re-establishes a Law Centre presence in Wales. Based on recent experience, we have been updating our membership offer, improving the way we explain why become a Law Centre and what is required of new groups or existing agencies wanting to convert.

The changing mix in LCN's movement-building work and the greater degree of direct service delivery have been instructive. Our Strategic Review has confirmed that it delivers good value to members and increases our collective impact, so expect to see more work in this vein in the coming years.

"Project management can feel like one administrative task after the other, detached from the frontline. But I know our projects make a difference. Meeting our EU project partners and discussing the support they give to people, I am proud of the work we do together. In the last year alone we have reached out to hundreds of worried people with valuable help through Brexit."

Jenny Antonsson, Projects Officer



COMMUNITY
Well-attended,
well-liked conference
with 27 Law Centres
represented, along with
8 regional or special
interest group meetings
taking in 32 Law
Centres

"The idea for an SMS tool came from Law Centre clients who expected text message reminders. Law Centres we spoke to during development were keen to change their ways of working to accommodate this need. Once we had the basic SMS tool, we saw how much more we could do with it, making it flexible enough to be useful to caseworkers, receptionists and clients alike."

Cristina Porto, LCN administrator

WHAT WE DO: EMBRACING DIGITAL INNOVATION ON OUR TERMS

Our approach to digital development has developed over time but its basic principles have remained the same. We are not interested in creating proprietary tools and apps for the sake of it. We are also not interested in creating self-help tools, as these are already being developed by others. Instead, we want to create digital tools for the context in which we work, helping Law Centres provide better, more responsive services to their clients and, hopefully, helping more of them.



A successful workshop with Law Centres and partners in September kicked off our new three-year digital development project

The first tool we have developed is a customisable SMS text messaging tool to make it easier to keep in touch with clients and guide them between meetings. It is off to a good start and we have secured additional funding to develop it further and, hopefully, share it with other organisations as well.

Having devised a five-year digital strategy, we were overjoyed when we received dedicated funding for it from the National

Lottery Community Fund, as part of the first round of its new digital programme. The grant will fund a three-year movement-wide digital development drive led by LCN, and we have started this off with a workshop to agree our joint priorities in September. We are excited at the opportunities that this presents us with and look forward to sharing developments and insights as an integral part of the process.

A voice for Law Centres using the law to achieve change



Going where the action is: justice minister Wendy Morton MP (third from right) visited Southwark Law Centre in October

"I have found support from LCN invaluable... It's hard, when you are a small and under-resourced organisation, to find time to look at strategic issues."

Law Centre director



PROFILE
Law Centres, through LCN, were featured in the Guardian Christmas appeal 2018 for their work countering Hostile Environment policies

“Law Centres are often among the first organisations to see the ramifications of policy changes. LCN is therefore well placed to communicate these reflections through advocacy and policy engagement.”

From Strategic Review 2019



ADVOCACY
Engagement with 3 government departments and evidence to 2 parliamentary select committees and 1 UN inquiry

“Advocacy and communications is a major component of LCN’s activity on behalf of Law Centres... Respondents saw the advocacy and policy engagement that LCN undertakes as very important.”

From Strategic Review 2019

The mammoth undertaking of Brexit has absorbed huge amounts of policymakers’ time and energy, leaving little for other policy areas such as civil justice. Despite this, in the past year LCN has been busy on the advocacy and profile-raising front, with some welcome results.

Our work **influencing government** has come to a head with the culmination of its **legal aid review** and its publication last December. While it remained frustratingly vague about the impact of the cuts on the public, the advice sector and the justice system, the Ministry of Justice did make some welcome concessions that we have been pushing for, not least ending the mandatory telephone gateway that was throttling a vital service for people facing discrimination. What’s more, the introduction of the Legal Support Action Plan has presented us with new opportunities to inform government thinking on early intervention, digital services and the homelessness prevention duty desks, which we continue to do.

We have also kept up **advocacy** work in related areas. Liaising with the Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government, we have raised detailed objections to its proposals to introduce a specialist housing court, suggesting alternative measures. We have discussed public legal education and information with both the Ministry of Justice and the Attorney General’s Office in order to keep new initiatives practical and helpful to the general public. Drawing on Law Centres’ experience in supporting Windrush migrants, we also contributed to the Home Office’s consultation on the compensation scheme for the people affected.

On **human rights**, we have followed up last year’s evidence to the Joint Committee on Human Rights with contribution to the UN Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights important UK inquiry. Unable to fault Professor Alston’s compelling evidence, the government chose to criticise his style – proof that his incisive critique was hitting home. We remain concerned that, on leaving the European Union, the loss of help to uphold rights would be aggravated by losing some of those rights and protections themselves.

Together with Law Centres, we have also been vocal critics of the £1 billion **court reform** programme, which has already led to closing a third of the court estate, plans to let a third of court staff go, and is heavily invested in digitising most of people’s interactions with the justice system. Our overriding concern, which we have shared with government, has been that the loss of local courts and assistance opportunities curtails vital access to justice,

especially for disadvantaged and vulnerable people. Making this case, we have also informed user research shaping the reforms and proposed accessibility improvements. We have also been sharing the same with the National Audit Office, which scrutinises the reform programme annually, and recently also in oral evidence to the Public Accounts Committee.

A busy public policy year has attracted welcome attention to LCN and Law Centres and helped our **profile-raising** work. We enjoyed a 24% increase in our news media appearances, shared between LCN itself and local Law Centres. Similarly, our social media following has grown by 18% and our reach by double that rate. We have also had more public speaking appearances representing the movement in professional forums at home and abroad. The surge in our reach supports a virtuous circle, introducing Law Centre services and successes to wider audiences, among them new backers and collaborators, who in turn support more services.

Our most notable opportunity on this front has been LCN's selection as one of a handful of beneficiaries of **the Guardian and Observer's annual appeal**. Previously, we had contributed Law Centre client stories to the newspaper's coverage of the Windrush crisis. Then, last autumn, the papers offered us the sterling opportunity to showcase Law Centres' work against the government's dehumanising Hostile Environment policies, and for it to be supported by their readers. The two-month promotional project has been a useful learning experience for us, as well as improving the movement's public positioning and raising welcome support for more Hostile Environment work in Law Centres.

The breadth and variety of our nationwide advocacy work was also reflected in our **regional work** in London, where nearly half of Law Centres are based. We have been actively involved in Greater London Authority (City Hall) discussions on supporting European Londoners and other migrants, and on city-wide data and civil society strategies. We and Law Centres have contributed to a London Assembly inquiry into the local temporary accommodation crisis. We have also contributed to a forthcoming report on social welfare advice provision across the capital and its challenges.

The upheaval in our justice system erodes people's faith in the rule of law and the UK's social contract. As Law Centres continue to help people against injustices, LCN will use their insights to speak truth to power and advocate for equitable policies and accessible services for all.



VOICE

Reaching 43% more people on social media and covered 24% more in news media, two-thirds of which in national media

"When we didn't get the duty tender, LCN's was the first number I rang."

Law Centre director



POLICY

3 of our recommendations taken up in the legal aid review: ending mandatory gateway, reintroducing early advice provision, and raising public awareness

"LCN is at the heart of so much of what we do. Thank you so much for all your work, inspiration and strength."

Law Centre co-ordinator

WHAT WE DO: PREVENTING AND MANAGING LAW CENTRE CLOSURE

As the national body for Law Centres, we have a direct interest in helping them survive and thrive. Sometimes, when things get out of hand and they face a crisis, Law Centres turn to us for support. We can leverage a variety of resources for the benefit of the Law Centre in need, that they may not be able to access on their own. We can negotiate on their behalf with public bodies or raise funds for an emergency cash injection. Where needed, we can advise the trustees and director on what to do, or get them external legal advice on their situation.



In a show of mutual support, solicitors from fellow centres rolled up their sleeves and helped Lambeth Law Centre close in an orderly way

If a Law Centre asks us to do so, we can also provide it with an interim manager, to steer it through a 'special measures' period of restructuring and putting its affairs in order. We have done so in the past with decisive results, and Law Centres know that this help is there for them should they need it.

Sometimes, though, all this may not be enough, or may come too late. This was the

case with Lambeth Law Centre, which closed in July after nearly forty years of operation. Still, even then we can extend help, by putting in the work to make sure that the Law Centre closes in an orderly manner, notifying all clients and creditors and helping staff to move on, sometimes to other Law Centre that can use their experience.

“The conversations I have with evaluators and funders are really instructive, and our projects benefit from the feedback. I’ve been asking more ‘how’ and ‘why’ questions and have been reflecting more critically on our work, focusing on systemic barriers, social and cultural aspects and what works. Our approach to evaluation and learning has definitely gained from these relationships.”

Laura Chilintan, Projects Manager

Approaching shared challenges together: discussing digital development priorities in September



WHAT WE DO: FIGHTING FOR THE BEST PEOPLE FOR LAW CENTRES

One of the great recent challenges of maintaining Law Centres has been the sector-wide workforce shortage. Public spending cuts have devastated the legal aid business model. Several law schools have discontinued their legal aid modules, and training positions were scarce. As social welfare law specialists retired, younger successors have been in short supply.



Mandy, a trainee solicitor from Ealing Law Centre, presents plans for our new Junior Lawyers Network at our Spring general meeting

Concerned about the sustainability of legal aid, we have been working with funders to enable more Law Centre training contracts, be it through the Legal Education Foundation's Justice First Fellowship or the Law Society's Diversity Access Scheme. It is a joy to see trainee numbers growing year on year.

We have been lobbying government for more reasonable legal aid supervision requirements, to optimise the use of our most experienced specialists across the network. We have also advocated for government to revive its legal aid trainee programme as an integral part of this public provision.

While government has yet to commit to this, the Opposition has taken up the cause. The Labour party has pledged not only to support the maintenance and expansion of Law Centres but also to invest in a large-scale legal aid training scheme. We are helping them draw up a blueprint for this.

Among Law Centres' existing workforce, we have welcomed a special interest network for junior lawyers, which should shape the future face of our movement. We are also exploring ways to improve professional development and workplace wellbeing in Law Centres.

The Law Centres Network has changed considerably over its 41 years. Only few now remember that, true to type, we started out as a workers' collective and only appointed our first director in the 1990s.



Peter Kandler, a Founding Father of the Law Centres movement, addresses colleagues and guest of honour Lord Beecham in Newcastle.

“We have reviewed LCN’s current activities and found it to be a well-run organisation that is serving its member needs.”

From Strategic Review 2019

The membership has ebbed and flowed, reaching its highest to date in the early 2000s with 64 members. Despite moving between four offices in the past decade, for some 22 years before LCF (as it was then) had been stably settled in one London office. In fact, for periods during our history that office was one of two, sometimes three regional offices that we operated. Yet through these changes the basic purpose of Law Centres and of LCN has remained remarkably constant over five decades.

Perhaps because of this, we must ask ourselves: after all these years, and especially given the upheaval of the past decade, is LCN still fit for its purpose? This was the question at the basis of our months-long strategic review.

The questions that we have considered would probably sound familiar – you may have wondered about them yourself: **Are government policies putting us in an ultimately impossible position? Is our competitive environment one in which relatively small players as us can sustainably succeed?** Is our medium- and long-term strategic vision a realistic one? And the hardy perennial: are there any income generation ‘tricks’ we may have missed?

The good news is that the review has found our focus to be largely well-placed, so there will be no surprise pivots into new territory. Much of our current work – for example on digital development, improving productivity and data collection – already leads in the direction in which we should be going.

The not-so-good news is that there is also no hidden fundraising ‘big win’, no significant stone we had left unturned in our pursuit of greater financial security – only the familiar channels and working harder at them. Well, we had to try...

Then there are the things you just cannot plan for. Our overwhelmingly good experience with the Guardian and Observer annual appeal is a brilliant example of this. The welcome attention that it has generated has opened doors for new initiatives. We were genuinely heartened by the extent of supporters and the average level of donations, both of which we had previously thought unattainable for controversial issues like the Hostile Environment. The Guardian’s generous platform surely mattered, but could we improve at asking people for their support?

This learning has also been timely given our plans for the coming year. Next July, the Law Centres movement and its first member, North Kensington Law Centre, turn fifty years old. To celebrate the accumulated achievement and support

Law Centres as they start their second half-century, we plan to launch a 50th anniversary appeal.

The fundraising drive, prepared over months, will focus on individual giving by members of the public who care about access to justice. Proceeds will serve as the basis of a standing fund that would support Law Centres' work.


This type of joint project is a first for our movement and reflects a bolder and more joined-up approach to securing future resources for our members.

This joined-up approach will also frame our other plans. We intend to lead on user-led design of new or improved services in Law Centres, and to help lighten their administrative load through more streamlined tech solutions. We will nurture new and existing communities of interest among Law Centres and form a national learning and evaluation network in order to make more of our accumulated experience. We will also redouble our efforts to raise Law Centres' profile, so they and LCN can better

advocate for the concerns of our clients and practitioners and challenge inequality and injustice in all their forms.

The last few years have been challenging, following up the hardship of the world economic crisis with additional pain inflicted by regressive policies of austerity, exclusion and Hostile Environment. The social and economic gaps in our communities have widened, and the 2016 referendum has further divided British society. So much adversity risks becoming normalised, eroding resistance into weary survivalism. How, then, to find it in ourselves to fight on?

We do it because the work arises from our values: a spirit of service and community; recognition of our common humanity; a belief that everyone is entitled to dignity; and that if equal justice is to mean anything, it is to support this dignity. We hold fast to these truths and, as a community of professionals, we turn to one another for support and learning. While times are dark, we make our own light.



Are government policies putting us in an ultimately impossible position? Is our competitive environment one in which relatively small players as us can sustainably succeed?

“Supporting the panel that made the grants from the Guardian Christmas Appeal was a fantastic chance to recognise how different Law Centres respond differently to problems, understanding what the needs are in their communities and coming up with ways to help. It was an important reminder of the value of locally-led work.”

Jayne Edwards, LCN Development Consultant

"18 months ago, the mood in some Law Centre regional meetings was solemn enough that they reminded one participant of bereavement support groups. But with care, over the past year the tone has shifted. It has been so encouraging to hear many Law Centres not only ask for more meetings, because they love attending them, but report having their best years in a long time!"

Klara Holdstock, Learning and Transformation Lead

Our conferences and meetings are important occasions for drawing strength and inspiration from one another



These summarised financial statements contain information from both the Statement of Financial Activities and the Balance Sheet for the year ended 31 March 2019 but are not the full statutory report and accounts.

The summary financial information shows the income raised for our activities was £1,177,401. The cost of raising the income and the amounts spent on our charitable activities were £837,931. The information is taken from the full financial statements which were approved by the trustees on 7 October 2019.

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
7 October 2019

Balance sheet	2019 (£)	2018 (£)
Fixed Assets		
Tangible Fixed Assets	3,641	3,828
Current assets		
Debtors	262,899	170,129
Cash at bank and in hand	530,849	260,133
	793,748	430,262
Creditors: amounts falling due within one year	(189,596)	(165,767)
Net current assets*	604,152	264,495
Net Assets	604,152	268,323
Funds		
Restricted funds		
In surplus	531,077	214,112
Unrestricted funds		
General fund	76,716	54,211
of which designated	51,219	29,987
Total funds	607,793	268,323

*£300,000 of funds carried forward was from Guardian Appeal which has now been distributed to Law Centres


15% of funds raised
this year are for project
delivery with Law Centres

We have reduced our
governance costs by
a further 22%


FINANCIAL STATEMENT

Income			
	% of Income	2019 (£)	2018 (£)
Donations	29.7	349,756	5,925
TLEF — IT National Upgrade	10.8	127,500	223,630
European Commission Contract Service — Citizen's Rights	8.4	99,030	—
Trust for London — PRE Brexit	6.7	78,300	39,050
Subscriptions from Law Centre members	6.2	73,480	72,380
Tides Foundation — IT — SMS Tool & Digital Development	4.8	56,666	—
TLEF — Strategic Review of LCN	4.7	54,890	—
Esmee Fairbairn Foundation	4.0	47,667	—
IT Licensing	4.0	46,598	23,451
TLEF — Social Finance	3.2	38,250	10,000
John Ellerman Foundation	2.5	30,000	30,000
City Bridge Trust — The Way Ahead	2.1	25,000	50,000
Online legal resources	2.1	24,989	22,067
Other Small Grants & Income	1.8	21,517	17,807
AB Charitable Trust	1.7	20,000	—
Gifts in Kind	1.5	17,760	21,261
Trust for London — Developing New Models	1.3	15,000	15,000
TLEF Law Centre Training & Training Fees	1.0	11,798	25,354
Annual conference	0.9	10,410	6,760
Freshfields — General contribuion to core activities	0.8	10,000	—
Barings — Strengthening the Voluntary Sector	0.8	9,990	19,950
TLEF — IT — 5yr Digital Strategy	0.7	8,800	—
European Union Latin American Project		—	156,548
European Commission — Living Rights Project		—	73,510
Future Advice Fund — EU funding (TLEF)		—	25,000
Law Society		—	8,000
Total		1,177,401	845,693

Expenditure			
	% of expenditure	2019 (£)	2018 (£)
Staff costs	34	281,769	291,204
Legal and Professional Fees	18	151,927	76,815
Services to Law Centres	18	146,850	139,626
Grants & Payments to Law Centres	7	62,831	184,930
Bad debts expense (Note 3c)	5	43,933	1,294
Other (Travel & Project Specific costs)	4	35,566	27,131
Gifts in kind	2	17,760	21,261
Premises costs	2	16,680	19,673
Annual Conference & Events	2	15,812	22,896
Office: Office costs, ICT, Insurance & Communications	2	13,618	17,741
Governance costs (note 3b)	2	13,442	17,044
Training and Course Costs	1	11,761	5,454
Staff Travel, Training, Recruitment & Meetings	1	9,056	8,833
Website / Digital Development	1	8,825	11,718
Publication design & print	1	5,243	442
Subscriptions & Journals		2,858	3,142
Total expenditure		837,931	849,202
Support Costs		—	—
Total expenditure		837,931	849,202



**We have reduced
our office costs
by a further 23%**




**Since last year we have
doubled our spending
on Law Centre training**



Thank you to our...

Trustees

Roger Berry
(from April 2019)

Caroline Bottoms
(until September 2019)

Sean Canning
[Vice-Chair]

Sally Causer
[Vice-Chair]

Sharon Challands

Sara Chandler
(from July 2019)

Elayne Hill
[Secretary]

Sue James

Muhammad Khan

Shyam Popat

Michele Rigby

Pamela Robotham

Helen Rogers
[Chair]

Sarah Scott

David Slater

Nick Whittingham
[Treasurer]

Team

Jenny Antonsson
Project Officer
(from February 2019)

Nimrod Ben-Cnaan
Head of Policy and Profile

Julie Bishop
Director

Alex Charles
Finance and IT Officer

Laura Chilintan
Projects Manager

Raluca David
Project Officer
[Maternity Cover]
(until January 2019)

Jayne Edwards
Development Consultant
(from May 2019)

Helen Gazzi
Innovation Lead

Klara Holdstock
Learning and
Transformation Lead

Cristina Porto
Administrator

Anna-Joy Runco-Farrands
Project Assistant
(until September 2019)

Funders

AB Charitable Trust

Allen & Overy

The Baring Foundation

The Bell Foundation

CAST
Centre for the Acceleration of
Social Technology

Eleanor Rathbone Foundation

The Esmée Fairbairn Foundation

European Commission
Representation to the UK

European Commission
Rights, Equality and Citizenship
Programme

Freshfields
Bruckhaus Deringer

The Guardian

Home Office
EU Settlement Scheme

The John Ellerman
Foundation

The Legal Education
Foundation

Microsoft Philanthropy

National Lottery
Community Fund

Trust for London

Twilio.org Impact Fund

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Law Centres Network is a business name of the Law Centres Federation,
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by guarantee no. 2433492.