



Contents

| | |
|------------------------|----|
| Foreword | 3 |
| Introduction | 5 |
| Mission Statement | 9 |
| Mandate | 11 |
| Values | 13 |
| Environmental Analysis | 15 |
| High Level Goals | 19 |
| Implementing the Plan | 35 |



Foreword

As Chairperson of the Legal Aid Board, it gives me great pleasure to introduce this Corporate Plan, which sets out our aims and objectives for the three year period to 2008. Our Plan has been developed following extensive consultation with our stakeholders, including groups with a particular interest in the services we provide, my colleagues on the Board itself, the Board's Partnership Committee and staff at all levels throughout the organisation.

We have made significant strides over the last year in reducing waiting lists for our services in law centres. The numbers waiting for an initial appointment with a solicitor have been reduced from 3,400 in April 2004 to less than 1,000 now. We have also achieved our target of providing a service to clients within 2 to 4 months of their initial contact with the organisation. Immediate appointments continue to be provided for the 20-25% of our clients who qualify for priority services. The Board's Refugee Legal Service continues to provide quality services within even stricter statutory deadlines, while our Refugee Documentation Centre is widely acclaimed as a centre of excellence in its specialised field.

The Board's mission in this Plan is "to provide a flexible, efficient, cost effective and accessible legal aid and advice service". Our mission is underpinned by core corporate values including professionalism, openness to change and customer focus. These values reflect the ethos of the Board, which, as a publicly funded provider of legal services to the less well-off in society, is fully committed to the twin principles of excellence in customer service and accountability to the taxpayer for the resources we employ to achieve that excellence. As far as the Board is concerned, our values are not just abstract concepts; they represent the tangible embodiment of the ethos of the organisation, where our vision is not just to respond to the ever evolving challenge of providing a timely and quality service to our customers, but to seek to ensure that the service we provide is on a par with best practice internationally.

In this Plan we seek to build on the important achievements of the organisation during the timeframe of the Board's three previous Corporate Plans and to position the Board to continue to provide services of a high standard in a timely, customer-focused, cost effective and efficient manner. It is a very exciting and challenging time for the public service generally and the Board is anxious to play its part in actively supporting Government policies on social inclusion, with a particular emphasis on access to justice. I also welcome the continued emphasis on corporate governance and the commitments in the Plan for robust monitoring and evaluation of all aspects of performance across the organisation to ensure appropriate levels of accountability and that the Board provides value for money to the taxpayer.

Our Plan outlines the challenges and opportunities facing the Board. It is intended to give the organisation a clear strategic direction over the medium term, further inculcate a customer service ethos across the entire organisation and ensure that we are flexible and responsive to changing circumstances. The Plan sets out a range of tangible high level organisational objectives and identifies specific outcomes intended to be achieved under each of these objectives. Our success, in meeting these objectives, will be critically evaluated through the actions and performance indicators identified in this Plan.

I am confident that we have a sound basis for making progress in all of the areas we have identified in this Plan. The Board, in partnership with all our staff and our stakeholders, and in consultation with our clients, will strive to achieve the very ambitious objectives set out in this Plan. Our objective is to see the Board firmly established as an organisation committed to delivering the highest standards of public service and as a recognised centre of excellence in the provision of legal aid and advice.

Anne Colley,
Chairperson, Legal Aid Board
November 2005

Introduction

The Legal Aid Board is the statutory body charged with the provision of civil legal aid and advice to persons who satisfy the qualifying requirements of the Civil Legal Aid Act, 1995. Services are delivered mainly through staff employed directly by the Board with a complementary service also provided on a fee per case basis by private practitioners engaged by the Board. The service is provided on a nationwide basis with some 33 full-time and 12 part-time law centres across the country, including the 3 law centres that comprise the Refugee Legal Service (RLS). Legal services are provided to around 17,000 persons annually. Approximately 10,500 cases are in the area of family law; 4,000 cases involve the provision of legal advice and assistance to asylum seekers by the RLS; the remaining 2,500 cases relate to other civil law matters.

The Board also operates a specialised Refugee Documentation Centre which provides an independent and professional research and library service for all of the main bodies involved in the asylum process.

The Board is appointed by the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform and has responsibility under the 1995 Act for:

- The strategic direction of the organisation;
- Determination of policy and monitoring its implementation;
- Overseeing the proper and effective management of the organisation;
- Monitoring the implementation of effective financial procedures and providing accountability;
- Approving and monitoring budgets; and
- Making certain reserved decisions.

The Board operates to the highest standards of corporate governance, in line with the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies. This involves, at Board level, the use of seven committees to assist it in achieving its objectives and in the effective discharge of its responsibilities: the Appeal and Certifying Committees, the Finance Committee, the Audit Committee, the Lawyers Committee, the Human Resources Committee and the Performance Committee.

During much of the period covered by the last Corporate Plan the Board faced considerable challenges in meeting its mandate within the financial resources allocated to it. The outcome of this was considerably increased waiting times for appointments with a solicitor, an inability to fill all positions and a suspension of the private practitioner scheme for a period.

Funding and Service Provision

In October 2004, the Board was successful in its ongoing efforts to secure a substantial increase in funding for 2005. As a result, the Board took immediate steps to put in place a number of initiatives to facilitate the provision of services in a timely manner. These initiatives included the re-introduction of the District Court Private Practitioner Scheme and the establishing of a new service using solicitors in private practice to take on divorce and judicial separation cases in the Circuit Court. These measures had an immediate impact on the availability of legal aid services. The numbers of persons on law centre waiting lists have reduced from a high of 3,800 in March 2004 to just 1,000 in August 2005 and the waiting periods have been reduced to a maximum of four months.

Judgment was delivered in December 2004 in a High Court case against the Board, the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform and the State arising from a delay in providing services. The High Court accepted the Board's contention that it had to operate within the resources available to it in accordance with Section 5 of the Act and that also that it was reasonable for the Board to seek to offer an appointment with a solicitor within a 2 to 4 month period. The level of funding that was provided for 2005 was sufficient to enable the Board to meet this target. The Board is confident that it will continue to be in a position where it can meet all applications for legal services within this time frame.

Corporate Plan Consultation Process

This Corporate Plan, covering the three year period 2006 to 2008, is the Board's fourth such Plan. It has been drawn up following a wide consultation process with staff of the Board and external groups and individuals who have a particular interest in the services provided by the Board. In tandem with the consultation process, a rigorous review of the organisation's operating environment and internal operating policies and procedures has been undertaken along with research into the models for service delivery in comparable organisations in other jurisdictions. As a result of this process, the Board is confident that its mission statement, high level goals and specific objectives reflect its statutory remit, international best practice for service delivery and the views of customers and other stakeholders, both internal and external. This plan also focuses more clearly on the link between the resources available for service delivery and measuring the effectiveness of the deployment of those resources. This reflects the need for good corporate governance and the attendant need to demonstrate value for money with a particular focus on outputs and outcomes arising from the resources deployed for service delivery.

This Plan seeks to build on the considerable achievements during the period of the Board's first three plans to ensure that the Partnership approach continues to provide the overall framework for translating strategy into action at all levels within the organisation's structures.

Developments over the lifetime of the previous Corporate Plan

Developments that have taken place over the lifetime of the previous Corporate Plan include :-

- Significant improvement in the time within which an appointment with a solicitor in law centres is offered;
- The provision of services by the Refugee Legal Service within exacting time limits;
- Agreement on implementation of new service delivery mechanisms;
- Development of a nationwide private practitioners scheme;
- The refurbishment of a number of the Board's law centres and the acquisition of more suitable accommodation in a number of areas;
- The improvement of internal service delivery through restructuring of sections and the implementation of new procedures and practices;
- Significant enhancement of the Board's information technology infrastructure;
- Development of the Human Resources Management System (HRMS)
- Restructuring of the Human Resources function in the Board;
- Improvements in the monitoring and evaluation of organisational performance through further development of management information systems;
- Roll-out of the Performance Management and Development System (PMDS) and external evaluation of its effectiveness;
- Implementation of more robust corporate governance procedures, including the development of a risk management strategy and a risk register;
- Development of a customer action plan and charter;
- Implementation of measures to enhance the role and representativeness of Partnership in the organisation following a comprehensive review of partnership in the Board;
- Development of a training strategy;
- Development of a Workforce Plan;
- Finalisation of an industrial relations procedural agreement with unions representing solicitors in the Board.

The main focus of this Corporate Plan is to enable the Board to implement its objectives in a cost effective and customer focused manner. This will be achieved by:-

- articulating the manner in which the Board proposes to build on important developments in the previous plan;
- identifying new initiatives designed to ensure that the service provided at all levels of the organisation is comparable to best international standards; and
- providing for robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, through ongoing review of the implementation of the objectives set, by reference to detailed performance indicators.

Mission Statement

To provide a professional, efficient, cost-effective and accessible legal aid and advice service.

Mandate

The Civil Legal Aid Act, 1995 which established the Legal Aid Board, provides a statutory framework whereby persons may apply for legal services in civil law matters in accordance with the provisions of the Act.

Section 5(1) of the Act states:

“The principal function of the Board shall be to provide, within the Board’s resources and subject to the other provisions of this Act, legal aid and advice in civil cases to persons who satisfy the requirements of this Act.”

Section 5(2) makes provision for the dissemination, for the benefit of those for whom its services are made available, of information in relation to those services and their availability.

The Board makes the services of solicitors and, where necessary, barristers available to persons of modest means in relation to matters of civil law. The Board’s current statutory remit and the level of resources provided are the main determinants of the range and responsiveness of the services provided by the organisation.

Values

Since its establishment, the Board has sought to reflect a series of values that support the implementation of its Mission Statement and underpin the manner in which the Board would like to see its services operate. These include:

For Service

- Professionalism
- Customer Focus
- Openness to Change

For staff

- Openness
- Emphasis on training and development
- Teamworking

For Government

- Cost effectiveness and value for money
- Proactiveness and Responsiveness

Environmental Analysis

The environment within which the Legal Aid Board operates has, no less than society as a whole and the legal system generally, undergone considerable change in recent years. There is little to suggest that it will be any less dynamic during the period covered by this Plan. To be effective, the Board needs to be constantly aware of changes occurring outside the organisation, whether these changes be political, social, economic or technological, and seek to position itself to best respond. There is a need also to be conscious of internal strengths and capacity as well as the Board's remit, both statutory and social, in considering the initiatives that can be put in place with a view to appropriately addressing the legal needs of those least well off in society. Thus, both the external environment and the Board's internal strengths and capacity need to be kept under close scrutiny.

1. External Environment

The nature of the operation of the Legal Aid Board means that a considerable number of organisations and individuals interact with the organisation on an ongoing basis. These include individuals seeking legal aid or advice in respect of civil law issues, including asylum issues and country of origin information or other research from the Refugee Documentation Centre. It also includes professionals, Government Departments, State bodies, a range of representative bodies and other agencies, interest groups and the media.

As will have been seen from the Introduction, change has been a recurring feature for the Legal Aid Board, not just over the period of the last Corporate Plan, but also in the decade since the establishment of the Board as a statutory body in 1995. It is quite clear, in common with the experience of other public service bodies, that the pace of change is likely to increase rather than diminish. This puts an onus on the Board to have a culture and processes in place which not only allow it to respond effectively to such change but, itself, to be the originator of, or catalyst for, change and modernisation where appropriate. The changes likely to have greatest impact on the Board include:

- Continuing changes in social relationships and family models;
- Changing structures dealing with immigration and asylum;
- Legislative and policy changes;
- Increasing diversity of the population, reflected in the profile of the users of services;
- The extent of resources made available to the Board to conduct its business;
- The changes in employment law in the public service being introduced through the Public Service (Management and Recruitment) Act, 2005;
- Changes in the regulatory environment relating to the legal professions;
- Government policy initiatives contained in Sustaining Progress and any successor National Agreements, particularly in the areas of equality, diversity, disability, the Irish language, health and safety, partnership and the workplace of the future;
- Continuing changes in the area of governance, including both financial and political accountability;
- Increased emphasis on value for money and measurable outcomes;
- Information technology, particularly the increased emphasis on eGovernment;
- Increased public expectation in terms of the manner and quality of service provided;
- The current decentralisation programme;
- Increased necessity to consult with and involve support and interest groups; and International developments in the area of civil law, including case law of the European Court of Human Rights, and the requirement for increased contact with other jurisdictions and institutions.

2. Internal Environment

Internal change is an inevitable consequence, indeed a requirement, of responding to external change. Practices, processes and structures also need to be constantly kept under review in order to ensure optimum organisational effectiveness. The main influences in this area over the lifetime of this Plan are likely to be:

- Increased emphasis on Partnership as the most effective means of managing and decision making in the Board;
- Effective leadership at all levels;
- Effective management of performance through the utilisation of the Performance Management and Development System (PMDS);
- Continued emphasis on training and development of staff;
- Continuing review of organisational structures and mode of delivery to ensure that service is provided to clients in the most efficient and effective manner possible;
- Continued monitoring and evaluation of the Board's capacity and effectiveness in meeting strategic objectives and responding to changing demands;
- The necessity for effective communication throughout the organisation;
- The development and implementation of an ICT strategy for the Board;
- The development of a knowledge management strategy for the Board;
- Decentralisation, particularly the impact of increased staff turnover, loss of corporate knowledge and costs of training new staff; and
- Managing a geographically dispersed service.

High Level Goals

This Corporate Plan is action oriented and is designed to implement the Board's mission and vision for the organisation in a cost effective, efficient and customer focused manner. This will be achieved through seven high level goals each of which is governed by more detailed and specific outcomes and actions. The Board has also developed a series of key performance indicators for each action so that it will be possible to monitor and review progress with the implementation of the Plan and evaluate the quality of the outcomes. The Board's seven high level goals and the attendant outcomes, actions and key performance indicators are outlined as follows.

- 1 High level goal - To provide a professional, accessible quality service

Outcomes

- Provision of an effective and timely service;
- Provision of a priority service in accordance with approved arrangements;
- Provision of a fully developed system of quality assurance of the Board's professional services;
- Development and implementation of effective mechanisms for the monitoring of the throughput of cases;
- Provision of a service which is responsive to the identified legal needs of clients;
- Development of robust service delivery mechanisms with a view to ensuring effective access to the service; and
- Ongoing monitoring of the efficiency and effectiveness of the service provided by the Board.

Actions

Review arrangements for providing priority services to persons in need of such service.

Provide all other eligible persons with an initial appointment with a solicitor within a maximum period of 2 to 4 months.

Seek to provide such service within 2 months by the end of 2008.

Monitor and review operation of new and approved arrangements regarding management of waiting lists from second quarter 2006 onwards.

Finalise ongoing programme of developing Best Practice Guidelines.

Introduce an agreed programme of best practice for private practitioners.

Develop and implement arrangements for assessment of the service actually supplied.

Continue to ensure that decision processes within the Board's remit are conducted in a timely and professional manner.

Put in place appropriate and effective management information processes.

Develop criteria for determining appropriate caseloads in law centres.

Develop and introduce regular client surveys and appropriate responses to outcomes.

Identify any issues or barriers to accessing the Board's legal aid and advice services as provided for in the 1995 Act and develop proposals.

Develop appropriate criteria and structures for determining efficiency and effectiveness in provision of the Board's services.

Performance Indicators

Review completed and Action Plan developed by July 2006.

Monthly monitoring of waiting lists and timely action where needed.

Proposals developed to secure this objective and submitted to Board by mid 2008.

Monthly reports on progress.

Guidelines completed and operational by June 2006.

Programme agreed and in place in September 2006.

Proposals developed by end 2006 and formal arrangements in place by mid 2007.

Quarterly reports to management.

Identify key management information needs by mid 2006 and develop effective processes for collation and analysis.

Criteria finalised and agreed by July 2006.

Client surveys in place by September 2006.

Proposals developed by September 2006.

Criteria developed and report prepared for management team by end 2007. Structures revised and modified as necessary.

- 2 High level goal - To ensure the Board is innovative and responsive in its approach to effective service delivery

Outcomes

- Ongoing review of the arrangements for providing legal aid services and consideration of how best to meet the needs of clients and potential clients;
- Development and implementation of new models of service delivery;
- Streamlined administrative arrangements for the provision of legal aid services;
- A review of the possible need for an out-of-hours service;
- Establishment of a research role in the Board;
- An increase in the knowledge base and capacity of the Board;
- Development of new policies and practices on alternative dispute resolution mechanisms;
and
- Flexible and responsive organisational processes and practices to enable the Board to respond proactively to new demands or proposed extensions of services.

Actions

Structured review of client needs, actual and potential, and within the current remit of the Board.

Develop and introduce appropriate arrangements for a pilot advice-only service.

Examine and develop proposals for a telephone service.

Examine and develop proposals regarding the most effective administrative arrangements for the provision of legal aid services, for example through a centralised, on-line applications facility.

Prepare and publish a staff handbook on administrative arrangements.

Assess potential demand for legal aid services outside office hours and issues arising.

Develop appropriate structures for research in the Board and identify specific areas for consideration.

Further develop links with third level institutions.

Keep international and domestic developments in the area of civil law under review.

Maintain and develop relationships with legal aid service providers in other jurisdictions and with the Council of Europe, UNHCR and other appropriate agencies.

Further develop the collaborative law approach in the organisation.

Engage as required with the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform in respect of requests for developing the range of the Board's services.

Performance Indicators

Review Group established by March 2006 and report prepared by December 2006.

Pilot project in place by end March 2006. Quarterly reports in 2006/07. Report on effectiveness of service by September 2007.

Research completed by end March 2006 and report developed by June 2006.

Review all administrative arrangements and introduce pilot project for a centralised applications facility for Dublin area by end June 2006 and consider its effectiveness by end of 2006. Review forms/documentation to ensure that they are client-focused and in plain English.

Handbook published in the first quarter 2007.

Assessment to be completed before end 2006.

Identify requirements and options by end March 2006. Develop proposals by end June 2006. Build on existing links in structured manner.

Programme agreed by end 2006.

Develop structured means of keeping developments under review.

Maintain appropriate relationships through annual meetings of bodies such as the Joint Consultative Committee.

Continue to provide training to solicitors. In partnership with the legal profession, roll out the collaborative law process by September 2006.

Develop structured communication process with the Department and report progress to Board twice yearly.

- 3 High level goal - To provide services in an environment which is appropriate to the business being conducted by the Board

Outcomes

- An effective customer oriented environment and service;
- All staff to be aware of intercultural and diversity issues;
- Facilities appropriate to meet the requirements of confidentiality and the physical and other needs of customers as well as organisational business;
- All premises comply with health and safety legislation including appropriate access for disabled;
- Mechanisms are in place to provide for structured feedback from customers in relation to the quality of facilities and other services;
- Full compliance with the provisions of the Official Languages Act, 2003.

Actions

Implement the commitments contained in the Board's Customer Service Action Plan and Customer Charter including:

- (i) The timeliness and quality of services
- (ii) The extent and quality of information supplied and
- (iii) The commitment to confidentiality, integrity and professional standards.

Provide information and training on intercultural and diversity issues across the organisation.

Develop and implement intercultural strategies, training and a charter in the Refugee Legal Service in accordance with the provisions of the National Action Plan against Racism.

Complete a facilities audit of all Board premises.

Review and update Health and Safety Strategy for the Board.

Ensure that the provisions of the Disability Act, 2005 are complied with.

Develop processes to collate and analyse feedback from customers relating to the quality of the Board's facilities.

Complete the required Scheme provided for in the Official Languages Act, 2003 and put a full implementation programme in place.

Performance Indicators

Develop new Customer Service Action Plan by June 2006 and an action plan for implementation. Include report on commitments in Charter in Annual Reports.

Continued training provided during 2006. Information pack developed by end 2006.

Initial strategy developed by end March 2006.

Audit to be completed during 2006.

Health and Safety Strategy and appropriate organisational arrangements to be in place by end July 2006.

Action plan regarding ongoing compliance in place by end March 2006.

Processes to allow for meaningful feedback and response in place during 2006.

Scheme developed within 6 months of request. Implementation programme drawn up and put in place.

- 4 High level goal - To put in place an effective public information, education and communication process

Outcomes

- Details of the Board's services are published in an effective, accessible and user-friendly manner;
- A comprehensive communications strategy;
- Further enhancement of the Board's website to complement other systems of promoting and disseminating information on services;
- A comprehensive information package regarding the Board's services is widely available;
- Proactive engagement with community groups and other groups acting for marginalized or disadvantaged people;
- Effective working with the Board's External Consultative Panel to make for more meaningful engagement.

Actions

Publicise details of the Board's services in an effective, accessible and user-friendly manner;

Ensure that all Board publications, particularly information leaflets, are widely and appropriately disseminated.

Publish details of all Board's promotional material on its Website.

Review communications systems and processes with a view to developing a comprehensive communications strategy.

Further enhance the Board's website to complement other systems of promoting and disseminating information on services. Redesign Board's Website.

Ensure Application forms downloadable.

Investigate feasibility of online applications.

Establish and promote a comprehensive information package regarding the Board's services.

Develop proposals regarding the manner in which the Board can proactively engage with community groups and other groups acting for marginalized or disadvantaged people.

Continue to engage with the Board's External Consultative Panel on all aspects of the Board's business.

Performance Indicators

Report on outcome of review of requirements by June 2006.

Review of distribution arrangements by June 2006.

Material on website by June 2006.

Strategy published in July 2006.

Website redesigned by end March 2006.

Application forms downloadable by end June 2006.

Feasibility study completed by end 2006.

Package available by July 2006.

Report on options by September 2006.

Further develop structures and communication processes with Consultative Panel.

- 5 High level goal - To develop the capacity of the Board to deliver a quality professional service

Outcomes

- An effective and responsive strategy regarding the management and development of staff of the Board;
- Development of a comprehensive knowledge management framework;
- An effective and comprehensive training strategy for staff which addresses both current and emerging organisational and development needs;
- Effective evaluation mechanisms in place to monitor the effectiveness and appropriateness of all training provided;
- Identification and provision of appropriate training and information programmes for legal practitioners involved in the Private Practitioner Service;
- Continued implementation of best practice recruitment and selection policies;
- A fully operational and effective Performance Management and Development System;
- Effective processes of communication within the organisation.

Actions

Develop and publish a revised Human Resources strategy.

Review the manner in which organisational knowledge is captured, managed, shared and used and introduce new processes where deemed necessary.

Publish and disseminate Training and Development Strategy.

Produce a twice yearly report on training and development for consideration by senior management and the Board.

Develop structured evaluation mechanisms for monitoring the effectiveness and appropriateness of training provided taking account of the work done by the National Centre for Partnership and Performance and other sources.

Ensure continuing engagement with staff on training and development in the organisation through the Staff Development Work Group.

In consultation with the Law Society of Ireland develop appropriate training and development programmes for legal practitioners involved in the Private Practitioner service.

Develop an internal code covering best practice selection and recruitment policies to be utilised by the Board.

Implement the recommendations contained in the external review of the Performance Management and Development System (PMDS) in the Board.

Ensure that all time deadlines regarding completion of the various elements of PMDS are adhered to by all staff of the Board by carrying out regular audits and putting in place appropriate monitoring procedures.

Develop a structured means of responding to all training and development requests arising under PMDS.

Put in place arrangements for conducting an annual training needs analysis within the organisation.

Further develop existing internal communications structures.

Develop and implement an internal communications strategy.

Performance Indicators

Strategy published by end June 2006.

Each unit reviewed during 2006.

Strategy published by end March 2006.

Reports available in July and December.

Evaluation mechanisms in place end December 2006.

Further develop the remit of the Work Group by end March 2006. Review membership.

Private Practitioner training to commence in July 2006.

Code to be in place by end September 2006.

Recommendations as agreed by the Management Team to be in place first quarter 2006.

Deadlines adhered to from January 2006. Audits to commence in same month.

All training requests to be collated on HRMS and quarterly reports provided to Management Team.

First training needs analysis to be conducted during 2006.

Review to be conducted in first half of 2006. At least 3 editions of LabLife to be published annually.

Strategy in place by September 2006. Partnership sub-group to monitor implementation.

- 6 High level goal - To develop the capacity of the organisation to respond positively to a changing work environment

Outcomes

- Continued review of developments in the public sector and generally, and identification of appropriate strategies to ensure the ongoing effectiveness of the organisation;
- Ongoing review of procedures and work practices to maintain and improve service delivery;
- Effective development and utilisation of technology in the delivery of service;
- An effective and cohesive partnership process at organisational and unit levels.

Actions

Engage actively with relevant civil service wide networks.

Develop an appropriate strategy to manage the impact on the organisation of the current decentralisation programme.

Continue to adopt a structured approach to review of business procedures and processes across the organisation.

Provide appropriate support to ensure that all staff are proficient and confident in the effective use of available technology.

Finalise and publish a new ICT strategy together with implementation dates.

Implement the recommendations of the ICT strategy, including

- Strengthen the underlying infrastructure through the introduction of central storage and effective disaster recovery and business continuity measures;
- Improve operational capacity by introducing a Legal Aid Board portal and further develop applications to support service delivery;
- Improving information service to clients by use of web enabled technology.

Further develop the central Partnership structure through the expansion of membership to include staff members representative of grade, gender and geographic location.

Develop proposals for ensuring that Partnership is more central to the development and implementation of strategic and operational change within the Board.

Performance Indicators

Membership of and attendance at all relevant networks and groups. Report to Management Team every 6 months.

Strategy developed by end March 2006.

Structured approach refined and applied to all units. Report to Management Team annually.

Review of needs of each individual unit following Central Storage project and support provided on a unit and individual level. Report to Management Team each quarter.

ICT Strategy published in first quarter 2006.

Implementation Plan agreed in first quarter 2006.

New structure in place by start of 2006.

Proposals to Partnership Committee and Management Team by mid 2006.

- 7 High level goal - To achieve the best use of the financial and operational resources allocated to the Board and to ensure value for money

Outcomes

- Full compliance with the Government's Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies;
- Robust financial management and reporting systems are in place and are reviewed on an ongoing basis;
- An effective risk management process including an ongoing review process;
- Operating to the highest standards in relation to procurement;
- Further development of an effective audit process covering both financial and procedural matters;
- Review of the cost effectiveness of the various means of service provision by the Board.

Actions

Meet the requirements of the Comptroller and Auditor General at the annual audit.

Prepare a comprehensive submission for the Chairperson's annual assurance and compliance report to the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform.

Supply the Board and management with appropriate financial reports.

Provide regular analysis of expenditure to the Finance Committee.

Ensure compliance with the requirements of the Departments of Justice, Equality and Law Reform and Finance on Estimate and expenditure returns.

Review and update the Risk Register.

Update the Audit Committee and the Board on progress on managing Corporate Risk.

Ensure risk management principles are embedded in the Business Planning process.

Review training and development needs on procurement and provide necessary training during the course of the year.

Continue to comply with requirements to provide regular reports to the Finance Committee on procurement exercises.

Obtain approval for the annual audit plan.

Identify and provide any further necessary training to Internal Audit and Audit Committee members.

Examine the feasibility of extending the audit process to procedural matters by Quarter 1 2007.

Complete phase 1 of the Value for Money (VFM) exercise on legal services in law centres by Quarter 1 2006 and overall exercise by Quarter 2 2008.

Initiate VFM exercise on Private Practitioner services.

Continue to market test a selection of external service providers to the Board.

Performance Indicators

Requirements met in timely fashion.

Submission completed in manner agreed by Chairperson and in good time for report.

Reports provided in advance of all Board meetings, Finance Committee meetings and Management Team meetings and as required.

Analysis submitted to Finance Committee as requested.

Ongoing compliance as required.

Risk Register reviewed and updated quarterly.

Update provided to Audit Committee for every meeting and to Board on an annual basis.

Included in Business Plans for 2006 and subsequent years.

Review to be conducted in first quarter 2006.

Schedule of procurement exercises to be agreed with Finance Committee in first quarter of each year.

Audit Plan approval at the beginning of each year Annual review of training needs.

Requirements forwarded to Director of Human Resources in first quarter of each year.

Feasibility study conducted by end 2006.

Completed on time.

Exercise initiated by June 2008.

Annual programme agreed at beginning of each year.

Implementing the Plan

This Corporate Plan has been developed with a particular focus on implementing the many targets set for the Board over the next three years. It includes very ambitious timeframes for almost every new initiative proposed. There is a strong Board and organisational commitment to ensuring that these targets are met.

The Board, through its statutory role under the Civil Legal Aid Act, 1995 has ultimate responsibility for overseeing the implementation of this Corporate Plan. The various Board committees will play an active role in overseeing progress made over the duration of the Plan and a formal report will be presented to the Board twice yearly outlining the progress made on every action.

Operational responsibility for implementation lies with the Board's management and staff and a formal review of progress will be conducted each quarter by the Management Team. Each of the actions outlined in this Plan will be reflected in the annual Business Plans of the relevant area and will be subject to review on an ongoing basis. The effective implementation of the Performance Management and Development System, through the active engagement of all staff, will also be a critical element in the success of this Plan. The Partnership Committee and other key committees will also be updated on progress on an ongoing basis.

Key Challenges

There are a number of challenges facing the Board in successfully implementing the actions outlined in this Plan:

- **Resources**

The success of the Board in meeting the challenges posed is heavily dependent on acquiring and retaining sufficient resources, not just to meet existing demand for our services, but also to ensure that the organisation has the capacity to effectively respond to any variations in service demand or any new responsibilities assigned to it. These include not just financial resources, but also human resources thereby emphasising the importance to the Board of continuing to attract and retain highly motivated and suitably qualified staff.

- **Engagement of Staff**

The current success of the Board is due in no small part to the commitment and dedication of the staff in its 36 different locations. This is reflected in the ongoing partnership approach adopted across the organisation, involving the encouragement of an open style of management and a participative approach to addressing organisational and unit challenges. Crucial to the success of this Corporate Plan will be the further embedding of partnership as a key element in the implementation process. Staff at all levels will need to be fully engaged with the process over the lifetime of this Plan.

- **Communication**

This Plan acknowledges the importance of communication, external and internal, in its development and subsequent implementation. By communicating the purpose of this Plan to all parties with a role to play in its implementation, the Board will seek to establish and maintain active and constructive engagement in its efforts to achieve the ambitious targets set out for the duration of the Plan.

