Southern England Law Centre

Providing free and low-cost specialist legal services to alleviate poverty and disadvantage for over 40 years.

We provide specialist legal advice and representation in…

Legal Aid | Housing | Pro Bono | Benefits

Strategic Plan

2025 - 2030

Approved by the Board of Trustees in May 2025.

Last reviewed and updated: May 2026

Version Control

Version	Revisions	Date Approved	Approved by	Next review date
1.0	• Initial approval.	May 2025	Trustees	February 2026
2.0	• Strategic Plan reviewed and extended to 2030 at 2026 Trustee Away Day. • Updated to SELC branding. • New version control table. • Extension of the Strategic Plan timeline from 2028 to 2030. • Addition of explanatory note in Section 3: Production and review, outlining the rationale behind the extension of the Strategic Plan timeline. • Added link to the minutes of the 2026 Trustee Away Day in Section 3.1. • Review and update of Section 7: Resources Overview for 2025 - 2030	May 2026	Trustees	February 2030

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1. About Southern England Law Centre

Established in 1981, the Law Centre is a registered charity providing free and low-cost specialist legal advice in Housing and Welfare Benefits to individuals on low incomes.

In recent years, we have significantly expanded our housing law programme, to address the growing specialist advice desert in south and southwest England, and we now represent clients from West Sussex to Worcestershire and from eastern Hampshire to Devon. We hold Housing and Debt Legal Aid contracts for Hampshire, Gloucestershire, Portsmouth and the Isle of Wight, Southampton and Wiltshire. We also hold Housing Loss Prevention Advice Service (HLPAS) contracts—enabling us to provide early legal advice and court duty—for Aldershot, Basingstoke, Gloucester, the Isle of Wight, Portsmouth, Salisbury, Southampton and Swindon.

With funder support, we have rebuilt our welfare benefits appeals programme. By providing benefits advice and representation, clients can avoid other legal and personal difficulties (e.g., in relation to their housing and health).

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2. Our Purpose

This strategic plan sets out our plans for the next three years, recognising the challenges we are facing and identifying our objectives, within our overall vision, mission, beliefs and values.

2.1 Our mission, vision and values

2.1.1 Our mission

- To provide free and low-cost specialist legal services to our communities.
- To fight for changes to laws and policies that perpetuate disadvantage.

2.1.2 Our vision for 2030

- Everyone in Southern England will have access to free or low-cost specialist legal advice when they need it.

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2.1.3 Our Values

Southern England Law Centre proudly adheres to these values:

- **Equal justice:** Human rights and equality before the law are the cornerstone of a fair and just society. Everyone has a right to equality before the law. This is only possible if every person can access high quality, independent and expert legal assistance, regardless of their means to challenge unjust laws and circumstances.
- **Dignity and respect:** We believe people should be able to live in their communities with dignity and respect. We aim to be empathetic and honest at all times.
- **Trust:** We recognise the specific circumstances of individuals or groups and tailor our services accordingly. We will always do what we can to create an environment of trust so that clients can understand their rights and engage in any legal processes that concern them.
- **Independence:** We must be free to champion the rights of the most disadvantaged and should be directly accountable to local people.
- **Social Justice:** We respond to needs in the community by raising the awareness of human and legal rights, pursuing test cases, influencing social policy and campaigning for social justice. We believe in early intervention and prevention, where possible. We are committed to working with local people, pursuing their cases until a just outcome is achieved.

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3. Production and review

This Organisational Strategy and Business Plan for 2025 – 2030 draws heavily on the previous 2022-25 strategy. It has also been informed by the Trustee Away Day in February 2024, the 2024-25 staff satisfaction survey and the group exercises at the all-staff conference in October 2024. The Law Centre management team developed then developed a draft for discussion at the Trustee Away Day in February 2025, and the Trustees amended further drafts. It aligns with the Lexcel Standard for Legal Practices Strategy Guidance set out in the appendix. The Board adopted it in May 2025, and it will be used for ongoing consultation with volunteers, staff, funders, and stakeholders about how we develop our services.

Note: At the Trustee Away Day in February 2026, the Board agreed that the Strategic Plan should be extended to 2030. Our strategic aims are intentionally set on a long-term horizon and are not expected to change frequently. However, the Board recognises that the social, economic and policy environment in which we operate is changing rapidly. This strategy is therefore a living document: while our overarching aims remain stable, the ways in which we deliver them will be reviewed regularly and adapted as needed through our business planning, budgeting and governance processes.

This strategy is intended to guide our work through to 2030. While the strategic aims are long-term and stable, the environment in which we operate is not. Trustees and management will therefore keep the implementation of this strategy under regular review and will adapt operational plans and priorities as needed, so that we remain responsive while maintaining a clear and consistent overall direction.

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3.1 Organisational Strategy Elements

The following discussions, tools and documents have helped us develop this strategy and are linked below (please note, these links will only work if you have SELC network account):

- Strategic Plan 2022-2025 - LEXCEL
- WLC Trustee Away-Day Notes Combined- 28-02-24.docx
- WLC Staff Conference 2024 Group Exercise Outputs.docx
- WLC Staff Satisfaction Survey 2024
- WLC Trustee Away Day Notes - 20.02.2025.docx
- Away Day 2026 - Minutes.docx

3.2 Business Planning

The organisational strategy and objectives will be delivered using annual business plans. These will contain specific, deliverable actions aligned to the strategy and objectives. These business plans will be used along with the organisational strategy to monitor progress against the objectives. The procedure for regular reporting on performance is outlined in section 12.

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4. Strategic Aims for 2025 – 2030

Southern England Law Centre will pursue three strategic aims over the 2025-30 period:

Strategic Aim 1

Build Access to Justice: provide an exceptional service for our clients and respond to the unmet legal needs of the communities where we operate in housing, welfare benefits and other areas of law. Challenge barriers through improving relevant laws and policies.

Strategic Aim 2

Ensure Resilience: secure the long-term sustainability of the Law Centre through diversifying our revenue streams, delivering fundable services and investing in our staff and volunteers. Continue re-developing specialist social welfare legal provision by hiring, developing and supporting additional legal practitioners, managers and all staff.

Strategic Aim 3

Regrow the Specialist Legal Advice Desert: assume a leading role in Southern England to expand specialist legal advice, develop relevant partnerships and referral pathways, and challenge policies and procedures that negatively impact our clients.

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5. Key Challenges for 2025 – 2030

We recognise that we will face challenges in pursuit of our strategic aims. We have identified the most significant challenges as follows:

- **Broader demand:** the needs of our communities for specialist legal services go far beyond our current offer, particularly given the lack of other providers.
- **Reduced funding opportunities:** Legal Aid funding has been stagnant for more than thirty years and grant funding is generally less available and unpredictable. For some, there is no LAA support for welfare benefits.
- **Changes in clients' accessibility requirements:** the service delivery model has drastically changed in since Covid-19.
- **Remote working:** large, rural area requires remote working, sometimes leading to staff feeling isolated.
- **Legal Aid Agency contract requirements:** for instance, ensuring we can meet the required supervisory ratios (e.g., housing requires one supervisor for every four caseworkers).
- **Recruitment and retention of staff**: Recruiting supervisors and specialists in other areas of law, for instance, someone who can meet the family LAA requirements.
- **Overstretched resources:** heavy reliance on limited staff numbers to respond to increasing demand and client complexities.

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6. Objectives and Risk Evaluation for 2025-30 (Lexcel 1.2.a and f)

Our objectives for 2025-30 have been developed to support our three strategic aims:

Strategic Aim 1
Build Access to Justice: provide an exceptional service for our clients and respond to the unmet legal needs of the communities where we operate in housing, welfare benefits and other areas of law and challenging barriers through improving relevant laws and policies

#	Objective	What we will do	Outcomes *We will know when we have achieved this if we…*	Risk Evaluation of Objectives
1.1	Expanding Free and Low-Cost Specialist Legal Service Provision to low-income individuals and households	When funding and resources allow, we will seek to provide services beyond our current offer to meet demand of communities.	Develop a sustainable business model for an additional area of law Expand and strengthen service provision in Gloucestershire, Hampshire, Herefordshire, Somerset, West Sussex, Wiltshire, Worcestershire and the surrounding counties	Risk of doing it: overextending our resources. Risk of not doing it: people are unable to access Legal Aid Services.
1.2	Ensuring an accessible service	We will design and deliver our services in ways that are most likely to make them accessible to those in need.	Evidence that clients are able to access our services	Risk of doing it: possible costs to update existing services Risk of not doing it: possible compensation liability, risk of professional negligence,

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				reputational risk, continuation of services/organisation at risk
1.3	Improving client care, regulatory compliance and practice management	We will establish systems to ensure best practice.	Train and support staff in client care and compliance best practices Strengthen our operational and governance policies and procedures	Risk of doing it: none. Risk of not doing it: possible compensation liability, risk of professional negligence, reputational risk, continuation of services/organisation at risk
1.4	Addressing underlying issues that lead to the need for specialist advice services, preventing future reliance on our services.	We will engage in preventative work.	Strengthen our provision of specialist Welfare Benefits advice and representation Broaden the scope of our current HLPAS ELA offer	Risk of doing it: overextending our resources Risk of not doing it: vulnerable clients are unable to access the welfare benefits advice and representation that they need.
1.5	Improving Relevant Laws and Policies	We will take a data driven approach to tackle barriers to access and flawed laws and	Identify relevant laws and policies that require changing Engage in strategic litigation to change laws and policies	Risk of doing it: diversion of resources from fee earning work, potentially negatively impacting business sustainability, unless

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		policies that cause underlying advice needs.		grant funding is secured to cover costs Risk of not doing it: continuation of damaging laws and policies

Strategic Aim 2
Ensure Resilience: secure the long-term sustainability of the Law Centre through diversifying our revenue streams, delivering fundable services and investing in our staff and volunteers and continue re-developing specialist social welfare legal provision by hiring, developing and supporting additional legal practitioners, managers and all staff.

#	Objective	What we will do	Outcomes *We will know when we have achieved this if we…*	Risk Evaluation of Objectives
2.1	Ensuring financial sustainability.	We will create a budget and apply sound financial management to reflect strategic aims and diversify our funding streams, in order to achieve Aim 1.	Develop a budget that considers our strategic aims and contemplates a growth of services Maintain relationship with and continue to secure funding through existing and new Legal Aid contracts Grow and diversify our income	Risk of doing it: staff feel pressured by targets, which could lead to dissatisfaction Risk of not doing it: charity is unsustainable and growth becomes stagnant, threatening services

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			Secure existing and new grant funding partners to support our strategic development	
2.2	Maximising service delivery within existing funding	We will continue to utilise and expand use of volunteers and technology to deliver an affordable service that has the greatest possible impact.	Increase numbers of volunteers Evidence consideration and, where relevant, adoption of relevant technologies to support service delivery	Risk of doing it: cost implications; impact on limited supervisory resources Risk of not doing it: less capable of meeting demand; less prepared for future service delivery models
2.3	Strengthening our people resources	We will create an interesting and vibrant workplace, where employees gain relevant skills and qualifications and continue employment.	Hire, train and promote increased numbers of employees, particularly supervisors and qualified lawyers Evidence employee training and qualification Continue to have high employee retention Provide competitive renumeration and employee benefits Evidence staff satisfaction	Risk of doing it: possibility that employees leave after charity supports training and qualification; overextending our financial and supervisory resources Risk of not doing it: vulnerable clients are unable to access the welfare benefits advice and representation that they need; employees are unable to meet the requirements of their

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				role/make a mistake because they are not up to date; charity is unsustainable and growth becomes stagnant, threatening services, leadership succession is threatened

Strategic Aim 3

Regrow the Specialist Legal Advice Desert: assume a leading role in South and Southwest England to expand specialist legal advice, develop relevant partnerships and referral pathways and change policies and procedures that negatively impact our clients

#	Objective	What we will do	Outcomes *We will know when we have achieved this if we…*	Risk Evaluation of Objectives
3.1	Developing partnerships and coordinating specialist legal advice services across the areas where work	We will develop partnerships and referral pathways, to ensure that clients have an unimpeded advice journey, increasing information sharing and working referral pathways and maximising resources through collaborative work with relevant stakeholders.	Identify potential partners and other beneficiaries in our service areas, to have a better understanding of their training and support needs and the needs of our clients Market our services to relevant beneficiaries through partnerships, including generalist advice charities and the Courts	Risk of doing it: overextending our resources Risk of not doing it: vulnerable clients are unable to access the welfare benefits advice and representation that they need; referring agencies are unable to identify need for

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			Establish new, and build on existing, relationships and programmes with other Law Centres, generalist advice services and relevant stakeholders Develop reciprocal referral pathways for advice and relevant services Build the capacity and expertise of community groups and other stakeholders so that they can intervene sooner to help people avoid legal problems, where possible	specialist advice early enough to prevent escalation of legal matters
3.2	Working closely with Law Centres Network to share data and learning to influence policy on areas that impact our clients. Supporting the development of our networks	We will collaborate with Law Centres Network to capture synergies, in order to effect greater change. Provide training and support for partners and other beneficiaries	Develop better data collection, analysis and sharing practices Support LCN's efforts to develop and execute an action plan to address network-wide shared threats to funding and staffing crisis	Risk of doing it: overextending our resources Risk of not doing it: vulnerable clients are unable to access the welfare benefits advice and representation that they need

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7. Resources Overview for 2026 – 2030 (Lexcel 1.2.b)

Note: The Resources Overview section was updated in May 2026 to the reflect extension of the Strategic Plan to 2030 and our current funding position.

To meet our objectives in the timeframe of the Strategic Plan, we will need to secure the following:

- To sustain the Welfare Benefits Appeal Programme at its current level, we must secure a further £528,605 of income between 2026-2030.
- To create the proposed further legal practice area (e.g., Family Law), we have designated £150,000 from our current funds, with a view to hiring a supervisor in that area in April 2027.
- We have currently budgeted for an additional three caseworkers to support the development of our Housing Programme between 2025 and 2030. We would be able to strengthen and build that programme with £150,000 in additional funding, as we will have supervisory capacity but lack funding to do absorb the impact of additional salaries.

Our anticipated funding arrangements for the 2026-2030 period include:

1. A projected annual income of approximately £1.2m rising to £1.5m from our Legal Aid contracts, assuming budgeted staffing levels:
   a. Housing and Debt Legal Aid contracts for Gloucestershire, Southampton, and Wiltshire:
      - To provide advice and representation in relation to tenancy and mortgage possession, homelessness, housing disrepair/uninhabitability, illegal eviction and defence to applications for anti-social behaviour injunctions and committal .

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- Including 150 Legal Help matter starts for advice and assistance to clients qualifying under the Legal Help scheme and unlimited Certificated cases.

b. Housing Loss Prevention Advice Scheme contracts to provide representation in possession matters in the county courts at Aldershot and Farnham, Basingstoke, Bury St Edmonds, Gloucester and Cheltenham, Isle of Wight, Portsmouth, Salisbury, Southampton and Swindon .

2. We anticipate receiving £12,000 in grant funding annually from Gloucestershire County Council to support our Welfare Benefits programme until April 2027.

3. Gloucester City Council have indicated their intention to provide £36,000 annually in further funding support for our Welfare Benefits programme.

4. We were awarded £10,000 in grant funding from A&O Shearman Foundation in 2024. This funding has now been received and utilised in support of our Welfare Benefits Programme.

5. We were awarded £300,000 (£100,000 per annum) in unrestricted funding from 2026-2029 from Access to Justice Foundation, to support the strengthening of benefits and two new practice areas, as well as community engagement, in Hampshire and West Sussex.

6. We will continue to seek additional grant funding to support our proposed service delivery.

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8. Our Services (Lexcel 1.2.c)

The staff and volunteers at Southern England Law Centre offer over 85 combined years of legal experience. They provide specialist legal advice and representation in a large specialist legal advice desert across South and South-West England.

Legal services	Specialist legal advice and representation areas	
	Housing	**Welfare benefits**
• Legal advice and assistance • Legal advocacy for clients e.g., letter writing • Client representation in court • Targeted policy and law reform advocacy	• Possession/eviction • Illegal eviction • Disrepair claims • Anti-social behaviour injunction applications (including committal); • Homeless advice and representation • Housing benefit queries and claims • Issues with suitability of accommodation for clients with disabilities • Mortgage arrears and repossession debt • Discrimination claims • Judicial review claims	• Challenging benefits decisions (mandatory reconsideration) • Appeals to the Upper Tribunal • Judicial review

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9. Our Client Groups (Lexcel 1.2.d)

- Although our Law Centre includes Wiltshire within its name and is based in Swindon, we cover a far-reaching geographical area. We have continued to expand our services into contingent geographic areas with limited or no service provision, representing clients from Worthing to Worcester and from eastern Hampshire to north Devon.
- We now hold Housing Loss Prevention Advice Service contracts—enabling us to provide early legal advice and court duty representation—for Aldershot, Basingstoke, Bury St Edmunds, Gloucester, the Isle of Wight, Portsmouth, Salisbury, Southampton and Swindon.
- We are one of the few remaining Legal Aid Housing providers in south and south-west England, an expansive Legal Aid desert, and one of the only specialist Welfare Benefits providers within the area in which we work. We often absorb the overflow of matters that other proximate providers lack capacity to handle.
- We offer our services equally to all, regardless of their means, race, colour, ethnic or national origins, sex, marital status, sexual orientation, disability, age or religion.
- To provide the greatest access to our services, we offer telephone and face-to-face appointments.
- The communities we serve experience a range of barriers, often exacerbated by living in rural communities. Around 90% of clients experience some form of disability, and many speak English as an additional language; most are in poverty, and some are in physically very inaccessible places, including sleeping rough in forests, or in prison.
- Public transportation networks across this area are poor. We work with third sector partners to ensure that we reach the most vulnerable and hard to reach clients through their trusted relationships, working to ensure that cross-referral pathways are clear and people are signposted to specialist services as soon as possible.

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10. Service Delivery (Lexcel 1.2.e)

- After significant changes to its management structure, SELC has grown and strengthened substantially in recent years.
- Services will be delivered by our 16 fee-earning staff (13.5 FTE) with 85 combined years of experience. We employ a mixture of caseworkers, solicitors, supervisors and senior supervisors who work across our geographical regions.
- For over forty years, Southern England Law Centre has provided free and low-cost specialist legal advice and representation. We are now one of the only remaining specialist social welfare law providers in the advice desert in south and southwest England, covering diverse urban and rural communities from Herefordshire to East Sussex.
- We are well placed to deliver our services due to the following considerations:
    - We are the only Housing and Debt Legal Aid provider accepting new work in Wiltshire, Gloucestershire and Hampshire and most of the surrounding areas—almost 3 million people—and hold contracts Gloucestershire, Southampton, Suffolk and Wiltshire. We provide advice and representation to tenants in possession/eviction, illegal eviction and disrepair claims; anti-social behaviour injunction applications (including committal); and homeless applicants. We bring discrimination and judicial review claims.
    - We hold HLPAS contracts covering Aldershot, Basingstoke, Bury St Edmunds, Gloucester, Isle of Wight, Portsmouth, Salisbury, Southampton and Swindon.
    - We are the only provider of specialist welfare benefits advice and representation, from mandatory reconsideration to appeals to the Upper Tribunal or judicial review.
- Having identified beneficiaries in section 9, we will work to ensure that our services are accessible. We employ a Legal Assistant to triage and to ensure those accessing our services are those most in need.

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- We have secured a Legal Aid Agency exemption to face to face advice to enable us to provide telephone services, invaluable for rural people, especially those experiencing homelessness, mental health issues, or those with children. We also offer email advice if the client indicates it is more appropriate.
- We offer face to face appointments where more appropriate, especially in cases where interpretation is needed. We are led by clients' needs: we will go to clients if they cannot access support by other means, including prison visits. Flexibility is key and we continually revise our services after listening to clients.
- We are the only specialist legal advice and representation agency across our wide, diverse catchment area. We have strong relationships with third sector and statutory agencies and we receive most clients by referral from these organisations, which range from foodbanks and refuges to CABs and local authorities.
- Since we began to re-examine our work, we have committed to working in limited areas of specialist legal provision - housing and welfare benefits - and review this provision periodically through surveys of available advice and consultation with stakeholders. This means we can work with the wider sector to resolve the most complex issues and reach those who would otherwise not be able to solve their problems through more generalist providers such as CABs.

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11. Marketing and Communications Plan (Lexcel 1.2.e)

11.1 Barriers to Access

- Due to the varied levels of language, literacy, disability, digital access and community engagement in our region we must make sure that our tone of voice, branding and visuals are uniform and accessible. Any activity also needs to be mindful of the other societal barriers to justice that exist for potential clients.

11.2 Communication Methods

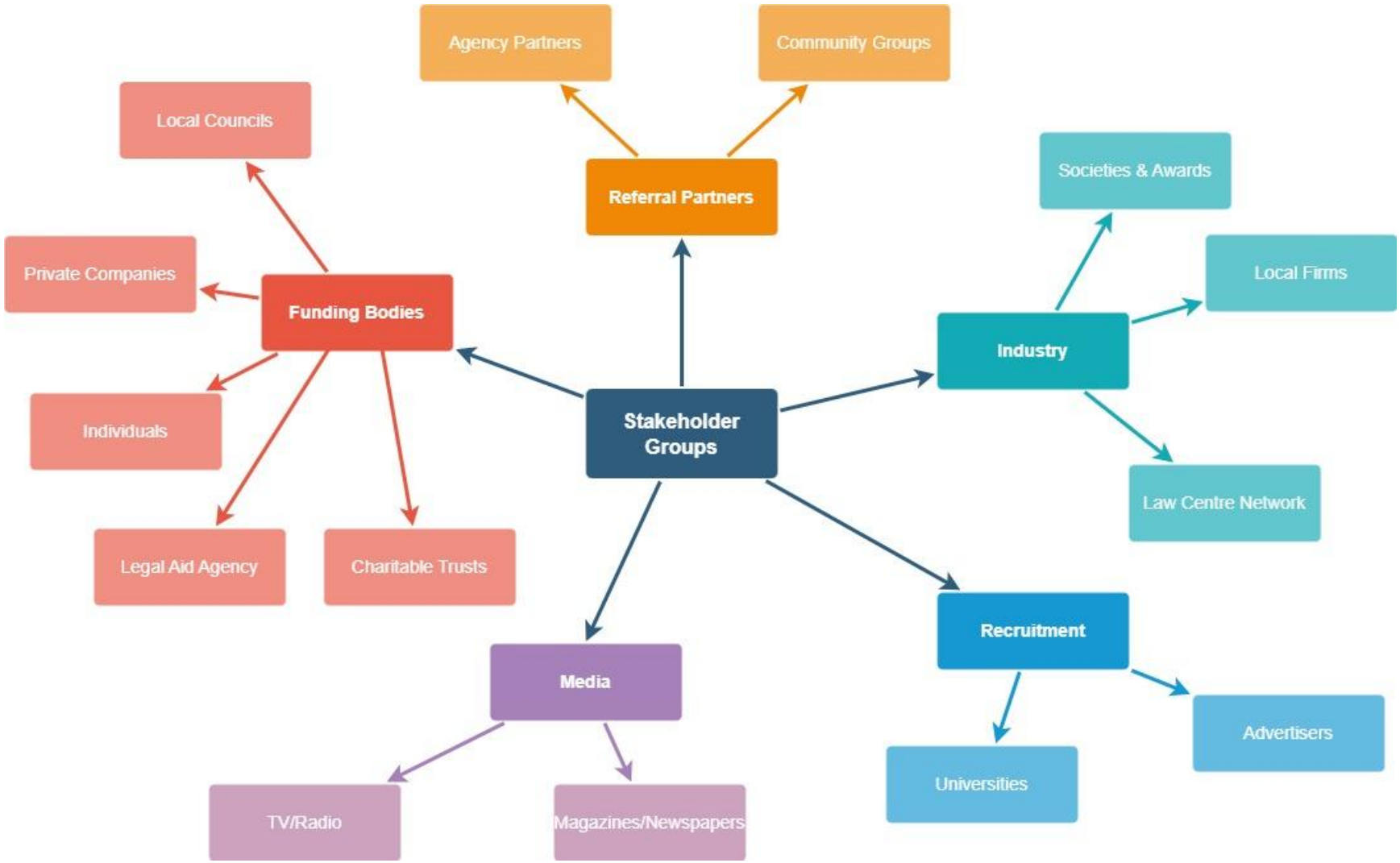
- The best methods of communication are those that are most appropriate to the audience, reduce barriers and gain most engagement. They also need to fit with the ethics and resources of Southern England Law Centre.
- The methods that most benefit WLC are:
    - Social Media
    - Partner signposting (agencies like NHS, social services)
    - Community Group outreach (schools, foodbanks, centres)
    - SEO driven content on website

11.3 Stakeholder Engagement

- Our stakeholders are all of the external groups who are involved in what we do. We depend on each stakeholder for different reasons.
- The communication strategy will need to engage with all of them but the resources spent on each depend on our priorities.
- For 2025-30, we will focus on building successful relationships with clients, media, funders and referral partners.

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11.4 Stakeholder Mapping



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11.5 Long Term Aims

- **Awareness:** to increase the overall awareness of SELC and the services we offer with residents, community groups and agency partners.
- **Referral**: to increase self-referrals through social media and the website, we also want to increase referrals through community partners.
- **Accessibility:** for all our communication content to be fully accessible considering relevant disabilities, impairments, literacy & language requirements.
- **Fundraising:** to raise project awareness in-line with fundraising goals, and to build stakeholder relationships to increase fundraising streams.
- **Education**: to help local residents understand their rights in: housing & disrepair and welfare benefits.

11.6 Resource Limitations

- The understandable limitation on staff hours and budget mean that the focus for the plan is on digital communications and using existing assets where printing is needed. A budget will be created and submitted if more resources are required. Advertising and articles in local papers will only be placed if we can get free coverage.
- The website is an essential channel which needs regularly updating and will be used for basic measurements. However, the website needs significant development if it is to be used as a lead generation tool.

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12. Monitoring (Lexcel 1.2.g)

Progress against the strategy and business plan will be monitored by the Board of Trustees. To monitor and evaluate our performance in relation to the Strategic Plan, we propose the following annual review and reporting procedure across the financial year:

By when?	Qtr.	Action Required	Responsible Person(s)
April	1	Review of Qtr. 4 performance against outcomes within Strategic Plan	Trustee Board, Senior Management
April	1	Annual business plan agreed	Trustee Board, Senior Management
April	1	Final budget agreed	Trustee Board, Senior Management
July	2	Review of Qtr. 1 performance against outcomes within Strategic Plan	Trustee Board, Senior Management
October	3	Review of Qtr. 2 performance against outcomes within Strategic Plan	Trustee Board, Senior Management
November	3	AGM and appointment of new members of the Board of Trustees	Trustee Board
January	4	Review of Qtr. 3 performance against outcomes within Strategic Plan	Trustee Board, Senior Management
February	4	Trustee Away Day and Risk Review	Trustee Board, Senior Management
March	4	Annual business plan development	Senior Management
March	4	Budget planning	Trustee Board, Senior Management

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Appendix: The Lexcel Standard for Legal Practices Strategy Guidance

1. Structure and Strategy	
1.1: Practices **must** have documentation setting out the:	a. legal framework under which they operate b. management structure which designates the responsibilities of individuals and their accountability.
1.2: Practices **must** have a strategic **plan**, **which** must include:	a. **objectives** for at least the next 12 months b. the identification of resources required to meet the **objectives** c. the services the practice wishes to offer d. the client groups to be served e. how services will be delivered and marketed f. documented risk **evaluation** of **objectives** g. **procedures** for regular reporting on performance.
1.3 Practices **must** have a business continuity **plan**, which **must** include:	a. an **evaluation** of potential risks that could lead to business interruption b. ways to reduce, avoid and/or transfer the risks c. key people relevant to the implementation of the **plan** d. a **procedure** to test the **plan** annually, to verify that it would be effective in the event of a business interruption.
1.4 Practices **should** have a **policy** in relation to **corporate social responsibility**.	

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Providing free and low-cost specialist legal services to alleviate poverty and disadvantage for over 40 years.

Fighting for changes to laws and policies that perpetuate disadvantage.

We assist with…

Legal Aid | Housing | Pro Bono | Benefits

Tel: 01793 486926

Email: info@selc.org.uk

Web: www.selc.org.uk

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A registered charity, No. 1000950.

A member of the Law Centres Network.

Law Centres Network