



FIVE YEAR STRATEGIC PLAN

APRIL 2021 to MARCH 2026

APPROVED BY THE BOARD – 23 JUNE 2021

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Support Through Court Strategic Plan 2021 to 2026

Executive Summary

The need for Support Through Court

Cuts to legal aid, increased court fees and closure of advice services have created advice deserts and stripped away a vital element of support for a fair and just legal system. Increasing numbers of people seeking justice through the civil courts, family courts and tribunals are facing the court system as litigants in person without advice and support. Support Through Court offers practical and emotional support to help people navigate their way through the civil legal system.

Our Vision: Every litigant in person receives the support they need so that no one has to face court alone.

Our Aim: To provide practical and emotional support to litigants in person so that they can navigate the civil and family courts, and tribunals, of England and Wales.

Our Values: Client focused; Valuing volunteers; Trusted; Committed; Respectful; Inclusive; promoting equality and diversity.

The Context

The implementation of the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act in 2013, combined with a wide range of cost saving measures in the civil justice system, including the closure of many local courts, has had a dramatic effect on the number of people accessing civil courts, family courts and tribunals as litigants in person. We estimate that in 2019 more than 550,000 people were unrepresented in these courts.

The impact of the Covid 19 pandemic on the courts system has been dramatic over the past year, including court closures and restrictions on access. This has resulted in a rapid move towards online access and remote hearings. As we emerge gradually from the restrictions imposed by the pandemic, there will be no return to pre-Covid patterns of court services.

Our current service

In 2019/20 STC provided support to litigants in person in 24 out of approximately 344 civil and family courts in England and Wales. In March 2020 we were on track to reach our target of 80,000 contacts with clients using the civil courts, family courts and tribunals. We were aware that we were approaching our capacity in terms of the number of people we were able to help within the existing model of face-to-face provision in courts. We therefore launched our National Helpline on 9th March 2020.

We recognise that the court system will not return to business as usual because of continuing restrictions and the rapid movement towards remote working. We also recognise that our current service is unable to provide support for people accessing the court system in courts where we do not currently provide a service.

Our objectives for 2026

- 1 We will double the number of client contacts from 80,000 in 2019/20 to 160,000 in 2025/26.
- 2 We will extend the geographic coverage of our service to provide a service to people using the civil and family courts throughout England and Wales.
- 3 We will offer a range of ways to access our support through a multi-channel service, offering clients choice and tailoring our support to our clients' needs as far as we are able.
- 4 We will grow our income to achieve long term sustainability of our financial resources.
- 5 We will make more efficient use of our resources including in particular our volunteers, providing value for money, resulting in efficiency savings and enabling investment in service improvements.
- 6 We will use our knowledge of the court system and the issues faced by LIPs to seek changes to make it easier for LIPs to navigate the court systems offering a better opportunity to access justice.

Meeting our objectives through a multi-channel service model

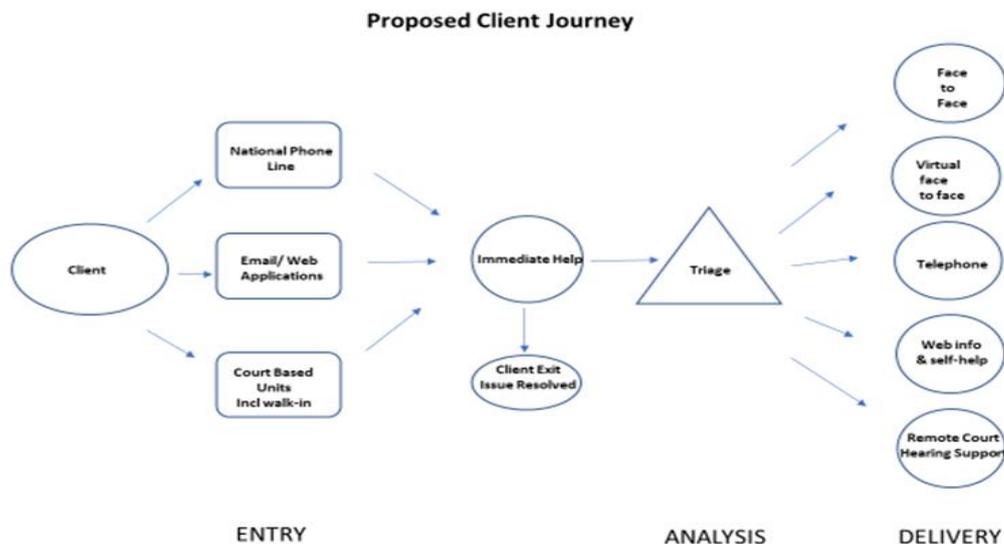
We believe that a multi-channel service will provide the best way of meeting the needs of as many people as possible. Over the first three years of the strategy, we will aim to build a multi-channel service starting from our existing predominantly court-based system.

We will provide:

- Court based local services for walk-in clients, phone, and email in our existing units.
- National Helpline providing immediate telephone support and onward referral where required.
- Web based support through email, web chat and video contact.
- Support for clients in remote court hearings.

By the end of Year 5 we will have an integrated service seamlessly supporting clients through local court-based services and remote services, covering England and Wales.

We will make particular efforts to address the needs of vulnerable and/or digitally excluded LIPs who may find it difficult to access and use remote services.



Supporting our multi-channel service

Systems to ensure clients get the support they need.

We will develop systems to support our service provision including:

- Triage
- Central Client database
- Knowledge database
- Training, supervision and support

Information technology and telephony

We will develop enhanced IT and telephony systems to support service delivery, paying particular attention to the needs of digitally excluded people.

Working with our volunteers

Development of our multi-channel service model will require change in the ways we recruit, train, and support our volunteers providing direct client support to LIPs. We will also extend the scope of volunteer activity, utilise the knowledge, skills and expertise of our volunteers in other capacities.

Measuring and evaluating our services

We will collect data necessary to measure our effectiveness and provide evidence to support changes in policy and practice.

Communications

Communication is a pivotal pillar of the strategy. We will appoint a Communications Manager in year one of the strategy.

Staff, organisation, and business support functions

In order to maintain the current service footprint and implement growth over the three-year period the infrastructure of the charity will be strengthened. Alongside the increased service team, systems, and telephony innovations the business support teams will be increased to meet increased demands.

Finance

Introducing the multi-channel model will require substantial financial investment for a number of years in technology and additional human resources including training. To support these developments, we will create a Strategic Investment Fund from current reserves, review our Reserves Policy to ensure we are properly managing risks and set balanced budgets aiming for an annual surplus over time to finance continued development. Income, expenditure, and reserves forecasting for the period of the strategy have been completed as noted below.



Fundraising

We will need to increase our income to support additional staff and invest in our systems. We will invest in skills building and staff retention. We will create three new fundraising positions to increase our fundraising capacity. We will build a culture of philanthropy across the organisation.

Partnerships

As a member of the Litigants in Person Support Strategy we will continue to work within the partnership to provide cross party referrals and support. Across the charity we work with a wide range of stakeholders both nationally and locally. We will continue to maintain and grow these relationships throughout the five-year strategy. Our partnerships will aim to complement our own support to clients, improve access to justice and influence policy and practice in the court system.

Influencing

As a front-line charity, we work to support our clients through influencing change nationally and locally, based on direct evidence from our service delivery. We will establish a volunteer led policy and practice support group to identify issues and solutions and work with partners to bring about change. Initially we will continue to work to influence change from within as we have done to date. We will also consider whether and how we might need to move towards more active lobbying and campaigning.

Support Through Court Strategic Plan 2021 to 2026

1. The need for Support Through Court

Traditionally, members of the public have exercised their rights and pursued justice through the services of a lawyer. However, cuts to legal aid, increased court fees and closure of advice services have created advice deserts and stripped away a vital element of support for a fair and just legal system. Increasing numbers of people seeking justice through the civil courts, family courts and tribunals are facing the court system as litigants in person without advice and support. They are trying to navigate a complex legal system and representing themselves in cases of enormous importance such as loss of contact with children, unfair dismissal, eviction from their homes or even deportation. Their troubles are often compounded by additional disadvantages such as unemployment, mental or physical disability and language barriers. Support Through Court offers practical and emotional support to help people navigate their way through the civil legal system.

2. Vision and Values

2.1 Our Vision

Every litigant in person receives the support they need so that no one has to face court alone.

2.2 Our Aim

To provide practical and emotional support to litigants in person so that they can navigate the civil and family courts, and tribunals, of England and Wales.

2.3 Our Values

Client-focused: We take the time to understand the needs of our clients and to provide non-judgemental support.

Valuing volunteers: Volunteers are at the heart of our organisation, and we are committed to supporting and enabling them to contribute to achieving our aims.

Trusted: We live up to the confidence placed in us by our clients and anyone who comes into contact with us.

Committed: What we do matters, and our skilled staff and volunteers are all committed to delivering a high-quality service.

Respectful: We all look after one another and take time to talk openly and honestly with everyone we work with.

Inclusive: We respect difference, treat our clients and each other with courtesy and attention, encourage ideas and look for opportunities to listen and learn.

Promoting equality and diversity: Equality and diversity are fundamental to our core beliefs and values. We welcome people from all ethnicities, genders, sexual orientations, socio-economic classes, religions, disabilities, and ages in everything we do.

3. Background

3.1 The Context

The implementation of the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act in 2013, combined with a wide range of cost saving measures in the civil justice system, including the closure of many local courts, has had a dramatic effect on the number of people accessing civil courts, family courts and tribunals as litigants in person. We estimate that in 2019 more than 550,000 people were unrepresented in these courts.

At the same time there were moves to make court forms available online and to pilot remote court hearings where cases could be heard without attendance at court. While these reforms aim to make justice more accessible, they risk excluding many people who lack access to or confidence in the necessary digital technologies.

The impact of the Covid 19 pandemic on the courts system has been dramatic over the past year. Civil courts were initially closed during the first lockdown. Although they have reopened, they have been subject to the same restrictions as other services and have been able to deal with far fewer people attending in person. This has resulted in a rapid move towards online access and remote hearings. As we emerge gradually from the restrictions imposed by the pandemic, there will be no return to pre-Covid patterns of court services. The pandemic has hastened reforms that were already in process. Some services will continue to operate face to face but many litigants in person will find themselves having to access the courts online, digitally and through remote hearings.

3.2 Our Current Service

In 2019/20 STC provided support to litigants in person in 24 out of approximately 344 civil and family courts in England and Wales. At the start of the first Covid 19 lockdown in March 2020 we were on track to reach our target of 80,000 contacts with clients using the civil courts, family courts and tribunals. This was an increase of 15,000 compared with 2017/18. Financial constraints in 2019 forced us to reduce our service team and withdraw services from 3 courts. Most of our court-based service is provided by over 800 volunteers working in the courts. We were aware that we were approaching our capacity in terms of the number of people we were able to help within the existing model of face-to-face provision in courts. We therefore launched our National Helpline on 9th March 2020.

The Covid 19 pandemic had a profound effect on the court system, our clients, and the support that we were able to offer. We were able to use our National Helpline to support as many people as possible with experienced volunteers helping people remotely, building rapidly to more than 1200 contacts per month. As restrictions eased, we were able to begin returning to courts in the summer and autumn but under

restrictions that severely limited our capacity to help and support people. The pandemic has also affected the capacity of our volunteers to continue providing support although many have been able to continue providing support by phone and online.

In developing our strategic objectives for the period 2021 to 2026 we have tried to look beyond the immediate restrictions imposed by the pandemic. We recognise that the court system will not return to business as usual because of continuing restrictions but also because of the rapid movement towards remote working. We also recognise that our current service is unable to provide support for people accessing the court system in courts where we do not currently provide a service.

Looking to the future of the service we recognise that the first year of this strategy will be one of Covid recovery, rebuilding contact numbers in court-based units and further development of the National Helpline.

4. Our objectives for 2026

Our vision remains that every litigant in person receives the support they need so that no one has to face court alone. Our objectives for 2026 will bring us closer to achieving that vision.

Objective 1: We will double the number of client contacts from 80,000 in 2019/20 to 160,000 in 2025/26.

We know that there are many thousands of litigants in person accessing the court system without support. We are committed to increasing the number of people we are able to help.

Objective 2: We will extend the geographic coverage of our service to provide a service to people using the civil and family courts throughout England and Wales.

Through our court-based units, National Helpline, email, and internet we will ensure that help and support is available to LIPs regardless of where in the country they are.

Objective 3: We will offer a range of ways to access our support through a multi-channel service, offering clients choice and tailoring our support to our clients' needs as best we can.

We will continue to provide a face-to-face service in courts wherever we can. We will offer different ways of accessing support via phone, email, web chat, and virtual face to face contact. We will aim to provide immediate support on first contact. Where further support is needed, we will aim to ensure that clients get the support best suited to their needs and preferences. We will work to ensure that the most vulnerable and/or digitally excluded LIPs are able to access our support.

Objective 4: We will grow our income to achieve long term sustainability of our financial resources We will make more efficient use of our resources, including in particular our volunteers, resulting in a lowering of the average cost per client helped whilst improving our services.

We will plan for an annual budget surplus to support further service development.

We will invest in fundraising, marketing, and external communications to grow our capacity to help clients.

We will further diversify our funding, reducing our reliance on Ministry of Justice funding to below 30% of our total income.

Objective 5: We will ensure that we make the most cost-effective use of all the organisations resources, including finances, systems, staff, and volunteers.

We will ensure that we make the most cost-effective use of our financial resources. We will explore ways of making best use of the knowledge, skills, and expertise of our volunteers in a variety of roles within the organisation.

We will invest in providing a quality service, monitoring the annual cost per contact, and leading to an ultimate cost per contact that demonstrates the efficiency and effectiveness of the organisation.

Objective 6: We will use our knowledge of the court system and the issues faced by LIPs to seek changes to make it easier for LIPs to navigate the court systems offering a better opportunity to access justice.

Working with partners, we will identify common problems and solutions. We will use our influence to seek improvements in court processes that will help all LIPs to better access justice.

For those clients who cannot travel to a court-based unit but need face to face contact we will offer virtual face to face support via a Zoom call or phone meeting.

Some vulnerable and/or digitally excluded LIPs may find it difficult to access and use remote services. We will make particular efforts to address the needs of this group including working with organisations such as community groups, housing associations, Citizens Advice, Shelter and other similar services to provide local support to access our remote services.

Remote volunteers based around England and Wales will support those clients whose needs can be met via phone or online interactions through the National Helpline and the remote volunteer service.

Remote hearings support will be offered across England and Wales. Digital hearings are offered across the Civil, Family and Tribunal courts; our volunteers can support LIPs pre-hearing, attend virtually and offer post hearing support and debrief. This service was created at the request of HMCTs at the start of the pandemic, recognising our expertise in this field within our court-based units.

Current office hours will be extended to provide an out of hours service to improve client access to support.

Volunteers will have access to a central client record database which will improve the client journey, saving repetition of the client story and providing efficiency within the process.

Volunteers will be supported to help clients through the creation of a knowledge data base containing forms, processes, and signposting opportunities.

By the end of Year 5 we will have increased our support to Litigants in Person to 160,000 contacts per annum, meeting Objective 1 of this strategy.

By the end of Year 5 we will have an integrated service seamlessly supporting clients through local court-based services and remote services, covering England and Wales.

5.2 Service Provision

Court-based units will continue to provide support in 20 Courts across England and Wales, with staffing and volunteer bases maintained.

The initial remote service will be created in partnership with a university and once successfully established we will scale up the service with the intention of reaching upwards of 450 volunteers working to support clients.

Up to three remote volunteer clusters working remotely will be created increasing geographical reach across England and Wales meeting Objective 2 of our Strategy.

Using learning from the National Helpline we will ensure that the new volunteer clusters receive support through training, supervision, and managerial support while on duty. We recognise that there will be differences between phone and online working and will take a flexible learning approach to ensure both clients and volunteers are able to work towards successful outcomes.

We recognise that developing this service model will be a gradual process in the first three years of the strategy; we expect these clusters to be in place by 2026 but recognise that this may take longer. We

will trial different approaches and learn from our experiences. We will be flexible and adaptable in our approach, holding client need at the centre of our thinking.

Ensuring that our new model is successful requires a review of our evaluation and monitoring processes. We need to understand how well each element of the multichannel model is supporting LIPS; what works and what doesn't work. Are online and phone channels working as well as face to face or better? Our data collection processes will provide the evidence and we will be able to make informed choices and decisions,

We also recognise that the changes we want to make will require us to secure additional funding for both the service development and continued service provision.

6. Supporting our multi-channel service.

Building our capacity to support clients is not just about service delivery but must include the infrastructure that supports the front line. We recognise the need to set objectives for the pillars that support our front-line services.

6.1 Systems to ensure clients get the support they need.

Triage

Where appropriate we aim to provide immediate support and assistance when clients contact us. Where we are unable to meet clients' needs on first contact, we will direct them to the most appropriate type of provision having regard for their needs and preferences.

In building a standardised entry point system which provides efficient use of resources we will not lose sight of the needs of the clients we are serving. This process will be personal, client led and mindful of the vulnerabilities of those facing court alone.

The triage process will be administered by the National Helpline, the remote service, and local face-to-face offices, depending on where the request for support has come in. The triage process will be a 'checklist' enabling volunteers to ascertain the needs of clients and pass them to the right support channel for them. The client will receive the support they need within two contacts with STC.

The triage checklist and process will be developed with consultation from the service team and will be ready for use when the remote service launches in year 2 of the strategy. Details entered into the checklist and the client database will support seamless transfer between colleagues, improving the client experience. We will continually review the triage process to ensure it is best supporting the needs of the client and the organisation.

We are committed to providing a personal empathetic service to our clients, we believe human interaction rather than a list of options are key to building confidence in our support.

Over the five years of the strategy, the work of court-based units (in house and remote), the National Helpline and remote services will come together into one seamless integrated service for client support across England and Wales.

Central Client database

By the end of Year 2 we will have a client database accessible by all service volunteers across England and Wales, supporting volunteer efficiencies and increasing their capacity to meet increasing client demand.

For each client we will have a record of their basic data (e.g., name, contact details, support needed), each interaction with the service, outcomes from those interactions i.e., completion of a Form C100, referral to another agency.

The client database will allow the Charity to map the client journey, showing single and multiple interactions with the service and other signposted or referring agencies.

The learning gained through this client mapping will assist in achieving Objectives 5 and 6.

Knowledge database

Volunteers will be supported by the introduction of a Knowledge Database containing access to processes, forms, local and national information to support client interactions.

Access to the database will support remote volunteers to quickly pull-down forms and the processes required to complete them.

The database will provide checklists, scripts and how-to advice for volunteers who are dealing with a variety of situations with their clients.

Signposting opportunities will be included to support client referrals to outside agencies where appropriate.

We will have a monitoring system in place to ensure that the database is current and provides accurate information to support volunteers service delivery.

We will work in partnership to share knowledge and ensure our information is regularly updated.

The Knowledge database must be kept up to date and frequent monitoring will be required. In keeping with Objective 5 we would see this as a role of a volunteer working group.

Training

By the end of Year 3 we will have a fully integrated remote training suite in place for volunteers.

In moving to a remote volunteer service, we will require training options that support those who cannot attend face to face training. We will develop a remote training process which provides quality assured training processes meaning volunteers whether court-based or remote receive full induction, training, and shadowing opportunities and are able to support clients confidently. Within this package there will be the opportunity for face-to-face training regardless of where within the organisation the volunteer will be providing support.

All volunteers regardless of their base of operations will complete the same induction package followed by specialist training for their area of operation.

All of our volunteers, whether working from court hubs or remotely, will be supported and supervised by a service manager. We will provide remote supervision and shadowing opportunities for volunteers working remotely.

We will introduce a requirement to take refresher training on a regular basis further supporting quality assured service delivery. To support the new training model, we will introduce a Training Manager post to maintain and support volunteer training across the charity.

Good quality training forms the foundation of quality assured service delivery, introducing a volunteer records system which supports the monitoring and management of training will support the Training Manager to ensure all volunteers complete the necessary training modules.

6.2 Information technology and telephony

By the end of Year 3 the Charity will have researched, developed, and implemented IT and telephony systems to support service delivery across the charity both court-based and remote.

The objective of the IT Strategy for STC is to establish a common set of applications and infrastructure supporting Service, Volunteer support, Fundraising and back-office processes, which will sustain planned growth and allow the introduction of more online functions. The aims are to:

- Enable STC to deliver consistent high-quality support to litigants in person, via any channel (online, by phone, or in person) and in every location.
- Allow online scheduling (of remote hearings, client appointments, volunteer sessions).
- Provide improved online support to volunteer teamworking, access to knowledge, training, and communication.
- Allow a commonly accessible single view of each client record, and to track support given and outcomes.
- By having more complete and consistent electronic records of client contacts and actions taken, to gain better insight and understanding of our clients' needs, the problems which give rise to them, the help we give and the impact we have on their outcomes.
- In providing the multi-channel service we recognise the needs of the digitally excluded and will work to offer services to these clients.

These IT Objectives support the overall strategic objectives of:

- Extending coverage nationally while reducing the average cost to serve each client.
- Providing more ways for clients to access support in a world with much reduced physical and face-to-face contact.
- Enabling Volunteer resources from any location to provide support wherever needed.

The strategy developed with the help of Accenture sets out an implementation roadmap, to put in place the target capability within three years, beginning with telephony and contact centre software to support

the new national service. The strategy identifies the incremental costs of implementation, the trade-off choices to be made, the risks to be managed and the assumptions made.

6.3 Working with our volunteers.

Development of our multi-channel service model will require change in the ways we recruit, train, and support our volunteers providing direct client support to LIPs.

By the end of Year 3 we will have extended the scope of volunteer activity within the Charity beyond service delivery, utilising the vast bank of skills and knowledge within the volunteer body and offering opportunities to those who wish to volunteer in other capacities.

We will recruit non-service volunteers to work within the organisation supporting infrastructure area such as fundraising, marketing and communications.

This aim will support Objective 5 to make more efficient use of our resources leading to a reduction on cost per contact.

Direct client support

The charity has adapted the excellent volunteer recruitment, induction, and training in place pre Covid to support remote working during the pandemic. We recognise that this has given us insights into the support that a multi-channel service will need to provide a quality assured service to our clients. We will take the learning from 2020/21 into the new strategy and build our systems to better support volunteers to assist clients.

We will listen to our volunteer body and embrace initiatives put forward that will improve service delivery and provide efficiencies that better support, the client journey. We will work to better embed the volunteer body in the governance of the organisation.

By the end of year 3 we will continue to provide a quality assured service and have the following in place:

- A volunteer database capable of tracking recruitment, induction, initial training, and ongoing volunteer development training. We will work with our university partners to support the management of student volunteers, ensuring tracking processes are well maintained.
- Provide support to online volunteers via a buddy system with experienced volunteers available to support immediate issues to those on duty, giving confidence to those working on a daily basis that they can reach out for support at any time.
- An online training program supported by a Training Manager, ensuring all service-based volunteers complete compulsory training, and are offered voluntary additional modules.
- Refresher training for volunteers to update and maintain levels of service delivery.
- An online knowledge bank that is available to all service volunteers, which is fully up to date being regularly reviewed by a team of experienced volunteers.

- A Client Relations Management System (CRM) which enables access to client data to all current volunteers, which is GDPR secure and provides statistical information to support the fundraising functions.
- In addition to the staff noted below we will bring up to 450 new remote volunteers onboard in the five-year period.

Other Volunteer Support

We will identify potential roles for volunteers to support the service in addition to the provision of direct client support. These could include fundraising, volunteer recruitment and training, administration, IT support, database update, communications, etc. We anticipate that some of our service volunteers may wish to offer their knowledge and expertise in such roles. We will also recruit non-service volunteers who wish to support us in roles other than providing a service to clients.

All volunteers providing non-service support will be recruited through the charity volunteer recruitment process.

All volunteers will undertake the online organisational induction processes together with any further role specific training that may be required.

6.4 Measuring and evaluating our services.

We recognise the limitations of our existing measurement and recording systems which have focused on client contacts but provided only limited evidence of needs, outcomes, effectiveness, and efficiency. Successful implementation of our strategy requires us to be able to measure our performance against our objectives, assess the level of need for our services, measure our effectiveness in meeting our client's needs, and our efficiency in making best use of our limited resources. We also need to collect data to provide evidence to support changes in policy and practice.

Our measurement and evaluation objectives are:

- To identify the data required to measure the performance and outcomes of our multi-channel service with reference to the needs of different stakeholders.
- To develop and implement recording and information systems that enable our staff and volunteers to easily record and access data.
- To develop methods of analysing and reporting data appropriate to the needs of different internal and external stakeholders.

Key elements in achieving these objectives will be the Central Client Database and our IT systems set out above. We will also look to work with partners, including HMCTS, universities and other charities, in assessing the needs of litigants in person and the support available to them.

6.5 Communications

Communication is a pivotal pillar of the strategy. Providing a regular flow of information to our staff, volunteers and key stakeholders, showcasing our work, being alive to media opportunities and offering messaging appropriate to a wide variety of audiences will support our plans to grow the service, influence well and work with partners who are keyed into our work.

The charity will appoint a Communications Manager (CM) in year one of the strategy. This role will support effective communication both internally and externally while meeting the core objectives of the strategy. The role will:

- Ensure that all communications from the organisation reflect the values, mission, objectives, and brand of the charity.
- Support the achievement of overall organisational objectives
- Ensure that our staff and volunteers are kept informed and engaged
- Ensure effective engagement with stakeholders
- Demonstrate the success of our work.
- Ensure people understand what we do (staff, volunteers, clients, partners, and external stakeholders).
- Ensure the organisation speaks to the brand and all communications are on message.
- Change perceptions and behaviours where necessary.
- Work with LIPSS partners to influence policy and practice in the wider LIPs sphere.
- Support the fundraising function.

6.6 Staff, organisation, and business support functions

In order to maintain the current service footprint and implement growth over the five-year period the infrastructure of the charity will be strengthened. Alongside the increased service team, systems, and telephony innovations the business support teams will be increased to meet increased demands.

In each of the five years of this strategy there will be increased staff numbers to support growth in service and meet demands created on the infrastructure and fundraising requirements of the charity.

We will introduce new staff as implementation of the strategy requires. Over time this will include a new remote Service Manager, IT, training, HR, and fundraising. Initially the strategy will require an increased fundraising team to support the planned growth.

As the organisation grows, we will work to maintain cultural cohesion through a variety of channels such as excellent internal communication, so no one feels left behind.

We will look for learning from other organisations that have been through change moving their systems online for support and advice as we move through the five-year strategy.

We will request support from and utilise the skills available within the volunteer body to support staff development through coaching and mentoring.

The increased staffing levels represent a serious investment in this new model of service delivery.

We recognise that staff retention has been and continues to be an issue for the charity and understand that this is related to salary which is set at 76.5% of the industry median. Trustees are committed to bring this to the median over time as funds permit.

A proposal to increase the 76.5% to 80.5% from 1st April 2021 - Year 1, was approved by the June 2021 Board and has been implemented: beginning this movement to the industry median salary. In January of each subsequent year, we will review the affordability of a further move towards the industry median treating this as a high priority for additional expenditure.

6.7 Finance

Finance

Introducing the multi-channel model will require substantial financial investment for a number of years in technology and additional human resources including training. To support these developments, we will:

Create a Strategic Investment Fund

The June 2021 Board signed off on a new Designated Development Fund of £200,000 being drawn from our current reserves to boost our future fundraising capacity, supporting investment in new technology, and fund extra staff to service the new channels and increased infrastructure requirements. The actual cost that we have identified are £262,000, the additional £62,000 will be raised by funding applications around the IT and systems infrastructure, providing project funding for engagement and implementation of the Accenture road map noted above.

In Year One of the strategy, we propose a gross investment from this fund of about £120,000 (net £90,000 after anticipated extra return from fundraising) to cover new technology, salary increases and additions to the fundraising team. It should be noted that some of these costs are likely to be recovered quite fast because new fundraisers will begin to recoup and in due course exceed their costs. The speed with which we can roll out the full strategy will in large part depend on the balance that can be struck between the new costs we will incur implementing the multi-channel strategy and the rate of return on new fundraising investments, while maintaining a safe level of reserves.

Review our Reserves Policy.

In order to create the Investment Fund, we have agreed to set aside a portion of our existing reserves, which currently stand at about £800,000 (or c 6.5 months operating costs) to be dedicated to investment in our future. With this in mind, we will review our existing reserves policy. We believe that the financial risk to the charity can be managed adequately by reducing our reserves to significantly less than 6 months running costs, allowing the Designated Development Fund to be signed off by the Board. Overall, the Charity is in a good position to take this risk because conservative income projections and analysis of closure or retrenchment costs show that we would still have more reserves than required for these purposes. Additionally, the Charity Commission no longer recommends that we need between 3 and 6

months of reserves. Instead, we are told to have a reserves policy informed by forecasts of income and liabilities, which we have considered in making this recommendation.

Shift Away from Deficit Budgeting

It is also critical for the future of the organisation that we move away from our “hand-to-mouth” model whereby each year we either budget to spend or even exceed our entire income (deficit budget). Instead, the strategy we propose now includes a clear objective to achieve financial sustainability. This means that in each budget cycle we aim to have a cash surplus to invest in future rather than just current expenditures. Although this may not be possible immediately, over the plan period, we aim to budget for income to exceed rather than fall short of current expenditures. In this way, the Investment Fund can be replenished over time for the future.

Financial planning for the 5-year strategy

The ability to fund and manage our financial position is crucial to the success of this strategic plan. Our head of Finance and Resources has worked closely with the Leadership team to bring together financial forecasts and budgets for the five-year period. We acknowledge that the further out we go from the now, the more difficult this process becomes. There are inherent risks involved in the introduction of change and we have worked to mitigate the financial risk as much as possible.

6.8 Fundraising

In the long run, an increase in fundraising capacity should be self-financing. In Financial Year 2019/20 our fundraising team created an income stream of just under £875,000 (excluding MOJ) with a total salary cost for the team of about £300,000. In other words, every £1 invested in fundraising produces about £3 in income. In practice, as is well-known, things are a bit more complicated. New fundraising staff will not be able to bring in three times their salary straight away because they require training, experience, and time to build a network of contacts and relationships.

Furthermore, the climate for fundraising has changed dramatically in the last 12 months, and we now must work harder for every £1 we raise. The global pandemic has had a severe financial impact across the charity sector, although in the last quarter of this year we have started to see a return to a more normal funding landscape which is in line with a stock market recovery.

Taking this into account, we will:

- Invest in skills building and job retention for the existing fundraising team to ensure knowledge is retained and relationships with donors can develop and grow. We will also create three new fundraising positions over two years to increase capacity. The fundraising team is making cautious but realistic assumptions about the likely returns over time of these investments. By Year Two of the plan the fundraising investment should start to pay for itself and then be strongly positive in subsequent years. Consequently, we will not only reduce our dependence on MOJ funding to no more than 30% of our costs but be in a position to fund further investments in service growth to meet our objective of doubling our client numbers over the plan period.
- The fundraising team will make it a priority to work even more closely with the business support teams to maximise the use of resources and engage with service managers and volunteers as appropriate to build a culture of philanthropy across the organisation.
- We will aim to attract additional project financing for our proposed investment in new technology. In that event, we may be able to accelerate the speed of the roll-out of the programme.

6.9 Partnerships

Across the charity we work with a wide range of stakeholders both nationally and locally including, HMCTS, MOJ, Citizens Advice, patrons, supporters, friends, local community groups, other charities, court managers and justices. This is not an exhaustive list. We will continue to maintain and grow these relationships throughout the five-year strategy. We will work with our volunteers to open opportunities that their networks may offer in partnership to support the organisation.

In 2014/15 we joined a group of six charities working in the access to justice field and formed the Litigant in Person Support Strategy (LIPSS). This group offers support in a number of forms to support those going through court alone. Support Through Court and its fellow LIPSS members cross refer LIPs, supporting clients with pro bono legal advice and advocacy, law clinics, web-based advice, and procedural understanding. We work as a partnership to improve the client journey and work with the MOJ who provide funding to the partnership to provide data to improve MOJ understanding of LIPs needs. Now in its ninth year the partnership has matured and continues to work to support innovation and improvement in the LIPs experience of the court system.

Anticipated developments such as online/digital reforms, implementation of measures arising from the Domestic Abuse Bill and improvements in the civil courts for vulnerable court users will inform our plans for partnership work.

Our partnerships will aim to:

- Support clients, particularly vulnerable court users, through sharing resources, signposting, referrals, providing information, process, and emotional support. We will work with others to create direct referral pathways to enhance the client journey through the court system. We recognise that improving our inter referral processes with partners both local and national provides the opportunity to improve the overall client journey and we will work to build partnership referral processes over the five years of the strategy.
- Improve access to justice by seeking changes to systems and processes to better support Litigants in Person.
- Influence policy and practice at national level where we identify obstacles to accessing justice.

Our Knowledge Database will offer opportunities to develop new relationships with organisations who can share and support information gathering, particularly those specialising in support for vulnerable groups. We will work with organisations such as Network for Justice, Foreign Language Interpreters, National Autistic Society, and others to improve referrals between agencies, share mutual training and offer better support to more LiPs.

The MOJ is exploring best use of third sector grants to streamline services and encourage collaborative working. They will look to LIPSS partners and others to be integral parts of a bigger support network, providing comprehensive services to litigants in person. Working closely with our partners will enhance our chances of retaining/increasing our MOJ funding.

We will continue to respond to and take part in consultations and reviews both as an individual organisation and jointly with partners.

6.10 Influencing

As a front-line charity, we work to support our clients through influencing change nationally and locally, based on direct evidence from our service delivery.

We will establish a volunteer led policy and practice support group to identify issues and solutions and work with partners to bring about change. Later in the planning period we will consider whether additional staff support is required.

We will have a particular focus on influencing MOJ and HMCTS to implement improvements in accessing the justice system for domestic abuse survivors and vulnerable court users.

Nationally, we will continue to work with the LIPSS partnership to respond to consultations, all party parliamentary group requests and other requests.

Locally, we will work with our court managers, judiciary, and other service delivery agencies to improve the client experience as they go through the court processes.

We will evaluate and utilise the data we collect to inform our responses and work to ensure we are collecting the right data to inform those responses. We will work to capture the impact of our influencing through our Evaluation and Measuring processes in order to ensure that we can demonstrate our successes whether they are as part of a partnership or as an individual organisation.

Initially we will continue to work to influence change from within as we have done to date. We will also consider whether and how we might need to move towards more active campaigning, learning from the experience of other organisations that have made that move.

Opportunities to influence are tied to our communication, marketing and partnership working and will provide a thread driving all these areas of our strategy.

6.11 Operations Planning

The CEO and Leadership Team have created a high line operational plan for years one and two of the strategy. It is important to have clear outputs that are Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, and Timely (SMART). This will allow the charity to ensure the plan is on track and provide measurable outcomes. It supports managing risk across the strategy and is intended to offer assurance that we are on track across the piece, whilst being a tool to manage slippage and highlight any issues which may cause concern. It will be integral to the risk assessment running alongside the strategy.