

Company number: 1408520

Charity Number: 280805

# Disability Law Service

Report and financial statements

For the year ended 31 May 2025

# Disability Law Service

Fighting injustice for disabled people

## Annual Report and Accounts

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## 1. Reference and administrative information

Company number	1408520
Country of incorporation	United Kingdom
Charity number	280805
Country of registration	England and Wales
Registered office Operational address	The Foundry 17 Oval Way London SE11 5RR
Trustees	<p>Members of the charitable company guarantee to contribute an amount not exceeding £1 to the assets of the company in the event of winding up. The trustees have no beneficial interest in the charitable company.</p> <p>Vijay Samtani (Acting Chair from Feb 2024 - Sep 2025) Eleanor Hassall Ellie McFatridge-Staves Mark Newbery (Acting Chair from Nov 2025) Edward Richards Alexander Woolfson</p>
Principal Staff	<p>Andrew MacKay – CEO (November 2024 – Present) Eric Appleby - Interim CEO (March 2024 to November 2024)</p>
President	Lynne Brooke
Patrons	<p>Prof. Luke Clements Rt. Hon. Sir Ed Davey MP Andrew Small</p>
Bankers	<p>Unity Trust Bank plc PO Box 7193 Planetary Road Willenhall WV1 9DG</p>
Independent Examiner	<p>Fleur Holden FCA, Sayer Vincent LLP 110 Golden Lane London EC1Y 0TG</p>

## 2. Chair and Trustees' statement

On behalf of the Trustees, I am pleased to present this Annual Report for Disability Law Service (DLS) covering the period 1 June 2024 to 31 May 2025.

During the year, DLS continued to meet exceptionally high levels of demand for specialist advice and representation for Deaf and Disabled people, their carers and families, while also strengthening organisational capacity and influence across the advice and disability justice sectors.

Across the period, DLS supported nearly **6,000** Deaf and Disabled people and handled close to **10,000** enquiries across our advice lines and specialist services.

This included sustained delivery across housing, community care, employment, welfare benefits, discrimination and public law, supported where possible through Legal Aid Agency contracts and grant-funded helplines and projects.

Notable service highlights included: **2,645 employment enquiries** (a 17% increase) and representation at five employment hearings; the MS Society-funded services which delivered **£1,086,282** of documented welfare benefits gains and saw a **71.5% increase** in MS legal line enquiries; and wider welfare benefits outreach which delivered **366 appointments** and **£434,007** in documented financial gains.

Trustees also noted the continuing high demand for our housing and community care helplines, alongside progression of legal aid casework, including a marked increase in community care cases taken on during the year.

The Board is encouraged by DLS's continued development of partnership delivery and sector capacity. Through Propel, DLS expanded community legal clinics and partnership working, onboarding **Choice in Hackney** and continuing work with **Real**.

DLS also delivered disability law training to a range of organisations, supporting improved practice and access across the wider advice landscape. DLS participated in Advice UK's "Advice Saves" campaign, reinforcing the importance of specialist advice provision.

As DLS marked its **50th anniversary**, Trustees remain focused on sustaining high-quality services, strengthening partnerships and systems-change work (including the planned Disability Law Network), and continuing to develop the Board through recruitment and support. We record our gratitude to staff, volunteers, partners and funders for their commitment to DLS's mission.

### 3. CEO statement

This year has demonstrated both the scale of need among Deaf and Disabled people and the critical role DLS plays in meeting that need through specialist advice, representation, training and systems-change activity.

Across the period, DLS supported our Deaf & Disabled clients with their pressing needs, on housing, community care, employment, welfare benefits, discrimination and public law. Our strategic focus has been to protect frontline capacity, deepen partnership reach, and convert lived experience and casework insight into wider systems change.

Demand remained high across all our services. In employment, we managed a 17% rise in enquiries, represented clients at five employment hearings. Our MS Society-funded services continued to have a major impact, with a significant increases in both legal and benefit advice.

Wider welfare benefits outreach supported 359 individuals, and securing £434,007 in documented gains. We also continued to face substantial demand for our housing and community care helplines, while progressing legal aid casework. Community care cases increased significantly compared with the previous year.

A key strategic strand has been expanding access through partnership delivery. Through our Propel project, we grew the community legal clinics model, investing in capability by mentoring trainees and partner advisers and supporting the qualifications of new advisers.

We increased our contribution to public debate and policy learning. DLS worked with the Parliamentary Health & Social Care Ombudsman, as well as the Advice UK “Advice Saves” campaign, and published a report on home care charging and Public Sector Equality Duty compliance—ensuring frontline experience informs systemic improvement.

While the funding landscape remains challenging, it is encouraging to be able to grow our relationships with current and new funders, and to be expanding the reach, depth, and ambition of the wide range of work we have planned for the year ahead.

## 4. About DLS

Disability Law Service (DLS) is a legal charity and a Deaf and Disabled People's Organisation (DDPO) that provides free legal advice, support, and representation to Deaf and Disabled people, their carers, and families, primarily across England and Wales.

We deliver a range of services across multiple legal disciplines, including community care, housing, employment, welfare benefits, and discrimination. We also provide a specialist welfare benefits and legal advice service for people with Multiple Sclerosis. A key part of our work is delivered through legal aid contracts in housing, community care, discrimination, and public law, ensuring that Deaf and Disabled people can access expert legal support regardless of their financial circumstances.

Clients can contact us directly via our helplines, email, or one-to-one appointments, with reasonable adjustments provided where necessary. We also carry out welfare benefits outreach in local communities in Haringey and Islington and run community legal clinics in housing and community care in Tower Hamlets and Hackney. All our legal advice is free, and ranges from one-off guidance to casework and, where feasible, tribunal representation.

Beyond our frontline services, we also build capacity and knowledge across the sector, offering disability law training, mentoring, tools, and resources. Our frontline work is fundamental to these second-tier activities, as the learnings, evidence, and insights gathered from client work feed directly into the development of our training modules and resources.

As a DDPO, we are proud that the lived experience of our staff, volunteers, and trustees shape our services, processes, and systems. This ensures that we centre our work around the interconnected and intersectional experiences of Deaf and Disabled people, and we are committed to rooting these principles across all our workstreams and future activities.

DLS has a committed team of 14 staff and works closely with volunteers, providing opportunities for career progression and development. We are proud of our low staff turnover and remain dedicated to prioritising staff wellbeing and mental health, recognising the challenging and often traumatic nature of the cases we handle.

### 4.1. Our vision, mission and values

**Our Vision:** The DLS vision is to work towards an equitable and accessible society, eliminating discrimination and ensuring that the rights of Deaf and Disabled people, their carers and families are upheld.

**Our mission:** Our mission is to provide free legal advice to Deaf and Disabled people and their carers to ensure that they have access to their rights and justice, while strengthening capacity, knowledge, and systems across the sector to advance justice for Deaf and Disabled people.

**Our values:**

- **Accessibility** – sensitive and proactive to the individual needs and preferences of our users; we will be flexible in the way we make our services available
- **Inclusivity** – we will carry out our work, in partnership with service users, in a way that is enabling of Deaf and Disabled people. We will take their views into account, to improve and develop our work
- **Respect** - we will treat our service users with respect at all times, respect confidentiality, be empathetic to our service users' problems and offer accurate, realistic advice
- **Excellence** – we will constantly monitor our work to ensure it is carried out to the highest standards and meets the changing needs of our service users
- **Partnership** – in pursuing our Mission, we will actively seek to work with other organisations

## 4.2. Our aims and objectives

**Objectives:**

Through providing legal advice, training, mentoring and policy work, our objectives are to:

- Ensure that Deaf and Disabled people have access to high quality, specialist legal services
- Improve awareness and understanding of the legal rights of Deaf and Disabled people and the range of legal and advice services available to them
- Empower Deaf and Disabled people to exercise their legal rights
- Challenge discrimination and exclusion by enforcing and strengthening laws that protect the opportunities, choices and legal rights of Deaf and Disabled people
- Ensure those with lived experience are at the forefront of shaping policy and practice
- Build capacity within the sector to collectively advocate for systemic changes to improve the lives of Disabled people
- Develop a coalition of partners to transform power structures, and achieve equality for Deaf and Disabled people
- Ensure DLS is high performing, well run and well regarded



**Aims:**

- Provide a quality legal service which enables Deaf and Disabled people to access relevant information, clarify their rights and take appropriate action
- Answer all queries clearly, concisely, accurately and with understanding
- Deal with clients' problems with care and as quickly as possible
- Achieve these aims in partnership with other organisations and agencies

### 4.3. Review of the year in 2024/25

This year, DLS continued to provide vital legal advice and representation to nearly 6000 Deaf and Disabled people across the UK, helping individuals secure their rights, challenge discrimination, and access justice.

We remain committed to sustaining and strengthening our frontline advice services supporting Deaf and Disabled people to navigate complex legal and benefits systems and secure their fundamental rights. We continue to provide robust legal casework through our legal aid contracts, alongside specialist advice delivered through our welfare benefits outreach and Propel clinics.

Alongside this, we have dedicated time to developing our second-tier work, providing disability law training and mentoring to a growing range of organisations across the advice, voluntary, and legal sectors. We also began improving our data collection and analysis, exploring how frontline insights can better inform policy, research, and campaigning initiatives.

We were featured in the Advice Saves campaign, which included an interview with our CEO on the challenges facing Deaf and Disabled people and launched a major policy initiative examining the impact of adult social care charging in England. These activities are just a few examples of our ongoing commitment to driving systemic change.

#### **Building capacity and driving systems change**

We began developing our systems change framework, laying the foundations to bring organisations together to share insights, resources, and tools, and to work collaboratively towards equal access to justice for Deaf and Disabled people.

We also strengthened our housing and community care clinics, working in collaboration with our partners Real and Choice in Hackney, ensuring that Deaf and Disabled people facing urgent housing and care issues could access timely, expert legal support in trusted community settings.

**Partnerships, influence and sector leadership**

A major focus this year was on building partnerships and raising our profile across the sector. We worked closely with a wide range of organisations, contributing our expertise to high-level roundtables, strategic discussions, policy initiatives, and training programmes. Through this work, DLS has reinforced its reputation as the go-to Disabled people's organisation for specialist disability law expertise, while expanding our networks and positioning itself as both a leading service provider and a thought leader in the field.

**Strengthening our organisation**

Internally, we focused on strengthening our frontline services by reviewing our resources, staffing structures, and the distribution of expertise, ensuring activities such as administrative work were shared more fairly and efficiently across the organisation. This has helped to support staff wellbeing while enabling us to respond more effectively to demand. Our new CEO also spent the latter part of the year settling into the role, bringing fresh energy and leadership to the organisation as we plan for the future.

We were fortunate to secure five funding contracts, including three new awards from the AB Charitable Trust, the Legal Education Foundation (LEF), and City Bridge Foundation, as well as extensions for our Justice First Fellowship programme, funded by the LEF, and our welfare benefits service funded by the Three Guineas Trust. These funds will help strengthen our frontline services, support second-tier activities and enable us to continue driving systemic change for Deaf and Disabled people.

**Celebrating 50 Years of Impact**

This year also marked a major milestone: DLS's 50th anniversary. For five decades, we have provided specialist legal and welfare benefits advice to Deaf and Disabled people. We are planning a celebration event later in the year to thank the staff, volunteers, trustees, patrons, funders, and partners who have made this work possible and who have helped us deliver justice over the last fifty years.

## 4.4. Key successes this year

- **Housing Helpline:**
  - Handled 421 enquiries, providing direct housing advice to nearly 80% of clients.
  - Received 95 housing-related legal aid enquiries and took on 14 cases, 5 of which were certificated.
- **Community Care & Housing Helpline:**
  - Handled nearly 400 enquiries, providing direct community care advice to around 75% of clients.
  - Received 72 legal aid enquiries, taking on 21 cases (a nearly 50% increase from last year), 2 of which were certificated.
- **Public Law & Discrimination:**
  - Received 78 discrimination enquiries and 4 public law enquiries.
  - Took on 2 public law cases and 1 discrimination case.
- **Employment Service:**
  - Received 2,645 employment enquiries (a 17% increase from last year), averaging 51 enquiries per week.
  - Represented 5 clients at employment hearings.
- **MS Welfare Benefits Advice:**
  - Received 1,563 enquiries, averaging 30 per week.
  - Provided support to 20 more individuals than the previous year.
  - Documented financial gains of £1,086,282 — over a 50% increase from last year.
- **MSLO Legal Aid Line:**
  - Handled 2,729 enquiries (a 71.5% increase from the previous year), averaging 50+ enquiries per week.
  - Supported 640 individuals, delivering 2,288 acts of assistance, valued at around £198,475 if sourced privately.
- **Welfare Benefits Advice Service:**
  - Received 620 calls and 540 emails, representing a 47% increase in calls and 8% increase in emails.
  - Outreach: delivered 366 appointments, supporting 359 individuals, representing 4 clients at tribunal.
  - Secured £434,007.16 in financial gains through casework.
- **Propel Project:**
  - One trainee solicitor nearly qualified.
  - Partner advisor completed NVQ.
  - Onboarded a new delivery partner (Choice in Hackney), running 9 specialist clinics (7 housing, 2 community care), with 7 clients referred for specialist DLS advice.

- **Policy and Campaign Work:**
  - Contributed to numerous policy initiatives and campaigns.
  - Invited to participate in the AdviceUK's Advice Saves campaign, featuring on their website and in UK Legal Features Magazine.
  - Published a report on the impact of home care charging and the failure of local authorities to comply with the Public Sector Equality Duty
- **Training and Capacity Building:**
  - Developed and delivered disability law training to organisations including Deaf-inately Women, MS Society, RNID, Bristol Parent Carer Forum and University of Leeds.
- **Networking, Partnerships and Systems Change:**
  - Expanded engagement with new organisations, strengthening collaborative impact.
  - Began developing an integrated systems change framework to use frontline expertise, data, and shared insights to achieve equal access to justice for Deaf and Disabled people.
- **Internal Development:**
  - Focused on strengthening frontline services, securing funding, promoting staff wellbeing, and more effectively using our internal resources.

## 5. Public benefit

The Trustees have referred to the guidance contained in the Charity Commission's general guidance on public benefit when reviewing the charity's aims and objectives and in planning its future activities. In particular, the Trustees consider how planned activities will contribute to the aims and objectives that have been set. In order to achieve these charitable objectives, DLS provided the following services during the period June 2024-May 2025.

### 5.1. Overview of advice lines and specialist advice

DLS is often the first- and sometimes the only- port of call for Deaf and Disabled people, their families, and carers seeking legal advice and support. This year, we handled nearly 10,000 enquiries, providing around 6,000 individuals with initial assessments, early-stage advice, legal information, casework and representation.

We offer free national helplines and specialist advice across a wide range of areas, including community care, employment, housing, discrimination, public law, and welfare benefits. To our

knowledge, we are one of the few dedicated providers offering expert legal support focused specifically on disability and discrimination.

Our services provide a vital lifeline for many who face inequality, injustice, or barriers to securing their rights, via the following services:

### **Advice Lines**

Our free telephone advice appointments give clients access to expert guidance and legal support from a qualified solicitor or specialist, across seven dedicated advice lines:

- Welfare Benefits Helpline
- Community Care Helpline
- Housing Helpline
- Legal Aid Line (for those eligible for legal aid representation in community care, housing, discrimination and public law)
- London Employment Helpline (employment and discrimination advice for those in London)
- Rest of England Employment Helpline (employment and discrimination advice for those outside London)
- MS Benefits Advice Line (specifically for people experiencing Multiple Sclerosis (MS))
- MS Legal Advice Line (covering employment, discrimination, and community care for people with MS)

In addition, clients can access all the above services by email and post.

While most of our advice lines are supported by specific grants, our community care and housing helplines remain unfunded and are maintained entirely through our core reserves. To our knowledge, they are among the only free national helpline services for Deaf and Disabled people specialising in these areas of law. The clients who call these lines often fall outside legal aid or just beyond the strict financial eligibility criteria, leaving them with no other recourse to expert legal support. We are therefore committed to securing long-term funding to ensure that this vital service remains accessible to those most in need.

### **Outreach and legal clinics**

Funded by the Three Guineas Trust, we provide welfare benefits outreach in local community settings in Haringey and Islington, allowing individuals to access specialist advice in places they already trust and have existing relationships. These sessions are particularly valuable for those who may need more holistic support, prefer in-person advice, and where reasonable

adjustments for access and communication can be more easily met. The clinics take place weekly and are accessed through local Mind charities.

Funded by Propel, we also offer free specialist legal clinics in housing and community care with our partners Real and Choice in Hackney. At these clinics, initial advice is provided by our trained community partners, with more complex or specialist issues filtered through to our expert solicitors. This approach ensures a seamless, connected, and integrated service, where clients do not need to navigate multiple systems. These clinics take place weekly, primarily online or over the phone.

### **Specialist advice**

Where capacity allows, and a case is deemed viable, clients can receive specialist, in-depth support from our solicitors and benefits advisors. This includes matters such as employment tribunals or judicial reviews. Our staff guide individuals through the entire legal process, from gathering evidence and analysing documentation to preparing their case, negotiating settlements and, where necessary, providing full representation in court.

Our Specialist Quality Mark (SQM) was renewed this year, and we remain a Centre of Excellence under the London Legal Support Trust programme, reflecting the high quality and specialist expertise of our services.

## **5.2. Defending rights: housing**

Over the last year, the political and policy landscape surrounding housing and homelessness has remained relatively consistent. The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 continues to underpin statutory duties for local authorities, while private rental sector eviction rules remain largely as introduced in 2023. Courts, however, continued to manage a backlog of possession claims arising from post-pandemic arrears and cost-of-living pressures.

Local authorities and tribunals increasingly recognise accessibility and adaptation needs under the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS) and the Disability Discrimination Act, with guidance from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government emphasising proactive enforcement of landlords' repair obligations, particularly when adaptations for Disabled tenants are involved. In April 2025, civil legal aid rates for housing cases were increased slightly, though coverage gaps remain for some complex cases.

Despite this relatively stable legislative environment, rising housing costs and insufficient temporary accommodation continue to disproportionately affect Deaf and Disabled tenants. Risks around evictions and possession claims remain high due to rent arrears, while delays in adaptations and unresolved disrepair continue to create barriers to independent living. Anti-social behaviour enforcement also continues to risk criminalising vulnerability rather than protecting tenants. Legal aid provides some support but does not fully cover all complex housing cases.

With one of the largest teams of housing experts specialising in supporting Deaf and Disabled people in the country, we not only run a Housing Advice Helpline, but also hold a legal contract to assist individuals with housing-related issues. Our services offer advice and representation in matters including homelessness reviews and appeals, unlawful evictions and harassment, landlord disputes, possession claims, and disrepair issues.

The Housing Helpline acts as the first port of call, providing low-level housing advice. For clients eligible for legal aid, cases are triaged to our legal team, where they are provided with either:

- Controlled legal help, covering advice, representation, and legal proceedings up to but not including court representation; or
- Licensed legal help, involving court representation, which can only be conducted with approval from the Legal Aid Agency on a case-by-case basis.

Over the last year, we handled 421 enquiries through our Housing Advice Helpline, providing direct advice to nearly 80% of clients, with the remaining 20% signposted to other DLS services or external organisations where enquiries were outside our expertise. Our legal team received 95 housing-related legal aid enquiries, taking on 14 cases, 5 of which were certificated.

The helpline is currently unfunded and operates only two afternoons a week, on Tuesdays and Thursdays, supported by our core reserves. Moving forward, we aim to secure project funding for both our Housing and Community Care helplines to meet demand and expand our reach.

### Case studies

We assisted a severely disabled client and her disabled young child with obtaining suitable homelessness accommodation from her local council. When the client came to us, she was residing in unsuitable accommodation riddled with mould and disrepair. Unfortunately for client, she was legally out of time to challenge the unsuitable accommodation despite the serious issues she was facing.

We assisted client, investigated her issues, and gathered her supporting evidence. We wrote to her local council and persuaded them to review her accommodation even though there was no legal obligation on them to do so. We prepared detailed representations on

client's behalf as to why she urgently requires suitable alternative accommodation. Positively, the client's council accepted our representations and agreed to promptly find suitable alternative accommodation for client and her daughter.

### 5.3. Defending rights: community care

Community care encompasses a wide range of services provided by local authorities and the NHS to support adults, children, and their carers in meeting their care needs. These services include in-home assistance, respite care, community access and travel support, residential care, and home adaptations. The legal framework around community care is essential for challenging decisions made by local authorities or NHS trusts, particularly in cases of care package reductions, delays or refusals in assessments, and unfair or incorrect charges for necessary services.

Clients approach us for advice on a wide array of community care issues, including direct payments, Disabled Facilities Grants, financial assessment outcomes, residential care, and disputes with local authorities.

The last year has seen several policy developments that, on the surface, suggest positive advancement in social care priorities. In January 2025, the UK government launched an independent commission into adult social care, chaired by Baroness Louise Casey, aimed at building cross-party consensus and making long-term recommendations for reform, framed as a step towards a future National Care Service. In spring 2025, the government published the updated Better Care Fund policy framework, reinforcing the focus on joined-up health and social care integration, local planning, and care closer to home. The Disabled Facilities Grant received a significant uplift: in May 2024, the government announced an additional £86 million for the financial year, bringing the total DFG fund to £711 million for 2025–26. Local government adult social care funding also increased, with an additional £880 million allocated in the Social Care Grant for 2025–26. Although a lifetime cap on personal care costs of £86,000 had been widely discussed by previous governments, the current government has moved away from implementing this reform in 2024–25.

However, despite these policy developments, councils' adult social care budgets faced some of the most severe financial pressures in years. Reports of overspending and cuts to preventive services, which help people maintain independence in the community, were widespread. While waiting lists for care assessments and packages appear to have reduced in overall number, the absolute scale of unmet need remains high, with hundreds of thousands still waiting for



assessments or care to begin. Rising living costs and workforce shortages further intensified pressures on providers, directly affecting service users. Proposed welfare reforms, including tightened eligibility for disability benefits and related Universal Credit health elements, also negatively impacted Disabled people's mental health and confidence in securing entitlements necessary for independent living — this is explained further in the Welfare Benefits section.

Reflecting these systemic pressures, our service continues to experience high demand. Over the past year, we handled nearly 400 enquiries through our Community Care Helpline, providing direct advice to around 75% of clients and signposting the remaining 25% to other DLS services or external organisations. The helpline is currently unfunded and therefore operates only two afternoons a week, supported by our core reserves. It is open on Mondays and Wednesdays from 2:00 to 5:30 p.m, highlighting the limited capacity of this critical service.

Our legal team received 72 community care legal aid enquiries, taking on 21 cases — nearly a 50% increase from the previous year — with 2 cases certificated.

Alongside individual advice, we continue to influence wider policy and practice in the community care sphere. On 5 March 2025, we hosted the Community Care Forum, discussing legal trends such as the recent increase in civil legal aid rates, housing, and immigration matters. Participants recognised these changes as positive but highlighted the need for government application across all civil law areas. We also presented findings from our Autism PLUS Campaign, demonstrating how frontline data can be used to inform policy initiatives and achieve measurable changes in local authority practices.

## Case studies

Our client, John was a victim of a racial attack in 2000, which left him with a head injury, balance issues, bowel problems, food intolerances and was later diagnosed as chronically anaemic, and with the impairments of depression and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

Unfortunately, as a result of the racial attack and his injuries, John had to medically retire from his job as a structural engineer. John started to receive social care from his local authority in 2006 to support him with his social care needs at home and in the community.

John has a number of disability-related expenses to support his conditions which he has to purchase himself. He has to purchase certain supplements, vitamins and special dietary foods on a weekly and monthly basis.

The local authority started to send John invoices, which initially he did not receive because of issues with his post. He received an invoice for £22,000 which related to social care contributions over a number of years.

John was not aware he needed to contribute towards his support because he was not informed until he had a review of his support needs and until he received the invoice. John instructed solicitors at Disability Law Service to represent him in this dispute as he felt the local authority had not carefully considered all his disability related-expenses. Community Care solicitors at Disability Law Service put forward submissions on behalf of John in relation to his disability-related expenses, why they were needed and how they apply to the Care and Support Statutory Guidance, legislation as well as caselaw. It was argued that the expenses John had were related to his impairments and evidence was provided to show that they were necessary to aid his conditions and that they were not met or funded by the NHS or social services.

The outcome of the case was that the local authority accepted all of John's disability-related expenses and quashed his debt of £22,000. John no longer had a debt with the local authority, and he no longer had to contribute towards his social care.

John said: "It was a great relief and made me feel a lot less stressed. I am overall feeling more positive about being able to maintain my health and have no debt hanging over me".

When service users receive a support package to assess their social care needs, a financial assessment will be carried out to assess whether a contribution is required. As part of this financial assessment, the local authority are required by law to take into account the disability-related expenses the person has.

Disclaimer – to protect the client's identity, we have changed their name, and all photos used in this story are stock photos.

Abdullah is a 9-year-old child who lives with complex health conditions and impairments. He lives with Delleman syndrome, learning disabilities, epilepsy, global developmental delay, hearing loss, ventricular septal defect and chronic kidney disease, where they only work at 35-50%. Abdullah's family consists of his mum, dad and younger brother, who lives with autism.

Abdullah had a support package of 72 hours a week for an interim period of time but this was drastically reduced to 23 hours and then increased slightly back to 30 hours a week.

When he received the 72 hours a week, his mother, who supports him full time was able to focus on her other responsibilities, such as her home, her younger son and her own

health and well-being. Her husband was working full time, to support the family financially.

The cut in hours had a severe impact on the family dynamic as Abdullah's mother was having to provide more assistance in the absence of the support workers, which was having an impact on her mental health and well-being.

We represented the client and fought to have the support care package of 72 hours re-instated, which required a great deal of correspondence back and forth with the legal team, fighting for more support care hours. We had to send a pre-action letter, which is the start of judicial review proceedings, due to the lack of care hours to support Abdullah's needs. We obtained supporting letters from Abdullah's medical professionals to support the increase in hours and made it clear to the local authority where the lack of support was throughout the day.

Following various meetings and correspondence with the legal and social care team, the local authority agreed to re-instate the 72 hours of support.

Abdullah's mother was happy with this outcome of the case as she could finally have the help and assistance she needed to support her son, and her family. This however does not take away from the stress and anxiety this caused her and her family, having to ensure months of litigation with the local authority, in fighting for justice for her son.

Nelson Mandela once said: "It always seems impossible until it's done."

"I acknowledge DLS's efforts and really admire how hard you have worked on our case your dedication is inspiring. You have incredibly talented team whose help and support has made all the difference."

Abdullah's mother, Samina said: "Caring for a special needs child is challenging due to the constant physical and mental toll, and parents often experience a mix of difficult emotions like stress, frustration, isolation and guilt.

The demanding, around-the-clock nature of care can lead to extreme fatigue and burnout. It is crucial for caregivers to seek support, take breaks, and prioritize their own well-being through strategies like respite. But all this can be possible when families get right care and support and access the specialist services they need.

We were experiencing all of it and it seemed we were never heard. I was going through deep anhedonia. We were made felt we don't exist I felt overwhelmed, ignored and humiliated by the local authorities. I felt like we were at war and I felt let down. I managed to get support from the legal team at DLS. I read their case studies and success stories and personally experienced about the dedication and empathy towards families who need their help. We finally got the right support in place and it feels victory."

Disclaimer – our client’s parents have provided consent to use their names and photos for the purpose of this case study.

## 5.4. Defending rights: public law and discrimination

Last year, DLS successfully secured two new legal aid contracts in public law and discrimination. Since launching these services, we have seen a steady increase in enquiries through our legal advice line, particularly in relation to discrimination. Over the past year, the service received 78 discrimination enquiries and 4 public law enquiries, and we undertook 2 public law cases and 1 discrimination case.

While our legal team has a broad range of expertise, we recognise the need for further targeted training in discrimination law to build on the initial training provided by Cloisters Chambers last year. Plans are also in place for our Senior Solicitor to potentially transition to discrimination legal aid work once the Trust for London employment contract concludes. This will bring valuable expertise to the team, foster shared learning, and enable us to take on more discrimination cases.

Discrimination cases present specific challenges, particularly in identifying cases with a strong likelihood of success. Public law cases have been a slightly easier transition due to overlaps with community care matters, but we continue to look for ways to strengthen the team’s collective knowledge. The team is structured to provide mutual support, collaboratively reviewing case materials with oversight from supervisors where necessary.

Over the next year, with the addition of our Senior Employment Discrimination Solicitor, we anticipate being able to take on more discrimination legal aid cases and further develop expertise across the team. We will also focus on creating additional training opportunities in both public law and discrimination, ensuring that our staff continue to build their skills and provide high-quality legal support in these areas.

## 5.5. Defending rights: employment

During the period June 2024 to May 2025, there were no major legislative changes in employment law, with the Equality Act 2010 remaining the primary legal protection for Deaf and Disabled employees.

However, the policy and guidance environment shifted slightly, with the Government and ACAS reinforcing employer duties on reasonable adjustments, flexible working, and inclusive recruitment practices.

The DLS Employment Advice Line continues to receive the highest number of enquiries of all our services, with demand steadily increasing. The service is primarily staffed by our Senior Employment Solicitor, focusing on Deaf and Disabled people in London, with a parallel quick advice line available to Deaf and Disabled individuals across the rest of England and Wales. Enquiries predominantly relate to workplace discrimination, particularly failures to make reasonable adjustments and discrimination arising from disability. We also provide guidance on unfair dismissal, whistleblowing, and unlawful deduction of wages. While we assist clients with legal challenges where necessary, our preferred outcome is often to help clients retain their jobs.

Growing demand for this service has significantly impacted the workload of our Senior Solicitor, who is now handling large volumes of basic enquiries rather than focusing on more complex cases. We frequently receive requests for full representation but are unable to meet this demand due to limited capacity. Over the past year, the service received 2,645 employment enquiries, a 17% increase from the previous year, averaging 51 enquiries per week.

Our Senior Employment Solicitor took over 1,800 actions to assist clients, representing a 20% increase from the previous year. Five clients were represented at employment hearings, primarily preliminary case management hearings; no final outcomes were known at the time of reporting.

A continuing trend is the growing proportion of enquiries from neurodiverse clients, which now accounts for around 50% of all enquiries. Most relate to reasonable adjustments. While in-depth research has not yet been conducted, this increase may reflect the rise in ADHD and other neurodiversity diagnoses in the UK and the persistent lack of employer understanding of their responsibilities under the Equality Act, which can lead to workplace discrimination and unmet adjustment needs.

Looking ahead, the Trust for London funding that supports the employment advice line is due to end in October 2025. While we are actively applying for specific project funding, we have not yet secured it, meaning the service will need to be scaled back in the next year until designated funding is obtained. Maintaining the service, even partially funded from core reserves, remains a high priority, given its vital role and the high demand from Disabled and neurodiverse clients.

Beyond frontline advice, our Senior Employment Solicitor continues to influence policy and practice in the wider sector. During the year, he spoke at a book launch on “Claiming Disability

Discrimination: Assessing Barriers to Justice” at Greenwich University on 3<sup>rd</sup> June 2024, and contributed evidence to the House of Lords Committee on their Transition to Work project (detailed more in our policy section), drawing on decades of experience in disability discrimination and employment law.

## Case studies

AL was employed as a recovery driver. He is autistic and requested adjustments for this – notably he had issues with the manner in which the respondent’s system assigned and took away jobs from him which caused him difficulties due to his disability. Whilst agreed in theory these adjustments were not kept to, and this led to a number of autistic meltdowns on his part. These in turn resulted in his dismissal at the end of his probation period. He brought a tribunal claim alleging failure to make reasonable adjustments and discrimination arising from disability but struggled to deal with preparation for the hearing and approached us for assistance. We provided guidance on the law concerning the issues in the claim and on how to prepare for the hearing itself. He was represented by his partner at the final hearing and his claim was successful. We subsequently provided assistance in respect of the remedies hearing which was contested throughout by the respondents who refused to seek to settle the claim. It resulted in an award of just over £21,000 to the client

AD approached us as he was under threat of dismissal on the grounds of capability. He had been off work for some time due to receiving cancer treatment. It was apparent that there had been little communication between the parties and as a consequence there was little understanding of his situation by his employer. We provided advice to him on his legal rights and also advised him as to how to approach matters with his employer. This led to an occupational health assessment which in turn made recommendations for adjustments to enable him to return to work. Accordingly the dismissal was avoided and, so far as we are aware, he has been able to return on a phased basis.

## 5.6. Defending rights: people with MS

### 5.6.1. MS Welfare and benefits advice

The MS Society has funded our dedicated Welfare Benefits Advice Service for people living with Multiple Sclerosis (MS) for seven years. The service was operated by two specialist welfare benefits advisors and provides specialist welfare benefits advice via telephone and email to people with MS and their carers across the UK, supporting them to access the benefits they are entitled to, challenge incorrect decisions, and resolve both complex and straightforward queries. This service is unique within our organisation as it is our only advice line operating across England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland; all other services are limited to England and Wales.

The service primarily offers one-off advice, supporting clients to apply for benefits, understand their entitlements, and challenge decisions. This includes providing template letters and drafting bespoke letters where appropriate. Our overarching aim is always to provide holistic, person-centred support, ensuring clients leave with clear information and practical next steps to move their issue forward.

#### **Demand and enquiry trends**

The period from January to March was particularly busy for this service, driven by widespread concern about proposed government changes to disability benefits. Many clients contacted us feeling anxious about announced reforms to Personal Independence Payment (PIP), which were later withdrawn following significant campaigning by Deaf and Disabled people's organisations.

During this period, we also supported many people navigating the new Scottish benefits system, particularly Adult Disability Payment. Many clients expressed frustration and concern about how low benefit rates are compared to the cost of living, particularly when health conditions limit their ability to work. Some reported that they needed to reduce their working hours for health reasons but were unable to do so because the benefits available would not cover their basic living costs, forcing them to remain in full-time work against their doctor's recommendations.

At the same time, we also continued to see a high volume of enquiries relating to:

- Migration to Universal Credit
- Transitions from legacy ESA to New Style ESA
- Work coach appointments
- Completing complex benefit forms

More than half of all enquiries related specifically to PIP, across both the mobility and daily living components. Other common enquiries included issues connected to Universal Credit, National Insurance, Housing Benefit, Council Tax Support, and Carer's Allowance.

### **Reach and impact**

Over the last 12 months, enquiry levels remained broadly consistent with the previous year, with 1,563 enquiries received, averaging around 30 per week. In total, our advisers supported 20 more individuals than the previous year.

The estimated financial value of benefit claims supported during this period was £1,086,282, representing an increase of more than 50% compared to the previous year. This figure is likely to be an underestimation, as outcomes for many PIP-related enquiries cannot be reliably tracked.

Around 52% of referrals came directly from the MS Society or via the MS Society website, highlighting the strength and visibility of the partnership.

Where demographic information was provided by clients, the breakdown was as follows:

- 62% of clients identified as female and 38% as male
- The majority of clients were aged 35–64
- A high proportion identified as White British
- Enquiries were received from across the UK, with higher volumes from Greater London, Kent, Leicestershire and the West Midlands

During this period, the advice line operated from 9am to 7pm. Where advisers were unavailable, clients left a message and were contacted within three to five working days.

Over the past year, we continued our strong partnership with the MS Society, delivering information sessions for staff and contributing to knowledge-sharing initiatives. In the last six months alone, we delivered eight webinars covering benefit entitlements, proposed changes, and how to challenge PIP decisions.

We also remained active members of the Disability Benefits Consortium (DBC)—a national coalition of over 100 charities working to improve the benefits system. During a year of intense sector-wide campaigning against proposed reforms to PIP and ESA, we contributed expertise to DBC discussions, joint letters, and coordinated advocacy, as outlined further in our policy work section.



## Case studies

A is in their 40s and lives in Manchester. They had received a managed migration notice about moving from ESA to Universal Credit and had lots of questions about the process. We advised that they should get a UC transitional element and LCWRA element as well as two weeks run on of ESA and HB. We advised them on the work allowance in UC and what to expect from the form. We advised them on UC advances and rules on going abroad. We estimated their monthly UC entitlement and advised on the best time to claim UC.

A said, “You’ve been fantastic, I feel a lot better now. Thank you so much for your help, advise & support with this. I couldn’t have done it without you!”

B is in their 40s. They were refused PIP and wanted help to challenge the decision. We advised them on the process for mandatory reconsiderations and appeals and sent them template letters to use.

*B said, “I just wanted to send an email to thank your department for all the help you provide for people with MS who have been refused PIP and are left feeling upset, confused, and beaten. Your easy-to-comprehend step by step email guidance and the template forms helped me a lot with my organisation for a Mandatory Reconsideration. [You were] the voice of reassurance during this stressful Mandatory Reconsideration and tribunal process. I am pleased to say that, following making an appeal to a tribunal, I am now one of the successful cases who did not have to attend court and will be in receipt of PIP in due course. I received a call from PIP and was told they can change my lack of awards to Enhanced for both components!”*

### 5.6.2. MS legal line

The MS Legal Advice Line is also funded by the MS Society and provides free legal advice and support for people with Multiple Sclerosis (MS) and their carers across England and Wales. The service is delivered by a dedicated MS Legal Officer (MSLO), offering expertise across a wide range of legal areas, including employment, discrimination (goods & services), and community care. In certain cases, the MSLO represents clients through to tribunal, and where necessary signposts individuals to other DLS services or external organisations to ensure they receive the most appropriate support.

Clients can access the service via phone, email, or post, with telephone appointments available Monday to Friday, 9.30 am to 5.30pm. If the service is busy or no one is available, clients can leave a message and are contacted within three working days. Over the past year, we achieved a 92% success rate in responding to clients within this timeframe.

Over the past year, the MSLO handled 2,729 enquiries, representing a staggering 71.5% increase compared to the previous year — averaging over 50 enquiries per week, up from 30 per week previously. The service supported 640 individuals, delivering 2,288 acts of support valued at an estimated £198,475 if sourced privately. Around 60% of enquiries related to employment issues, followed by community care and discrimination cases. Approximately 36% of enquiries were referrals from the MS Society or its website, and around 25% were from returning clients, reflecting the reliability and trust built with service users.

The MSLO service supports clients across a broad geographical area, with a high proportion from London and the South East of England. Age demographics vary across areas of law: employment enquiries predominantly come from people aged 35–49, while community care enquiries are mainly from those aged 50 and above. Where clients specified ethnicity, the majority were White British, although many did not provide this information.

As outlined elsewhere in this report, the broader political landscape this year has influenced the types of client enquiries. Pressures on adult social care budgets, the rising cost of living, workforce shortages, and proposed welfare benefit reforms have all contributed to increased demand and complexity in the enquiries we receive.

In addition, we have noticed specific trends within these enquiries. For example, in community care, clients frequently face inappropriate or premature threats of court action by local authorities regarding care charges. These threats often cause significant stress and may involve charges that can be disputed, sometimes amounting to thousands of pounds. To address this, DLS aims to publicise the steps outlined in the Civil Procedure Rules, Action Protocol, and debt recovery processes, empowering clients to identify and challenge inappropriate threats.

Further to providing high-quality legal support, the MSLO continues to provide mentorship and guidance to MS Society staff, supporting capacity building and influencing practice. This includes:

- Meeting regularly with the MS Society policy team to provide employment law insights ahead of the Employment Rights Bill 2024.
- Delivering webinars and training to inform policy and practice.
- Supporting the MS Society digital contact team to provide employment rights guidance for newly diagnosed individuals, addressing post-diagnosis discussions with employers.

- Contributing to the development of the MS Society Hub model.

The MSLO continues to combine expert legal support with mentorship, guidance, and sector engagement, ensuring people with MS and their carers can navigate complex legal issues while strengthening the MS Society's staff knowledge and wider service delivery.

## Case studies

### Employment

A gentleman with MS contacted the MS Society Helpline in March 2025, following dismissal from his warehouse job with a national retailer. He was transferred to the MSLO for advice. The MSLO established the gentleman was dismissed for capability reasons. That is, his employer decided he was no longer capable to perform his role (safely), because of MS related mobility limitations. That is, the employer considered the gentleman was no longer able to walk long distances (without rest breaks), could not stand for longer than one-hour (independently), and was at-risk of falling while at work.

The gentleman explained that the rest breaks could be reasonably accommodated without significantly impacting his productivity, and a walking / standing aid would also enable him to perform his role. The MSLO provided the gentleman with grounds of appeal, citing the right to reasonable adjustments (including aids and equipment) for people with MS under the Equality Act. The gentleman attended his appeal, and emailed the MSLO ... .. "i had the meeting , and i was rehired, thanks so much, hope you have a nice day ..."

### Discrimination (goods and services)

An elderly lady with MS contacted the MS Society Helpline in August 2024. She explained she had commenced disability discrimination proceedings against her bank for withdrawal of banking services due to security concerns. The bank's security systems were triggered by variance between the signature samples held on record, and two cheques signed by the lady. Services were withdrawn when the elderly lady was unable to recite her banking security pin 6 number. She commenced legal proceedings because the bank refused to adjust its security practices to allow for the effects of MS.

The Helpline was transferred her to the MSLO. The lady explained the signature variations arose from shaky-handwriting, which arose as her MS symptoms progressed. The MSLO established that the bank's solicitors had responded to the claim, and applied for the lady's case to be struck-out on technical grounds. MSLO agreed to represent the lady at the strike-out hearing. The case was not struck-out, and the lady was given permission to correct the technical defects. MSLO corrected the defects, and the lady proposed a compensation settlement of £4000. The bank agreed. The lady closed her

account, and moved her savings to a new bank. She expressed her gratitude, “Thank you for all your help ...”.

## 5.7 Defending rights: welfare and benefits

In addition to our specialist welfare benefits service for people with MS, DLS delivers a wider welfare benefits advice service with two core strands: a welfare benefits advice line and a community-based outreach service.

Our welfare benefits advice line provides immediate support to individuals with questions or challenges relating to benefit entitlement, mandatory reconsiderations and appeals. People can contact us by phone, email or in writing and receive clear, practical advice and guidance on how to progress their case. Demand for this service increased significantly this year, reflecting both rising need and growing awareness of our expertise. We received 620 calls and 540 emails, representing a 47% increase in calls and an 8% increase in emails compared with the previous year. This surge was particularly noticeable following government announcements on proposed changes to disability benefits.

Alongside the advice line, we run a welfare benefits outreach service, which has been operating for nearly eight years. Through this service, our specialist welfare benefits adviser delivers weekly outreach sessions in familiar, inclusive community settings, using a tailored, accessible and holistic approach. We currently deliver outreach through Mind in Haringey and Islington Mind, providing advice in safe, welcoming and trusted spaces where people feel understood and supported. These partnerships are built on long-standing relationships, with our Mind partners offering vital emotional and wellbeing support while DLS provides specialist legal advice on welfare benefits.

Our community-based model is particularly effective in overcoming barriers that many Deaf and Disabled people face when accessing legal support, including anxiety, past experiences of discrimination, complex forms, digital exclusion and a lack of trust in institutions. By delivering advice in trusted settings, we reduce the stress of navigating complex benefit systems.

Through our outreach service, we support clients throughout the entire welfare benefits process — from initial contact and form-filling, to evidence gathering, legal argument development, appeals and tribunal advocacy. Our work is trauma-informed and client-led, ensuring individuals remain in control of their cases and are supported to build confidence in asserting their rights.

As noted in our specialist welfare benefits service for people with MS, the unsettled political landscape earlier this year — particularly the proposed changes to PIP and Limited Capability for Work-Related Activity (LCWRA) — caused significant anxiety among our client base. Many

people contacted us seeking reassurance about their ongoing eligibility and fearing the withdrawal of vital income. We also saw a high volume of enquiries linked to the managed migration from legacy benefits to Universal Credit.

In addition to this, the ongoing cost of living crisis continues to drive demand for our services, disproportionately affecting Deaf and Disabled people. Rising energy costs, food prices and housing expenses are pushing many household budgets to breaking point. Disabled people face additional, unavoidable costs associated with their impairments, leaving less financial resilience than non-disabled households. As a result, increasing numbers of people are contacting DLS in acute distress, urgently needing support to secure the benefits they are entitled to in order to meet basic living costs.

During the year, our outreach adviser delivered 366 appointments, supporting 359 unique individuals. Where cases progressed to tribunal, she represented clients in four cases: one resulted in a PIP standard rate mobility award, and three appeals lapsed in the client's favour prior to tribunal hearings. These appeals related to PIP and Housing Benefit overpayments. Across all casework, we secured £434,007.16 in documented financial gains for clients.

Demand for face-to-face outreach appointments remained extremely high throughout the year, resulting in a growing waiting list. This reflects both the shortage of welfare benefits advice in the area and the high level of trust clients place in our service, particularly among people with mental health needs who may struggle to access advice elsewhere. Where clients required additional or specialist support, we referred them to trusted local organisations, including Help on Your Doorstep (energy advice), Haringey Law Centre (unsuitable accommodation), and separate debt advice services.

Alongside frontline advice provision, DLS advisers contributed to wider campaign and policy initiatives throughout the year. This work was particularly important during the government's proposed changes to PIP, where we collaborated with the Disability Benefits Consortium to support the pen portraits for the four-point rule campaign. Our advisers also challenged proposed welfare reforms and contributed to sector-wide responses, including submissions to DWP consultations, ensuring that the voices and lived experiences of Deaf and Disabled people were reflected in national policy discussions.

The service faces a significant operational challenge next year with our 18-month grant coming to an end in October 2025. We have submitted an application for a new 3-year grant with the Three Guineas Trust. While we expect a funding decision by mid-October, we already know that any award will represent an almost 50% reduction in funding. This will require careful consideration of how the service is resourced moving forward, including whether we can sustain current levels of delivery or need to reduce operational hours.

**Case studies – Advice Line****Loss of Carers income during migration from legacy benefits to Universal Credit**

Ms A is the sole carer for her teenage son, who has significant disabilities and requires continuous two-to-one support. During the transfer from legacy benefits to Universal Credit, all of Ms A's means-tested entitlements were stopped without warning. This left her with no income to meet basic household needs, placing the family in immediate hardship.

The suspension arose from a misunderstanding of the capital rules relating to her son's Direct Payments and disability benefits. Ms A manages these funds as his appointee. The Direct Payments are held in a separate ring-fenced account to meet his assessed care needs under the Care Act 2014. A substantial balance had accumulated due to an ongoing shortage of skilled carers rather than any change in need or misuse of funds. Under the Universal Credit Regulations 2013, such capital should be disregarded where it remains identifiable and intended solely for care.

Likewise, her son's Personal Independence Payment savings also held in Ms A's name for administrative purposes should not have been treated as her income or capital. Statutory provisions make clear that funds belonging to a dependent child or qualifying young person are excluded from a carer's capital assessment.

Despite repeatedly explaining these points, Ms A struggled to have her circumstances correctly understood. The loss of income resulting in acute financial hardship with Mrs A unable to afford essential household bills and it was at this point whilst in the JobCentre we called her.

Whilst we generally do not act for or liaise directly with DWP or JobCentre staff on this occasion the carer had left a distraught voicemail for us and then went to the JobCentre in distress to explain her situation and it was whilst at the JobCentre she took my call. The Welfare Benefits Advice Service liaised directly with JobCentre Manager setting out the legal position and advising Ms A on corroborating evidence from the local authority regarding the accumulation of unused Direct Payments. This support enabled her to challenge the decision effectively and safeguard the financial resources required to maintain her son's care. She was referred for foodbank vouchers and her Universal Credit entitlements have since been re-instated.

This case is one of quite a few similar cases in which ringfenced personal budget and direct payments were erroneously considered capital in excess of thresholds for claiming Universal Credit, I have encountered over the past year illustrating the vulnerability of full-time carers during managed migration and the essential role of specialist welfare rights advice

**Disabled students and Universal Credit Enquiries**

Mr B contacted our service querying his entitlement to Universal Credit whilst undertaking a fulltime University Course and was unsure how this affected his entitlement as a disabled student.

I explained that full-time students are generally excluded from Universal Credit while receiving education. However, I also clarified an important exception: students in receipt of Personal Independence Payment, Disability Living Allowance, or Adult Disability Payment in Scotland may claim Universal Credit if they have been assessed or treated as assessed as having limited capability for work before starting their course.

A key issue was the status of his course. Universities determine whether a course is full-time or part-time and evidence may be required to persuade the Department for Work and Pensions otherwise. I therefore advised him to obtain written confirmation from his university regarding the structure of his programme and the expected study hours.

I also explained rules relevant to the work capability assessment, which determines whether a claimant has limited capability for work or limited capability for work-related activity. I outlined how this assessment affects Universal Credit and Employment and Support Allowance when undertaking a programme of study.

In addition to clarifying the Universal Credit rules, I signposted Mr B to alternative sources of support. This included information on Disabled Students' Allowance, specialist disability bursaries, and other educational grants. I provided him with a link to further guidance from UCAS and encouraged him to contact his University's Student Advice Centre for advice and guidance about student bursaries and grants he might qualify for.

This case demonstrates the importance of accessible welfare rights advice and the value of signposting to wider support for disabled students navigating complex benefit entitlements whilst in education to advance their potentials and future employability.

**Loss of Carer's Allowance due to misinterpretation of EU Coordination Rules**

Mrs C approached our service after the Department for Work and Pensions refused her claim for Carer's Allowance on the basis that her small pension from Poland made her ineligible. She cares full time for her husband and relies on Carer's Allowance entitlements to afford essentials. Refusal of her entitlement to Carers Allowance left her without essential income and caused significant distress, particularly as she believed she satisfied qualifying conditions.

During our discussion, it became clear that the DWP decision to disallow Carers Allowance entitlements had been based on an erroneous interpretation of EU social security

coordination regulations. Ms C has lived in the United Kingdom for many years and has a nineteen-year UK employment history, considerably longer than her eleven years of contributions in Poland.

I explained that the Polish pension, amounting to approximately £70 per week, was well below the earnings threshold for Carer's Allowance and had no bearing on her entitlement. I also clarified complex welfare benefit rules in relation to Carer's Allowance and state pensions, , and the circumstances in which Carer's Allowance can increase when a pension is lower than the Carer's Allowance rate.

I drafted a detailed written summary for Ms C and her daughter assisting Mrs C, setting out the relevant legal provisions and practical steps. This included guidance on requesting a Mandatory Reconsideration, providing evidence of her UK National Insurance history, and citing the applicable EU regulations. I also advised her to submit the request by recorded delivery and retain proof of posting.

Recognising the importance of wider support, I signposted Ms C to additional resources. This included information on the Law Centres Network and LawWorks for potential representation if an appeal to the First-tier Tribunal became necessary, as well as links to official guidance on the Mandatory Reconsideration process. I also explained the DWP complaints procedure, should she wish to challenge the way her case had been handled, including escalation to the Independent Case Examiner and, ultimately, the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman.

The case illustrates the significant impact of DWP decision making errors on carers ability to access Carers Allowance entitlements to continue providing essential support. It also illustrates the value of specialist welfare rights advice in identifying misinterpretations of complex legislation signposting clients towards further advice and guidance or avenues of practical support.

**Carers daughter left a review on Google Ola Skrodzka**

"Disability Law Service were very helpful in supporting my parents and fantastic service, so much needed! We had contact with Eva and she went above and beyond to support. She had excellent expertise, was very knowledgeable, excellent attention to detail and simplified complex terms in a way my parents could understand. Above all she was very kind, approachable and had remarkable communication skills. Highly recommend this and we wish the Disability Law Service all the best"



**Case studies – Outreach/representation****Client feedback – Charlotte Eadie****To Whom It May Concern**

I am writing regarding Jo Mitchell. I was referred to Jo for assistance applying for benefits by Mind in Haringey back in February of this year and have met with her on three occasions to date. I have been incredibly impressed with the outstanding level of support and assistance I have received from Jo, so much so that I wanted to commend her to her manager and I hope this email will be forwarded on to the appropriate person / persons.

To provide some background, I am diagnosed with PTSD, ADHD and am awaiting full testing for Autism Spectrum Disorder having been screened as highly likely to meet the diagnostic criteria. My PTSD relates to a previous abusive relationship involving a great deal of gaslighting and discrediting me with professionals / blocking me from accessing services to help me regain independence. One of the most debilitating consequences of this and a major feature of my PTSD is the fear of being disbelieved by professional services. This manifests itself in a number of ways - including an inability / fear of completing or attempting to complete forms, over-explaining and going to unnecessary minute detail and presenting with extreme vocal and motor tics when meeting with professionals and, at times, becoming involuntarily mute, sometimes for days or even weeks. One of the many ways that this has impacted my life is that, since 2019, I have been unable to claim the appropriate Universal Credit and PIP resulting in huge rent arrears and debt. This is despite having had the assistance of three mental health advocates and the assistance of Early Help and Child Services for four years. I make no criticism of those professionals, the simple fact is it takes a great deal of patience and time to assist me as result of my PTSD. I do not say that lightly, I myself spent over 15 years practicing as a criminal barrister working predominantly with vulnerable clients and so, ironically, am very familiar with the complexities of working with people in similar situations to this.

It is against this background that I want to commend Jo who, in the space of three face to face meetings, has managed to resolve my issues with Universal Credit and make excellent headway in dealing with Council Tax and PIP - no mean feat considering the fact I have been unable to make this progress in 4 ½ years.

This is primarily been achieved because Jo took the time and had the patience to listen to the words I was saying, without being distracted by the manner in which they were delivered - which is often extremely fast, at times incoherent, repetitive and with frequent irrelevant diversions. It is hugely frustrating for me because if I am dealing with anything other than my own issues, I am an extremely good communicator. Jo has shown me huge compassion whilst using a variety of tactics to gain my trust and keep me focused and on track. She has also worked extremely hard outside of face to face meetings, dealing with fairly complex legal

issues with Universal Credit directly and liaising with my landlord and benefits agencies on my behalf.

The service she has given has gone over and above anything I have previously experienced or, indeed, anticipated or expected. For example, we needed extra time to complete PIP review form and I had struggled to make contact with DWP to request an extension. Without being asked to do so, Jo made the necessary calls on my behalf. When a further extension was required, Jo emailed to remind me to call to request this and checked to make sure I had managed to do so before the deadline. In addition to this, Jo has dealt with constant emails from my Landlord directly to her and protected my privacy and rights, considerably relieving the pressure he repeatedly places on me.

I hope that you will forgive the lengthy email, people these days are extremely quick to complain about poor service but sadly rarely commend good service. The service I have received from Jo has made an enormous difference to my wellbeing, not simply because of the progress she has made in resolving my benefit claims, but also by increasing my confidence in dealing with professionals generally. I would not hesitate to recommend her or the DLS to people in the future.

## 5.8 Propel project

The Propel Project, jointly funded by City Bridge Foundation and London Legal Support Trust, provides DLS with two years of funding to train new social welfare solicitors and support, mentor, and train generalist advisors at local Deaf and Disabled People's Organisations (DDPOs). The initiative aims to deliver holistic, accessible advice to Deaf and Disabled people at an early stage, reaching new audiences while building capacity across the sector. Insights from this project will inform a scalable model that both strengthens sector expertise and expands equal access to justice.

This year marked the second year of the project, during which we scaled up operations by expanding to a second DDPO, Choice in Hackney, while continuing our work with Real in Tower Hamlets. The new partnership in Hackney has created a much-needed route for Deaf and Disabled residents to access community care and housing advice through both generalist and specialist legal advice clinics.

### Training and development

- One DLS trainee solicitor has nearly qualified, gaining practical experience across housing, community care, and discrimination cases.
- The second DLS trainee solicitor is expected to qualify next year after a temporary leave of absence.
- Real's social welfare advisor completed their NVQ and continues to develop skills through shadowing and direct client work.
- Choice in Hackney's advisor has similarly built skills through training and shadowing, contributing to both clinics.

### Coordination and learning

- Monthly project meetings and regular trainee/advisor meetings ensured progress was monitored, and learning was shared across partners.
- In September 2024 and March 2025, we held monitoring reviews with partner organisations to address challenges such as communication and leadership changes, which has strengthened our collaboration.
- In January 2025, we held the first mobilisation meeting with Choice in Hackney. Clinics were officially launched and integrated in March 2025, with shadowing and training starting in April 2025.
- A preliminary advice model has been developed for future advisor training, which will be continuously refined with partner input.

## User engagement

- The first user reference group in October 2024 engaged five Deaf and Disabled residents in Tower Hamlets, offering feedback on clinic design and highlighting gaps in participation.
- Suggestions included simplified resources for clients and validated the need for these clinics in trusted local spaces.

## Clinics and impact

- Clinics alternate between community care and housing each Friday.
- Over the year, 9 clinics were held (7 housing, 2 community care).
- 7 clients were referred from Real and Choice in Hackney for specialist DLS advice.
- Housing cases mainly involved navigating homelessness following landlord possession actions, while community care cases focused on care assessments and ensuring adequate provision.

## Looking ahead

- We have submitted an application for third year funding which will allow us to develop the model, expand partner capacity, and further increase access for Deaf and Disabled residents.

Real offered some feedback about their experience of the project:

*“In this year of the project Real feels that the partnership between Real and DLS has really strengthened. We have been able to have honest and transparent conversations about what works well and what works less well in order to adapt our ways of working and we now have a clear, accessible guide to the partnership.*

*Real's advisor has really grown in confidence and has nearly completed their NVQ. They are now able to give detailed and accurate advice across a range of areas.*

*They have also created a strong peer support network through the DLS staff and their NVQ cohort.*

*The legal clinics are working well and feedback from clients is positive. The DLS and Real staff have worked together well to shape these clinics. Uptake for the legal clinics is still low and time to promote is limited, often relying on Real staff who are attending other events to promote the*

*service, future learning could be to build in funding for promotional activities as meeting advisors and solicitors face to face can often help to break down barriers for potential clients.*

***Choice in Hackney** offered some feedback about their experience of the project so far.”*

*“Choice was grateful for the approach from Disability Law Service (DLS) in late Autumn of 2024 and for the subsequent offer for us to become a Propel partner. We believe there is a synergy between our respective services and between the needs of some of our service users and what DLS hope to provide. We were also grateful that DLS agreed to defer the start date to allow for the return of our CEO, who was on extended Leave abroad, who wanted to be hands-on in the recruitment process of the funded worker. A short time after we made an appointment, DLS proactively arranged a visit our offices for a very positive and helpful 'mobilisation' meeting involving our CEO, our DCEO (who line manages the funder worker) our funded worker and some of our other Staff whose work includes Care issues which, along with Housing, is one of the two strands that DLS Trainee Solicitors are offering to provide Legal Advice with. This was a detailed discussion and enabled both parties to understand not just the aims and parameters of the project but also each others' practical needs e.g. our funded worker has a separate, part-time post at another organisation and DLS were able to commit from day one to holding their Advice Clinics on one of the days that the funded worker is at Choice. At the same time, DLS stressed that they would try to be as flexible and responsive as possible if things changed. Since then, DLS have allowed our funded worker to sit-in on their helpline to gain experience and there has been regular contact between DLS and Choice at all levels i.e. between their Trainee Solicitors and our funded worker and between DLS management and ours.”*

*“Choice has welcomed the opportunity to increase both our capacity, and our breadth of work, by partnering with DLS. Prior to becoming a Propel member organisation, our involvement in housing was limited to assisting with applications to join the housing Register and priority on medical or disability grounds and to chase outstanding repairs. Although all those things are important, the partnership with DLS had enabled us to begin to put in place access to Qualified Legal Advice for our service users via Community Care & Housing Legal Clinics and, at the same time, facilitated Choice offering non-Legal advocacy through the funding of a part-time post and an NVQ.”*

## 6. Policy, campaigning and influencing

Over the past year, DLS has played an active role in national policy, research and campaigning initiatives, helping to amplify collective impact by lending both our name and our specialist expertise. We have worked alongside DDPOs, advice sector partners, regulators and government bodies to influence debate, challenge harmful narratives and promote a fairer social security and equality framework for Deaf and Disabled people.

### 6.1 Campaigns and open Letters

DLS supported a wide range of campaigns and open letters during the year, including:

- **The National Campaign for Disability Justice**, coordinated by Inclusion Barnet, calling on the Government to work with organisations led by Deaf and Disabled people to guarantee access to work, financial security and dignity for all Deaf and Disabled people, whether in work or not.
- **An open letter to the Secretary of State** for Work and Pensions, Liz Kendall MP, coordinated by Carers UK, calling for an immediate halt to the creation of new Carer's Allowance overpayment debts.
- **Support for Public Law Project's campaign** urging the Government to use the Public Authorities Bill to legislate to restrict the recovery of Universal Credit overpayments caused by Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) error.
- **Support for the Rethink Mental Illness campaign** calling for the implementation of a cross-departmental mental health strategy to address the root causes of the growing national mental health crisis.
- **Signing an open letter to the Chancellor of the Exchequer**, Rachel Reeves MP, coordinated by Turn2Us and supported by over 60 organisations, urging the Government to use language that supports rather than stigmatises people when talking about social security, ahead of the Autumn Budget.
- **Signing a joint letter coordinated by the UK DDPO CRDP Coalition** to the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, responding to contradictory media reports regarding proposed changes to the Work Capability Assessment and highlighting the potential impact on Disabled people, while urging the Government to halt plans to cut disability benefits.
- **Signing an open letter led by the DPAC, ROFA and the DPO Forum**, calling on the Equality and Human Rights Commission to investigate the urgent threat to the human rights of Deaf and Disabled people posed by a series of recent policy announcements and legislative proposals.

In addition, DLS supported numerous campaigns opposing proposed UK Government benefit cuts, demonstrating our support through our website and social media channels. Our Chief Executive, Andrew McKay, publicly highlighted the disproportionate and damaging impact these proposals would have on Disabled people and the advice sector, stating:

“The announced cuts to disability benefits are very worrying. We urge the Government to rethink its proposals. Disabled people need better health and social care, accessible housing, accessible workplaces and disability benefits that will not push us into poverty.

We stand with the Disability Benefits Consortium in condemning the changes and support [Scope’s campaign to stop the cuts.](#)”

## 6.2 Policy engagement and research

Alongside campaigning, DLS contributed specialist insight to a number of policy and research initiatives:

- We provided input to the Equality and Human Rights Commission on the updated Code of Practice for Services, Public Functions and Associations.
- We contributed to a roundtable discussion on the Government’s “Pathways to Work: Reforming Benefits and Support to Get Britain Working” Green Paper, sharing frontline expertise to help inform a mayoral response to the proposals.
- We met with the Office for Equality and Opportunity in the Cabinet Office to provide insight into research supporting legislative manifesto commitments in the equality sphere, including:
  - Strengthening protections against discrimination based on combined or intersecting protected characteristics.
  - Research into strengthening equal pay protections and addressing pay discrimination linked to combined discrimination.

## 6.3 Parliamentary evidence and sector leadership

DLS’s expertise was also recognised at parliamentary and sector level:

- Our Senior Employment Solicitor provided oral evidence to the House of Lords Public Services Committee, contributing to its inquiry and subsequent report, “Think Work First: The Transition from Education to Work for Young Disabled People”, published on 15th October 2024.

- DLS was invited to take part in Advice UK’s “Advice Saves” campaign, highlighting the vital role of Deaf and Disabled People’s Organisations and the growing pressures facing the advice sector. The campaign featured DLS on Advice UK’s website, including client testimony illustrating the real-life impact of our work:  
<https://www.adviceuk.org.uk/2024/12/10/advice-saves-campaign-highlights-the-vital-role-of-deaf-and-disabled-peoples-organisations-and-the-challenges-they-face/>. In response to a parliamentary question AdviceUK asked an MP to table, the minister Stephen Timms named the report and welcomed its findings:

*“We are grateful to Advice UK for sharing their insights and concerns from their ‘Advice Saves’ campaign and findings in their ‘Voices of Deaf and Disabled People’ report. Ensuring the views and voices of disabled people are at the heart of everything we do is a priority for this government and we are committed to listening and engaging closely with disabled people and their representative organisations as we develop policies that may impact them, including the reforms set out in the recent ‘Get Britain Working’ White Paper and the Health and Disability Green Paper”*

- We were also featured in UK Legal Futures, a leading legal sector publication, which showcased the work of Disability Law Service and told the story of one of our clients, helping to raise awareness of disability justice issues within the legal profession.

It was a privilege to work closely with Advice UK through this campaign, sharing our experience and insight into the challenges facing the advice sector—particularly specialist services for Deaf and Disabled people—and amplifying the voices of our clients while highlighting the ongoing need for our services.

## 6.4 DLS-led policy and research initiatives

Alongside our contribution to sector-wide campaigning and policy development, DLS continued to advance its own policy and research initiatives grounded in frontline casework and client experience. On the 24<sup>th</sup> July 2024, we published a report examining the impact of home care charging and identifying systemic failures by a number of local authorities to comply with the Public Sector Equality Duty in the design and operation of charging policies. The findings were featured in Disability News Service and presented at the Community Care Forum, contributing to wider debate among practitioners. Building on this work, we plan to publish an opinion piece expanding on the research and to launch a joint letter to the Minister of State for Care and the



Association of Directors of Adult Social Services (ADASS), with signatories from across the equality and advice sectors, calling for action to address unlawful charging practices.

DLS also facilitated an independent research project led by our Justice First Fellowship Fellow, focusing on barriers to Care Act advocacy. The project is being undertaken independently by our Fellow, with facilitation from DLS through staff and volunteer input and supervisory oversight. During the year, the research involved Freedom of Information requests to local authorities and interviews with both independent advocacy organisations and people with lived experience. This work will continue into the next year, with DLS working alongside the Fellow and Linklaters to analyse and publish the findings, strengthening the evidence base for improved access to advocacy and accountability under the Care Act.

As this overview demonstrates, it has been a busy and impactful year for DLS in supporting partner campaigns, contributing to policy development and engaging with high-level decision-makers. Through calls for evidence, roundtables, parliamentary inquiries and collective campaigning, we have continued to use our frontline expertise to influence systems and advocate for meaningful change for Deaf and Disabled people.

## 7. Training and capacity building

With our unique expertise across multiple legal disciplines, combined with the lived experience of disability embedded across our organisation, DLS is uniquely placed to deliver high-quality disability law training across the sector. Our training supports organisations to build capacity, knowledge, and confidence, helping to increase access to justice for Deaf and Disabled people.

Disability law training remains a strategic priority for DLS, as set out in our operational plan, and we are committed to employing a dedicated Training and Partnerships Manager in the coming year. This year, however, the scale of our training programme was slightly lower than in previous years. This was a deliberate decision, driven by rising demand for our frontline services, a focus on strengthening internal resourcing and service sustainability and renewed funding activity.

Despite this, we continued to deliver targeted and impactful training to a range of organisations and audiences. This included welfare benefits training to RNID and the Bristol Parents Carers Forum, and community care law training, with a particular focus on direct payments, for members of Deaf-nitely Women. We also delivered training to students at the University of Leeds, through a disability law panel session exploring routes into the social welfare advice sector, becoming a solicitor, and the importance of using frontline data to inform policy and systems change work.

Through our Propel project, we continued to provide robust, holistic training to advisers at Real and Choice in Hackney, focused on housing and community care law. This included opportunities for advisers to shadow our specialist solicitors and receive ongoing mentoring, supporting a more integrated and sustainable advice ecosystem.

In addition, we provided informal training, workshops, and ongoing support to MS Society staff, particularly in relation to welfare benefits advice, strengthening their ability to support people with MS more effectively.

While our external training offer was more limited this year, this reflected a strategic focus on consolidating and strengthening our internal services and systems. With this work now underway, we remain committed to rolling out a robust and expanded training framework in the year ahead, guided by a dedicated Training and Partnerships Manager and informed directly by our frontline experience.

## 8. Volunteering

Volunteers continue to play a vital role in delivering DLS's services, enabling us to support more clients and enhancing the reliability and reach of our work across the organisation. Over the past 12 months, volunteers have contributed across a wide range of tasks, from conducting research to handling client enquiries via phone, email, and our legal aid line.

This year, we recruited three volunteers from UCL's Centre for Access to Justice, training them to support our legal aid team. Several of these volunteers have chosen to continue working with us, bringing valuable continuity and experience to the service. Members of our legal team also attended UCL's Access to Justice end-of-year event, where certificates were presented to students for their contributions. We are exploring opportunities to establish a second year of collaboration with UCL and are discussing potential financial support to help offset the staff time required to train and supervise volunteers.

Our volunteers provided crucial support on the Housing Helpline, assisting clients by taking calls and offering guidance on their options. This work empowers clients to understand their choices and make informed decisions that can improve their circumstances. Volunteers also support the Legal Aid Line during working hours by responding to calls and emails, assessing eligibility for legal aid, and directing clients to the appropriate legal team or external services if necessary.

In addition to client-facing roles, we welcomed a new volunteer this year to support our communications work. With experience as a copywriter, they have contributed to social media

content, website updates, and press materials, including work supporting our policy focus on social care charging. We are exploring further ways to utilise their skills across the organisation.

All volunteers at DLS receive a comprehensive induction and training programme, covering the organisation, their role, and key policies including confidentiality when handling client enquiries. Where possible, we provide professional development opportunities to help volunteers develop new skills or progress in their careers.

Without our volunteers, our capacity to meet growing demand would be significantly reduced. They are an indispensable part of DLS, and we remain committed to providing a rewarding experience, supporting the development of professional skills, and strengthening our volunteer programme. Next year, we plan to take a closer look at fully funding the programme to further enhance its sustainability and impact.

## 9. Information and technology

### 9.1 Social media

DLS continues to maintain a strong and consistent presence across our social media channels, posting almost daily throughout the year. Our content highlights key policy developments, relevant news and articles, client success stories, and information of direct relevance to Deaf and Disabled people.

This year, we made a strategic decision to establish a presence on BlueSky as an alternative to X. This decision was informed by growing ethical concerns around X, alongside an increase in civil society organisations using BlueSky as a space for communication and networking. We have been posting on both platforms while monitoring engagement and reach on BlueSky to inform our longer-term approach.

### 9.2 Website development

We have continued to keep our website up to date, ensuring accurate and timely information about service changes, opening hours, news articles, newsletters, and opportunities to get involved in our fundraising activities, most notably marathon events.

During the year, we also established an IT, Digital and Comms Working Group. One of its priorities has been to analyse our existing website to better understand how we can improve accessibility, user flow, and content. This work will inform the development of a new website next year, designed to better reflect our brand identity and how we want to be seen by clients,

partners, and funders. As part of this work, we will also explore the potential integration of an AI-enabled chat function to improve access to information and support.

### 9.3 Newsletters and future content

We continue to publish our quarterly newsletters on the website, where they can be downloaded by clients and partners. Looking ahead, we are exploring the launch of a blog or electronic newsletter. This would allow us to share tools, resources, and information about our training opportunities with partner and civil society organisations, supporting our broader systems change work.

### 9.4 WorkRights platform

The WorkRights platform is an online tool embedded within our website, designed to improve access to advice for Deaf and Disabled people in relation to workplace reasonable adjustments under the Equality Act. The platform uses a guided decision-tree approach, asking users a series of questions and generating tailored advice and draft letters to support adjustment requests.

On average, four to five individuals per week are referred to our Employment Advice Service through the WorkRights platform. As part of our wider IT, digital and website development work next year, we will review the platform to ensure it remains up to date, accessible, and aligned with developments in AI and digital technology.

### 9.5 Factsheets and accessible information

We continue to host a range of detailed factsheets on our website for both clients and civil society organisations. These resources explain key legal and benefits processes and how to access relevant entitlements. While a full review of these materials was carried out last year, we were unable to repeat this process during the reporting period due to capacity constraints.

As part of our planned website redevelopment, we will review how we maintain and expand our online resources, including improved systems to regularly update information and assess accessibility. We will also explore how to improve access for Deaf people through the use of BSL video content on the website, which we hope to begin rolling out next year in line with the new site

## 10. Partnerships and networking

The past year has provided a significant opportunity to strengthen existing partnerships and build new ones, particularly following the appointment of our new CEO in November 2024. This transition created a valuable moment to re-engage with organisations we had lost contact with, introduce DLS to new partners, and strengthen relationships with funders. Combined with our growing work to support civil society organisations to build capacity and our broader systems change ambitions, the second half of the year saw a focused and proactive approach to partnership development.

As a result, there has been a growing recognition of DLS both as a sector leader in disability law and as a thought leader in the use of law as a tool for systemic change. Over the past six months, our CEO has attended numerous networking events and has been invited to roundtables, learning events, and partnership-building sessions. We are now exploring structured ways to deepen engagement with these organisations, including the planned launch of a tailored newsletter next year aligned with our systems change work and disability law training offer.

### **Delivery partnerships**

We continue to strengthen partnerships with organisations we work directly with, including Mind in Haringey and Islington Mind, Real, Choice in Hackney, and the MS Society. Solicitors and advisers working on these projects have played a vital role in building trust, creating space for shared learning, and addressing any emerging challenges collaboratively. We are delighted that all partner organisations have expressed a commitment to continuing to work with DLS beyond the current year.

We have applied for a third year of partnership funding through Propel with Real and Choice in Hackney to continue delivering our community legal clinics, while funding from the Three Guineas Trust continues to support our outreach work with Mind in Haringey and Islington Mind. Our long-standing six-year partnership with the MS Society, delivering welfare benefits and legal advice services, also continues to develop and strengthen.

### **Community Care Forum**

We continue to host the Community Care Forum, funded and supported by the London Legal Support Trust. This collaborative platform brings together advice agencies and community care lawyers to address pressing issues, share legal developments, and explore opportunities for joint working.

During one forum this year, our lead researcher and solicitor presented findings from our policy report on local authorities' non-compliance with the Public Sector Equality Duty in social care charging. The report was warmly received and generated discussion around further collaborative work in this area. Our patron, Luke Clements, Professor at the University of Leeds, has been a regular contributor to the forum, grounding discussions in an academic framework and sharing his expertise with the wider network.

The forum has also enabled us to connect with new organisations, and we are exploring opportunities for deeper collaboration. Building on this, we have developed plans for future thematic focuses and aim to expand access to the forum in the coming year.

### **Training and sector engagement**

We have continued to build new partnerships through the disability law training we delivered this year. Many organisations returned for further or more advanced training, demonstrating the quality and value of our offer. These sessions not only support capacity-building across the sector but also provide valuable opportunities to learn from partner organisations and explore future collaboration.

We also maintain strong relationships with organisations we regularly signpost to when clients present issues outside our areas of expertise, including Citizens Advice.

### **Strategic networks and profile-raising**

This year, DLS was invited by Advice UK to feature in their Advice Saves campaign. While we had an existing relationship with Advice UK, participation in the campaign significantly strengthened our connection and provided a valuable platform to showcase our work and impact. We are already exploring future opportunities to work together.

Through regular attendance at sector forums and networks, including the Disability Benefits Consortium, we continue to raise our profile, support collective policy and campaigning work, and lay the groundwork for new partnerships. We are excited about the collaborative opportunities this will bring in the year ahead.

## 11. Risk review and change management

The Board maintains a comprehensive risk register, tracking potential risks across workforce, service provision, regulatory compliance, environmental concerns, reputation, funding, legal operations, health and safety, asset management, financial stability, and governance. Each risk is evaluated based on probability—from 1 (very unlikely) to 5 (highly likely)—and impact—from 1 (minimal effect on operations) to 5 (severely affecting the achievement of strategic goals)—which together determine the gross risk score. The register also outlines existing controls and any additional mitigation actions required.

As in previous years, one of the most significant risks facing DLS remains cash flow, stemming from delays in receiving payments from the Legal Aid Agency. These delays are often due to administrative processes, including the requirement that cases be fully closed before funding can be claimed, which can take several months or even years. Delays in funding can jeopardise our ability to achieve key organisational objectives, meet financial obligations, and plan effectively.

This year, we have strengthened financial oversight, including reviewing our billing processes and exploring dashboards and tools to improve cash flow forecasting. We have also cultivated stronger relationships with funders, pursued new funding opportunities, and secured three new grants, helping to stabilise our finances.

Another critical risk is external claims and complaints, which can affect staff morale, increase workload—particularly for senior personnel—and elevate reputational risk. To manage this, we regularly review and update our complaints procedure, record and monitor cases, ensure staff are compensated for additional work, and aim to resolve complaints in a timely manner. We are also planning an in-depth review of our complaints framework in the coming year to streamline processes and reduce the time required to address issues.

Trustees continue to review risks regularly and take proactive steps to mitigate both immediate and long-term challenges, ensuring DLS can deliver its services effectively and sustainably.

## 12. Looking ahead: our future plans

Last year we developed our three-year Operational Plan (2024–2027), which has guided our work over the past year and continues to shape our priorities for the next two years.

### 12.1 Strengthening frontline services

A central focus of the plan is managing demand for our advice services while maintaining the highest quality of legal support. This remains a priority. Over the past year we have made progress in strengthening frontline services, including reducing administrative burdens on legal staff so they can focus on delivering advice. We will continue to review and strengthen these arrangements in the years ahead. This will include securing continued project funding for key services currently at risk, in particular our Employment Advice Line and our Welfare Benefits Advice Line and outreach service, both of which face potential discontinuation at the next funding review.

We are also continuing to explore the introduction of a triage function to streamline enquiries and improve access to our services. While progress in this area was limited this year due to competing priorities, triage remains a core area of development. We believe it has the potential to improve access to the organisation, offer a more joined-up and holistic client journey, and enable legal staff to focus on more complex casework. Over the coming years we will continue to assess and develop how a triage function could operate effectively within the organisation.

### 12.2 Policy, advocacy and systems change

Alongside frontline services, systems change work will be a growing focus. We will continue to build capacity across the advice and disability sector, supporting Deaf and Disabled People's Organisations and other civil society organisations to strengthen their legal knowledge and reach more Deaf and Disabled people. We will also use our legal expertise to inform policy, research, and collaborative initiatives across the sector.

Building on partnership development over the past year, we will continue to deepen and expand collaborative relationships. In the coming year, we will launch the Disability Law Network as a key part of our systems change work. The Network will provide a shared space for collaboration and peer learning, enabling organisations to share insights, resources and tools; map systemic barriers to access to justice; and co-produce solutions that promote equality and fairness for Deaf and Disabled people. In its first year, we will establish a steering group, launch a mailing list, and develop a clear framework of activities to support capacity-building across the sector. To support this work, we aim to recruit a Partnerships and Training Manager, who will also lead



the development of a more structured Disability Law training programme. Over time, this programme has the potential to become an income-generating activity that supports our long-term sustainability.

## 12.3 Staff wellbeing

We will continue to prioritise staff wellbeing and mental health. In the year ahead, we will develop a dedicated wellbeing strategy to ensure staff have the support, tools and space they need to thrive both personally and professionally. This will include clear communication channels, access to appropriate resources, and support for navigating both work-related and personal challenges.

## 12.4 Strengthening governance

Another key focus in the coming year will be strengthening our governance. We will prioritise the recruitment and development of new trustees to further diversify and enhance the Board. In particular, we will seek a trustee with treasurer experience to strengthen our financial oversight. We are committed to ensuring that all trustees are Deaf or Disabled people or individuals with lived experience of disability. Alongside recruitment, we will ensure that all trustees receive up-to-date training, supporting effective decision-making and reinforcing a strong, values-led governance framework.

As we continue to deliver our three-year Operational Plan, all of our work will remain underpinned by lived experience, with meaningful opportunities for clients, staff, trustees and volunteers to shape our direction. As part of this, we will further develop our Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning framework to strengthen how we capture impact and learn from our work.

Overall, our focus in the coming years will be on:

- strengthening and sustaining frontline legal services
- prioritising staff wellbeing
- expanding our systems change work through partnerships, mentoring, consultancy and training
- strengthening governance and trustee development
- building a more efficient, resilient organisation with strong processes and the capacity to maximise both staff potential and client reach

## 13. Board of Trustees

### 13.1. Overview

The Board of Trustees comprises 5 members at the year-end, 4 of whom are Disabled people. The Trustees are committed to maintaining a Board membership that comprises at least 75% Deaf and Disabled people and to ensuring that at least 50% of paid staff, at all levels, are a Deaf or Disabled person. This is in line with the requirements to be a DDPO. The Board is also committed to ensuring that the charity carries out its work in line with the requirements of the Social Model of Disability.

Trustees are also Directors of the Company. The Board considers that its primary role is to establish and monitor the strategic direction of the charity, ensure financial viability, adhere to the highest standards of governance and actively maintain its commitment to equal opportunities and combating discrimination.

The Board meet five times each calendar year. Trustees take decisions on all matters concerning governance, major strategic plans and finance planning and monitoring. Day-to-day operational matters, including staffing, work planning and finance are delegated to the Chief Executive.

Trustees are typically recruited via open advertisement with a view to filling gaps identified in an annual skills audit and maintaining a balanced and diverse group. They are appointed by the Board and receive a full induction programme.

Trustees provide line management and supervision for the Chief Executive, led by the Chair of the Board.

## 14. Financial review

### 14.1. Financial summary

Our income continues to be from a variety of sources including contract income from the Legal Aid Agency and the MS Society (for whom we delivered two contracts), a variety of grant giving organisations (some for specific projects and some toward core costs) and both corporate and individual giving.

Income in 2024-25 was £899,247 compared to the previous year (£850,126). However, expenditure increased from £844,684 to £925,554, giving an overall loss of £26,308, compared to the previous year's surplus of £5,442. Total income for the year comprised restricted income of £450,188 and unrestricted income of £449,059. Unrestricted income is recognised in full in the year that it is received, as those funds were deployed.

By far the largest single item of expenditure was the total cost of employment, at £687,418, compared to the previous year of £659,381. This reflected a significant pay review during the year. The second highest cost was premises, followed by the costs of a new CEO. A reasonable level of reserves is required given that there is a considerable time lag in receiving payment for work carried out under our Legal Aid contracts, with claims for payment on Legal help cases only able to be made once the file has been finally closed. We are taking further steps to ensure that our billing procedures are such that claims are submitted as quickly and efficiently as possible. In general, we rarely get challenged on our legal aid billing and have high recovery rates. We have however made a precautionary provision for bad debt in case we don't get full recovery.

### 14.2. Reserves policy

In line with our reserves policy, trustees aim to hold a minimum of three months' operating costs in unrestricted reserves, with a target of four to six months. As of the end of 2024-25, our total reserves stand at £372,6509, representing four months of total expenditure (2023-24 £296,239, representing four months total expenditure).

However, a significant proportion of these are in the form of Work in Progress, meaning that the funds are not available for use yet. This largely represents the cost of delivering work incurred before we receive payment for it. These are therefore shown as a designated fund, which reduces general free reserves to £65,389 (2023-24 £105,521).

The Board reviews its reserves policy annually to ensure there is a realistic and practical reserve to protect against the immediate impact of possible reductions in funding.

### 14.3. Remuneration policy

Over the past year, the Board worked closely with staff to develop a new organisational Pay and Compensation Policy, which was successfully implemented in June. The policy ensures that all staff are remunerated fairly, taking into account their level of seniority and length of service. In addition, the Board approved a 3% salary increase for all staff to reflect the significant rise in the cost of living.

Remuneration of all staff, including key management personnel, is reviewed annually by the Board of Trustees, taking into account current market rates and affordability.

### 14.4. Information on fundraising practices

This year, we implemented our new Fundraising Strategy, maintaining a strong focus on foundations and trusts as our primary sources of income. We were fortunate to receive a small capital grant from LLST for IT equipment, which will enhance the efficiency and accessibility of our advice services. In addition, we secured three grants from the AB Charitable Trust, Legal Education Foundation, and the City Bridge Trust for our Anchor Programme, two of which contribute specifically to our systems change work. We also received an 18-month extension for our Welfare Benefits Advice and Outreach Project, funded through the Three Guineas Trust.

Alongside grant funding, we continued to grow our individual giving and community fundraising, particularly through marathon and running events. Using Enthuse and GoFundMe we raised funds from the 2025 London Marathon. Two places will be rolled over to next year, providing an opportunity for fundraising by six individuals. We also participated in the Big Half, the London 10,000, London Landmarks Half Marathon, and the Brighton Marathon.

This year served as a trial to test recruitment and assess the return on investment of different events. The London Marathons and London Landmarks Half Marathon proved to be strong in terms of fundraising returns, while other events, particularly the Brighton Marathon, were more challenging to recruit for. Next year, we will focus on filling places in the London Marathon and London Landmarks Half Marathon and may explore new events, including the Paris Marathon, in the following year.

We continue to benefit from support from LLST as a Centre of Excellence and our partner Linklaters Law Firm, as well as ongoing funding from the MS Society for our MS welfare benefits and MS legal line. Moving forward, our fundraising will prioritise foundations and grants that provide core, unrestricted funding alongside project-specific support, particularly for our at-risk Employment Advice and Welfare Benefits Advice services.

We will also be reviewing our fundraising strategy in the coming year to explore opportunities to engage more solicitors and corporate partners, develop long-term partnerships, and attract public support and financial contributions.

DLS recognises the need for caution when fundraising, particularly in relation to vulnerable individuals, and we do not seek donations from our clients.

## 14.5. Statement on Trustee responsibilities

The Trustees (who are also Directors of Disability Law Service for the purposes of company law) are responsible for preparing the report of the Trustees and the financial statements in accordance with applicable law and United Kingdom Accounting Standards (United Kingdom Generally Accepted Accounting Practice). Company law requires the Trustees to prepare financial statements for each financial year which give a true and fair view of the state of affairs of the charitable company and of the incoming resources and application of resources, including the income and expenditure, of the charitable company for that year. In preparing these financial statements, the Trustees are required to:

- select suitable accounting policies and then apply them consistently
- observe the methods and principles in the Charities SORP
- make judgments and accounting estimates that are reasonable and prudent
- state whether applicable UK Accounting Standards (United Kingdom Generally Accepted Accounting Practice) have been followed, subject to any material departures disclosed and explained in the financial statements; and
- prepare the financial statements on the going concern basis unless it is inappropriate to presume that the charitable company will continue in operation

The Trustees are responsible for keeping adequate accounting records that disclose with reasonable accuracy at any time the financial position of the charitable company and enable them to ensure that the financial statements comply with the Companies Act 2006. They are also responsible for safeguarding the assets of the charitable company and hence for taking reasonable steps for the prevention and detection of fraud and other irregularities. The Trustees are responsible for the maintenance and integrity of the corporate and financial information included on the charitable company's website. Legislation in the United Kingdom governing the preparation and dissemination of financial statements may differ from legislation in other jurisdictions.

The Trustees are members of the charity but this entitles them only to voting rights. The trustees have no beneficial interest in the charity.

The Trustees are members of the charity but this entitles them only to voting rights. The trustees have no beneficial interest in the charity.

The directors' annual report has been prepared in accordance with the special provisions applicable to companies subject to the small companies' regime. The trustees' annual report has been approved by the trustees on 25 March 2026 and signed on their behalf by:

Mark Newbery

Acting Chair of Trustees

## 15. Independent examiner's report

### **Independent examiner's report to the trustees of Disability Law Service**

I report to the trustees on my examination of the accounts of Disability Law Service for the year ended 31 May 2025.

This report is made solely to the trustees as a body, in accordance with the Charities Act 2011. My examination has been undertaken so that I might state to the trustees those matters I am required to state to them in an independent examiner's report and for no other purpose. To the fullest extent permitted by law, I do not accept or assume responsibility to anyone other than the charity and the trustees as a body, for my examination, for this report, or for the opinions I have formed.

### **Responsibilities and basis of report**

As the charity trustees of the Company you are responsible for the preparation of the accounts in accordance with the requirements of the Charities Act 2011 ('the Act') and Companies Act 2006 ('the 2006 Act').

Having satisfied myself that the accounts of the Company are not required to be audited under Part 16 of the 2006 Act and are eligible for independent examination, I report in respect of my examination of the Company's accounts carried out under section 145 of the 2011 Act and in carrying out my examination I have followed all the applicable Directions given by the Charity Commission under section 145(5)(b) of the Charities Act 2011 ('the 2011 Act').

### **Independent examiner's statement**

Since the Company's gross income exceeded £250,000 your examiner must be a member of a body listed in section 145 of the 2011 Act. I confirm that I am qualified to undertake the examination because I am a member of The Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales, which is one of the listed bodies.

I have completed my examination. I confirm that no material matters have come to my attention in connection with the examination giving me cause to believe that in any material respect:

Accounting records were not kept in respect of the Company as required by section 386 of the 2006 Act; or

The accounts do not accord with those records; or

The accounts do not comply with the accounting requirements of section 396 of the 2006 Act other than any requirement that the accounts give a 'true and fair view' which is not a matter considered as part of an independent examination.

I have no concerns and have come across no other matters in connection with the examination to which attention should be drawn in this report in order to enable a proper understanding of the accounts to be reached.

Signed:

Name: Fleur Holden FCA

Address: Sayer Vincent LLP, 110 Golden Lane, London, EC1Y 0TG

Date: 27 March 2026



## Disability Law Service

### Statement of Financial Activities *(incorporating an income and expenditure account)*

For the year ended 31 May 2025

	Note	Restricted £	Unrestricted £	2025 Total £	2024 Total £
<b>Income from:</b>					
Donations	3	8,333	84,019	92,352	123,886
Charitable activities					
Legal advice and casework	4	441,855	365,040	806,895	726,240
<b>Total income</b>		<b>450,188</b>	<b>449,059</b>	<b>899,247</b>	<b>850,126</b>
<b>Expenditure on:</b>					
Raising funds		–	28,039	28,039	21,587
Charitable activities					
Legal advice and casework		495,769	401,746	897,515	823,097
<b>Total expenditure</b>	5	<b>495,769</b>	<b>429,785</b>	<b>925,554</b>	<b>844,684</b>
Transfers between funds		5,227	(5,227)	–	–
<b>Net (expenditure)/income for the year and net movement on funds</b>	6	<b>(40,354)</b>	<b>14,047</b>	<b>(26,308)</b>	<b>5,442</b>
<b>Reconciliation of funds:</b>					
<b>Total funds brought forward</b>		<b>102,719</b>	<b>296,239</b>	<b>398,958</b>	<b>393,516</b>
<b>Total funds carried forward</b>		<b>62,365</b>	<b>310,285</b>	<b>372,650</b>	<b>398,958</b>

All of the above results are derived from continuing activities. There were no other recognised gains or losses other than those stated above. Movements in funds are disclosed in Note 13 to the financial statements.

## Disability Law Service

### Balance sheet

Company no. 1408520

As at 31 May 2025

	Note	£	2025 £	2024 £
<b>Tangible fixed assets</b>	9		<u>1,432</u>	<u>3,854</u>
<b>Current assets</b>				
Work in progress		243,464		186,864
Debtors	10	241,622		158,306
Cash at bank and in hand		<u>17,932</u>		<u>134,691</u>
		503,018		479,861
<b>Creditors: Amounts falling due within one year</b>	11	<u>131,800</u>		<u>84,757</u>
<b>Net current assets</b>			<u>371,218</u>	<u>395,104</u>
<b>Net assets</b>	12		<u><u>372,650</u></u>	<u><u>398,958</u></u>
<b>Funds</b>				
Restricted funds			62,365	102,719
Unrestricted funds				
Capital fund			1,432	3,854
WIP fund			243,464	186,864
General funds			<u>65,390</u>	<u>105,521</u>
<b>Total funds</b>	13		<u><u>372,650</u></u>	<u><u>398,958</u></u>

### Audit exemption statement

For the financial year ended 31 May 2025, the charitable company was entitled to exemption under section 477 of the Companies Act 2006 relating to small companies.

The Trustees acknowledge their responsibilities for:

- Confirming that the members have not required the charitable company to obtain an audit in accordance with section 476; and
- Complying with the requirements of the Companies Act 2006 with respect to accounting records and the preparation of accounts.

Approved by the Trustees on 25 March 2026 and signed on their behalf by

Mark Newbery  
Acting Chair of Trustees

## Disability Law Service

### Statement of cash flows

For the year ended 31 May 2025

	2025 £	2024 £
Cash flows from operating activities	(116,759)	33,312
Cash flows from investing activities		
Purchase of property, plant and equipment	–	(1,475)
Net cash used in investing activities	–	(1,475)
Change in cash and cash equivalents in the year		
Cash and cash equivalents at the beginning of the year	134,691	102,853
Cash and cash equivalents at the end of the year	17,932	134,691

#### Note to the cashflow statement

##### Reconciliation of net movement in funds to Net cash flow from operating activities

Net movement in funds	(26,308)	5,441
Depreciation charges	2,422	2,967
(Increase)/decrease in debtors	(83,316)	37,150
(Increase)/decrease in work in progress	(56,600)	(30,249)
Increase in creditors	47,044	18,003
Net cash (used in) / provided by operating activities	(116,759)	33,312

Notes to the financial statements

For the year ended 31 May 2025

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**1 Accounting policies**

**a) Statutory information**

Disability Law Service is a charitable company limited by guarantee and is incorporated in England & Wales.

The registered office address and principal place of business is The Foundry, 17 Oval Way, London SE11 5RR.

**b) Basis of preparation**

The financial statements have been prepared in accordance with Accounting and Reporting by Charities: Statement of Recommended Practice applicable to charities preparing their accounts in accordance with the Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland (FRS 102) (effective 1 January 2015) – (Charities SORP FRS 102), the Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland (FRS 102) (September 2015) and the Companies Act 2006.

The financial statements have been prepared to give a 'true and fair' view and have departed from the Charities (Accounts and Reports) Regulations 2008 only to the extent required to provide a 'true and fair view'. This departure has involved following Accounting and Reporting by Charities preparing their accounts in accordance with the Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland (FRS 102) issued on 16 July 2014 rather than the Accounting and Reporting by Charities: Statement of Recommended Practice effective from 1 April 2005 which has since been withdrawn.

In applying the financial reporting framework, the trustees have made a number of subjective judgements, for example in respect of significant accounting estimates. Estimates and judgements are continually evaluated and are based on historical experience and other factors, including expectations of future events that are believed to be reasonable under the circumstances. The nature of the estimation means the actual outcomes could differ from those estimates. Any significant estimates and judgements affecting these financial statements are detailed within the relevant accounting policy below.

**c) Public benefit entity**

The charitable company meets the definition of a public benefit entity under FRS 102.

**d) Going concern**

The Trustees consider that there are no material uncertainties about the charitable company's ability to continue as a going concern.

The Trustees do not consider that there are any sources of estimation uncertainty at the reporting date that have a significant risk of causing a material adjustment to the carrying amounts of assets and liabilities within the next reporting period.

**e) Interest receivable**

Interest on funds held on deposit is included when receivable and the amount can be measured reliably by the charity; this is normally upon notification of the interest paid or payable by the bank.

**f) Voluntary income**

Voluntary income is received by way of donations and gifts and is included in full in the statement of financial activities when receivable. Unsolicited donations and gifts are included as donations and similar incoming resources. All income received from the London Marathon sponsorship is credited to voluntary income.

**g) Revenue grants**

Revenue grants are credited to the statement of financial activities when received or receivable whichever is earlier, unless they relate to a specific future period, in which case they are deferred. All revenue grants relate to legal advice and casework.

**h) Contractual income**

Contractual income is recognised when earned.

**i) Restricted funds**

Restricted funds are to be used for specific purposes as laid down by the donor. Expenditure which meets these criteria is charged to the fund.

**j) Designated funds**

Designated funds are unrestricted funds earmarked by the Trustees for particular purposes.

**k) Unrestricted funds**

Unrestricted funds are donations and other incoming resources received or generated for the charitable purposes.

Notes to the financial statements

For the year ended 31 May 2025

1 Accounting policies (continued)

l) Staff costs

Staff costs are allocated to activities on the basis of the estimated staff time spent on those activities:

▪ Fundraising and publicity	2.5%
▪ Legal advice and casework	97.5%

m) Expenditure

All expenditure is accounted for on an accruals basis and has been classified under headings that aggregate all costs related to the category. Resources expended include attributable VAT which cannot be recovered. Where non-staff costs cannot be directly attributed to particular headings they have been allocated to activities on the following basis, which is based on the estimate of consumption:

	Fundraising & publicity	Legal advice & casework	Governance
Telephone, premises, printing, postage, stationery	2.5%	94.5%	3.0%
Other costs	0%	100%	0%

n) Governance costs

Governance costs relate to the costs of running the charitable company such as the costs of Trustee meetings, independent examination and statutory compliance.

o) Depreciation

Depreciation is provided on all tangible fixed assets at rates calculated to write off the cost of each asset evenly over its expected useful life. The depreciation rates in use are as follows:

▪ Fixtures, fittings and office equipment	20%
▪ Computer equipment	33%
▪ Website costs	20%

Depreciation costs are allocated to activities on the basis of the use of the related assets in those activities. The minimum capitalisation limit is £100.

p) WIP

Income is recognised on casework earned and due ("work in progress" or "WIP") according to the time booked on the matter multiplied by the relevant legal aid or interpartes rate. Appropriate provision is made for irrecoverable WIP.

q) Debtors

Trade and other debtors are recognised at the settlement amount due after any trade discount offered. Prepayments are valued at the amount prepaid net of any trade discounts due.

r) Cash at bank and in hand

Cash at bank and cash in hand includes cash and short term highly liquid investments with a short maturity of three months or less from the date of acquisition or opening of the deposit or similar account.

s) Operating leases

Rentals payable under operating leases, where substantially all the risks and rewards of ownership remain with the lessor, are charged to the statement of financial activities on a straight line basis over the minimum lease term.

t) Creditors and provisions

Creditors and provisions are recognised where the charity has a present obligation resulting from a past event that will probably result in the transfer of funds to a third party and the amount due to settle the obligation can be measured or estimated reliably. Creditors and provisions are normally recognised at their settlement amount after allowing for any trade discounts due.

u) Pension scheme

The charitable company operates a defined contribution pension scheme for its employees. The assets of the scheme are held separately from those of the charitable company in independently administered funds. The pension cost charge represents contributions payable under the scheme by the charitable company to the fund. The charitable company has no liability under the scheme other than for the payment of those contributions.

## Notes to the financial statements

For the year ended 31 May 2025

## 2 Detailed comparatives for the statement of financial activities for 2023/24

	2024 Restricted £	2024 Unrestricted £	2024 Total £
<b>Income from:</b>			
Donations	12,917	110,969	123,886
Charitable activities			
Legal advice and casework	383,207	343,033	726,240
Sundry income	–	–	–
<b>Total income</b>	<b>396,124</b>	<b>454,002</b>	<b>850,126</b>
<b>Expenditure on:</b>			
Raising funds	–	21,587	21,587
Charitable activities			
Legal advice and casework	303,423	519,674	823,097
<b>Total expenditure</b>	<b>303,423</b>	<b>541,261</b>	<b>844,684</b>
<b>Net expenditure/(income) for the year and net movement on funds</b>	<b>92,700</b>	<b>(87,258)</b>	<b>5,442</b>
<b>Reconciliation of funds:</b>			
Total funds brought forward	10,019	383,497	393,516
<b>Total funds carried forward</b>	<b>102,719</b>	<b>296,239</b>	<b>398,958</b>

## 3 Donations

	2025 Restricted	2025 Unrestricted	2025 Total £	2024 Restricted £	2024 Unrestricted £	2024 Total £
Donations from individuals	–	24,011	24,011	–	5,969	5,969
Esmée Fairbairn Foundation	–	–	–	–	50,000	50,000
Linklaters	–	45,000	45,000	–	45,000	45,000
City Bridge Trust	8,333	–	8,333	12,917	–	12,917
LLST	–	15,008	15,008	–	10,000	10,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>8,333</b>	<b>84,019</b>	<b>92,352</b>	<b>12,917</b>	<b>110,969</b>	<b>123,886</b>

## Disability Law Service

### Notes to the financial statements

For the year ended 31 May 2025

#### 4a Legal advice and casework

	Restricted £	Unrestricted £	2025 Total £
<i>Grant Income:</i>			
Trust for London	68,509	–	68,509
AB Charitable Trust	25,000	–	25,000
MS Society	–	162,770	162,770
Three Guineas Trust	100,000	–	100,000
LEF – Justice First Fellowship	3,000	–	3,000
Propel – City Bridge Trust	66,000	–	66,000
Propel – LLST	65,083	–	65,083
ATW	3,282	–	3,282
LEF CORE	62,480	–	62,480
CBF Anchor	48,500	–	48,500
			–
<i>Other Income:</i>			
Legal Help and Legal Aid	–	202,270	202,270
	441,855	365,040	806,895

#### 4b Legal advice and casework (prior year)

	Restricted £	Unrestricted £	2024 Total £
<i>Grant Income:</i>			
Trust for London	86,923	–	86,923
MS Society	–	149,212	149,212
Three Guineas Trust	92,000	–	92,000
LEF – Justice First Fellowship	88,000	–	88,000
ATW	2,660	–	2,660
Network for Social Change	18,749	–	18,749
Propel – City Bridge Trust	48,375	–	48,375
Propel – LLST	46,500	–	46,500
<i>Other Income:</i>			
Legal Help and Legal Aid	–	193,822	193,822
	315,298	345,694	726,240

Notes to the financial statements

For the year ended 31 May 2025

5a Total expenditure (current year)

	Fundraising & publicity £	Legal advice & casework £	2025 £	2024 £
Staff costs (Note 7)	17,185	670,232	<b>687,418</b>	659,381
Legal aid, legal help and other disbursements	–	10,084	<b>10,084</b>	25,263
Subscriptions	–	9,537	<b>9,537</b>	10,760
Depreciation	–	2,422	<b>2,422</b>	2,967
Solicitors' practising certificates	–	3,241	<b>3,241</b>	2,896
Professional indemnity insurance	–	2,854	<b>2,854</b>	5,255
Consultancy and HR expenses	–	32,946	<b>32,946</b>	14,403
Staff expenses	–	8,757	<b>8,757</b>	8,304
Telephone	297	11,602	<b>11,899</b>	8,165
Premises costs	987	38,504	<b>39,492</b>	37,767
Printing, postage and stationery	125	4,859	<b>4,984</b>	1,950
Accountancy	532	20,737	<b>21,269</b>	19,687
Recruitment and training	–	9,300	<b>9,300</b>	5,837
Other costs	–	20,813	<b>20,813</b>	15,203
Fundraising costs	8,759	–	<b>8,759</b>	3,299
Project Partner costs	–	45,608	<b>45,608</b>	18,976
Governance costs:				
Independent examination	90	3,510	<b>3,600</b>	3,400
Other governance costs	64	2,509	<b>2,573</b>	1,173
<b>Total expenditure</b>	<b>28,039</b>	<b>897,515</b>	<b>925,554</b>	<b>844,684</b>



5b Total expenditure (prior year)

	Fundraising & publicity £	Legal advice & casework £	2024 £
Staff costs (Note 7)	16,485	642,897	659,381
Legal aid, legal help and other disbursements	–	25,263	25,263
Subscriptions	–	10,760	10,760
Depreciation	–	2,967	2,967
Solicitors' practising certificates	–	2,896	2,896
Professional indemnity insurance	–	5,255	5,255
Consultancy and HR expenses	–	14,403	14,403
Staff expenses	–	8,304	8,304
Telephone	204	7,960	8,165
Premises costs	944	36,823	37,767
Printing, postage and stationery	49	1,901	1,950
Recruitment and training		5,837	5,837
Other costs	–	15,203	15,203
Fundraising costs	3,299	–	3,299
Project Partner costs		18,976	18,976
Governance costs:			
Independent examination	85	3,315	3,400
Other governance costs	29	1,144	1,173
<b>Total expenditure</b>	<b>21,587</b>	<b>823,097</b>	<b>844,684</b>

Notes to the financial statements

For the year ended 31 May 2025

**6 Net incoming / (expenditure)**

This is stated after charging:

	2025 £	2024 £
Depreciation	2,422	2,967
Independent examiner's remuneration	3,600	3,400

**7 Staff costs and numbers**

Staff costs were as follows:

	2025 £	2024 £
Salaries and wages	612,351	589,609
Social security costs	56,492	57,090
Pension costs	18,575	12,683
	<b>687,418</b>	<b>659,381</b>

No employee earned more than £60,000 (excluding employer pension and national insurance costs) during the year (2024: 1 employee).

The average number of employees during the year on a head count basis was as follows:

	2025 No.	2024 No.
Legal advice and casework	<b>16</b>	<b>15</b>

Key management personnel are considered to be the Trustees of the charity, who receive no remuneration, together with the CEO (including interim CEO). Total remuneration, including employer's national insurance contributions and employer's pension costs for the CEO (which is also the total remuneration for the key management personnel) during the year amounted to £49,066 (2024: £89,010).

**8 Taxation**

The charitable company is exempt from corporation tax as all its income is charitable and is applied for charitable purposes.

Notes to the financial statements

For the year ended 31 May 2025

9 Tangible fixed assets

	Office equipment, fixtures & fittings £	Computer equipment £	Total £
<b>Cost</b>			
At 1 June 2024	4,713	31,193	35,905
Additions in year	–	–	–
Disposals in year	–	–	–
At 31 May 2025	4,713	31,193	35,905
<b>Depreciation</b>			
At 1 June 2024	4,713	27,339	24,785
Charge for the year	–	2,422	2,422
Eliminated on disposal	–	–	–
At 31 May 2025	4,713	29,760	34,473
<b>Net book value at 31 May 2025</b>	<b>–</b>	<b>1,432</b>	<b>1,432</b>
Net book value at 31 May 2024	–	3,854	3,854

All tangible fixed assets are used for direct charitable purposes.

10 Debtors

	2025 £	2024 £
Trade debtors	207,130	117,181
Prepayments	7,139	3,565
Accrued income	27,354	37,560
	<b>241,622</b>	<b>158,306</b>

11 Creditors: amounts falling due within one year

	2025 £	2024 £
Taxation and social security	11,780	20,112
Pensions	2,936	–
VAT	6,955	6,646
Other creditors	22,927	21,433
Accruals	43,785	36,565
Deferred Income	43,417	–
	<b>131,800</b>	<b>84,757</b>

## 12a Analysis of net assets between funds (current year)

	Restricted funds £	Designated funds £	General funds £	Total funds £
Tangible fixed assets	–	1,432	–	1,432
Current assets	62,365	243,464	65,390	371,218
<b>Net assets at 31 May 2025</b>	<b>62,365</b>	<b>244,896</b>	<b>65,390</b>	<b>372,650</b>

## 12b Analysis of net assets between funds (prior year)

	Restricted funds £	Designated funds £	General funds £	Total funds £
Tangible fixed assets	–	3,854	–	3,854
Current assets	102,719	186,864	105,521	395,104
<b>Net assets at 31 May 2024</b>	<b>102,719</b>	<b>190,718</b>	<b>105,521</b>	<b>398,957</b>

## 13a Movements in funds (current year)

	At 1 June 2024 £	Income £	Expenditure £	Transfers between funds £	At 31 May 2025 £
<b>Restricted funds:</b>					
Trust for London	18,557	68,509	(63,048)	–	24,019
Legal Education Foundation – 2023	36,659	–	(41,080)	4,420	–
City Bridge Trust	–	8,333	(8,333)	–	–
Legal Education Foundation – 2025	–	3,000	(3,212)	212	–
Advice Line (Network for social change)	18,749	–	(19,344)	595	–
ATW	–	3,282	(7,277)	–	(3,995)
National Lottery	5,375	–	(5,375)	–	–
Three Guineas Trust	1,147	100,000	(100,482)	–	665
Propel – CBT	11,324	66,000	(77,324)	–	–
Propel – LLST	10,907	65,083	(75,990)	–	–
LEF CORE	–	62,480	(28,223)	–	34,257
CBF Anchor	–	48,500	(41,082)	–	7,418
AB Charitable Trust	–	25,000	(25,000)	–	–
<b>Total restricted funds</b>	<b>102,719</b>	<b>450,188</b>	<b>(495,769)</b>	<b>5,227</b>	<b>62,365</b>
<b>Unrestricted funds:</b>					
Designated capital	3,854	–	(2,422)	–	1,432
Designated WIP	186,864	–	–	56,600	243,464
General funds	105,521	449,059	(427,364)	(61,827)	65,390
<b>Total unrestricted funds</b>	<b>296,239</b>	<b>449,059</b>	<b>(429,786)</b>	<b>(5,227)</b>	<b>310,285</b>
<b>Total funds</b>	<b>398,958</b>	<b>899,247</b>	<b>(925,554)</b>	<b>–</b>	<b>372,650</b>

## 13b Movements in funds (prior year)

	At 1 June 2023 £	Income £	Expenditure £	Transfers between funds £	At 31 May 2024 £
<b>Restricted funds:</b>					
Trust for London	–	86,923	(68,365)	–	18,557
Legal Education Foundation	–	88,000	(51,341)	–	36,659
City Bridge Trust	–	12,917	(12,917)	–	–
Access to Justice Foundation	4,644	–	(4,644)	–	–
Advice Line (Network for social change)	–	18,749	–	–	18,749
ATW	–	2,660	(2,660)	–	–
National Lottery	5,375	–	–	–	5,375
Three Guineas Trust	–	92,000	(90,853)	–	1,147
Propel – CBT	–	48,375	(37,051)	–	11,324
Propel – LLST	–	46,500	(35,593)	–	10,907
<b>Total restricted funds</b>	<b>10,019</b>	<b>396,123</b>	<b>(303,423)</b>	<b>–</b>	<b>102,719</b>
<b>Unrestricted funds:</b>					
Designated capital	5,346	–	(2,967)	1,475	3,854
Designated WIP	156,615	–	–	30,249	186,864
General funds	221,536	454,003	(538,294)	(31,724)	105,521
<b>Total unrestricted funds</b>	<b>383,497</b>	<b>454,003</b>	<b>(541,261)</b>	<b>–</b>	<b>296,239</b>
<b>Total funds</b>	<b>393,516</b>	<b>850,125</b>	<b>(844,684)</b>	<b>–</b>	<b>398,958</b>

**Purposes of restricted funds**Trust for London

This grant is for specialist legal advice and assistance for disabled Londoners experiencing discrimination, threats and insecurity in the workplace and to support them in obtaining and retaining employment

Legal Education Foundation

This grant is to enable the employment of a trainee solicitor under the Justice First Fellowship scheme.

Three Guineas Trust

This grant is to provide a welfare benefits advice service including outreach.

This grant was to support the development of a new and more accessible website

Propel

These PROPEL grants enable us to train two new social welfare solicitors and to train and support generalist advisors in local DPOs to offer disabled people advice in a new holistic model at an early stage and in accessible settings

City Bridge Trust

The grant is to support that element of DLS' work that directly benefits Londoners.

**Movements in funds (continued)**

**Purposes of designated funds**

Capital Fund

This fund represents the future depreciation of unrestricted tangible fixed assets held at the year end.

**Transfers**

Transfers from unrestricted funds are to correct designated fund balance.

**14 Related party transactions**

There are no related party transactions to disclose for 2025 (2024: none).

There are no donations from related parties which are outside the normal course of business and no restricted donations from related parties.