

Statement of Strategy 2021-2023



An Bord Um
Chúnamh Dílthiúil
Legal Aid Board

Providing access to justice since 1979





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access to
justice
since 1979**

Foreword by the Chairperson and Chief Executive

We are pleased to present this Statement of Strategy for the period 2021–2023. A clear and understood Strategy gives us the direction we need in terms of taking the organisation forward.



Mr Philip O'Leary
Chairperson



Mr John McDaid
Chief Executive

At the time of the establishment of a Scheme of Civil Legal Aid and Advice the then Minister for Justice stressed the importance of the Scheme as an instrument by which the concept of equality before the law could be brought substantially nearer to realisation in practice. Some 40 years later, in unprecedented times, we are still striving towards this goal and towards playing our part in making easy access to justice a reality for everyone. We play an active part as one component of a broader justice framework. Our services provide people with a pathway to seeking protection or resolving their disputes and we do so by using services directly provided by our staff or indirectly by funding cases dealt with through the private sector. We contribute to draft legislation, policies and practices that are relevant to legal aid and we do so with the aim of ensuring the effectiveness of the legislation, policies and practices and of improving the experience for the citizen. Our Statement of Strategy 2021-2023 remains grounded in this framework.

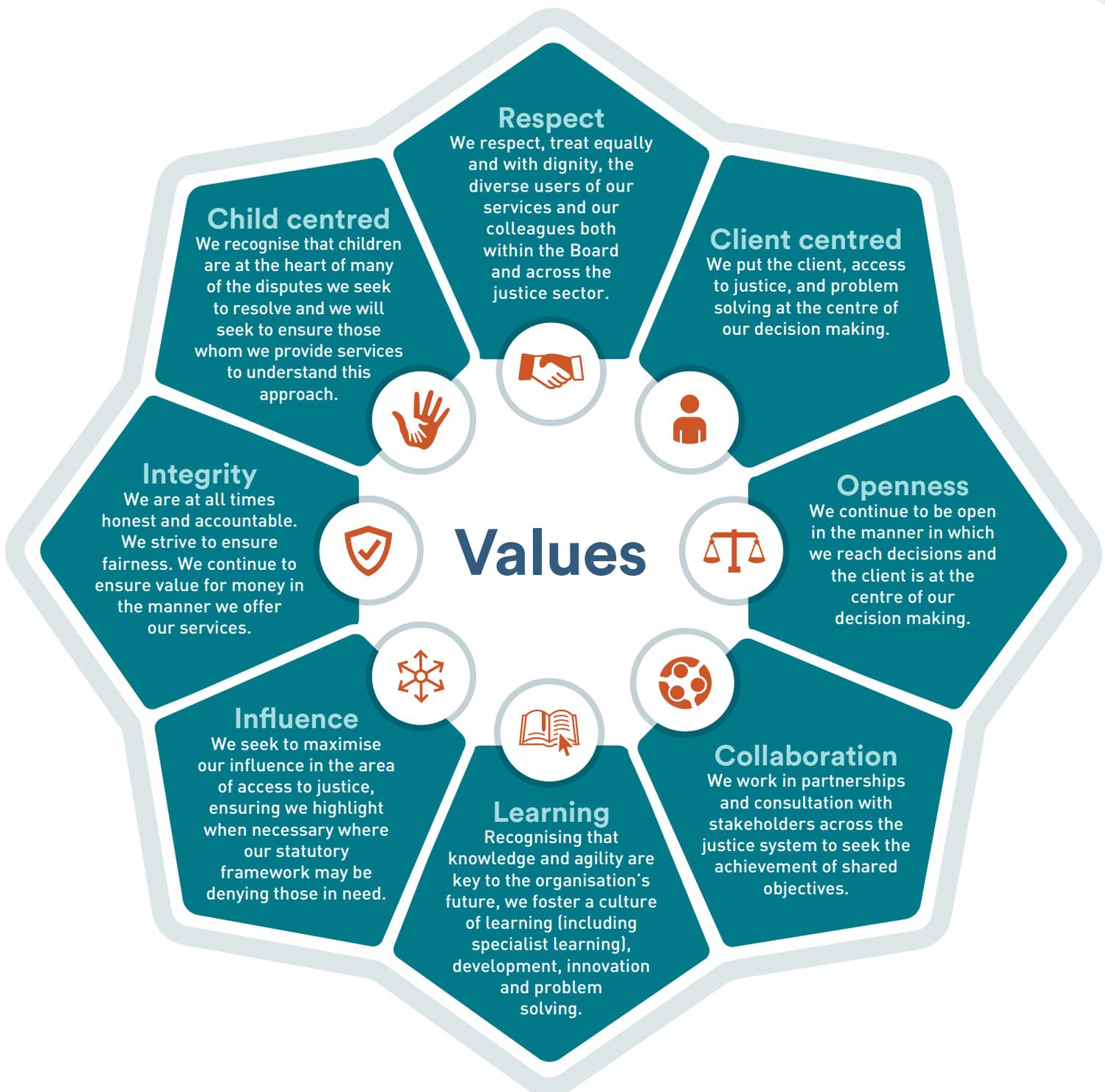
During the period of the previous Statement of Strategy (Corporate Plan 2018-2020), we made a number of submissions to the Minister for Justice and Equality including a submission relating to financial eligibility thresholds and financial contributions for civil legal aid. As a result, the Minister removed a requirement to pay a contribution for cases involving domestic violence in 2018.

We are in on-going discussion with the Minister and officials in her Department in relation to certain other proposals designed to increase the level of access to our services.

We recognise the need to reflect our core values in everything that we do and that we will serve our clients most effectively when those values are real and meaningful. We will strive for the duration of our terms of office, to give this Statement real effect, particularly in the difficult times that are being experienced and may well continue to be experienced on account of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Mr Philip O'Leary
Chairperson

Mr John McDaid
Chief Executive



Our Statement of Strategy 2021 – 2023 Journey

We undertook a careful and considered approach to consultation in developing our Statement of Strategy. We committed to a meaningful internal consultation process with staff facilitated in giving their observations and suggestions on the strategy as it progressed through initial ideas to final document. We also recognised the expertise in our operating environment which offered the potential to provide really meaningful observations on our aspirations over the next three years and would allow us to reflect on the direction our strategy should take. To that end, we consulted with stakeholders on our External Consultative Panel and invited comment on our strategy both through our stakeholder forum and in writing. The observations received gave a positive influence to our strategy as we moved through the formation process. We recognise the importance of consultation and commit to this consultation continuing as we move towards attainment of our high level objectives up to 2023.

Human Rights Positive Public Duty

Section 42 of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act 2014 establishes a positive duty on us to have regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, promote equality and protect the human rights of staff and persons to whom we provides services. It also requires us to provide an assessment of the human rights and equality issues we believe to be relevant to our functions and purpose and the plans we have in place and propose to have in place to address these issues. Within the Statement of Strategy we have set a number of high level objectives with a view ensuring access to our services for the marginalised and those in danger of marginalisation and similar objectives around eliminating discrimination, promoting equality and protecting human rights through a better working environment for our staff. The promotion of equality and human rights through our day to day work, whether in the development of policy or in administration generally, forms part of our broader objectives to be a values-driven organisation.



Purpose

We are an independent statutory body responsible for the provision of civil legal aid and advice, family mediation and vulnerable witness related services and for the administration of a number of ad hoc legal aid schemes. We are a key strategic partner and a civil agency of the Department of Justice.

Mission

Our Mission is to deliver timely, effective, inclusive and just resolution of family and civil disputes to those most in need of our assistance, through high quality legal representation and advice and / or mediation and to manage other aspects of legal aid which have been entrusted to us.

Vision

We will be instrumental in ensuring access to justice to those most in need, through a highly motivated and trained workforce, external providers and working with stakeholders across the justice framework and beyond.

Our People, Resources & Culture

Internal Environment

Our internal environment means our people, resources and culture which are fundamental to providing our services and meeting our mission and vision. These strategic objectives recognise that having a dedicated and professional workforce is central to the services we deliver. The objectives we have set will ensure our staff are supported and empowered and that as an organisation we position our resources and capabilities in a manner which ensure we offer the service to which we aspire.

Strategic Objective 1

We will develop and align our resources and capabilities with demand on our services to ensure an efficient and effective service for the client.

Actions

Our actions up to 2023:

1. A resource and capability audit will be undertaken to inform workforce planning allowing an anticipation of where resources should be placed.
2. We will develop a resource allocation model that has regard, among other things, to the needs of the client / potential client and the learning and development needs of staff in order to meet those needs.

Key Performance Indicator / Outcome

By 2023 we will achieve the following:

1. Resource and capability audit undertaken.
2. Effective deployment of resources to ensure an efficient and effective service.

33

LEGAL OFFICES

6 co-locations



17 mediation offices



Court based mediation in Dublin, Carlow, Ennis and Mullingar

3

Criminal Legal Aid Ad-Hoc Schemes



470

staff



Strategic Objective 2

We will ensure our staff are seen, engaged and listened to. We will build on the communication initiatives employed during the Covid-19 pandemic and continue this approach into the future.

Actions

Our actions up to 2023:

1. An Employee Engagement Strategy will be developed and embedded throughout the organisation.
2. An internal communications officer will be appointed.
3. Our internal communications strategy will be updated to make it reflective of a modern organisation. Regard will be had to the internal communication initiatives employed during the Covid-19 pandemic.
4. We will learn from the Civil Service Employee Engagement (s) and take positive actions in relation to areas that are identified as needing improvement.

Key Performance Indicator / Outcome

By 2023 we will achieve the following:

1. Employee engagement strategy implemented
2. Internal Communications Officer appointed
3. Internal Communications Strategy updated and implemented
4. Higher scores in the CSEES achieved.

Strategic Objective 3

We will explore and implement solutions as regards how technology can provide access to and assist with learning and development.

Actions

Our actions up to 2023:

1. An assessment of how learning and development can take place via technology will be undertaken and documented. The results of this assessment will be used to ensure the majority of internal learning and development opportunities will take place via technology platforms.

Key Performance Indicator / Outcome

By 2023 we will achieve the following:

1. Assessment undertaken of learning and development opportunities which can be done via technology.
2. Most internal learning and development opportunities take place via technology platforms.

Strategic Objective 4

We will foster an environment focused on staff development, learning and innovation in the delivery of services in response to an ever-changing legal and social environment.

Actions

Our actions up to 2023:

1. We will refine our job descriptions for roles within the organisation, specifically identify learning needs for each of those roles and put in place a standard training menu for each role.
2. An on-going assessment of what specialist learning should be provided to staff will be undertaken.
3. Develop and implement a Continuing Professional Development model where appropriate staff not already under a CPD requirement.
4. Focused leadership and management training will be provided to all managers with a significantly greater emphasis on each manager's role as people developers.
5. Performance assessments of managers will focus to a much greater extent on staff development.

Key Performance Indicator / Outcome

By 2023 we will achieve the following:

1. Improved job descriptions with specific learning needs and training programmes in place.
2. A continued facilitation of learning opportunities through the academic fees policy. Targeted learning opportunities in place.
3. CPD model implemented.
4. Training programme in place for managers with a much greater emphasis on staff development.
5. Managerial performance assessment more focused on staff development.

Strategic Objective 5

We will commence an on-going assessment of our workforce with a view to the organisation being reflective of the broader community in terms gender, race, and diversity.

Actions

Our actions up to 2023:

1. An assessment will commence on the diversity of staff and pro-active steps will be put in place to make the workforce more reflective of the broader community.
2. An illustration of potential career paths for all staff will be rolled out. This will have particular regard to illustrating the potential for elements of the workforce to pursue internal career paths traditionally not seen as being an option for those staff.
3. Measures will be identified and put in place to ensure equality of opportunity at all levels of the organisation for those not represented at a level similar to the broader community.

Key Performance Indicator / Outcome

By 2023 we will achieve the following:

1. Assessment completed. Workforce more diverse.
2. Career paths illustrated via internal communication structures and with the cooperation of external stakeholders.
3. Measures identified and put in place.

The Justice Framework Operating Environment

Our operating environment means the wider justice framework in which we offer our services. Our strategic objectives focus on reaching those who are most in need of our services and also on our interaction with the operating environment and the part we play in it. We recognise that those who need our services must be aware of them and have prompt access to them. We have strategic objectives allowing us to be able to identify the drivers of change in the legal environment, interpret their significance for the delivery of our services and contribute to them when appropriate. We have also outlined the necessity of gathering evidence from this environment to inform our decision making.

Strategic Objective 1

We will work with our stakeholders to improve the level of awareness of the Board's services and also to address how we can meet the needs of persons and/or communities who may be marginalised or in danger of marginalisation.

Actions

Our actions up to 2023:

1. We will work with members of our External Consultative Panel and other stakeholders to improve the level of awareness of the Board's services among the groups those stakeholders represent.
2. We will specifically explore with stakeholders how we can meet the needs of persons and/or communities who may be marginalised or in danger of marginalisation and we will take steps, on a pilot basis if appropriate, to meet those needs without expectation or assumption that those needs can be met using our standard model of delivery.
3. Where we deem it necessary submissions will be made to the Minister to outline where statutory amendment may be appropriate to facilitate access to justice to those in need and/or marginalised and/or in danger of marginalisation.

Key Performance Indicator / Outcome

By 2023 we will achieve the following:

1. Direct engagement with stakeholders and specific projects in place to improve levels of awareness.
2. Documented exploration along with specific actions taken to address the needs of persons and / or communities that may be marginalised.
3. Submissions made to the Minister where necessary.

Strategic Objective 2

We will seek to put in place solutions to facilitate those that are not within easy reach of our offices. Those solutions will have regard to the availability of information on our services and access to those services and to how technology can assist.

Actions

Our actions up to 2023:

1. A documented exploration of the cost / benefit of outreach services to areas where we do not have a physical presence will be undertaken. If it is deemed appropriate on foot of this exploration, outreach services will be rolled out.
2. A policy will be introduced on the use of technology to allow those not within easy reach of our offices to be offered legal services remotely when it is appropriate to do.

Key Performance Indicator / Outcome

By 2023 we will achieve the following:

1. Exploration undertaken and document produced. Outreach services in place if appropriate.
2. Policy introduced on offering legal services remotely.

Strategic Objective 3

We will facilitate a timely consultation following receipt of an application for services. We will assess and implement measures including empowering staff to assist in meeting this target.

Actions

Our actions up to 2023:

1. Metrics will be maintained and actions developed with a view to reducing waiting times (where they apply) for the provision of legal services and family mediation services.
2. We will identify where we might implement measures that will assist us in providing improved waiting times. In doing so we will have regard to a balanced mix of measures including:
 - a. The strategic use of private solicitors
 - b. The scope for 'triaging' applicants
 - c. Enabling non-solicitor/mediator staff to assist clients
 - d. Assessing the feasibility of creating a mediator private practitioner panel

Key Performance Indicator / Outcome

By 2023 we will achieve the following:

1. Metric information readily available. Improved waiting times with a target average waiting time of no more than 12 weeks.
2. Measures identified and put in place.

Strategic Objective 4

We will continue to strengthen our relationship with stakeholders across the justice system, maximising our influence to ensure improved services for those in need and access to the pursuit of justice.

Actions

Our actions up to 2023:

1. We will proactively contribute and provide leadership to the Family Justice Oversight Committee and the Criminal Legal Aid Oversight Committee.
2. We will work with the Courts Service and other stakeholders to develop a model family justice centre / hub in Limerick.
3. Participation in joint approaches to access to justice issues with other state agencies and government departments will continue.

Key Performance Indicator / Outcome

By 2023 we will achieve the following:

1. Maintained presence and contributions to the Family Justice Oversight Committee and the Criminal Legal Aid Oversight Committee.
2. Model family justice centre / hub in place.
3. Continued participation in joint approaches access to justice.

Strategic Objective 5

We will strengthen our relationship with service providers undertaking legal aid work and use this relationship as a means of ensuring clients of the Board get an efficient and effective service. We will implement technological solutions to help facilitate this relationship.

Actions

Our actions up to 2023:

1. We will continue to quality assure the work carried out by private practitioners undertaking work on our panels.
2. We will examine the extent to which our system for quality assuring this work can be made more effective and efficient (e.g. remotely and through peer reviews)
3. We will identify training requirements for private practitioners on our Panels and provide such training.
4. Technological solutions will be implemented to facilitate service providers undertaking legal aid work which will include an on-line portal.
5. Regular information will be provided to private solicitors undertaking legal aid work containing important developments in case law and policy developments whether by form of a written bulletin or other methods.

Key Performance Indicator / Outcome

By 2023 we will achieve the following:

1. The files of 60 Private Practitioners will be reviewed on an annual basis.
2. Alternative methods of quality assuring private practitioners reviewed and implemented (e.g. remote file reviews and peer reviews).
3. Training provided to private practitioners.
4. Technological solutions implemented. On-line portal in place.
5. Regular information on case law and policy developments given.

Strategic Objective 6

We will monitor, anticipate and respond to legislative changes. We will seek to involve ourselves at the earliest opportunity when relevant legislation is being drafted and offer observation from the perspective of those in need of our services and from the perspective of our operating environment.

Actions

Our actions up to 2023:

1. Our Management Team will keep itself informed of potential legislative changes which may affect those in need of our services or our operating environment and plan appropriately.
2. In anticipation of the enactment of the Family Courts Bill, we will continue to analysis what the delivery of our services might look like on foot of such enactment.
3. When invited by the Minister, or at other appropriate times, we will offer observations with those observations being informed by our knowledge of civil legal aid and criminal Legal Aid work and its operating environment.

Key Performance Indicator / Outcome

By 2023 we will achieve the following:

1. An informed Management Team on relevant legislative changes with planning undertaken accordingly.
2. Documented analysis of a service delivery model.
3. Observations offered on draft legislation and relevant policy issues.

Strategic Objective 7

We will manage with integrity and good governance services for which we have responsibility. Where we are entrusted with new areas of practice, we will bring our cross functional expertise to bear with a view to making services effective for the end user.

Actions

Our actions up to 2023:

1. Oversight agreements and annual performance agreements with the Department of Justice will continue to be met.
2. Facilitation and participation in governance meetings with the Department will continue.
3. New areas of practice will be approached with integrity, bringing all necessary cross functional expertise to bear, to ensure appropriate use of resources.
4. Evidence based decision making will be evident across all functions.
5. Where we do not have the expertise within the organisation, we will ensure we acquire same to ensure we meet this objective.

Key Performance Indicator / Outcome

By 2023 we will achieve the following:

1. Oversight agreements and annual performance agreements met.
2. Facilitation and participation in governance meetings.
3. Integrity demonstrated when actioning new areas of practice.
4. Decisions made based on evidence.
5. Expertise acquired when deemed necessary

Strategic Objective 8

We will continue to develop our research function, liaising with service users, third level institutions and other relevant stakeholders, to further our collective knowledge and ensure our policy decisions are evidence based to the greatest extent possible.

Actions

Our actions up to 2023:

1. The number of third level research projects we are currently assisting will have increased.
2. Increase the volume of research that is undertaken internally and facilitate staff undertaking research when appropriate. A policy to facilitate the undertaking of research internally will be implemented.
3. Policy decisions will illustrate they are evidence based to the greatest extent possible.

Key Performance Indicator / Outcome

By 2023 we will achieve the following:

1. Increase in third level projects being assisted
2. Volume of research increased. Policy on internal research implemented.
3. Policy decisions based on evidence.

Society

External Environment

Our external environment means the wider society which we are part of. Our strategic objectives for this environment encompass the high-level factors which may impact on the Board and the service we provide during the period 2021 – 2023. We have carefully identified and assessed external factors which we believe are strategically important for the Board for this period. We recognise the need for these factors to be interpreted very specifically to identify how they can assist us in providing the service.

Strategic Objective 1

We will develop a resource allocation model which will inform us, based on the evidence it provides, where we might place our resources.

Actions

Our actions up to 2023:

1. A Resource Allocation Model will be developed and deployed to facilitate evidence based decision making across all organisational functions.

Key Performance Indicator / Outcome

By 2023 we will achieve the following:

1. Resource Allocation Model developed

Strategic Objective 2

We will continue to build relationships with Non Governmental Organisations and other external stakeholders with a view to establishing where unmet legal needs may arise and address these needs whenever possible.

Actions

Our actions up to 2023:

1. Relationships established with a greater number of stakeholders where we do not already have that relationship.
2. We will participate in any review of the Civil Legal Aid Act and the civil legal aid system generally.

Key Performance Indicator / Outcome

By 2023 we will achieve the following:

1. Greater number of stakeholder groups with whom we have a relationship.
2. Participation in a review of the 1995 Act.

Strategic Objective 3

We will monitor the external environment both globally and domestically for changes which may affect services and we will undertake resource planning accordingly.

Actions

Our actions up to 2023:

1. We will continue to engage with the Global Access to Justice Project.
2. Continued to engage and participate in discussions with colleagues in other jurisdictions so as to learn ways of service delivery.

Key Performance Indicator / Outcome

By 2023 we will achieve the following:

1. Continued engagement with the Project team.
2. Continued dialogue with colleagues in other jurisdictions.



Resources, Monitoring and Reporting

Our Statement of Strategy 2021 – 2023 is a high level document and we are committed to ensuring we achieve our objectives. This requires us to commit resources to ensure its attainment. Our service delivery and support functions will align their individual business plans with this Statement of Strategy. Our Management Team will consider at each stage what resource will be required to drive the achievement of our strategic objectives. Organisational Priorities will be identified each year based on the Strategy and progress will be monitored on a quarterly basis.

Each function will set out targets which will be measured and monitored by the Management Team. We will work together across the organisation to ensure each function meets its key performance objectives on which our strategy rests. The Statement of Strategy will be placed on our agenda on a biannual basis for review to ensure attainment of our high level objectives by 2023.

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