

Corporate Strategy 2023-26:

Summary of responses and feedback

October 2023

Background

On 10 May 2023 we published '[Corporate Strategy 2023-26](#)' as part of a consultation process that ran until 2 August 2023.

The consultation invited views from our stakeholders on our proposed 3-year Corporate Strategy, which sets our mission and strategic priorities for 1 November 2023 to 31 October 2026.

Feedback received during the consultation was used to shape and finalise our Corporate Strategy for 2023-26.

Who did we hear from?

We delivered a programme of activities to access views and feedback about our proposed Corporate Strategy for 2023-26.

Through the programme we also discussed our work and budget proposals for 2023-24 within the context of our longer-term strategic approach over the coming years.

We engaged with close to 17,000 people. Our programme featured:

- a [news release](#) and media coverage across the legal press, including the Law Society Gazette, Solicitors Journal, Legal Futures, Law360, and Today's Conveyancer
- social media engagement and polls delivered through our [LinkedIn](#) and [Twitter](#) channels
- a webinar - '[Our Corporate Strategy – have your say](#)' – broadcast on 26 May 2023 and then available on-demand
- four in-person focus groups with members of the public in Bristol, London and Newcastle, and four online focus groups in both Welsh and English languages
- roundtable meetings with a range of stakeholders, including:
 - groups representing specific diverse communities in legal services
 - in-house-solicitors and lawyers in local government
 - stakeholders from technology and innovation communities
- meetings with people from harder-to-reach communities and groups that represent them, including:
 - people with lived experience of mental health needs
 - Kensington and Chelsea over-50s Forum, and Greater London Forum for Older People
 - young people with learning disabilities in North Wales, and with their carers and parents

- attending events that included:
 - Legal Eye conference
 - Legal Geek conference
 - Solicitor Sole Practitioners Group annual conference
- engagement with MPs and peers, including a House of Lords event and a reception with Welsh parliamentarians in the UK Parliament
- discussion with local law societies, including City of London Law Society, Devon & District Law Society, Cardiff & District Law Society and Bournemouth & District Law Society
- dinner events for regional stakeholders with SRA Board members in Leeds and Newcastle
- discussion with SRA employees through a digital roundtable meeting.

We also received five written consultation responses, including from the Law Society (TLS), the Legal Services Consumer Panel (LSCP) and Liverpool Law Society.

We are grateful to everyone who took part in our consultation process and engaged with us in some way about our proposed Corporate Strategy. We reviewed all responses and feedback received, and in the remainder of this report, we summarise this. The feedback informs the final version of our Corporate Strategy for 2023-26.

Comments and feedback for question one

Our first question was:

Do you have any views about our mission for 2023-26?

In our consultation we proposed a mission to shape and direct our work in 2023-26, which was ‘enhancing confidence in legal services’.

We heard different perspectives about the proposed mission. This included support from all written respondents, with TLS agreeing ‘...that the public having confidence in legal services is vital to the rule of law...’.

Members of the public in our focus groups, and in our events with harder-to-reach communities, offered more mixed feedback. Most people supported the concept of connecting our work to an overarching mission, and that this should aim to build trust between the public and solicitors that they may rely on.

However, our proposed wording divided opinion in particular, the word ‘enhancing’ which some people argued did not feel ambitious or clear enough. Others suggested it felt like a defensive word, with one participant likening it to a political statement.

Some people suggested alternatives, such as:

- improving confidence in legal services
- promoting confidence in legal services
- ensuring confidence in legal services.

Reservations about ‘enhancing’ were also raised at some of our roundtable meetings. This included our engagement with innovation and technology stakeholders, where we heard concerns that it seemed not to speak to people who have not previously accessed legal services before, but who may need to do so in the future. At our meeting with people who had experienced health and social support services, we heard feedback that the statement, as currently worded, seems to imply low current levels of trust in legal services.

Comments and feedback for question two

Our second question was:

Do you agree with our first strategic priority and its key deliverables? If not, what would you change?

Our first proposed strategic priority was: ‘We will deliver high professional standards’.

We heard good levels of support for our success criteria, and for our proposed deliverables under this first strategic priority.

This included our ongoing focus on professional education, and in particular our commitments around the Solicitors Qualifying Examination (SQE). Most members of the public taking part in our focus groups ranked this as one of the most important priorities for us, while TLS welcomed our proposals for evaluating the SQE’s impacts. This included the opportunities this could introduce to explore and respond to concerns around the SQE’s impacts for equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) considerations.

Participants at our meeting with SRA Board members in Newcastle also felt the SQE’s impacts needed to be fully explored in coming years. This included exploration of regional disparities, and the extent to which it may improve social mobility for candidates from diverse communities and backgrounds. The diversity representative groups from the profession were equally supportive of the SQE’s EDI aims, and welcomed further work to embed new opportunities this could bring.

The LSCP called for specific consideration of the Legal Services Act 2007 (LSA)’s objective for improving access to justice as part of our evaluation activity - to understand the SQE’s impacts on specific areas of law where access to legal services appears to be declining. On this point, it also suggested access to justice could usefully be an objective in its own right in our Strategy. Discussion with

consumer representative groups led to similar suggestions, given the scale of issues associated with access to justice in specific areas like immigration services. And with the affordability / accessibility of legal services more generally.

We were pleased to hear expressions of interest in working with us to progress our proposed key deliverables in the coming years. This included interest from TLS in collaborative work to implement the LSA's [incoming regulatory objective](#) to promote the prevention and detection of economic crime. TLS was also interested in working together on responses to the Legal Services Board (LSB)'s policy statement on ongoing competence – an area of focus that chimed also with participants in our engagement work with older people. They felt the most important thing for us to do was to assure that solicitors have the right skills and keep them up to date.

Other stakeholders also placed value on solicitor skillsets. People taking part in our focus groups in Wales felt it important solicitors understand laws as they apply to Wales, and laws set by Senedd Cymru / Welsh Government.

TLS expressed support for our proposed commitments for EDI. It welcomed the opportunity to work collaboratively on shared areas of interest, including actions to improve career progression for women and people from Black, Asian and minority ethnic origin backgrounds. The diversity representative groups from the profession shared our concerns about retention and progression for these groups. It also highlighted the importance of focusing on challenging barriers for LGBTQ+ and disabled lawyers. Our EDI commitments were also scrutinised by the LSCP. TLS also suggested the lack of progress in tackling longstanding issues in the sector required greater regulatory intervention, and a sharper focus on monitoring and evaluation. It argued we should have a much clearer vision and strategy for EDI.

We received feedback on other areas of our proposals, including our commitments to develop enhanced SRA Transparency Rules, and for consumers to be more confident and make informed choices about legal services. The LSCP confirmed it supported our ambition, and suggested building-in commitments to extend transparency requirements to family law and other areas. This was also well supported by TLS, and it confirmed that 'Empowered consumers of legal services are crucial to access to justice,' emphasising that law firms had made significant progress since transparency requirements were introduced.

Comments and feedback for question three

Our third question was:

Do you agree with our second strategic priority and its key deliverables? If not, what would you change?

Our second proposed strategic priority was: 'We will strengthen our risk based and proactive regulation'.

TLS confirmed its support for our proposed focus on improved insights, and for our thematic review commitments – alongside our intention to better support solicitors to meet regulatory obligations. Other professional stakeholders welcomed this area of focus. TLS and other professional stakeholders did however caution against inadvertently increasing regulatory burdens. They were also interested in the opportunities and intentions behind improved data. This included calls from Cardiff & District Law Society members, echoed by Liverpool Law Society, that new data collection initiatives should be clearly explained and rationalised.

The LSCP agreed with our proposed deliverables under our second strategic priority. However it also called for accompanying commitments to monitor and evaluate regulatory policy, as part of any moves towards proactive regulatory approaches.

Members of the public taking part in our consultation process generally appreciated the importance of data and analysis work, especially where it prevents poor outcomes. However, some people argued this shouldn't be prioritised over swift reactions to problems and concerns being raised with us.

Some stakeholder groups taking part in our roundtable events suggested we proactively explore issues that impact specific communities, and areas of the legal services market. They felt this would position us well to understand problems and to then respond in the best ways. One example suggested was concerns experienced by in-house lawyers to challenge and speak-up about conflicts between their employers' expectations and their regulatory duties.

Comments and feedback for question four

Our fourth question was:

Do you agree with our third strategic priority and its key deliverables? If not, what would you change?

Our third proposed strategic priority was: 'We will support innovation and technology'.

We heard good levels of support for this area of our consultation. Respondents to one of our LinkedIn polls ranked legal tech as the most important priority for us. And in another poll, technology and Artificial Intelligence (AI) were identified as the highest-impact issues for the legal services sector in the next few years. The Liverpool Law Society confirmed this was a top priority for us.

AI was also discussed at our roundtable meeting with technology stakeholders. We heard suggestions to deliver, and / or contribute to, good-practice guidance to support law firms to understand the use of AI, and to use it responsibly.

Consumer groups were also supportive of our focus on technology and innovation. This included the LSCP, which confirmed full support for our objectives and deliverables for objective three. It referenced the importance of consumer protection

being central to this work, and for lawtech to be applied towards access to justice issues and improved consumer experiences.

Members of the public in our focus groups were generally enthusiastic about using new technologies to access legal services. Representatives of people with learning disabilities agreed and confirmed that people on the whole use the internet more and feel comfortable online and using video platforms. Welsh speakers taking part in our focus groups were also enthusiastic about the opportunities provided by technology to engage with legal services in the Welsh language.

Some people in our focus groups went on to say they would look to us to assure them, and provide confidence, about new technology being offered by solicitors and law firms. One idea that was well supported by focus group participants was for us to endorse technology, with people confirming that this would inform their decisions about whether or not to try using those technologies.

A number of stakeholders recommended we use collaborative, partnership-driven approaches towards technology and innovation issues. This included the LSCP which felt joint working with other regulators would maximise the effectiveness of our approaches and avoid duplication of effort. TLS meanwhile asked that we collaborate with it to examine technological landscapes, suggesting that expertise and strong relationships would bring further value to our work.

TLS also supported our commitments to focus specifically on small law firms and their use of, and capacity to access, technology. It suggested good-practice resources that might add value into our work under our third strategic priority. Our roundtable meetings provided further feedback on this, including questions from Cardiff & District Law Society's members about SRA Innovate and other initiatives. This included the extent to which they can be positioned to benefit and reach all solicitors and smaller firms operating in Wales and more rural areas.

Technology stakeholders attending our roundtable meeting also agreed about the importance of securing good conditions for smaller law firms to benefit from technology advancements. Liverpool Law Society supported our focus on smaller firms, while emphasising that our work to understand developments should include larger firms as major change is likely to stem from them.

Comments and feedback for question five

Our fifth question was:

Do you agree with our fourth strategic priority and its key deliverables? If not, what would you change?

Our fourth proposed strategic priority was: 'We will be an authoritative and inclusive organisation, meeting the needs of the public, consumers, those we regulate and our staff.'

Our proposed key deliverables included publishing a policy statement on environmental, social and governance (ESG) considerations. TLS confirmed its enthusiasm for continued collaboration with us and expressed interest in further detail about specific areas of focus to be included in the statement. Members of the public in our focus groups acknowledged the importance of climate change responses, although many felt this of secondary importance to our work around standards and access.

The LSCP confirmed it agreed with our fourth proposed priority, and that it was ‘...particularly pleased to see a focus on customers and a commitment to place customers at the heart of everything the SRA does.’ It also welcomed our proposals to improve communication with consumers, referencing its own recommendations for standardised information and how this could inform our work.

Our engagement with people with lived experiences of learning disabilities reached similar conclusions. Some people acknowledged the confusion they face when they need help from a solicitor, and our role is to make sure the best possible information about legal services, in accessible formats, is made available. Accessible information was also flagged by people taking part in our Welsh language focus group, including that people who wish to use the Welsh language should be able to do so.

Participants in our focus groups were enthusiastic about receiving good customer service from us, while acknowledging it was also important for us to respond quickly and decisively. The majority of participants in our focus groups in Newcastle felt that good customer service was equally as important as other things we do.

Comments and feedback for question six

Our sixth question was:

‘Do you agree with our approach towards finance and future investment over the three year lifespan of the Corporate Strategy? If not please explain why.’

Most members of the public taking part in our focus groups agreed it was important that we use our finances effectively. In our draft Corporate Strategy we described financial challenges, and how we plan to navigate them in the coming years.

This includes inflationary pressures and the financial controls we propose to use in response. TLS acknowledged the importance of this, to ‘...ensure there is a strong focus on efficiency savings and that costs are controlled to avoid unnecessary pressure on the profession.’

Comments and feedback for question seven

Our seventh question was:

‘Do you have any comments on the approach we have taken to EDI? Are there any other EDI issues we should take into account to help us understand the impact of our proposed strategy?’

EDI issues and responses were discussed by some of our stakeholders. This included the LSCP which felt there was strong rationale for EDI to be a stand-alone objective in our Strategy, rather than being weaved in. It stated ‘...this approach risks downplaying the focus needed for progress in these areas.’

TLS reiterated its support for our EDI-related proposals under our first strategic priority. It suggested we might also consider more circumstances where reduced practising certificate fees could be offered.

Other groups also welcomed our EDI commitments, and the correlation that they have with areas of work already in train in other sectors. This included feedback from in-house lawyers about local government’s legal sector and its diverse representation, and strong social mobility delivered by apprenticeships and other flexible approaches.

Other groups, such as Sikhs in Law, and Cardiff & District Law Society LGBTQ+ Subcommittee, felt we could take a leadership role to build awareness of role models in legal services. This could include people with lived experiences who could help to build stronger pathways for others through the legal professions. Our role in providing training and guidance on EDI-related subjects was also highlighted as being important.

Comments and feedback for question eight

Our eighth question was:

‘Do you agree with our approach to measuring our success? If not please explain why or describe other tools you think we should use.’

We described tools that we plan to use to track and measure our progress, and to evaluate the impacts we are having, in delivering our Corporate Strategy between 2023 and 2026.

This includes using a perception survey. Liverpool Law Society supported our proposed approach. TLS also confirmed its support, and expressed interest in understanding more about data that may emerge from the survey, and how we will use that data to drive improvements.

Comments and feedback for question nine

Our ninth and final question was:

‘Do you agree with our assessment of our proposed strategic priorities towards the regulatory objectives? If not, please explain why.’

We concluded our consultation by assessing the alignment between each of our proposed strategic priorities, and our delivery of each one of the LSA’s [regulatory objectives](#).

TLS confirmed it was broadly supportive of the assessment, but flagged concerns about the impacts of any additional requirements introduced by the SRA to solicitors and their businesses, given inflationary pressures and cost of living increases.