The Next Chapter

Our Three-Year Strategy
2026–2029

advocate

advocate

Only together can we achieve access to justice for all.

Foreword

> *"Advocate has brought the Bar's expertise to people who would otherwise face the legal system alone. This strategy honours that commitment while setting out how we will better support applicants, enable more barristers to take up pro bono and build an organisation ready for the years ahead."*

Sharif A. Shivji KC, Chairman

After three decades at the heart of pro bono at the Bar, Advocate is entering an exciting new phase. Over the last three years, we have transformed our ways of working: we built a national casework team, digitised core processes and secured more funding than ever to support our mission of access to justice for all. This was all in response to the growing pressure on the justice system and the increasing number of people turning to us for help.

Having moved at such a fast pace, we stepped back to ask what the past three years have taught us: about the systems we rely on, the demand we're meeting and how we can refine our services and use our relationships across the legal sector and beyond to strengthen our contribution to access to justice. This strategy is the result.

To develop this strategy, we sought internal and external perspectives. We held focus groups with our staff team to discuss our vision and mission and understand the applicant experience, including their wants and needs within our current services. We also spoke with stakeholders across England and Wales, from long-standing partners such as the Bar Council and LawWorks to newer contacts including university law centres in Manchester, Liverpool and Wales.

These conversations gave us new connections and a clearer view of the access to justice landscape – where Advocate fits within it, where the regional gaps and opportunities lie, and how we can strengthen our impact and presence across England and Wales. We also analysed our case data against sector and external trends. Together, these surfaced a consistent picture: a strong recognition of our clarity of mission and the impact of our day-to-day work, alongside rising sector-wide demands and emerging opportunities to enhance our visibility and improve core systems and processes.

What we learned shaped our plan for the next three years: strengthening our foundations, introducing new frameworks and refining our delivery so that our work makes the greatest possible difference.

Our three strategic aims are to help more people move through the legal system with confidence, to help more barristers engage with pro bono, and to build an organisation sustainable enough to meet whatever the next three decades ask of it.

The Next Chapter: Our Three-Year Strategy was created in consultation with the Board of Trustees, Advocate's Senior Leadership Team and colleagues.

Organisational context

The past decade has brought about extraordinary strain on the justice system, with the cost-of-living crisis heightening insecurity, the ramifications of the COVID-19 pandemic still present in delays across courts and tribunals, and the removal of large areas of law from eligibility in legal aid meaning so many have nowhere to turn and must endure the system alone.

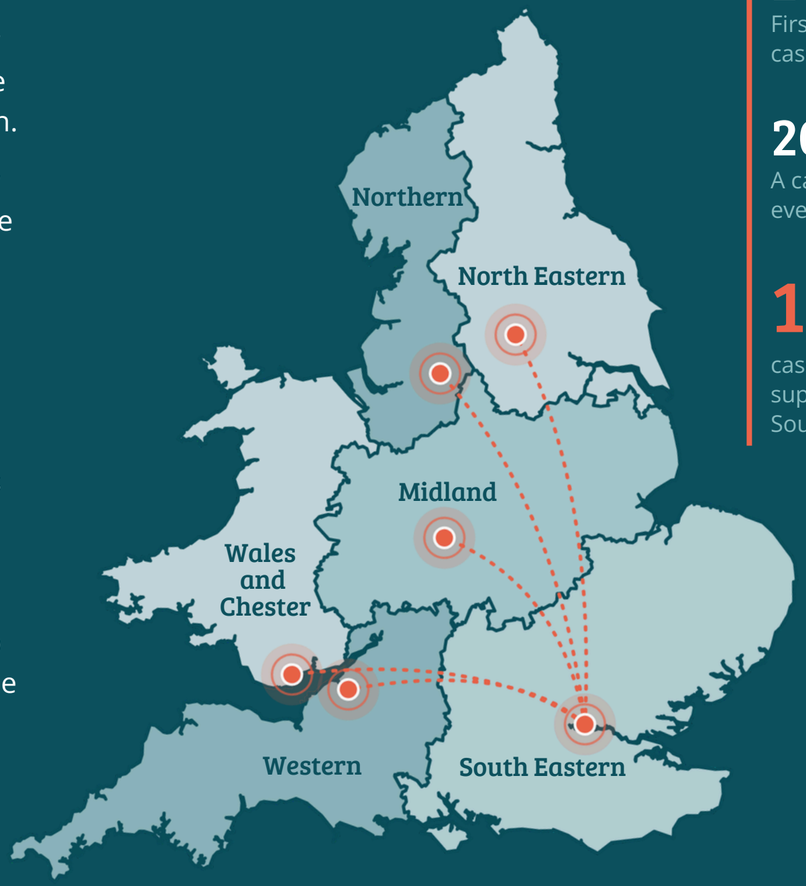
Since 2021, applications to Advocate for help with housing law have risen by 21%, with family law rising by 22%, and employment law by 48%. We have had to respond quickly to this increasing need. Over the past three years we have expanded our reach, taken on more complex casework, met rapidly rising digital demand and secured more funding to sustain our work and support applicants in crisis.

We recruited our first circuit-based caseworkers in 2022, and by 2023, we had a caseworker in every circuit across England and Wales.

Regional engagement has grown since, with over 1,100 cases receiving legal support outside of the South Eastern Circuit as a result of this expansion.

We have also expanded our specialised and duty schemes, which support litigants in person on the day of their hearing. They include the award-winning Manchester Chancery Litigant in Person Support Scheme (M-CLIPS), which has helped 71 litigants in person since it launched in October 2024.

But moving quickly has meant layering new ways of working onto old structures and stretching systems that were never designed for today's demand. *The Next Chapter*, our three-year strategy, builds the foundations we need to keep delivering high-quality, free legal assistance as the Bar's national pro bono charity.



OUR NATIONAL REACH

2022
First circuit-based caseworkers recruited

2023
A caseworker in every circuit

1,100+
cases receiving legal support outside of the South Eastern Circuit

What makes us unique

Advocate sits in a unique position within the wider justice system. We are a national access to justice organisation, operating in every region across England and Wales, and the only charity that offers free legal assistance in all areas of law. As the Bar's pro bono charity, we work alongside some of the most dedicated barristers, who advise and represent litigants in person.

We work to embed a culture of pro bono across the Bar and encourage and support pro bono activity in all its forms. Sitting on the Attorney General's Pro Bono Committee, we help shape and coordinate activity at a national level, including through the Pro Bono Recognition List and the Bar Pro Bono Awards, that encourage the adoption and continued development of a pro bono practice.

> *"At the lowest and most traumatic time of my life, I received outstanding quality of support from Advocate. I was supported through every step; always with patience, kindness, and clarification until I won my case."*
>
> Advocate applicant

VISION

Access to justice for all.

MISSION

We exist to strengthen access to justice by providing free legal advice and representation, delivered by volunteer barristers across every area of law in England and Wales.

CORE BELIEFS

- Access to justice for all is the cornerstone of the rule of law. A lack of means should never be a barrier to accessing justice. Pro bono provides a level playing field in legal proceedings.
- Pro bono is a longstanding tradition of the Bar, stretching back hundreds of years. We are proud to be sustaining this tradition and adapting it to modern times.
- Pro bono should operate alongside a properly funded legal aid system.
- Collaboration is at the heart of pro bono. By uniting the profession around a shared commitment to access to justice, we are building a vibrant pro bono community that benefits both individuals and society.

Our strategic aims

From the data gathered during the research process, we developed three strategic aims, which we will use to monitor and measure our progress throughout the strategy period.

1

More people who apply to Advocate are empowered to move through the legal system with confidence

We will:

- Provide a clear and accessible service model that helps people understand what support is available, how decisions are made and feel that they have been heard and supported.
- Make strategic choices about the volume and type of work we take on to maximise the positive outcomes we achieve for applicants, volunteers and staff.
- Continue to develop our services by learning from insight, experience and evidence, and use this learning to strengthen how our casework is delivered.

2

More barristers are engaged, supported and enabled to deliver pro bono

We will:

- Build a strong understanding of who engages with pro bono work, how they engage, and what support and training best enables them to contribute effectively.
- Improve barristers' experience of volunteering through clear communication, accessible systems and modern technology.
- Influence, grow, and shape pro bono practice at the Bar using insights and evidence.

3

Advocate is a trusted and sustainable organisation that can adapt and respond to changing legal and societal needs

We will:

- Maintain strong foundations, including clear governance, reliable systems and the right infrastructure to support our work.
- Strengthen Advocate's financial sustainability by developing diverse and reliable sources of income.
- Strengthen Advocate's national role and reputation, building trust and impact across the circuits and the wider access to justice system.
- Foster an internal culture that encourages questioning, learning and adaptation, where activities are regularly evaluated and development supports greater impact.

Our approach for the next three years

We will deliver this strategy in three stages, each building on the last.

Year one

In year one, we strengthen how we work day to day, improving our systems, data and processes and our understanding of demand.

Year two

In year two, we use what we learned to make targeted improvements, testing new ways to engage the Bar and new routes of support for applicants.

Year three

By year three, streamlined delivery and proven engagement models will be embedded at scale, so we can support more people and speak with authority in national access to justice discussions.

> *Demand for help continues to grow, while too many people still struggle to access legal support when they need it most. This new strategy sets out a vision and a plan for how Advocate can respond to that challenge: supporting more applicants, engaging more barristers in pro bono work, and building an organisation ready for the future."*
>
> Christopher Stacey, Chief Executive

Year one

The work in year one lays the foundations for the following two years.

We will start by building the frameworks needed to scale and keep our services consistent, and by modernising our systems and ways of working. Alongside day-to-day delivery, this will give us a clearer picture of demand, applicant experience and the effectiveness of our services.

We will review and refine the applicant journey so that it is clearer, more accessible and reflects the support we provide. Barristers are central to our work, so we will also make volunteering with us as straightforward as possible: reviewing the barrister journey and exploring technology that simplifies onboarding, case engagement and ongoing communication.

We will keep growing our reach across the circuits, working out where engagement is strong and where a greater Advocate presence would benefit those in need of legal assistance.

By the end of year one, we will know where demand is greatest and what we need to meet it, setting up the changes we make in year two.

Year two

> *Advocate embodies the true spirit of justice and community support. The impact of their work extends far beyond individual cases – they are transforming lives and ensuring that legal recourse is available to all, regardless of financial circumstances."*
>
> Advocate applicant

Building on year one's applicant journey improvements and regional analysis, we will improve how we deliver our services and extend our reach. Applicants arrive with different needs, from pre-action advice to urgent representation, and therefore need tailored responses. Where someone is not eligible for our services, we aim for them to leave knowing where else to find support and able to make their own informed decisions.

We will develop a deeper understanding of applicant groups across areas of law. With investment in technology and infrastructure, we will then pilot ways of working organised by area of law to meet growing demand more effectively. This should make it easier for barristers to find cases that match their expertise and where they can have the most impact, so they can advise and represent more people. This should also help applicants reach the right support more quickly and effectively.

What we learn about each region will allow us to strengthen relationships with local stakeholders and referral partners, creating more accessible routes into our services. We can then tailor our approach to each area, rather than apply a single model across England and Wales, and expand into the priority regions identified in year one.

We will also turn our data and organisational knowledge into impact measurement, embedding monitoring and evaluation practices that enable us to demonstrate outcomes, inform decision-making and continuously improve the support we provide to applicants.

Year three

By year three, we will have strengthened our national role, through streamlined, technology-enabled delivery and consistent, effective engagement. The area-of-law pilots from year two will have matured into integrated ways of working that meet the needs of different applicant groups at scale.

Referral pathways and stakeholder relationships will be well established, and our expansion into the priority regions will be under way. Monitoring and evaluation will be fully operational, giving us an ongoing evidence base for our impact and the confidence to exert greater influence in the wider access to justice landscape. With that evidence, a clearer national picture and strong relationships across the profession, we will be recognised as a trusted source of data, sector expertise and user experience, helping to shape the future of access to justice.

The end of year three will be a time to reflect on a defined period of change, but not the end of our development. We will continue to grow our national reach, strengthen our processes and adapt to the changing needs of our applicants and the justice system, building on everything years one and two have achieved.

None of this is possible without the barristers who represent our applicants, and the individuals and chambers who donate their time and support to us. Thank you for everything you do to support access to justice, and we look forward to continuing our partnership.

We draw on the strength of our history to look ahead, making the most of the next three years to help more people in need and create more pathways to justice for all.

Get involved and help us make this happen

VOLUNTEER

Advocate would be nothing without our dedicated and growing panel of volunteer barristers. Barristers with a practising certificate, from second six to KC, can sign up to browse pro bono cases with Advocate, and make a real difference to lives.

To find out more, please scan the QR code or visit the link below.

www.weareadvocate.org.uk/volunteer

DONATE & FUNDRAISE

We rely on generous contributions from donors and fundraisers to continue delivering pro bono help to those in need.

If you would like to fundraise or donate, please scan the QR code or visit the link below.

www.weareadvocate.org.uk/support-us

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