Meeting	OLC Board Meeting	**Agenda Item No.** **Paper No.**	5 146.3
Date of meeting	29 April 2026	**Time required**	20 Minutes

Title	2025/26 Annual Report and Accounts and update on progress
Sponsor	Laura Stroppolo, Head of Programme Management and Assurance Blessing Simango, Head of Finance, Procurement and IT Mike Harris, Head of Communications, Engagement and Impact
Status	OFFICIAL
To be communicated to:	Members and those in attendance

Executive summary

The Executive Team has progressed preparations for the Office for Legal Complaints' (OLC) Annual Report and Accounts (ARA) 2025–26, incorporating lessons learned from previous years and responding directly to the Board's feedback on proportionality, clarity and use of resources. This paper provides an update on progress, governance arrangements and next steps.

An Executive-led kick-off meeting took place in early February 2026, establishing clear roles, responsibilities and oversight for delivery of the ARA. Provisional laying dates of 2 or 7 July 2026 have been shared with Ministry of Justice colleagues, subject to approval by the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee and the OLC Board in June 2026.

A dedicated Board workshop on 25 February 2026 enabled early discussion of the ARA's structure, key messages and production approach. Board members strongly supported a shorter, more focused report that meets statutory and governance requirements while being less resource-intensive to produce. The Executive Team has reflected this feedback in its approach to commissioning, drafting and assurance.

To support this, an independent external review of the 2024–25 ARA and commissioning process was completed. The review has informed a revised structure, clearer section-specific templates and improved guidance for contributors, all designed to support more concise, higher-quality content for 2025–26. Drafting is now underway using the revised approach.

Established data quality and assurance processes remain in place, with early engagement planned with external auditors to support a smooth audit. Overall, good progress has been

made, supported by stronger governance, clearer commissioning and earlier Board engagement. The revised high-level structure for the 2025–26 Annual Report and Accounts, reflecting the Board's feedback and the independent external review, is provided for information at Annex 1.	
Recommendation / action required	
The Board is asked to note the report.	
Equality Diversity and Inclusion	
EDI implications	**Yes**
The OLC's Annual Report and Accounts reviews the whole of the OLC's governance structures and the Legal Ombudsman's operations. EDI matters in respect of LeO's people and customers cut across the narrative, reflecting mandatory requirements and best practice wherever possible. The ARA's final published form will be an accessible PDF.	
Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FoI)	
Paragraph reference	**FoI exemption and summary**
N/A	N/A
Value for Money (VfM)	
The Annual Report & Accounts demonstrates how the organisation has sought to deliver value for money by aligning resources to strategic priorities, making informed choices in response to rising demand and financial constraints, and maintaining effective governance and assurance over expenditure. It shows how delivery against the Business Plan has been achieved within the approved budget, alongside actions taken to improve efficiency, manage risk and maximise the impact of available resources.	

2025/26 Annual Report and Accounts: update on progress

1. OLC Annual Report & Accounts 2025–26 – Board workshop

OLC Board review ARA 25-26 ARA proposals & key messages

On 25 February the Executive Team conducted a workshop with the OLC Board to review, discuss and ultimately agree key milestones and actions for the ARA 25-26 project.

The workshop proved an extremely positive and helpful exercise, which reinforced the collective view that the ARA needs to be significantly shorter and less resource intensive to produce, while adhering to best practice/governance requirements (i.e. NAO and FReM guidance).

Key themes, which the Board are keen to see taken forward are:

- A rigorous approach to content – include only what is necessary
- More focus on achievements rather than operational detail and process descriptions – it is not a manual
- A stronger, more confident strategic narrative
- Audience first reporting that demonstrate we are meeting our readership's requirements
- A tighter more cohesive structure, which avoids repetition. The focus will be on brevity across content, layout, graphics
- Continued engagement with the NAO to ensure the ARA meets good practice reporting expectations, as a robust, balanced document that covers both achievements and shortfalls

The Executive team has listened to and responded to the Board's feedback and direction. It is focusing on ensuring that the ARA's production is project managed smoothly through an efficient, but flexible process, which allows sufficient time for the Board to review the Report at key stages of its preparation, as well as alleviating demand on LeO's people's time.

Simplifying the report, while telling LeO's story effectively is vital and the Board welcomed recommendations to commission a rigorous analysis of the 24-25 ARA to ensure the creation of a shorter, more focused ARA, which would be supported by a standalone Impact Report containing more detailed, human centric narrative, which would help meet accountability and transparency requirements. The Board also approved an independent review of the ARA 24-25, as well as the commissioning process.

Key messages

Identifying and conveying the key messages within the ARA is vital – these were agreed with the Board as follows:

- Highlighting the increase in operational output in 25-26 and the expected increase in consumers numbers seeking LeO's help (up 30% year on year)
- How we are meeting these challenges – currently and future
- Charting performance against strategic objectives and KPI's
- How we continue to deliver Value for Money
- People and culture are an important element of the storytelling

2. ARA external review/recommendations

Comprehensive review of ARA & commissioning templates

To help deliver our objective of a shorter, more focused report, we commissioned an external content consultant to carry out a thorough review of the OLC's 2024-25 ARA and to make recommendations for how we might significantly streamline our 2025-26 ARA while remaining compliant with our reporting requirements and in tune with annual reporting best practice.

The consultant produced a very detailed and comprehensive holistic review plus recommendations, summarised as follows:

Key Findings:

- An independent external review of the 2024–25 Annual Report and Accounts (ARA) provided assurance that the report is compliant with the Financial Reporting Manual (FReM) and other statutory reporting requirements, with no material gaps identified.
- The review concluded that the ARA could be significantly shorter and clearer without reducing transparency or accountability, particularly within the performance report, which accounts for over half of the document.
- Key issues identified included duplication of narrative and metrics, extensive use of operational and internal language, repetition of data in text and visuals, and people-related content spread across multiple sections.
- The reviewer emphasised that best-practice annual reporting prioritises clarity of narrative, focused key messages and disciplined use of data, rather than volume of detail.
- Recommendations included tightening drafting by removing boilerplate and over-explanation, reorganising content more closely in line with the FReM, reducing the number of metrics reported, and making more effective use of visuals.
- A separate review of the 2024-25 commissioning process found that a single generic template contributed to length and duplication. The reviewer recommended commissioning content via clearer section-specific templates, aligning content more closely to Business Plan delivery, and using review and sign-off stages to shorten and sharpen content.
- Overall, the review concluded that LeO has substantial flexibility to improve how it tells its story within a shorter ARA.

3. ARA 2025-26 drafting progress and next steps

The Executive is confident that drafting of the 2025–26 Annual Report and Accounts is progressing as planned and remains on track to meet the agreed timetable.

A clear ARA skeleton and commissioning framework are now in place, informed by the independent external review and the Board's steers. Content has been commissioned from contributors, and drafting is underway ahead of the planned Executive, finance and audit review stages.

Key differences in approach for 2025–26

The approach to drafting the ARA this year differs from 2024–25 in several important respects:

More focused commissioning: The single generic template used last year has been replaced with a suite of section-specific templates aligned to LeO's operational and corporate functions. These are supported by tailored guidance (Writing a Great Annual Report), providing clearer expectations on focus, tone and length.

Stronger discipline around narrative and deadlines: Contributors were issued templates and guidance together, with a clear deadline of 17 April for narrative and data returns, supporting more consistent content and reducing late-stage reworking.

Earlier issue identification and management: A central ARA contributor group has been established to surface questions early, support shared understanding, and allow potential issues or slippages to be addressed promptly.

Improved approach to design and visuals and a tighter design brief are being used to support clearer, more purposeful use of graphics and reduce reliance on illustrative or duplicative visuals.

Data

Supporting data for the front half of the 2025-26 Annual Report and Accounts has been collated throughout the year, with established controls in place to ensure data quality and accuracy.

As in the prior year, data will be subject to review by relevant Departmental Heads, followed by review by the Business Intelligence and Finance teams, and final sign-off by the Head of Finance ahead of submission to the external auditors.

Printing

Printing and production arrangements for the 2025–26 Annual Report and Accounts are in place. LeO has appointed HH Global to manage print and delivery, including the production and delivery of 15 copies for Board and statutory purposes.

Next steps

The next phase will focus on consolidating a first full draft, followed by Executive and finance review, engagement with external audit, and preparation of a near-final version for Board consideration in line with the agreed timetable. The deadline for the ARA 25-26 is 30 April.

The collation of the first draft will be undertaken as last year by our external content agency, Scroll, supported by in-house resource. The timeline is unavoidably tight: The deadline for creating the first draft of the report is 30 April.

Board colleagues will have the opportunity to review a near-final draft of the ARA in May. With no Board meeting scheduled for that month, we have created an alternative opportunity for Board members to engage and provide input. We will hold 'drop in' sessions on 18, 20 and 26 May, where we will be particularly grateful to receive the Board's thoughts on the tone and content of the report, and how effectively it tells our story.

4. External Audit Process

The external audit is scheduled to commence on 5 May 2026. Preparatory work is currently underway across the organisation, with teams working collaboratively to ensure that the required data and the draft Annual Report are ready in advance of the audit start date.

5. Annexe 1 – New ARA 2025-26 Structure (Outline)

This framework is intended to give a high-level view of the ARA 25-26 structure

Performance report
Foreword from the Chair of the Office for Legal Complaints
Performance overview
Report from the Chief Ombudsman
Key performance indicators / visual / annualised strategic scorecard
About the Office for Legal Complaints and Legal Ombudsman
Summary of strategic risks and issues
Performance analysis
Delivery against the 2025/26 Business Plan
Delivery against the 2025/26 budget
Strategic risks and issues
Sustainability report
Other reporting
Looking ahead

Accountability report