

ANNUAL REVIEW

2024–2025

Your Law Centre –
fighting for equal justice



Mission Statement



Cover photo: to follow

Southwark Law Centre exists to promote access to justice for people in need in Southwark and Lewisham, as well as neighbouring boroughs.

We do this by providing specialist, high-quality, and free legal advice and representation to those who cannot afford legal services.

Our work covers asylum and immigration, discrimination, education, employment, housing, planning, public law, welfare rights, and the Windrush compensation scheme.

We prioritise cases that prevent homelessness, destitution, discrimination, human rights violations, and poverty. Beyond casework, we strengthen our community's capacity by delivering training and support to local advice and community organisations.

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We also use our experience to influence law, policy, and practice, ensuring that the voices of those most affected by injustice are heard. Through our legal work and advocacy, we defend and promote human and civil rights and work toward a fairer, more equal society.

Key activities 2024/25

- Handled 537 complex new cases, in addition to ongoing work.
- Provided one-off advice and signposting to nearly 900 individuals.
- Delivered workshops and community training to around 700 frontline workers, community groups, and local residents.
- Enabled 264 people to regularise their immigration status.
- Helped 141 individuals to remain in their homes or access housing.
- Offered employment advice to 75 people.
- Secured £348,000 in compensation for survivors through 22 Windrush cases.
- Assisted 27 people in resolving welfare rights issues.
- Amplified community voices through our Planning and Education work.
- Expanded our public law work, increasing case numbers and broadening our impact.
- We survived one office move....

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Chair's report



Alex Polley KC, Chair of Trustees

Another busy year for Southwark Law Centre's incredibly dedicated, indeed just generally incredible, team of solicitors, caseworkers and administrators. More than 500 new complex cases, as well as hundreds more people helped through one-off advice or through the workshops run by staff.

As always, the work covers a very wide range of areas – asylum and immigration, discrimination, education, housing, planning, welfare rights – and helps people who might otherwise be unable to access legal advice and enforce their legal rights, often in circumstances of great personal stress or trauma.

But it has also been a busy year away from the front-line work, with an unusual amount of institutional change. Regular readers will know that since this time last year we have welcomed a new Executive Director, Stacey Edgar, who has brought both energy and wisdom to the role, as

well as some valuable fresh perspectives. It has been a great pleasure to work with her as Chair this year.

And on top of all that we have (finally! regular readers will again need no further explanation) managed an office move in January, exchanging the delights of Hanover Park for the rather more light and airy premises at 53 Addington Square.

We have been very pleased to set up shop there alongside Migrant Legal Action, an organisation which shares our core goals and ideals.

My thanks to all the staff – case workers and solicitors, finance, admin, volunteers and cleaners, as well as Stacey (and Anna at MLA) – who have worked hard to make that move a success and help us adapt to the new environment.

I would also like to thank the members of the trustee board – another talented and

dedicated group of people who have this year once again given their time generously to help support Stacey and her team.

As in previous years, this annual report showcases some of the particular successes the teams have had this year, and some of the achievements of which they are particularly proud. But they should be, and are, proud of everything they have achieved this year for their clients – and all done with good humour and good cheer, even when pressed to keep their legal aid billing up to date.

The latter efforts, coordinated by the tireless Debbie, have contributed to the stable financial position the Law Centre is – very – lucky to enjoy. As well as all the staff, we also have to thank Southwark and Lewisham Councils, and the large number of charitable trusts, hospital trusts, law firms and individual donors who also continue to support our work.

We greatly appreciate all that support, without which the Law Centre simply could not do what it does.

I am delighted to be able to say that this year's accounts show a surplus, allowing us to replenish our reserves a little after some leaner years recently and ahead of what may, very well, be leaner times again ahead.



Executive Director's Report



Stacy Edgar, Executive Director

This has been my first year as Executive Director of Southwark Law Centre, and it has been an immense privilege to lead such an outstanding organisation. Every day I am inspired by the dedication, compassion, and skill of our staff and volunteers. Together, we have navigated a year of transition and achievement, delivering justice and hope for communities across Southwark, Lewisham, and beyond.

In January 2025, we relocated from Peckham to Camberwell, marking a major milestone. Managing the move alongside a leadership change was no small task, but it was completed seamlessly thanks to Flozel Webley, Jayed Ahmed, and Verona Patterson, whose professionalism ensured uninterrupted service and a welcoming new home for the Centre.

Across all departments, our teams have continued to show extraordinary commitment to fairness, equality, and human dignity.

The Immigration Team achieved exceptional results for people facing destitution, detention, and separation. Over the year, the team opened 264 new cases and worked closely with local authorities, the NHS, and community groups to help clients rebuild their lives.

The Windrush Justice Clinic, run with King's College London, secured £348,000 in compensation this year, bringing the total since 2021 to £670,000. Its success, now embedded as an accredited module within the King's LLM programme, reflects our mission to restore dignity and rebuild trust through the law.

Our Employment and Discrimination Team continues to defend workers facing exploitation and unfair treatment, in partnership with Citizens Advice Southwark and the South London and Maudsley NHS Trust. Their work has delivered justice and confidence to clients at some of the hardest moments of their lives.

The Education Team remains central to our community engagement, empowering parents and children to enforce education rights, particularly for Black and minority ethnic pupils and those with special educational needs.

The Public Law Team challenged unlawful decision-making in education, welfare, housing, and asylum, turning individual injustice into systemic reform.

Our Planning Voice project championed communities affected by redevelopment, preventing displacement, increasing affordable housing, and ensuring local voices shape planning decisions.

The Housing Team has worked tirelessly to prevent homelessness and defend tenants' rights. It supported vulnerable private renters and provided expert advice to local agencies.

The Welfare Rights Team handled 27 complex benefit cases, often for people facing destitution. A landmark win, GA v

Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (2024), confirmed that survivors of domestic abuse with EU pre-settled status must not be denied Universal Credit—restoring stability for GA and setting a precedent for others in similar situations.

Lewisham Law Centre continues to play a vital local role, with growing numbers of projects supporting local residents. This year, the team prevented the eviction of a stroke survivor, securing an adapted home that allowed him to live safely and independently.

Through our Influencing and Advocacy work, we ensure clients' experiences drive wider reform. We lead and participate in networks such as the Housing and Immigration Group, Southwark Homelessness Forum, and the Equalities and Human Rights Panel. We also engage with government consultations on SEND provision, legal aid, and temporary accommodation, and work closely with local MPs to ensure community voices shape policy.

As I reflect on this first year, I am struck by how much this small but mighty organisation achieves. Every day, our staff and volunteers prove that social justice work is not only possible but essential. Their determination to build a fairer society inspires me and strengthens my resolve for the years ahead.

Looking Ahead: Key Challenges for 2025/26

- Strengthening infrastructure to support expanding services.
- Responding to the evolving needs of our diverse communities.
- Supporting staff and volunteer wellbeing through an inclusive culture.
- Embedding diversity and accessibility across all our work.
- Raising the visibility of Southwark and Lewisham Law Centres.
- Safeguarding and expanding our specialist casework capacity.

Employment report

The team continues to work from referrals made by frontline partners, mainly Citizens Advice Southwark and the Talking Therapies Team at the South London and Maudsley NHS Trust. This close collaboration ensures that people facing discrimination, workplace injustice, or barriers to fair treatment receive early legal support before problems escalate.

This year, the team has grown in strength and capacity. Nana Adusei joined for a joint seat with the Public Law team as part of his training contract, and Caitlin Colquhoun began her solicitor apprenticeship with us. We also welcomed Fabienne Persaud-Drennan as our new paralegal, shared with the Welfare Benefits team. Their dedication has significantly increased our capacity and allowed us to support more clients in need.

We have expanded our Legal Aid-funded work through Legal Help, which supports clients preparing discrimination and employment claims for the Employment Tribunal. However, severe delays in the Tribunal system mean many cases wait over a year for a hearing. This has a serious impact on clients who are encouraged to find new work to reduce their financial loss, but who then risk losing Legal Aid eligibility because their new income exceeds the threshold.

Looking ahead, the Employment Relations Bill, expected to receive Royal Assent by



late 2025, offers some hope. It will extend the time limits for bringing claims and make it easier for workers to enforce basic rights such as sick pay and holiday pay.

Case Study: Challenging restrictive covenants

Our client, a migrant worker with limited English, faced threats from a former employer attempting to use restrictive covenants to block them from taking a new job. We intervened immediately, challenging the legality of the covenants

and the intimidation. The employer withdrew all threats, and the client was able to keep their new, better-paid and more secure job, restoring both their confidence and stability.

Education report

Our education work is rooted in the community. We continue to support Black and Ethnic Minority young people and children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) in Southwark and neighbouring boroughs, helping them access the education they deserve. We achieve this by:

- Empowering parents to understand and enforce their children's education rights.
- Supporting frontline community organisations to identify legal issues early.
- Influencing education policy at both local and national levels.
- Providing specialist advice and training through our education legal hub, giving second-tier support to community groups.
- Coordinating the Action for Education Rights Group, a quarterly forum bringing together parents and community organisations to share knowledge and shape our legal priorities.

This strong network ensures that community voices drive our work. Parents, advocates, and local groups help us identify patterns of unfairness and inform the strategic challenges we take forward.

This year, our focus has been on supporting the 4,000 children living in temporary accommodation in Southwark. Many of these children face disrupted schooling, long commutes, and barriers to accessing the support they need. Working closely with Southwark Council and local organisations, we are pressing for coordinated action so every child in temporary housing can attend a suitable school and thrive academically and emotionally. This work is ongoing and remains a key priority for the year ahead.

Like others in the education sector, we await details of the government's response to the national SEND crisis. Once published, we will analyse the implications for children in Southwark and



neighbouring boroughs to strengthen our advocacy and ensure access to appropriate education for all.

We thank the Legal Education Foundation and all our partner organisations for their continued support and collaboration.

Housing report

This year has been one of transition and achievement for the Housing Team. As we prepare this report, we are about to say farewell to Sarver, who retires at the end of October after a long and dedicated career in law centres and advice agencies across London. Throughout his career, Sarver has provided expert advice and

representation to people in urgent housing need, including those facing eviction, homelessness, and the daily threat of insecurity. His commitment to social justice and his tireless advocacy have improved countless lives.

Since joining Southwark Law Centre in 2022, Sarver has led our Impact on Urban Health Project, delivered in partnership with Kineara, a Southwark-based social enterprise that supports vulnerable private tenants. Through this project, Sarver has taken on around 30 complex cases each year, often defending tenants facing “no fault” evictions under Section 21. He has acted urgently to set aside possession orders, prepared detailed pleadings, and represented clients in court. Sarver has been a valued colleague, trade union advocate, and source of inspiration to the team. We thank him sincerely and wish him all the very best in his well-earned retirement.

It has otherwise been an exceptionally busy year. The Housing Team continues to provide advice and representation to residents across Southwark, Lewisham, and Lambeth, supporting people who are homeless, living in poor conditions, or facing eviction. Many of our clients are families with children or people with disabilities placed in unsuitable temporary accommodation or outside the borough.

We act for tenants at risk of losing their homes, representing them in court and bringing counterclaims where their homes are in disrepair or unsafe. We regularly use the Equality Act 2010 to challenge discrimination in housing decisions and continue to advise on housing allocations to ensure those in greatest need are prioritised for permanent social housing.

The team also provides second-tier advice to advice agencies across Southwark and has developed a dedicated phone line and webform for tenants in Southwark, Lewisham, and Lambeth who have



received possession papers. This ensures early intervention and timely support when it matters most.

Although we no longer have a Legal Aid Agency duty advice contract at court, we continue to act as agents for other law centres, advising tenants facing imminent possession orders. This partnership enables us to assist more people while keeping our advocacy skills sharp.

This year we welcomed three new members to the team: Oscar, who joined in January and is already handling complex homelessness and possession cases; Billy, who joined in August and will take over the Impact on Urban Health Project; and Isabel, our newest recruit, who is assisting on both Kineara and the possession line. We are also proud that Daniel, our solicitor apprentice, passed his SQE1 with excellent results and will now prepare for SQE2 ahead of qualification in 2026.

Case Study: A Safe Home and a Fresh Start

Our client arrived in the UK as an asylum seeker with her young son, who is profoundly disabled. As asylum seekers, they were housed in accommodation that was entirely unsuitable for his needs. Despite a High Court order requiring the Home Office to find appropriate housing, they continued to live in unsafe and inaccessible conditions.



After being granted immigration status, the family faced eviction from their asylum accommodation. When the local authority said it had no suitable housing and tried to move them out of the borough, Southwark Law Centre stepped in. We challenged the council's decision, prepared judicial review proceedings, and successfully secured a ground-floor, wheelchair-accessible two-bedroom council home, all within a month.

This outcome meant that the family never had to enter temporary accommodation. For the first time, they had a safe and stable home where the child could move freely and the mother could focus on his care without fear of eviction.

Lewisham Law Centre



Lewisham Law Centre (LLC) was launched in 2018 as a partnership between Southwark Law Centre and Citizens Advice Lewisham (CAL), becoming a formally constituted Law Centre within SLC in 2021. Supported in its early years by Trust for London funding, LLC built strong referral networks and partnerships across Lewisham's advice sector while co-located with CAL at the Leemore Centre.

In 2025, CAL's funding and service model changed, leading to its move from the Centre. We are deeply grateful for CAL's role in establishing LLC and continue to work closely together, sharing referrals and ensuring residents can access legal aid where available. LLC remains embedded in the local advice community, providing vital legal support and partnership across Lewisham.

Following CAL's departure, LLC secured its own lease at the Leemore Centre, ensuring that we remain part of the thriving community of advice and third-sector organisations based there. We continue to collaborate with several local partners, particularly Action for Refugees in Lewisham, with whom we run joint projects to deliver immigration advice and casework support.

SLC also manages several Lewisham-based projects, including the Hospitals Pathway Project, the Rough Sleepers Immigration Project, and the NRPF Project. During 2025, we re-established a separate LLC Working Group to bring these strands together, strengthen our identity as a distinct Law Centre within SLC, and expand the range of advice and representation available to Lewisham residents.

Case Study: Regaining a Home and Independence

C was referred to the Lewisham Law Centre housing team in the summer of 2023 through our Hospitals Project, following a devastating stroke. At the time, he was still an inpatient on a stroke ward and was facing imminent eviction from his home, with bailiffs due within weeks.

C had previously suffered two minor strokes in 2021 and 2022 but had managed to return to work each time. He lived alone and struggled to manage his finances after repeated periods of illness. Confusion over his Universal Credit payments caused him to fall into significant rent arrears of more than £14,000, leading his housing association landlord to obtain a possession order.

When we were instructed, C's health had deteriorated significantly. He had limited mobility, memory problems, and was unable to climb stairs or safely leave his fourth-floor flat, which had only one unreliable lift and no emergency

evacuation plan. His situation was life-threatening.

We urgently contacted his landlord, setting out the discrimination issues under the Equality Act 2010 and requesting a stay of the possession warrant. The landlord initially refused. However, after further medical evidence and advocacy from our team, they agreed to apply to the court to set aside the possession order, cancel the eviction warrant, and withdraw the claim.

We also supported C with a homelessness application, arguing that his home was so unsuitable for his medical needs that he was "homeless at home." The council accepted this and awarded C priority status on the housing register. Although initially restricted from bidding due to his rent arrears, we challenged the restriction and, before the review concluded, his landlord offered him a new, fully adapted ground-floor social tenancy.

C has now moved into his new home, which is safe, accessible, and close to his medical support network. He is working with his landlord's debt team to apply for a Debt Relief Order to clear his previous arrears, giving him a genuine fresh start.

For C, the outcome was transformative. After months of hospitalisation and fear of eviction, he now has a secure home that meets his needs and allows him to live independently again.



Asylum & Immigration report

Despite an increasingly hostile and unpredictable political environment, the Immigration Team has had an excellent year, achieving outstanding outcomes for highly vulnerable clients with complex cases. These results reflect the skill, dedication, and compassion of each team member, who manage demanding caseloads with professionalism and empathy.

In 2024/25, Southwark and Lewisham Law Centres opened 264 new immigration and asylum cases alongside many ongoing matters. Cases are taking longer to conclude due to poor Home Office decision-making and long delays at the First-tier Immigration Tribunal. These delays cause real harm, leaving clients and families in prolonged uncertainty that affects their wellbeing and ability to move forward.

The Law Centre prioritises supporting the most vulnerable, including children, survivors of gender-based violence, and people with severe physical or mental health needs. Many clients are homeless or destitute.

Partnership Work

The Law Centre leads a major project funded by London Councils to help street homeless people regularise their immigration status, working with Lewisham Refugee and Migrant Network. We are pleased that funding has been secured for another year.

We also receive support from Lewisham Council to provide specialist immigration advice for families and individuals assisted by the NRPF team, and through our partnership with Action for Refugees in Lewisham, funded by Trust for London.

Our collaboration with Guy's and St Thomas' hospitals provides casework and representation for homeless patients. This work secures immigration status and housing for vulnerable people while saving the NHS significant costs. The project is now funded on a rolling basis by the GSTT Hospital Trust, and a similar scheme with University Lewisham and Queen Elizabeth Hospitals has been extended to 2028.

Through the Justice Together programme with South London Refugee Association, we provide consultancy and take on complex referrals, achieving positive outcomes for clients at risk of exploitation and homelessness. We are also grateful to the United St Saviour's Charity for funding an additional caseworker, expanding our capacity to reach those most in need.

Miss K: Escaping Violence and Finding Safety

Miss K, a bisexual woman from the West Indies, suffered abuse from her family and later severe domestic violence from her partner. When the abuse became life-threatening, she fled to the UK and claimed asylum. Despite intrusive Home Office interviews, she persevered. A

medico-legal report from the Helen Bamber Foundation confirmed her trauma and strengthened her case. The Home Office ultimately recognised Miss K and her two children as refugees. She now lives in safety, rebuilding her life and providing stability for her family.

Mrs O: Family and Care

Mrs O, a non-British national, had been visiting her British son, who required full-time care due to chronic illness. Despite seven years of refusals, she remained his primary carer. In 2024,

after persistent advocacy, we secured indefinite leave to remain for Mrs O, allowing her to stay lawfully and care for her son. Both now live with stability and relief after years of uncertainty.



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Windrush Justice Clinic

During 2024/25, the Windrush Justice Clinic (WJC) continued to deliver vital specialist support to members of the Windrush Generation and their families. In an increasingly complex legal environment, the team ensured that people wrongfully deprived of their rights, livelihoods, and sense of belonging can finally access justice, compensation, and dignity.

Over the year, the Clinic worked on 22 complex live cases, with another five on the waiting list. Between April 2024 and March 2025, £348,000 in compensation was awarded or offered to clients. This brings the total secured since the Clinic began in 2021 to £670,000, demonstrating the life-changing impact of this work.

In addition to financial redress, the team helped five people regularise their

immigration status under the Windrush Scheme, bringing the total since 2021 to twelve. For those affected, these outcomes mean not only legal success but also security, stability, and recognition after decades of exclusion and injustice.

Strategic Litigation and Policy Work

In April 2025, the Clinic was granted permission to appeal a High Court decision that dismissed a judicial review challenge against the refusal of legal aid to Windrush compensation claimants. The appeal, due to be heard in December 2025, has major implications for access to justice. Many claimants struggle to navigate the process without representation, and the case could set an important precedent for fair legal support.

Client Voices

The voices of our clients best illustrate the Clinic's impact:

LR: *"Working with SLC helped me in a sense that I now have a little bit of money. If anything happened to me, I have something to give my grandchildren. I have never been in a position to give anything. Now I have something, thanks to Mr Van and Nana."*

PU: *"Everyone at SLC works diligently, caring, and attentive. Van made the process manageable and stress-free. I wish they were better funded so they could help more people."*

SE: *"They worked really hard, were very professional, and made me feel comfortable and supported."*

These testimonials capture the heart of the Clinic's mission: restoring dignity, rebuilding lives, and rebuilding trust after decades of injustice.

Partnership with King's College London

The year marked the fifth year of partnership with King's College London (KCL) Law School, central to the Clinic's success. This collaboration combines high-quality casework with education and research, providing pro bono representation while training the next generation of human rights lawyers.

From 2025/26, this partnership will form a new accredited module, "Human Rights in Practice and Clinical Legal Education," within KCL's LLM and Master's programme. In January 2025, the Clinic and KCL were jointly shortlisted for the King's Engaged Research Awards, recognising the innovative impact of this model.

Research and National Recognition

The Clinic contributed to a JUSTICE report led by Dr Jo Wilding, published in June 2025, showing how specialist legal advice improves fairness and efficiency in the compensation process.



Our legal team and volunteers challenge the lack of legal aid for Windrush victims

Previously recognised as the Best New Pro Bono Clinic at the King's College London National Awards (2022), the WJC continues to build on its reputation for innovation, collaboration, and commitment to justice.

Through expert casework, strategic litigation, and pioneering partnerships, the

Windrush Justice Clinic continues to deliver hope, recognition, and change for those whose lives were disrupted by government failure. Its work exemplifies Southwark Law Centre's mission: using law to right historic wrongs and secure justice that lasts.

Public Law Report

In 2024/25, the Public Law team has grown stronger and more impactful. The team has expanded its capacity and embedded collaboration across departments, allowing us to take on more complex and strategic work. Through this growth, we have been able to support more individuals while pursuing public interest litigation that drives wider systemic change.

The Public Law team uses the law to challenge unfair, unlawful, and discriminatory decisions by public bodies. Working closely with our education, immigration, welfare benefits, and planning teams, we take on cases where individual advocacy alone cannot resolve the underlying issues. Our approach combines casework and strategic litigation to hold authorities to account, protect rights, and promote fairness for communities that are too often excluded from justice.

Education and Children's Rights

We continue to act in judicial reviews of school exclusion decisions and of local authority failures to meet legal duties toward children with special educational needs (SEN). Building on pre-litigation research funded by the Strategic Litigation Fund (SLF), this work targets both individual injustices and wider systemic failings under the Children and Families Act 2014. Our aim is to compel local authorities to establish systems that genuinely meet the needs of children with SEN.

Welfare Benefits

In partnership with the welfare benefits team, we have successfully challenged unlawful delays by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). Through pre-action correspondence, we secured overdue payments for vulnerable clients who urgently needed them.

Planning

Alongside the planning team, we are developing judicial review challenges to decisions that reduce affordable housing or negatively affect local communities. This collaboration ensures that planning policy serves the public interest rather than private profit.

Immigration and Asylum

With our immigration team, we have sought judicial review of a wide range of unlawful Home Office decisions that would otherwise leave clients destitute or at risk of detention and removal. These cases include:

1. A systemic challenge to the Home Office's failure to make reasonable adjustments for adults who lack capacity, including the absence of independent advocates within the asylum system.
2. A Court of Appeal case testing whether the Secretary of State retains a residual

power to revoke indefinite leave to remain granted in error. The outcome will have significant implications for the stability and rights of migrants across the UK.

We have also supported vulnerable asylum seekers housed in unsafe and overcrowded hotel accommodation. Our legal intervention secured emergency relief for several families, compelling the Home Office to provide suitable, self-contained housing. This work builds on earlier SLF-funded research and has now developed into a wider challenge to the system that allows such conditions to persist. Recent funding from the AB Charitable Trust will enable us to recruit a part-time paralegal to expand our litigation capacity on this issue.

In addition, we are pursuing pre-litigation work, supported by SLF funding, on the



government's eVisa system, which currently fails to accommodate vulnerable adults. We are collaborating with Deighton Pierce Glynn and other sector

partners to seek systemic adjustments that make digital immigration processes accessible and lawful.

XE – Fighting Racial Disparity in Exclusion

XE, a Black Caribbean student, was permanently excluded from school for bringing in a toy water gun. We challenged the decision as discriminatory and procedurally unfair. The case settled in her favour: the

exclusion was expunged from her record, and she received compensation. The case highlights ongoing racial disparities in school exclusions and the need for fairer disciplinary systems.

BL – Exposing Inhumane Asylum Conditions

BL, a vulnerable asylum seeker with severe mental ill-health, lived with her family in a single overcrowded hotel room for more than 16 months. After she attempted suicide, we brought judicial review proceedings challenging both her placement and the systemic failures behind it. The High Court

ordered the Home Office to move the family to safe, self-contained housing and granted permission for systemic grounds to proceed. We are now pursuing these arguments in other cases to achieve lasting reform.

Planning Voice Report

In today's challenging economic climate, driven partly by speculative property development and recent developer-friendly policy reforms, developers are increasingly submitting applications with minimal affordable housing and reduced community benefits. It is therefore more crucial than ever that the communities most affected have a meaningful voice in planning decisions, to ensure public benefit is maximised and harm minimised.

Planning Voice helps communities engage with and influence the long and complex planning process. At early stages, the project raises awareness of the planning system, upcoming applications, and people's rights to participate. As proposals progress, it provides detailed advocacy and representation, drafting written

submissions, speaking at planning committees, and preparing cases for planning inquiries.

Key areas of work

● South Dock Marina

The Council's redevelopment plans risked displacing independent creative businesses and creating a hostile environment for berth holders. Planning Voice's intervention prevented immediate eviction and secured better terms, including a business support plan for affected enterprises.

● Borough Triangle

Careful scrutiny of the application led to an increase in the number of social rent homes. Berkeley Homes' redevelopment of this Elephant & Castle site would have displaced around 40 independent food traders, most from lower socioeconomic and global majority backgrounds, without assistance. Our advocacy secured a

temporary market space, stronger rights to return after redevelopment, and a £200,000 relocation support package. We also ensured that relocation support was extended to Peckham ABC, a long-standing community boxing club.

● Aylesham Centre

Working closely with *Aylesham Community Action (ACA)*, the project helped raise public awareness and improve both the Council's and the developer's consultation processes. Joint advocacy by ACA and Planning Voice persuaded the Council to refuse the application on grounds of insufficient social housing and negative impacts on independent businesses. The developer has appealed the decision. Jed will represent ACA at the planning inquiry, giving evidence on the urgent need for social housing in Peckham and the importance of development that sustains the area's

diverse community.

Advocacy on business protection has already led to an improved support offer for affected traders.

- **Dorchester Court**

The project represented tenants of this Lambeth estate, where the landlord plans to add an extra storey of unaffordable flats, threatening to displace all residents. The proposals currently offer weak protections, with a real risk tenants will be unable to return without steep rent increases. Planning Voice continues to press for stronger safeguards and secure tenancies.

- **Aylesbury Estate**

Working with the Public Interest Law Centre (PILC) and residents, the project exposed misinformation in Council and developer documents. This analysis revealed that the latest phase of the regeneration scheme would actually result in a net loss of social housing, contrary to public claims. The findings have strengthened the residents' campaign for greater accountability

and genuine affordable housing.

- **Crossness Nature Reserve**

Planning Voice represented the community campaign opposing industrial development threatening this ecologically important reserve in Bexleyheath. Through participation in the Development Consent Order inquiry, the project helped ensure that the case for protecting the nature reserve was clearly and robustly presented.

- **Development Consultation Charter (DCC)**

The project successfully campaigned for significant improvements to the DCC, resulting in earlier, more meaningful engagement with local stakeholders and a more transparent consultation process overall. These reforms set a stronger precedent for community involvement across future developments.



Impact

Across these cases, Planning Voice has ensured that affected communities, from estate tenants and small traders to environmental campaigners, are informed, represented, and empowered. Its advocacy has achieved concrete outcomes such as preventing evictions, improving social housing offers, securing financial and business support, and influencing planning policy. In a policy landscape increasingly tilted toward developers, Planning Voice remains a crucial mechanism for protecting community interests and amplifying local voices in planning decisions.

Welfare Rights report



In 2024/25, Southwark Law Centre supported 27 clients through complex welfare rights cases. Our specialist work covers appeals to the First-tier Tribunal (Social Security and Asylum Support), the Upper Tribunal, and Judicial Review challenges. These cases often involve people facing destitution, disability, or sudden loss of income, and our intervention can make the difference between survival and crisis.



Legal Aid is rarely available for welfare rights matters, which makes our work in this area especially vital. The Law Centre's welfare rights casework is largely funded through our important contract with Southwark Council, ensuring that residents most in need can still access expert advice and representation.

We also received funding from the South East London Integrated Care Board (ICB) to provide welfare benefits advice and representation for people living with Sickle Cell Disorder across South East London. Many of these clients face significant health-related barriers to work and to navigating complex benefit systems. Our specialist support helps them secure essential financial stability, improving both their wellbeing and access to healthcare.

This year, the Law Centre achieved a strategic legal victory that will have a lasting impact for survivors of domestic abuse with EU pre-settled status.

Case Study: GA – Restoring Security and Dignity

GA, a Ghanaian national, married her Dutch husband in 2020. During her pregnancy, she experienced serious domestic abuse and was forced to leave the relationship in April 2021. Her daughter was born a few months later.

With support from *Rights of Women (ROW)*, GA made a late application to the EU Settlement Scheme, arguing that she had retained her residence rights as a survivor of domestic abuse. She was granted EU pre-settled status and applied for Universal Credit (UC) on the same day. Despite this, the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) refused her claim, stating she did not have a qualifying right of residence.

At a time when she and her baby were struggling to meet even their basic needs, this refusal left GA with no income and no safety net. ROW referred her to Southwark Law Centre, who agreed to represent her in challenging the decision.

GA's appeal argued two key points:

1. The refusal of UC breached her and her child's rights under the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, which guarantees the right to live in dignified conditions.
2. The refusal amounted to unlawful discrimination under Article 14 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), as she was treated less favourably because she was a domestic abuse survivor with pre-settled status.

The First-tier Tribunal dismissed the appeal, but Southwark Law Centre continued to fight the case in the Upper Tribunal. Before the hearing concluded, the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (SSWP) conceded that GA had been unlawfully discriminated against. The Department accepted that victims of domestic abuse with EU pre-settled status were treated differently, that there was no lawful justification for that

difference, and that the discriminatory provisions in the UC Regulations should be disapplied in GA's case.

On 5 December 2024, the Upper Tribunal allowed the appeal. GA was awarded significant arrears of Universal Credit, restoring her financial stability and ensuring ongoing support for her and her young child.

The decision, *GA v Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (UC)* [2024] UKUT 380 (AAC), is now a published precedent. It will help other survivors of domestic abuse in similar situations, ensuring they are no longer unfairly denied support.

For GA, the ruling brought more than financial relief—it restored her independence and security after a period of fear and uncertainty. For others, it represents a step forward in ensuring that government policy treats survivors with the dignity and equality they deserve.

Influencing & Advocacy Report

Southwark Law Centre's impact extends far beyond individual representation. Through our influencing and advocacy work, we ensure that the experiences of our clients drive wider systemic change. By amplifying the voices of people directly affected by injustice, we help to shape fairer laws, policies, and public services both locally and nationally.

A cornerstone of this work is our **strategic litigation and public law practice**, which challenges unlawful decision-making and secures long-term improvements for communities. These cases not only bring justice for individual clients but also expose systemic failing, strengthening accountability, transparency, and equality in public life.

We play a leading role in key local and London-wide networks that bring together charities, councils, community

groups, and universities to create collective impact:

- **Housing and Immigration Group:** Coordinated by the Law Centre with Trust for London's support, this group strengthens practice across the capital and provides a vital route for urgent referrals.
- **Southwark Homelessness Forum:** Chaired by our Executive Director, the Forum unites the Council and voluntary sector to tackle homelessness and safeguard residents.
- **Southwark Exchequer Service Liaison Meetings:** Facilitated by the Law Centre, these quarterly meetings address the ongoing impact of the cost-of-living crisis on tenants and low-income households.
- **Equalities and Human Rights Panel (EHRP):** Our Executive Director ensures local policy decisions reflect fairness, equality, and community voices.
- **Windrush Justice Clinic:** As a founding partner, we work with community groups, universities, and law centres nationwide to secure justice and recognition for victims of the Windrush scandal.
- **Action on Education Rights:** This community-led initiative challenges school exclusions and drives fairer outcomes for Black and minority ethnic pupils.
- **Southwark Borough of Sanctuary:** Partnering with the Council and others, we help ensure Southwark remains a welcoming place for refugees and migrants.

We also engage actively with **government consultations on SEND provision, legal aid reform, and temporary accommodation**, and maintain close working relationships with local MPs, ensuring that our clients' lived experiences shape debate and influence policy at every level.

Client Voices

Although our client feedback sample this year represents only a small proportion of those we worked with, the responses we received were overwhelmingly positive and reflect the life-changing impact of our work.

- 100% of clients surveyed said they were very happy with the outcome of their case.
- 100% rated the standard of advice and support they received as excellent.

Every respondent said they felt more confident in managing their situation and had greater clarity about their legal rights and options after receiving help from our team.

All clients surveyed said they would recommend our service to others. The feedback also highlights the compassion, professionalism, and dedication of our staff:

- “You are the best person!”
- “Helpful and understanding.”
- “Extremely satisfied.”
- “She came in at a time when all hope was fading.”
- “A Godsend to us.”
- “Many thanks to her!”

One particularly touching message came from a client supported by our Housing Team, who wrote to thank Sarver as he approached retirement:

- *“I am writing to express my heartfelt gratitude to you for assisting me with my unsuitable accommodation. This decision brings immense relief during what has been a very challenging time for my health and my children’s wellbeing. It has been a pleasure working with you and witnessing your dedication, professionalism, and commitment to ensuring that Southwark residents receive the best possible service. Your*

hard work and kindness have made a lasting difference to the community you have served.

As you move into this new chapter of your life, I wish you good health, happiness, and many joyful moments with your loved ones. May your retirement bring the relaxation and fulfilment that you truly deserve. You will be greatly missed and fondly remembered.”

These words speak to the heart of what Southwark Law Centre does every day. Beyond legal expertise, our staff and volunteers bring empathy, patience, and unwavering commitment to helping people rebuild their lives. Even in a challenging climate, clients continue to tell us that our service provides not only justice but also hope and dignity.

Administration, Finance, and IT Team Overview

Admin Team

Behind the scenes, our Admin Team keeps Southwark Law Centre running like clockwork. Led by Senior Office Administrator Flozel Webley, with strong support from Verona and Jayed, the team delivered one of the year's biggest achievements: managing the complex relocation from Peckham to Camberwell. From archiving thousands of client files and recycling furniture to major involvement in problem solving IT systems and ensuring health and safety compliance, the team handled every aspect of the move all while maintaining services across two sites. Their commitment, including out-of-hours work, speaks volumes.

Alongside the relocation, the Admin Team managed high volumes of enquiries, supported staff onboarding, and contributed to strategic initiatives in digital transformation, proactive

coordination, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, wellbeing, and sustainability. Their dedication and professionalism have been invaluable to the Centre's continued success.

Billing & Finance Team

Debbie our Legal Practice Manager, supported by Eden, ensures the Law Centre can survive financially by managing the ever more onerous task of legal aid billing. Thankfully our recent audits have shown the quality of our work and the efficiency of our billing processes. Catherine, our self-employed finance manager, has ensured that incoming funds are properly accounted for, juggling the complexity of our various funding sources. Catherine provides monthly cash flow projections for the Trustee Board, a critical task to ensure the ongoing financial stability of the organisation.

IT Team

We contracted the services of an external IT support team who played a key role in

our office move, ensuring our technological infrastructure was successfully upgraded and maintained throughout the transition. Their work helped minimise disruption and laid the foundation for a more resilient and efficient system.

Our admin team provided vital support during this process, assisting staff and coordinating logistics. Together, they've enabled our growing team of caseworkers to work effectively by delivering reliable IT solutions and resolving technical issues promptly.

Cost draftsman

Richard works with the Law Centre as a self-employed draftsman, ensuring that we recover proper costs for our legal aid work.

Premises Cleaners

We would like to thank Mosunmola & Ayodele for their hard work in keeping both our old and new offices safe, clean and welcoming throughout the office relocation.

Volunteers and Training

The Law Centre is committed to nurturing the next generation of social welfare lawyers. By investing in trainees, apprentices, and volunteers, we strengthen the future of access to justice from within our own community.

Thanks to support from the Legal Education Foundation, we continue to train and mentor Trainee Solicitor **Nana Adusei**. This year, we also welcomed Apprentice Solicitors **Daniel Bradbury** and **Caitlin Colquhoun**, both of whom joined us as Paralegals.

This was made possible through apprentice levy transfers from Norton Rose Fulbright and Covington. **Rita Rasheed** qualified as a solicitor, and **Mariya Popova** is on track to qualify soon, supported by the Social Welfare Solicitors Qualification Fund and the Access to Justice Foundation.

Our partnerships extend beyond qualification routes. In 2024/25, law students from King's College London joined our Windrush Compensation Scheme project, gaining hands-on experience in public law and community advocacy. Their work helped clients access long-delayed justice while learning the real-world impact of legal aid.

We were also supported by four dedicated office and casework volunteers, including students and professionals exploring legal careers. They brought energy, organisation, and fresh perspectives, helping us stay responsive across departments and maintain the high standards our clients deserve.

By creating clear routes into social justice law, Southwark Law Centre ensures that the commitment, skill, and values driving our work today will continue to shape a fairer system tomorrow.

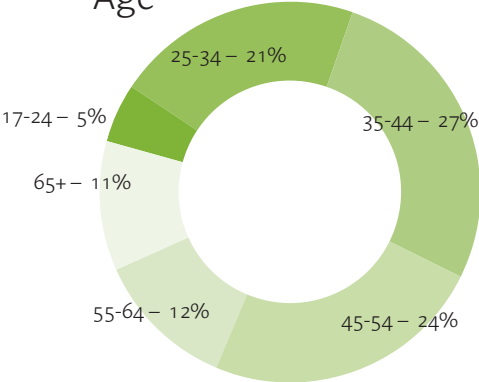


WL, Volunteer:

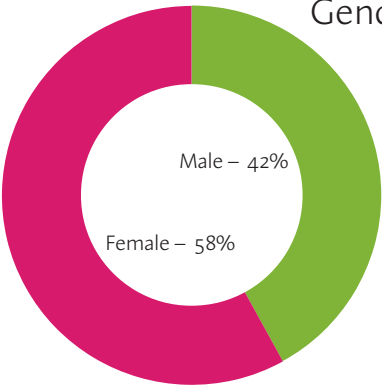
“At Southwark Law Centre, every day was different. I assisted with reception, client liaison, research, and even attended court. What stood out most was the warmth and dedication of the staff. The skills and confidence I gained here opened doors for me as an intern and legal administrator, and I’ll carry the Law Centre’s ethos into my career”

Our Client profile 2024/5

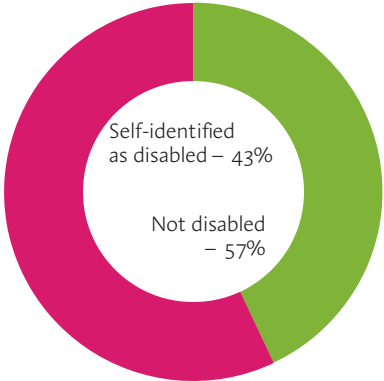
Age



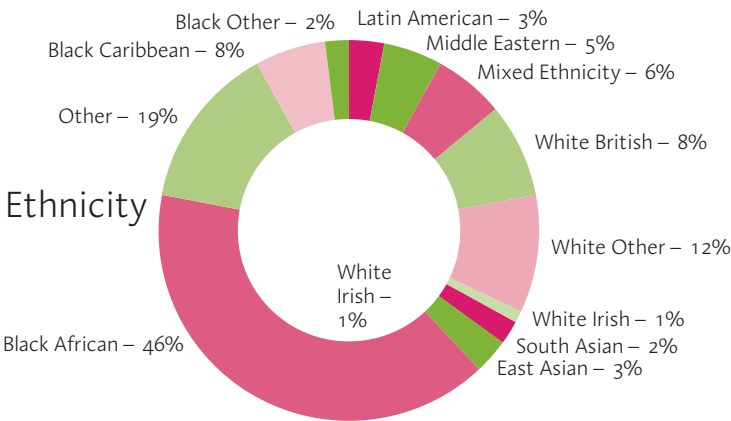
Gender



Disability

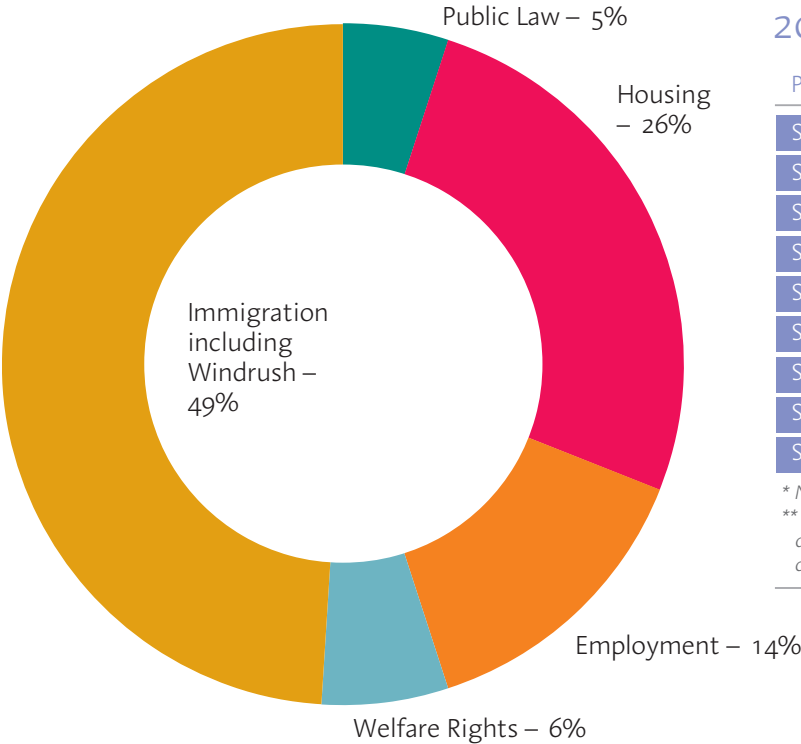


Ethnicity



Numbers & types of cases we dealt with 2024/5

Areas of Law



Where our clients live 2024/2025

Postcode	Percent	Postcode	Percent
SE1	6%	SE21	0%
SE4	2%	SE22	1%
SE5	5%	SE23	1%
SE8	3%	SE26	1%
SE11	0%	Lewisham	12%
SE15	12%	Other *	2%
SE16	4%	Non Southwark**	46%
SE17	4%		
SE19	1%		

* No fixed abode (3).

** Includes people who have been dispersed and living in temporary accommodation outside the borough but have a Southwark connection

Thank you

We would like to take this opportunity to say a huge **THANK YOU** to some of the people and organisations that have supported us and made our work possible over the past year.

Thank you to our funders 2024/25:

AB Charitable Trust, Access to Justice Foundation, Action for Refugees in Lewisham, Alan and Babette Sainsbury's Charitable Trust, Baring Foundation, City Bridge Foundation, The Clothworkers Foundation, Guy's and St Thomas' Hospital, Impact on Urban Health, Indigo Trust, John Ellerman Foundation, Justice Together, King's Health Partnership (Pathway), The Legal Education Foundation, London Legal Support Trust, National Lottery Fund, Oak Foundation, Paul Hamlyn Foundation, Propel, South East London Integrated Care Board, South London Refugee Association, Trust for London, United St Saviour's Charity. All of these funders, along with generous individual supporters, enable us to provide

critical help to a wide range of disadvantaged and marginalised clients.

Thank to the organisations with whom we work in partnership: 35% Campaign, Action for Refugees in Lewisham, Cambridge House Law Centre, Citizens Advice Lewisham, Citizens Advice Southwark, Claudia Jones Organisation, Community Southwark, Elim House, Housing Action Southwark and Lambeth, Housing Solutions Southwark, IndoAmerican Refugee and Migrant Organisation, JCWI, The Jigsaw House Society, Lewisham Refugee and Migrant Network, London South Bank University, Migrant Legal Action, Our Local MPs, New Europeans, Peckham Vision, Project 17, Public Interest Law Centre, Social Integration and Recovery Group, South London Refugee Association, Southwark Black Parents Forum, Southwark Day Centre for Asylum Seekers, Southwark Exchequer Service, Southwark Group of Tenants Organisation, Southwark Planning Network, Southwark Refugee Communities Forum, Southwark Travellers Action Group, St Mungo's, Thamesreach, Westminster University Legal Clinic, Windrush Lives.

Thank you for pro bono support:

Clifford Chance LLP, Gowling WLG LLP, Norton Rose Fulbright LLP, Withers Worldwide

Thank you to the individuals who have provided support over the past year:

Including: Jack Carter – Architect, Alex Evans – consultant, William Harwood – DWP Partnership Manager, Edina Ely, Andrew Matheson, Sheeana Street – LBS, Melu Mekonnen – GSTT Homeless Team, Kareena Miller – Kings Homeless Team, Nimrod Ben Caan, Julie Bishop, Simon Brown and Cristina Porto – Law Centres Network, Pamela Robotham – Chair, Windrush Justice Clinics, Rhys Robotham – IT Consultant, Anna Kouma, Miriam Alaoui – Migrant Legal Action, Andrew Weir – Anthony Gold, Brian Dikoff – Migrants Organise.

Members of our Education Rights Project Advisory Group.

Members of the Planning Voice Advisory Group

Our structure

Southwark Law Centre is governed by a dedicated Trustee Board, composed of volunteers who bring a wealth of experience and a deep understanding of the communities we serve. Trustees are elected on a rotating basis, with one-third standing for re-election at each Annual General Meeting. We conduct an annual skills audit to ensure the Board continues to reflect the needs of the organisation. Trustee vacancies are advertised on our website: www.southwarklawcentre.org.uk

Current Trustee Board (11 Members)

Trustees: Alex Polley (Chair), Anthony Chandler (Treasurer), Victoria Olisa (Vice Chair), Vicky Fewkes, Stephen Lancashire, Lisa McGown, Oliver Persey, John Rhodes, Katrina Thomas, Kimberley McIntosh, Pamela Noakes

The Trustee Board delegates day-to-day management to the **Executive Director:** Stacey Edgar.

Admin & Infrastructure

1 x F/T Operations Manager (Starts Jan 2026),
1 x F/T Senior Office Administrator, 2 x F/T Administrators,
1 x P/T Legal Practice Manager, 1 x P/T Legal Aid Billing Assistant,
2 x P/T Premises Cleaners.

Immigration Department

1 x F/T Senior Solicitor, 2 x P/T Senior Solicitors, 7 x F/T Solicitors,
5 x P/T Solicitors, 1 x F/T Caseworker, 1 x F/T Trainee Solicitor.

Windrush Justice Team

1 x F/T Solicitor, 1 x P/T Windrush Justice Clinic Co-ordinator,
1 x P/T Windrush Justice Clinic Administrator.

Housing Department

1 x F/T Senior Solicitor, 2 x P/T Senior Solicitors,
2 x F/T Housing Solicitors, 2 x F/T Housing Caseworkers,
2 x P/T Housing Solicitors, 1 x F/T Apprentice Solicitor.

Welfare Rights Department

1 x F/T Senior Caseworker/Supervisor, 1 x F/T Welfare Benefits
Paralegal, 1 x P/T Welfare Benefits Paralegal.

Employment, Discrimination & Education Department

1 x P/T Senior Solicitor, 1 x P/T Employment Paralegal.

Public Law Department

1 x F/T Public Law Supervisor, 1 x P/T Public Law Caseworker,
1 x F/T Apprentice Solicitor, 1 x Volunteer.

Planning Department

1 x F/T Senior Planning Solicitor.



Southwark Law Centre

Southwark Law Centre, 53 Addington Square, London SE5 7LB.

0207 732 2008

www.southwarklawcentre.org.uk

Follow us on Bluesky: [@southwarklawcentre.bsky.social](https://bsky.app/profile/southwarklawcentre.bsky.social)

Advice Services in Southwark and Lewisham

The Southwark Legal Advice Network website www.southwarkadvice.org.uk has full information about advice agencies in Southwark.

The Advice Lewisham website www.advicelewisham.org.uk has full information about advice services in Lewisham

Our organisation

We are a registered charity (No. 277927) and are governed by a trustee board of local people elected at our AGM by our members.

Our Members

We are a membership organisation rooted in the local community and welcome new members, either individuals who live work or study in South East London or local charities who support our aims and objectives. Members receive invitations to events such as our AGM.

If you are interested in becoming a member or would like to make a donation to support our work please visit

www.southwarklawcentre.org.uk