

Dear Applicant

Re: Chair of Trustees Recruitment

Thank you for your interest in becoming the Chair of South West London Law Centres.

The board of trustees is looking for a new Chair of trustees to help support the law centre to grow and prosper. If you have a passion for access to justice and believe that you can improve the impact the SWLLC can make, then we look forward to hearing from you. To apply to become chair, please read the attached document and fill in the application form available in this pack.

The applications will be considered on a rolling bases, and we encourage you to submit as soon as possible.

A panel of trustees and senior management team will review your application. If we consider that your skills and experience are a good fit with the Law Centre, you will be invited for an informal discussion with the panel about our work and the trustee role. A recommendation will be made to the board of trustees.

Please message us through Reach for further information on making your application or you have any queries in the meantime.

I look forward to receiving your application.

Yours sincerely,

Patrick Marples
Chief Executive
South West London Law Centres

ABOUT SOUTH WEST LONDON LAW CENTRES & WHAT WE ARE LOOKING FOR

Who are we?

Law Centres are community-led, not-for-profit organisations that help local people to understand and enforce their legal rights. Their services are free, and they attempt to target the people who most need them – people who are at risk of discrimination and ill-treatment and those who are least able to protect themselves, for example because they lack the money to hire someone with legal expertise to help them. The right to use the name “Law Centre” is protected by the Law Centres Federation.

We can trace our roots back to 1974 when the original law centres were established in Wandsworth. We are currently celebrating our 50th year.

South West London Law Centres is one of the larger Law Centre in Great Britain. It was set up in 2004 to bring together the Law Centres covering six London boroughs – Croydon, Kingston, Merton, Richmond, Sutton and Wandsworth. Our catchment area covers 1.7 million people. We now operate from 3 branch offices. We help over 6,000 people each year with a face to face service covering 3 broad services.

- Expert casework and representation in the social welfare law covering community care, debt, employment, housing, immigration/asylum, public law, welfare rights and cost of living support
- Emergency representation as part of the Housing Possession Court Duty Scheme
- Pro Bono Clinics

Amongst the results we achieve that make us proud of what we do are:

- the prevention of homelessness
- the prevention and reduction of poverty
- the protection of family life by reuniting people living in the UK with those living abroad
- the prevention of torture and death beyond our borders by the provision of advice and representation to people fleeing persecution
- the prevention of ill-health by successfully challenging unfit living conditions
- the prevention of mental ill-health by assisting people to deal with their personal debts
- the improvement of working and living conditions for people experiencing unlawful discrimination on the grounds of sex, gender, race, nationality, disability, religion, belief or sexual orientation
- the improvement to living conditions by assisting people to get the welfare support they are entitled to and to get financial support to help them out of difficult times.

The role of the Trustees, and the Chair

SWLLC is a charity and a company limited by guarantee. This means that we hold money on trust to deliver services in line with objects set out in our governing document, and the organisation has trustees whose role is to oversee the charity and make sure it is doing what it is supposed to. *The objects of SWLLC are the prevention and alleviation of poverty, and the education of the public, by the provision of legal advice and representation, in South West London and surrounding areas.*

In that role, they have to act within charity law and should follow the guidance of the Charity Commission. As long as they act in good faith and do their best to use the funds of the charity to meet the objects of the charity their liability should something go wrong is very limited. The trustees are also the directors of the company, and again in that role their liability is strictly limited as long as they act in the interest of the company and its objects, setting the organisation's strategic direction and scrutinising the actions of SWLLC's managers.

The role of chair is to provide leadership to the charity and its Board, ensuring that the Charity has maximum impact for its beneficiaries.

SWLLC is funded from a variety of public, private and charitable sources, but its core operations are paid for through Legal Aid contracts.

We have changed our constitution to limit the size of the board to 12 Trustees. Trustees are usually co-opted and then elected at an AGM for a term of four years. Trustees can only be elected for two terms of four years, as a maximum. There are currently 9 trustees.

Who are we looking for?

Our previous chair Allan Blake has stood down after an extended term of 6 years. Allan helped oversee the law centre during the pandemic and its aftermath during which we have seen the law centre continue to flourish in a very challenging environment. We are looking for a new chair who believes in what we do and is prepared to lead and act as an ambassador for the charitable trust so that we can continue to do this work. We currently have a strong trustee board of varying skills and tenures and the day to day management of the law centre is delegated to a small team. This team is small for what the law centre is trying to achieve. We need you to bring your expertise, energy and networks to the law centre. The role isn't glamorous, it's unpaid, and it's sometimes unacknowledged, but it is rewarding. You will play a critical role in helping SWLLC to support over 6,000 people a year, who would not otherwise have access to legal advice. We are very proud of the impact that we have had over the last 50 years, and continue to have.

SWLLC continues to operate in a challenging environment, the work of the law centre is regulated and audited by a number of external bodies, our finances continued to be challenged by static legal aid, grants and donations, despite this we have continued to flourish, but the need for our services is greater than we can provide.

The main areas that our trustees board can support alongside the role of governance of the law centre are:-

Finance:

SWLLC is funded from a variety of public, private and charitable sources, but its core operations are paid for through Legal Aid contracts. Legal aid rates have remained frozen for many years and other resources may not fill the gap left by this. The law centres finances have remained challenging and steady guidance is needed to see the law centre through this.

Fundraising

As well as attracting main grants and corporate donations mainly from partner solicitor firms we are looking to generate and attract more general donations and giving. Over the development of the law centre thousands of people have volunteered with us. We have a volunteer base of over 400 people who participate each year in our pro bono clinics, as well as many day time volunteers. A lot of these volunteers are at the start of their careers and we want to look at ways of keeping in touch with them with the aim of developing a strong supporters base. The current management team doesn't have the resources to develop streams of general giving and we need help from our trustees to do this.

Human Resources

Although we have external support through a contract which covers most HR issues, we continue to want to look at better ways of developing, rewarding, recognising and retaining staff in an environment where pay and conditions has not kept up with the public and private sector. We want to continue to develop diversity and inclusion within the staff group of the law centre, the way we operate and deliver our services. There is a

continual task of keeping the law centre connected as we are spread apart over 3 branch offices in 3 boroughs as well as keeping a close connection between the board and staff group.

Communications and Marketing

We need to get the message out about what we do and what we can help with. We have a catchment area of 1.7 million people. We have a Strategic Development Manager who covers our main communication needs. It is still a challenge to cover this area and to develop contacts in each of the boroughs. We are looking for people to help act as ambassadors of the law centre alongside the management team. We get many good results for services users and we are looking at ways in which we can better capture, develop and communicate the impact that we have on people that use our services.

Further we need to get the message of what the law does achieve to those who may be willing to donate and give to the law centre.

IT & Facilities

In the next quarter we should be moving to smaller but newly refurbished premises in Croydon. Our office space in Wandsworth is too small. Although the pandemic fast forwarded the development of mobile and hybrid working we continue to need to develop the best use of technology to help us to deliver our services. Many of the people who seek our help have limited use of technology. So technology for us needs to help free up our time so we can spend more time directly helping people.

Community Engagement and Community Activism

As part of the pandemic funding for the law centre we were able to get some seed funding to develop community engagement work. We have a Campaigns, Policy and Community Manager covering our 6 London boroughs. Work is being focused on supporting people through the cost of living crisis and campaigning around temporary accommodation issues. Community call outs have allowed us to work more pro-actively with community groups and is now helping us to explore other avenues of work for the law centre. We would still benefit from a voice within the board to help promote the growing need for campaigning to work alongside the legal work that the law centre covers.

Below are the Chair's role and person specification.

Chair -SOUTH WEST LONDON LAW CENTRES

Time commitment: 6 Board meetings per year.

Take place through a mixture of in person and online meetings in the evenings (usually midweek between 6pm – 7:30pm). The in person meetings take place through a partner firm in Putney or in our offices in Croydon.

The Chair will also need to have regular meetings with the Chief Executive, and Senior Management Team outside of these regular board meetings. Such meetings will typically be brief, online and arranged at a mutually convenient time. The Chair will also need to represent the Charity at various events and meetings with key stakeholders. Our head office is based in Croydon with other offices in Clapham Junction and Morden.

We expect the role to take around 1 -2 days per month.

Reporting to Board of Trustees (Executive Committee)

Role Description

Objective

The Chair will act corporately holding the Board and Senior Management Team to account for the Charity's mission and vision, providing inclusive leadership to the Board of Trustees, ensuring that each trustee fulfils their duties and responsibilities for the effective governance of the charity. The Chair will also support, and, where appropriate, challenge the Chief Executive and ensure that the Board functions as a unit and works closely with the entire Senior Management Team of the charity to achieve agreed objectives. He or she will act as an ambassador and the public face of the charity in partnership with the Chief Executive.

Principal responsibilities:

Strategic leadership

- Act as representative of the whole board and not its defacto head
- Provide leadership to the charity and its Board, ensuring that the Charity has maximum impact for its beneficiaries
- Ensure that Trustees fulfil their duties and responsibilities for the effective governance of the Charity
- Ensure that the Board operates within its charitable objectives, and provides a clear strategic direction for the Charity
- Ensure that the Board is able to regularly review major risks and associated opportunities, and satisfy itself that systems are in place to take advantage of opportunities, and manage and mitigate the risks
- Ensure that the Board fulfils its duties to ensure sound financial health of the charity, with systems in place to ensure financial accountability
- Utilise their network of contacts to open new routes to fundraising

Governance

- Ensure that the governance arrangements are working in the most effective way for the Charity
- Develop the knowledge and capability of the Board of Trustees
- Encourage positive change where appropriate address and resolve any conflicts within the Board
- Appraise the performance of the Trustees and the Board on an annual basis

- Ensure that the Board of Trustees is regularly refreshed and incorporates the right balance of skills, knowledge and experience needed to govern and lead the charity effectively, and which also reflects the wider population
- Work within any agreed policies adopted by the charity

External Relations

- Act as an ambassador for the cause and the charity in partnership with the CEO
- Maintain close relationships with key stakeholders both locally and nationally and with key influences
- Act as a spokesperson for the organisation when appropriate representing the charity at external functions, meetings and events
- Facilitate change and address any potential conflict with external stakeholders

Efficiency and effectiveness

- Chair meetings of the Board of Trustees effectively and efficiently, bringing impartiality and objectivity to the decision-making process
- Ensure that Trustees are fully engaged and that decisions are taken in the best, long-term interests of the Charity and that the Board takes collective ownership
- Foster, maintain and ensure that constructive relationships exist with and between the Trustees
- Work closely with the Chief Executive to give direction to Board policy-making and to ensure that meetings are well planned, meaningful and reflect the responsibilities of trustees
- Monitor that decisions taken at meetings are implemented.

Relationship with the Chief Executive and the Senior Management Team

- Establish and build a strong, effective, supporting and a constructive working relationship with the Chief Executive, ensuring s/he is held to account for achieving agreed strategic objectives
- Support the Chief Executive and the Senior Management Team to manage the operational side of the law centres work within the vision, values and overall strategic direction set by the board, whilst respecting the boundaries which exist between the two roles
- Ensure regular contact with the Chief Executive and develop and maintain an open and supportive relationship within which each can speak openly about concerns, worries and challenges
- Conduct an annual appraisal for the Chief Executive in consultation with other Trustees
- Ensure that the Chief Executive has the opportunity for professional development and has appropriate external professional support

Chair - SOUTH WEST LONDON LAW CENTRES

Person Specification

In addition to the qualities required of a Trustee of the charity, the Chair should also meet the following requirements:-

Personal Qualities

- Personal gravitas to lead a significant organisation demonstrating a strong and visible passion and commitment to the law centre, its strategic objectives and cause

- Exhibit strong inter-personal and relationship building abilities and be comfortable in an ambassadorial role
- Demonstrate tact and diplomacy, with the ability to listen and engage effectively
- Strong networking capabilities that can be utilised for the benefit of the law centre
- Ability to foster and promote a collaborative team environment
- Ability to commit time to conduct the role well, including travel and attending events out of office hours

Experience

- Experience of operating at a senior strategic leadership level within an organisation
- Successful track record of achievement through their career
- Experience of external representation, delivering presentations and managing stakeholders
- Significant experience of chairing meetings and events

Knowledge and skills

- Broad knowledge and understanding of the legal sector and current issues affecting it
- Strong leadership skills, ability to motivate staff and volunteers and bring people together
- Good understanding of charity governance and finance issues

Terms

The charity's Chair (and board members) will serve a four-year term to be eligible for re-appointment for one additional term.

In addition to chairing the main Board meetings, the Chair has the right to attend the sub-committees,

The statutory duties of a Trustee:

Main duty

Under charity law SWLLC Trustees have and must accept the ultimate responsibility for directing the affairs of SWLLC, and ensuring that it is solvent, well-run and delivering the charitable outcomes for the benefit of the public for which it has been set up. In law trustees of SWLLC have three duties — care, compliance and prudence — which are set out below following the wording given by the Charity Commission.

Duty of care — Trustees must:

- Use reasonable care and skill in their work as trustees, using their personal skills and experience as needed to ensure that SWLLC is well-run and efficient.
- Consider getting external professional advice on all matters where there may be material risk to SWLLC, or where the trustees may be in breach of their duties.

Duty of compliance — Trustees must:

- Ensure that SWLLC complies with charity law, and with the requirements of the Charity Commission as regulator; ensure that the charity prepares reports on what it has achieved and Annual Returns and accounts as required by law
- Ensure that SWLLC does not breach any of the requirements or rules set out in its governing document and that it remains true to the charitable purpose and objects set out there.

- Comply with the requirements of other legislation and other regulators which govern the activities of SWLLC.
- Act with integrity, and avoid any personal conflicts of interest or misuse of SWLLC funds or assets.

Duty of prudence - Trustees must:

- Ensure that SWLLC is and will remain solvent.
- Use SWLLC funds and assets reasonably, and only in furtherance of SWLLC objects.
- Avoid undertaking activities that might place SWLLC endowment, funds, assets or reputation at undue risk.
- Take special care when investing SWLLC funds, or borrowing funds for SWLLC to use.

Specific duties of Trustees:

Vision, values and strategic direction

- To contribute actively to the board of trustees' role in giving firm strategic direction to SWLLC, setting a vision, goals, policy and plans, and targets and key performance indicators
- To ensure that SWLLC seeks and considers the views of beneficiaries and stakeholders in setting strategic direction and policy
- To ensure breadth and diversity in the vision, values, policy and strategy of SWLLC
- To serve as an ambassador for the charity, promoting understanding and recognition of, and support for, SWLLC vision and values

Performance management

- To monitor and evaluate performance against plans, targets and key performance indicators, and its wider impact on stakeholders
- To appoint the Chief Executive and monitor his/her performance
- To safeguard the good name and values of SWLLC

Compliance

- To ensure that SWLLC complies with all legal and regulatory requirements
- To ensure that key risks to SWLLC are identified and effectively managed and that professional advice is sought and considered where appropriate

Prudent management of assets

- To ensure the financial stability of SWLLC through creation of an effective fundraising strategy
- To ensure the proper management of the charity's assets both physical and intellectual; and sound financial management

Good governance

- To comply always with the Trustee Board Code of Conduct and other Trustee policies
- To uphold the principles and practice of good governance
- To participate in Trustee development and training as appropriate
- To prepare for and attend Trustee Board meetings regularly and contribute to discussion and collective decision making
- To use any personal knowledge, skills and experience to help the Board of Trustees to further the objects of the charity

Code of Conduct for Trustees -Trustee Code of Conduct

Introduction

At SWLLC, the Trustee Board, having regard to our core values and examples of best practice within the sector have created this code to set out a framework in which its trustees and governing body will operate.

We use our values to describe the way we want to be, and how we want to be seen by everyone who encounters us.

We believe in providing **care** for people who come to us. We will **accept** them as individuals and **respect** their beliefs, needs and wishes.

We aim to provide a **happy** environment in which to **encourage** recovery and progression.

Accountability

Everything SWLLC does will be able to stand the test of scrutiny by the public, the media, charity regulators, members, stakeholders, funders, Parliament and the courts.

Integrity and honesty

These will be the hallmarks of all conduct when dealing with colleagues within SWLLC and equally when dealing with individuals and institutions outside it.

Transparency

SWLLC strives to maintain an atmosphere of openness throughout the organisation to promote confidence of the public, stakeholders, staff, charity regulators and Parliament.

Additionally, I agree to the following points:

Law, mission, policies

- I will not break charity law or go against charity regulations in any aspect of my role of trustee.
- I will support the mission and consider myself its guardian.
- I will abide by organisational policies.

Conflicts of interest

- I will always strive to act in the best interests of the organisation.
- I will declare any conflict of interest, or any circumstance that might be viewed by others as a conflict of interest, as soon as it arises.
- I will submit to the judgment of the board and do as it requires regarding potential conflicts of interest.

Person to person

- I will not break charity law, go against charity regulations or act in disregard of organisational policies in my relationships with fellow trustees, staff, volunteers, members, service recipients, contractors or anyone I come into contact with in my role as trustee.
- I will strive to establish respectful, collegial and courteous relationships with all I come into contact with in my role as trustee.

Protecting the organisation's reputation

- I will not speak as a trustee of this organisation to the media or in a public forum without the prior knowledge and approval of the Chief Executive or Chair.
- When prior consent has not been obtained, I will inform the Chair or Chief Executive at once when I have spoken as a trustee of this organisation to the media or in a public forum.
- When I am speaking as a trustee of this organisation, my comments will reflect current organisational policy even when these do not agree with my personal views.
- When speaking as a private citizen I will strive to uphold the reputation of the organisation and those who work in it.
- I will respect organisational, board and individual confidentiality.
- I will take an active interest in the organisation's public image, noting news articles, books, television programmes and the like about the organisation, about similar organisations or about important issues for the organisation.

Personal gain

- I will not personally gain materially or financially from my role as trustee, nor will I permit others to do so as a result of my actions or negligence.
- I will document expenses and seek reimbursement according to procedure.
- I will not accept gifts or hospitality without prior consent of the Chair.
- I will use organisational resources responsibly, when authorised, in accordance with procedure.

In the boardroom

- I will strive to embody the principles of leadership in all my actions and live up to the trust placed in me by (organisation).
- I will abide by board governance procedures and practices.
- I will strive to attend all board meetings, giving apologies ahead of time to the Chair if unable to attend.
- I will study the agenda and other information sent me in good time prior to the meeting and be prepared to debate and vote on agenda items during the meeting.
- I will honour the authority of the Chair and respect his or her role as meeting leader.
- I will engage in debate and voting in meetings according to procedure, maintaining a respectful attitude toward the opinions of others while making my voice heard.
- I will accept a majority board vote on an issue as decisive and final.
- I will maintain confidentiality about what goes on in the boardroom unless authorised by the Chair or board to speak of it.
- I will work to avoid conflict in the boardroom and seek external support to do this when necessary.

Enhancing governance

- I will participate in induction, training and development activities for trustees.
- I will continually seek ways to improve board governance practice.
- I will strive to identify good candidates for trusteeship and appoint new trustees on the basis of merit.

- I will support the Chair in his/her efforts to improve his/her leadership skills.
- I will support the Chief Executive in his/her executive role and, with my fellow board members, seek development opportunities for him/her.

Leaving the board

- I understand that substantial breach of any part of this code may result in my removal from the trustee board.
- Should I resign from the board I will inform the Chair in advance in writing, stating my reasons for resigning. Additionally, I will participate in an exit interview.

*This Code of Conduct was adapted from NCVO's publication *Best Behaviour: Using trustee codes of conduct to improve governance practice**