

LO BUSINESS PLAN

2025-26

1. Deliver effective statutory monitoring.	
	Status
1.1 Raise public awareness: Use effective national communications through multiple channels to increase awareness of and interest in applying for the LOs. Measure outcomes.	National recruitment advertising is employed for every campaign.
1.2 Lay Observer recruitment: Deliver a joint recruitment approach that uses staff and member resource efficiently and effectively; prioritises need; and meets the Public Appointments Code. Measure impact and revise the approach as necessary.	The LO recruitment will take place early in the New Year. The National Council (NC) decided not to conduct a campaign any earlier as the last campaign in 2025 yielded a high intake (though not all have taken up their role yet).
1.3 Reasonable adjustments: Conduct a review of reasonable adjustments and make changes to policy and practice in order to ensure compliance.	A review of the LO recruitment approach has been conducted jointly between the NC and staff leads for the next campaign.
1.4 Lay Observers appointments: Ensure Lay Observers are appointed according to a robust appointments process that applies the right level of assurance and puts in place any required mitigations.	New due diligence checks have been introduced by the recently appointed minister's delegate. This will be a more robust approach but has resource implications.
1.5 Lay Observer conference: Organise Lay Observer conference, to share good practice in monitoring.	The new conference will be in March 2026. Plans are already underway.
1.6 Relationships with other bodies: Develop operational relationships with other bodies in support of the work of the LOs.	New thematic reporting will help develop the relationships with the relevant ministers, HMCTS and PECs.
1.7 Lay Observer communications: Improve engagement with members, including opportunities for more frequent localised meetings.	Local meetings have been introduced and the first round took place towards the end of 2025 to improve sharing of good practice and support.

1.8 Technology support: Consider options for a potential replacement of the STOWED solution.	A temporary IT solution will be implemented shortly with an assessment of how the long term needs of the LOs might be best supported.
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2. Maximise the impact of Lay Observer reporting and outcomes.	
	Status
2.1 Promoting findings: Maximise the reach of reporting, using both established media and social media to disseminate LO findings where appropriate.	A first thematic report has been produced by the LOs. While the NC decided not to promote this first report it was published on the LO website.
2.2 Thematic reporting: Collate, escalate and publish thematic findings to increase impact.	The first thematic report was produced on transportation. The learning from this exercise will be discussed with the NC and applied to future monitoring and reports.
2.3 National annual reports: Draft and publish a Lay Observer annual report.	The next National Annual report is due at the end of this financial year.
2.4 Policy influence: Suggest changes to relevant policy, guidance or legislation drawing on thematic evidence from monitoring.	This is ongoing. The LOs have chance to comment on policies based on the evidence collected during monitoring visits.
2.5 Policy influence: Respond to policy consultations or inquiries based on monitoring findings.	As above, where relevant.
2.6 National Preventive Mechanism: Consider how the LOs can contribute to the impact of the National Preventive Mechanism.	The LOs are one of the 21 bodies that make up the UK's NPM. Their evidence feeds into the sum of knowledge and is reported on as part of the NPM's Annual report.
2.7 Relationships with other bodies: Develop links with the IMB and ICVA in order to share intelligence.	Ongoing. Monitoring feedback is shared with other bodies where relevant.

3. Further develop the role of the LOs	
	Status
3.1 Purpose of LOs: Review the purpose of the LO role and develop a means of achieving that. Engage with the membership on any proposals.	Discussions remain at the National Council level currently though thematic reporting was discussed at the last LO conference.
3.2 Review allocation of resources: Consider the number of LOs required to deliver the role, and develop a strategy to best deploy LOs to undertake these visits taking into account frequency and location of courts as well as presence of detained people.	The NC is considering the area and court allocations for LOs and the way the rotas are managed to ensure adequate court coverage.
3.3 Diversity & inclusion: ensure equality, diversity and inclusion is at the forefront of all staff and LO matters.	Ongoing.
3.4 Recognition: Consider a programme of recognition.	This was considered by the NC and based on the experience of the IMB, a decision was made not to pursue this. Letters of recognition from the minister, however, were supported,

4. Provide business assurance in support of the IMB and LOs	
	Status
4.1 Staff structure: Embed the new staff structure ensuring that both the LOs are supported across the team.	This is a work in progress. While the new staff structure is settling, there is some adjustment required to the way the LOs are supported. The access to the whole team and their respective skills and knowledge is a benefit to the LOs but, being small, they still require a single point of contact. This is currently being provided through the policy lead for LOs.
4.2 Protocols: Review agreements and MOUs with external bodies by the review date.	Not applicable so far.

4.3 Operational policies: Update operational policies and guidance so they reflect the agreed direction.	Ongoing. As processes are reviewed e.g. recruitment, guidance is updated.
4.4 Data protection: Build and maintain robust data protection by advising on compliance, managing information requests, processing data in accordance with GDPR principles, and offering training to members on safe data handling.	Ongoing.
4.5 Risk management: Effectively manage risk through the development and implementation of a responsive risk management strategy.	Ongoing. The risk plan is considered by the NC every quarter and managed on a day-to-day basis by the staff.
4.6 Financial management: Provide robust financial forecasting and management that supports the membership and complies with departmental requirements.	Ongoing. The NC consider the financial position every quarter with more detailed discussions just before the NC meeting between the LO National Chair and CEO.
4.7 Assurance: Provide business assurance through regular challenge meetings with MoJ; accurate completion of non-/financial returns and commissions as required within timescales.	These are held every 6 months by Public Bodies Centre of Expertise.
4.8 Inquiries: Respond to statutory and other official inquiries as required.	Not applicable so far.