

Solicitors Disciplinary Tribunal

Budget Principles

Introduction

These Budget Principles support the SDT's Budget Application 2021 and provide information to assist with understanding the Budget Application.

Budget Principles

The SDT will:

1. Manage budgets within clear, credible and predictable limits within the approved annual funding cap such that:
 - the level of funding is proportionate to the number of cases heard in a year.
 - costs are consistently reduced wherever possible, including by reviewing ways of working and moving towards a paperless (or 'paper-light') working environment with consequential cost savings for the SDT and the parties in the proceedings.
2. Seek to capitalise wherever possible on the potential for technology to improve services and deliver cost benefits for the solicitors' profession and the public (e.g. digital evidence management and workflow-enabled case management systems).
3. Allocate its resources to ensure that cases are dealt with efficiently and expeditiously.
4. Review its performance against the agreed Key Performance Measures (KPMs) to ensure that resources are targeted, so far as practicable, at those areas where stronger performance against the KPMs would be beneficial to the parties in the proceedings.
5. Closely align budgets with the strategic priorities of the SDT and the wider legal regulatory environment by:
 - ensuring that the level of funding supports the SDT's Mission, Vision and Core Values, including continuous improvement of services to deliver best practice and value for money for stakeholders.
 - ensuring that the SDT remains appropriately resourced at the correct level to enable it to develop to reflect best practice, particularly in the areas of technology and human resource management.

6. Implement the agreed Reserves Policy, including the capital budgeting framework, in order to meet longer-term development needs in a cost-effective and coherent manner.
 - Whilst the SDT does not have a large capital budget requirement, it would be desirable to recognise that a small number of significant projects are likely to run over more than one financial year.
 - Current examples of such projects are a major upgrade of the case management system to deliver cost efficiencies and service improvements.
 - The ability to plan and secure the total necessary funding properly required to deliver and complete such projects will provide more certainty and enable better management and sustainability of these important projects.
7. Facilitate an inclusive, participative and realistic debate on budgetary choices for the SDT and ensure that budget documents and data are open, transparent and accessible so that relevant stakeholders can make informed decisions where required.
8. Actively plan, manage and monitor budget execution by:
 - regular reporting to the management team, SDT Board and The Law Society.
 - monitoring and continuous improvement.
9. Ensure that performance, evaluation and value for money are integral to the budget process, including by:
 - regular reporting of the prevailing KPMs.
 - applying zero-based budgeting so that each year every expense is justified.
 - tight control of expenditure, realising savings wherever possible.
 - carrying out Efficiency Impact Assessments as part of the budget decision and application process.
10. Identify, assess and manage prudently longer-term sustainability and other financial risks by:
 - refining a risk register which is regularly reviewed and which records identified risks, their severity and likelihood, and measures to mitigate and control them.
 - regularly reviewing and updating the Strategic and Operational Plans to ensure that the SDT remains fit for purpose in all respects.
 - investing in SDT Member and staff development, training, recruitment and improved human resource management.
 - enhancing business resilience in the infrastructure and business systems e.g. implementing external hosting of ICT systems.
 - developing the use of technology to deliver efficiencies and improvements within carefully controlled budgets.
 - developing education and information about the SDT's activities e.g. using the website and other communication tools.

- developing and implementing research into service-user satisfaction.
- maintaining the User Group Committee (UGC).
- achieving and retaining accreditation such as Investors in People.
- observing, developing, implementing and sharing best practice from and with other tribunals and similar bodies.

11. Promote the integrity and quality of budgetary forecasts, financial plans and budgetary implementation through rigorous quality assurance including independent audit by:

- enhancing where necessary in-house financial management capability.
- regular reporting and review by the management team, SDT Board and The Law Society.
- an annual external audit, which examines the historic financial records as well as forecasts and future budgets to assess the sustainability of the organisation going forward.

12. Ensure that our budget planning and decisions are transparent, fair and inclusive and do not impact adversely on minority or vulnerable groups, including but not limited to those with protected characteristics, including conducting equality impact assessments on significant budgetary decisions and changes.

Key Business Planning Assumptions

The key assumptions which have been/are used alongside the budget principles for business planning and budget decision-making purposes are set out below:

1. The SRA will continue to provide open and transparent information about cases to be sent to the SDT by reporting at least monthly on: (1) the number of cases forecast to be delivered in each month of 2021; (2) the number of sitting days at substantive hearing estimated by the SRA for each case; and (3) the number of those cases that might result in Agreed Outcome applications.
2. Any reduction in demand by the SRA for straightforward first instance disciplinary tribunals will be balanced by increased SRA demand for longer, more complex and serious first instance hearings and an increase in the number of appeals from internal SRA decisions.
3. The SDT will sit in court on all hearings (substantive, case management, applications) for no more than 300 days in 2021.
4. The number of new applications from all sources will not exceed 150 in 2021.

5. Annual staff basic salaries will increase by no more than 2.0% in 2021.
6. There will be an increase in the daily fee levels for Lay Members (from £450 to £595) with effect from 1st January 2021. This will bring parity with Solicitor Members' fees.
7. General inflation is assumed to be 2%.
8. Zero-based budgeting is applied; each year every expense must be justified.
9. Subject to Board review of the Reserves Policy, sittings required over and above 300 days will be funded from reserves.
10. The introduction of a new case management system in 2021 to replace the current system will improve operational efficiency and reporting capability.

SDT/SDTAL

September 2020