

Sent by email

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17 November 2022

Dear Alison

SDT Budget 2022

Following our extra ordinary Board meeting on 14 November 2022, I am writing to confirm the LSB's approval of the SDT's operating budget of £4,289,381 for the 2023 calendar year. As you are aware, the Board was initially due to consider the SDT budget application at the October Board meeting. Due to the unexpected change in the SDT's accommodation situation, the SDT's original budget application was not capable of being considered. Instead, my Board noted the change in situation and agreed to receive revised figures for decision at an extraordinary board meeting.

Against the backdrop of that approval, the Board noted that the need to secure new accommodation drives a significant increase in the budget compared to last year and it will be necessary for the SDT to engage effectively with those on whom the financial burden falls to explain the position.

Going forward, the Board encourages the SDT to view the requirement for new accommodation as an opportunity to consider new, innovative and potentially radical ways to deliver value for money for the solicitors' profession while building its contribution to promoting the public interest.

This year my Board would like to see the SDT develop an accommodation strategy which should guide the SDT's efforts to operate in a manner which delivers value for money.

As discussed at our meeting in July 2022, my Board also expects the SDT to further develop its strategic vision setting out the SDT's purpose and approach in promoting the public interest. My Board expects that the 2024 budget application, should refer to this strategic vision and show how the budget supports its delivery. We look forward to receiving a note following the SDT's 16 November strategy day updating us of SDT's progress in this area.

There were several other points made at the Board meeting which I append overleaf for the SDT's consideration.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Helen Phillips".

Dr Helen Phillips
Chair

cc: Geraldine Newbold, Clerk and Chief Executive Officer of the SDT

Addendum:

My Board made the following points at the meeting which I share for the SDT's consideration:

- 1) In last year's decision letter, the Board requested that the SDT focus on securing a downward trajectory in the cost per court'; managing the underspend of sitting days and monitoring the courtroom utilisation rate'. The Challenge Panel, which met on 4 October, noted that prior to the need to secure new accommodation the SDT was expecting to reduce court per court and had a plan for tackling the undershoot on expected sitting days.
- 2) The need to secure new accommodation is an opportunity to radically consider whether the SDT needs permanent physical courtrooms. It was suggested that having one courtroom or renting courtroom space as required was more in line with other tribunals. When deciding on the need for physical courtrooms, the Board expects the SDT to use data on courtroom utilisation rate and effective sitting days to inform its decision making.
- 3) The Board notes that the figures for obtaining new accommodation are currently best estimates. The Board expects as much cost effectiveness and transparency on these costs as possible.
- 4) Should the need for an in-year budget application arise, our expectation will be to apply the same standards of scrutiny and transparency for any in-year application as we do for the annual budget application.
- 5) The Board expects the SDT to develop three or four Key Performance Indicators for Value for Money which should be based on the assumption that ongoing administrative costs can be reduced if required.
- 6) The Board discussed the need for the SDT to learn lessons from this situation in the following areas:
 - The SDT should consider how it can provide improved transparency to its stakeholders, staff and members.
 - The Board would like the SDT to consider what it might do differently next time such as getting a lease agreed in writing and account for dilapidations on an ongoing basis.