

# Business plan 2016–17

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VLA continues to make progress against the Strategy 2015-18 against the three strategic directions along with the four priorities in our commitment to work better together. Our outcomes and outputs naturally align with all of these and many have a strong correlation between more than one strategic direction. Accordingly these interdependencies are shown under each outcome as:

**SD1, SD2, SD3 & WTGB**

# Making a difference

## Our vision

A fair and just society where rights and responsibilities are upheld.

## Our purpose

To make a difference in the lives of our clients and for the community by:

* resolving and preventing legal problems.
* encouraging a fair and transparent justice system.

# Our values

### Fairness

We stand up for what is fair.

We aim to be fair when making choices about which people we help and how we help them.

### Care

We care about our clients and the community in which we live.

We look out for and take care of each other.

### Courage

We act with courage backed by evidence about what is best for clients and the community.

We act with courage to be the best we can be.

# Year ahead

In 2016–17 we will continue to invest in initiatives that help us advance our strategic directions against a backdrop of growing demand and the need to respond to two major State Government inquiries.

We are now in the second year of our *Strategy 2015–18* and have built strong foundations for achieving our strategic directions. We have continued to make careful investments to increase access to justice and to review and improve our services to make a difference for our clients and the community.

In 2015–16 we increased access to justice by helping more than 86,000 clients and providing more grants of legal assistance for serious matters and duty lawyer services – and demand for those services will continue to grow.

In the coming year, we expect to provide more grants of legal assistance in child protection, summary crime and youth crime as a result of recent State Budget initiatives to increase child protection activity, provide more police, expand youth diversion and the drug court. Our duty lawyer services are also likely to come under more pressure from the increased detection of crime and the continued policing of family violence.

Our total revenue, including State and Commonwealth funding, will be $188 million. However, with an expected increase in demand this year we are anticipating services to grow by almost 9 per cent and are budgeting for increased expenditure of nearly $8 million. Without additional government investment we expect to be in deficit by the end of 2017.

Our focus on providing the best possible services for clients and the community will continue in 2016–17 with the ongoing review of our child protection services and the implementation of new approaches to family law and family violence, including a new client safety framework.

We will develop a strategy to provide better services to young people involved in the criminal justice system and support the implementation of expanded diversion programs, which help address the underlying causes of criminal behaviour, encourage young people to be accountable and prevent reoffending.

We will also finalise the evaluation of our summary crime services to ensure they are effective, efficient, appropriate and sustainable.

Improved coordination and collaborative service planning are important in maximising the impact of legal services across Victoria. In 2016–17 we will place greater emphasis on sector planning, with a focus on increasing access to services in the Mildura region and the state’s north east. We will build on existing partnerships in regional areas with our newly formed advisory body to help us co-ordinate planning, promote innovation and increase access to services for those who are most marginalised and disadvantaged in our community.

We will also continue the review of our means test, which will see an increase in people eligible for grants of legal assistance on financial grounds.

As we head into the second year of VLA’s Reconciliation Action Plan, our new Associate Director of Aboriginal Services will recruit three Aboriginal Community Engagement officers to help build relationships across the state and continue to roll out cultural awareness training so our staff can improve our capacity to work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients.

In the next 12 months we will also need to respond to the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Family Violence, and the Victorian Government’s Access to Justice Review which is set to deliver its final report in August 2016.

The State Government has committed to implementing all of the Royal Commission’s recommendations but early investment has focused on funding for front line services such as women’s refuges, housing services and perpetrator programs rather than legal assistance. However, there are many recommendations which will have significant impact on the justice sector, including VLA, which has so far not received additional funding. Over the next year we will need to advocate for additional resources that will enable us to deliver on the Royal Commission’s recommendations.

The Access to Justice Review is due to hand its report to the Attorney General in August 2016 but it is not known when its recommendations will be released or how they will impact on VLA. In our submission to the review we made 29 recommendations to increase access to justice in Victoria. Given the review’s aim of increasing access to justice in Victoria we hope to see extra investment as a result of its findings in future state budgets.

# VLA clients and services

Consistent with the government’s response to act on all the recommendations from the Royal Commission into Family Violence, the increase in child protection workers, the increase in police and expansion of therapeutic courts, we expect to continue to see increases in the number of clients we help and the services we provide.

In total we expect to provide legal services to more than 87,000 unique clients with Legal Help taking more than 20,000 additional calls. We also expect to provide 640 more duty lawyer services and almost 3,000 more grants of legal assistance, with increases of 14 per cent in child protection, 11 per cent in family violence, 7 per cent in summary crime and 9 per cent in youth crime. Assistance delivered by our Independent Mental Health Advocacy service is expected to increase with over 8,000 services provided.

Our client and service targets are outlined in the table below.

**Table 1: Client and service targets**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Clients | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 | 2017B |
| Unique clients | 81,853 | 85,007\* | 86,847 | 87,630\*\* |
| Calls answered by Legal Help | 94,151 | 114,391 | 111,504 | 132,000 |

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Legal Services | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 | 2017B |
| Grants | 33,339 | 34,681 | 38,345 | 41,075 |
| Duty lawyer services | 73,147 | 83,674 | 87,162 | 87,802 |
| Legal advice and minor work | 46,932 | 48,925 | 40,770 | 39,675 |
| Legal Information (including Legal Help) | 111,574 | 137,342 | 125,892 | 150,161 |

\* This does not include clients assisted by a private lawyer through VLA’s private practitioner duty lawyer scheme  
\*\*This number will be updated to include clients seen by a private practitioner duty lawyer

**Table 2: Performance indicators 2016-17**

| **The objectives of VLA are:** | **Measure** |
| --- | --- |
| (a) to provide legal aid in the most effective, economic and efficient manner. | * 87,630 unique clients helped * VLA is within +/- 5% of targets against key service types (table 1) * Percentage of 200 private practitioner files checked with a satisfactory rating (baseline for future) * Monthly cost recovery ratios for each program’s in-house practice |
| (b) to manage its resources to make legal aid available at a reasonable cost to the community and on an equitable basis throughout the state | * 30% of unique clients residing in regional and rural areas. * Quarterly comparison of service delivery (grants, duty lawyer, legal advice and minor work and FDRS) against other commissions (National Legal Aid benchmarking) * Progress of sector planning (including development of legal needs model) |
| (c) To provide to the community improved access to justice and legal remedies | * 132,000 calls answered by Legal Help * 5% increase in priority clients (unique) accessing grants of aid and duty lawyer services as a percentage of total clients by service type. * >80% overall satisfaction rating in client survey * >50% of service improvements identified through complaint-handling are implemented within six weeks |
| (d) to pursue innovative means of providing legal aid directed at minimising the need for individual legal services in the community | * >80% of community legal education sessions targeted to vulnerable client groups or organisations/individuals that work with vulnerable groups (such as children and young people, people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, people with a disability and indigenous people). * 30% increase in website sessions for *Find legal answers* |

# Priorities for 2016-17

# SD 1. Invest in timely intervention, especially for children and young people

Timely intervention is good for all clients but especially vulnerable young people at the centre of family law or child protection matters, or in early contact with the criminal justice system. We know that timely intervention can stop problems from escalating and reduce a young person’s risk of continued contact with the law.

In the coming year we will develop a strategy to improve our youth crime services, building on the recommendations of our youth crime review.

We will work with partners in the justice sector and clients to increase access to diversion, better address and identify the underlying causes of offending, reduce the likelihood of reoffending and increase accountability through restorative processes.

We will also continue our review of child protection services and provide earlier access to legal help for vulnerable family law clients and asylum seekers.

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| In three years' time we will see:At risk children and young people receiving a more intensive, co-ordinated service which addresses the underlying causes of their legal problem.  * Child protection legal services that focus on more timely support to parents and more integrated help for children and risk of further legal problems. * An increase in the intensity of services at points that are likely to prevent legal problems from escalating. | | |
| Outcome / output 2016-17 | Measure / Indicator | Activities |
| A youth crime strategy that promotes timely intervention and improves service delivery for at risk young people SD; 2 & 3 WTGB; 1, 3 & 4 | Completion of Youth Crime strategy | Develop strategy and implementation plan based on the recommendations of the Youth Crime Service Review |
| More legally aided young people diverted away from the criminal justice system through access to diversion  SD; 2 & 3 WTGB; 1, 3 & 4 | Increase in number of legally aided young people accessing diversion compared to 2015-16 | Work with the Children's Court and Victoria Police to roll out diversion across the state |
| A Child Protection Service Review outlining a new approach to legal services designed and targeted to provide more effective and timely support for children and families  SD; 2 & 3 WTGB; 1, 3 & 4 | Review completed | Child Protection Review |
| Clearer and more consistent family law guidelines and new family law practice tools  SD; 2 & 3 WTGB; 1, 2, 3 & 4 | Feedback from in-house practice and private practitioners using guidelines and practice tools | Consultation with stakeholders to develop clearer guidelines  * Development of quality tools |
| Coordinated early assistance for “legacy caseload” asylum seekers  SD; 2 & 3 WTGB; 1, 2, 3 & 4 | * Number of “legacy caseload” asylum seekers assisted through clinics at Refugee Legal. * Number of “legacy caseload” asylum seekers referred by Justice Connect for pro bono or low fee private assistance | * Assistance to asylum seekers through clinics delivered by Refugee Legal * Develop and implement common referral arrangements for legacy caseload asylum seekers to ensure timely referral to most appropriate service |

## SD 2. Match services to the needs and abilities of our clients

We want to make it easier for people to access our services, navigate the legal system and ensure they get the right level of support for the legal problem they have and the consequences they face.

A new Client Safety Framework will enable us to provide more consistent services for people experiencing family violence and will provide assessment tools for lawyers to screen for family violence or other safety risk factors.

We will increase access to legal services by establishing a prisoner help line and dedicating resources to provide more culturally appropriate responses for our clients who identify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders.

We will provide more coordinated triaging of clients to help connect them with the help they need to address legal and non-legal issues.

In August 2016, the Access to Justice Review will hand its report to Government. Although it remains unknown when its recommendations will become public or how it may be used, we expect it to provide a further platform for VLA to seek additional government investment for legal aid.

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| In three years' time we will seeA more coordinated approach to triage, assessment and intake at multiple points to the legal sectorConsistent use of family violence safety and risk assessment tools as well as more and better referrals for clients to support servicesMore Legal Help information services available to the communityLegal Help as the main entry point for clients to the whole legal assistance sectorMore Indigenous clients getting better legal assistance | | |
| Outcome / output 2016-17 | Measure / Indicator | Activities |
| Client Safety Framework implemented across all VLA services and locations SD; 1 & 3 WTGB; 1, 2, 3 & 4 | Feedback from staff using Client Safety Framework | * Develop Client Safety Framework  Develop and deliver training |
| A bigger, modernised legal help telephone service that provides the main entry point to the whole legal assistance sector SD; 1 & 3 WTGB; 1, 2, 3 & 4 | 132,000 calls answered by Legal Help | Review legal help operations to identify options to strengthen capacity and increase access to legal and non-legal assistance |
| Improved legal services and support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with family, civil and administrative issues SD; 1 & 3 WTGB; 1, 2, 3 & 4 | Increase in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders accessing specialist civil and family law services compared to 2015-16Increase satisfaction rating of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders clients from previous client survey | Recruit Aboriginal Community Engagement Officers |
| Consistent and coordinated triage, intake, assessment, assignment and improved communication with clients.  In 18 months, client focused communications and triage processes in Assignments. SD; 1 & 3 WTGB; 1, 2, 3 & 4 | * Prisoner Legal Helpline established at four prisons  Online Referral Booking and Information Tool (ORBIT) prototype built and testedOutcome of initial client survey on Assignments communications (establish baseline) | * Establish pilot prisoner helpline at four sites  Commence implementation phase of ORBIT projectEstablish Assignments as a key entry point into VLADefine and communicate customer service expectations and build Assignments staff capacity to meet expectations |

**3. Maximise benefits by working with others**

The Summary Crime Evaluation will assess the impact of the changes to the summary crime duty lawyer services in 2012, to ensure these services are effective, efficient, appropriate and sustainable. We will continue to work with our partners on developing coordinated approaches to sector planning by identifying legal need and gaps in access to legal services. We will establish a presence in Mallee and Albury/Wodonga region to help increase access to justice. As the demand for family violence legal services continues to grow and in response to the recommendations of the Family Violence Royal Commission, VLA will continue to work with our stakeholders to provide a more coordinated and planned response to the findings and recommendations. We will work with our partners to ensure consistent eligibility criteria and increase access to legal services for clients, ensuring that clients experience a consistent quality of legal services across the state. We will continue to identify opportunities to minimise the need for individual legal services in the community through strategic advocacy.

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| In three years' time we will see:Expansion of co-ordinated service planning between Victoria Legal Aid, community legal centres and other justice partnersMore consistent, easy to understand eligibility criteria, with more people eligible for legal assistanceStrategic advocacy that delivers broad community benefit and helps clarify law and policyMore legal services in the outer metropolitan fringe and in regional areas with acute needs | | |
| Outcome / output 2016-17 | Measure / Indicator | Activities |
| Evaluation of summary crime duty lawyer services identifies future directions to help improve service delivery and ensures they are effective and sustainable  SD; 1, 2 WTGB; 1, 2, 3 & 4 | Evaluation report with recommendations to feed into planning and investment | Undertake evaluation informed by stakeholder consultation, VLA and court data and in depth case studies in agreed court locations |
| An enhanced VLA presence in the Mallee region to help improve access to justice  Work with other legal assistance service providers in Albury Wodonga to help improve access to justice  SD; 1, 2 WTGB; 1, 2, 3 & 4 | Team of three (minimum) VLA staff based in MilduraIncrease in number of clients in Mallee region provided with services by VLA’s in-house practiceNumber of stakeholders consulted to progress sector planning and outreach in Albury/Wodonga region | * VLA to undertake broad consultation to establish presence in Mallee region * Appoint a team based in Mildura to broker relationships with VLA, private and community legal practitioners and community services  VLA to collaborate with LAC NSW and Hume Riverina CLC to establish improved legal services to address cross border legal issues in the Mallee and Albury Wodonga region |
| * A response plan to the Royal Commission into Family Violence addresses: * Policy * Service Delivery * Resourcing/Funding * Advocacy  SD; 1 & 2 WTGB; 1, 2, 3 & 4 | A range of responses developed and agreed upon to respond to the Royal Commission into Family Violence | Co-ordinate a VLA wide response, including identifying further resourcing/funding required to respond effectively to the recommendationsWork with relevant agencies to assist with delivering recommendationsContribute to legislative and policy responses to RCFV findings |
| The transformation and strengthening of the legal assistance sector is supported WTGB; 1, 2, 3 & 4 | 80% of innovation and transformation projects on trackNew funding framework for CLSP completedSector planning framework developed and tested with Sector Innovation and Planning CommitteeNumber of private practitioners accessing training and other practice resources | * Completion and implementation of phase 1 & identify the learnings/opportunities from existing projects/priorities for reforming CLC funding * Commence phase 2 innovations and transformation projects * Complete phase 1 of CLSP reform: establish governance, undertake consultation and desktop reviews, develop and test options for funding framework; * SIPC providing regular advice on sector innovation and planning  Develop framework for coordinated sector planningMake more training and resources available to PPsDevelop and distribute targeted grants newsletters, information and education to PPs |
| Recommendations for changes to VLA’s means test identified  SD; 2 WTGB; 1, 2, 3 & 4 | * Recommendations finalised | Means Test Review and stakeholder consultation |
| Strategic advocacy delivers broad community benefit  SD; 2 WTGB; 1, 2, 3 & 4 | * VLA wide-campaigns identified and developed * Successful examples of strategic advocacy and systemic improvements (qualitative) | Build capacity within VLA to identify and undertake priority strategic advocacy campaignsBuild capacity of Strategic Advocacy Advisory Group in prioritising and overseeing the policy and campaign work |

# Working better together

VLA recognises need to and will continue to support its staff to undertake their demanding roles by ensuring they have the right training, tools and equipment to provide the best possible services to our clients.

In the coming year we will provide improved flexibility in to the way we work, we will increase mobility and accessibility of services to clients with all staff provided with portable electronic devices. Furthermore, in 2017, the Melbourne office will be moving to a new location at 570 Bourke St, which will provide improved facilities for staff and clients. Ensuring the well-being of our staff is vital to delivering high quality services to our clients. We will continue to ensure that we provide opportunities for learning, training and career development. We continue to ensure we reduce any impacts of vicarious trauma on our staff through customised counselling and debriefing programs for legal teams, and continue to provide support for individuals through our Employee Assistance Program.

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| Working better togetherImprove Innovate and reform practices to provide better services to clientsSupport our peopleEngage externally for accountability and transparencyUse evidence and experience to improve legal services delivery | | |
| Outcome / output 2016-17 | Measure / indicator | Activities |
| Flexible technology adopted by staff delivering client services across the state | * All staff across VLA are effectively using new Surface Pro tablets and Skype for business * Stable and reliable network performance for regional and mobile staff | * Rollout of Surface Pro tablets and implementation of Skype for Business across the state. * Undertake a change management program to ensure staff are effectively supported and trained and adopting mobile lawyering. * Review and upgrade infrastructure services * Work with magistrates’ and other courts to increase VLA staff access to their Wi-Fi networks. |
| Staff engagement and wellbeing is improved | * 80% of participants on the leadership program embed learning by applying tools and resources in teams (measured by participant feedback) * 100% of managers with below average employee engagement scores develop and implement targeted action plans * Increase in wellbeing and greater awareness of physiological and psychological risks of VLA's work amongst Chambers and Criminal Law staff (measured through psychometric testing) * 8-10 % utilisation rate for EAP services as an indicator of VLA staff accessing first-line support for psychological needs. | * Implement Leadership and Management training programs * Conduct employee engagement survey * Evaluate wellbeing and vicarious trauma work underway in Chambers and Criminal Law * Settle service offerings that support wellbeing having regard to the results of programs underway across VLA |
| Transition to new premises promotes effective and safe work practices, with improved facilities for staff and clients | * Majority of staff are satisfied with the engagement process and new accommodation  Project delivered on time and on budget | * Execute project according to project management policy and guidelines. * Implement stakeholder engagement plan with multiple opportunities for engagement and evaluate its effectiveness * Implement change program to build internal capability to prepare staff for the move |

# Appendix 1 – Strategy 2015–18

The table below shows the link between our statutory objectives and intended outcomes under our Strategy 2015-18.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Strategic Directions**  **time Invest in timely intervention, especially for children and young people**  **links Match services to the needs and abilities of our clients**  **person Maximise benefits by working with others** | | |
| **Statutory objective** | **Strategy outcomes** | **Strategy Measures** |
| To provide legal aid in the most effective, economic and efficient manner  time | * At risk children and young people receiving a more intensive, coordinated service which addresses the underlying causes of their legal problems * Child protection legal services that focus on more timely support to parents and more integrated help for children at risk of further legal problems * An increase in the intensity of services at points that are likely to prevent legal problems from escalating | * Outcome of child protection and youth crime service reviews (qualitative) * Actions implemented from the final report of the Family Law Legal Aid Services Review (qualitative) |
| To manage its resources to make legal aid available at a reasonable cost to the community and on an equitable basis throughout the state  **links person** | * A more coordinated approach to triage, assessment and intake at multiple entry points to the legal assistance sector * Consistent use of family violence safety and risk assessment tools as well as more and better referrals for clients to support services * Expansion of coordinated service planning between Victoria Legal Aid, community legal centres and other justice partners * More legal services in the outer metropolitan fringe and in regional areas with acute needs | * Report on expansion of coordinated service planning across the sector * All client facing staff received training using the Client Safety Framework * Increase in clients in outer metropolitan fringe and rural areas accessing services |
| To provide to the community improved access to justice and legal remedies  **links person** | * More Legal Help information services available to the community with Legal Help as a main entry point for clients to the whole legal assistance sector * More indigenous clients getting better legal assistance * Lawyers and social workers working together to provide a more comprehensive service to clients with a mental illness * More consistent, easy to understand eligibility criteria, with more people eligible for legal assistance | * Increase in number of callers accessing Legal Help * Increase in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients accessing civil and/or family law services * Number of referrals between legal and non-legal services for civil law clients with a mental illness * Increase in people eligible for grants of legal assistance on financial grounds (further actions identified and measure developed following means test review) |
| To pursue innovative means of providing legal aid directed at minimising the need for individual legal services in the community  **person** | * Strategic advocacy that delivers broad community benefit and helps clarify law and policy | * Successful examples of strategic advocacy and systemic improvements |

**Notes**

The measures have been designed to provide an overall picture of performance against each strategic direction and the best representation (at this point in time) of actual performance. They are a mixture of output and outcome measures with some new data collection required.

There remain some areas where a performance measure has not been identified and further work is required to better understand our current service delivery, develop baselines and/or complete projects. We will continue to build our maturity towards an integrated performance and accountability framework which will also be supported by targeted evaluation effort over the life of the Strategy.

# Appendix 2 – Key performance indicators

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Invest in timely intervention, especially for children and young people** | |
| **Measure / Indicator** | **Responsibility** |
| * Completion of Youth Crime strategy | *Executive Director Criminal Law* |
| * Increased number of legally aided young people accessing diversion compared to 2015-16 |
| * Child protection services review completed | *Executive Director Family, Youth and Children’s Law* |
| * Feedback from in-house practice and private practitioners using guidelines and practice tools |
| * Number of “legacy caseload” asylum seekers assisted through clinics at Refugee Legal * Number of “legacy caseload” asylum seekers referred by Justice Connect for pro bono or low fee private assistance | *Executive Director Civil Justice, Access and Equity* |

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| --- | --- |
| **Match services to the needs and abilities of our clients** | |
| **Measure / Indicator** | **Responsibility** |
| * Feedback from staff using Client Safety Framework | *Executive Director Family, Youth and Children’s Law* |
| * 132,000 calls answered by Legal Help * Increase in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders accessing specialist civil and family law services compared to 2015-16 * Increase satisfaction rating of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders clients from previous client survey | *Executive Director Civil Justice, Access and Equity* |
| * Prisoner Legal Helpline established at four prisons * ORBIT prototypes built and tested |
| * Outcome of initial client survey on Assignments communications (establish baseline) | *Executive Director Legal Practice* |

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| --- | --- |
| **Maximise benefits by working with others** | |
| **Measure / Indicator** | **Responsibility** |
| * Summary crime evaluation report with recommendations to feed into planning and investment | *Executive Director Criminal Law* |
| * Team of three (minimum) VLA staff based in Mildura * Increase in number of clients in Mallee region provided with services by VLA’s in-house practice * Number of stakeholders consulted to progress sector planning and outreach in Albury/Wodonga region | *Office of the Managing Director* |
| * A range of responses developed and agreed upon to respond to the Royal Commission into Family Violence | *Executive Director Family, Youth and Children’s Law*  *Executive Director Criminal Law*  *Executive Director Civil Justice, Access and Equity* |
| * 80% of innovation and transformation projects on track * New funding framework for CLSP completed * Sector planning framework developed and tested with SIP Committee | *Executive Director Civil Justice, Access and Equity* |
| * VLA wide-campaigns identified and developed * Successful examples of strategic advocacy and systemic improvements |
| * Number of private practitioners accessing training and other practice resources | *Executive Director Legal Practice* |
| * Recommendations for changes to VLA’s means test finalised |

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| **Working together better** | |
| **Measure / Indicator** | **Responsibility** |
| * All staff across VLA are effectively using new Surface Pro tablets and Skype for business * Stable and reliable network performance for regional and mobile staff | *Executive Director Corporate Affairs* |
| * 80% of participants on the leadership program embed learning by applying tools and resources in teams (measured by participant feedback) * 100% of managers with below average employee engagement scores develop and implement targeted action plans * Increase in wellbeing and greater awareness of physiological and psychological risks of VLA's work amongst Chambers and Criminal Law staff (measured through psychometric testing) * 8-10% utilisation rate for EAP services as an indicator of VLA staff accessing first-line support for psychological needs |
| * Majority of staff are satisfied with the engagement process and new accommodation * Project delivered on time and on budget |