

Administrative Justice Council - Business Plan 2024-2027

The Business Plan sets out the strategic objectives of the Administrative Justice Council and the activity to meet these objectives for the term 2024-2027. Proposed actions and desired outcomes will fall under the objectives and overall principles listed below:

Objectives

The Administrative Justice Council ('the Council') has the following objectives:

- To keep the operation of the administrative justice system under review;
- To consider how to make the administrative justice system more accessible, fair and efficient;
- To advise on, and develop, recommendations and proposals to ensure the effectiveness of the administrative justice system;
- To share learning and areas of good practice across the UK;
- To provide a forum for the exchange of information between Government, the judiciary, ombudsman schemes, academics and those working with users of the administrative justice system; and
- To identify areas of the administrative justice system that would benefit from research.

Principles

The Council's purpose will be to help make the administrative justice system increasingly accessible, fair and effective by:

- playing a pivotal role in the development and sharing of good practice;
- promoting understanding, learning and continuous improvement; and
- ensuring that the needs of users are central to the operation and ongoing reform of the system.

Outcomes

The Council will set objectives and measure its effectiveness against the following outcomes:

- those taking administrative decisions do so on soundly-based evidence and with regard for the individual needs of those affected;
- routes of appeal are simple and accessible to those who need them;
- people are assisted to understand how they can best challenge decisions or seek redress at least cost and inconvenience to themselves;
- grievances are resolved in a fair, timely, open and proportionate manner; and

- the advice, recommendations and proposals made by the Council are based on evidence and principle, and the Council advocates for evidence-based policy-making centrally focussed on the needs of users

Core Objectives

	Objective	Proposed Action	Desired Outcome
1	To keep under review the operation and delivery of the administrative justice system, and to make recommendations for improvements and sharing of best practice	<p>Bring together key stakeholders in administrative justice to identify problems and propose solutions to the most pressing issues</p> <p>Identify areas for review and report on possible reforms to improve the system</p> <p>Identify and respond to relevant bills, consultations and calls for evidence on administrative justice as appropriate.</p>	Areas for review identified and steps taken to assess and report on possible reforms to improve the system in these areas
2	To consider how to make the administrative justice system more accessible, fair and efficient	<p>Promote good quality decision-making by public bodies, assessing the impact of those affected and making suggestions for improvements</p> <p>Consider the impact of the modernisation of tribunals on litigants in person</p> <p>Promoting the increase of powers held by public service ombudsman schemes to investigate systemic issues and increasing accessibility to ombuds for complainants.</p>	<p>More informed understanding of public body decision-making resulting in reduced cases before the tribunal and reduced cases overturned by the tribunal.</p> <p>A well-informed tribunal modernisation programme with the needs of users taken into consideration by HMCTS/MoJ and improvement made as a result.</p> <p>Increased powers by public services ombudsman schemes resulting in more recommendations in the public interest on systemic issues which benefit larger</p>

		Consideration of the impact of the use of AI in the administrative justice system in the context of wider society.	<p>numbers of complaints resolved.</p> <p>Appropriate and effective use of AI into administrative justice processes which enhances the process without compromising the accuracy of information or reducing the quality of decision-making.</p>
3	To advise on, and develop, recommendations and proposals to ensure the effectiveness of the administrative justice system	To develop recommendations through evidence-based research on issues affecting the administrative justice system through working groups of the AJC.	That the government, judiciary, and ombudsman schemes are fully informed on the development of the administrative justice system and that recommendations are taken onboard to ensure a more effective system
4	To provide a forum for the exchange of information between government, the judiciary, ombudsman schemes, academics and those working with users of the administrative justice system; and to share learning and areas of good practice across the UK	<p>Exchange of information between similar oversight bodies, government departments, organisations, NGOs and administrative justice stakeholders</p> <p>To share areas of best practice across all UK jurisdictions</p> <p>To arrange thematic events on issues affecting the administrative justice system</p> <p>To share learning between ombudsman schemes and tribunals</p>	<p>An increased awareness of good practice across government, oversight bodies, sectors and geographic jurisdictions</p> <p>Improved services for users</p> <p>Improved pathways for users by better signposting and cross-referrals between redress mechanisms</p>
5	To identify areas of the administrative justice system that would benefit from research	Explore issues of concern and good practice, and provide evidence-based research for the Council's consideration	<p>Increased evidence-based research into challenges within the system to help inform government policy.</p> <p>Improved data collection which can be used for analysis of challenges in the system</p>

AJC Work strands and working groups 2024-2025

1. Digitisation Working Group

Scope: The working group will have the overall aim of reviewing the ‘user experience’ of tribunal users in the light of His Majesty’s Courts and Tribunals Service (HMCTS) Tribunals modernisation programme. The outcome of the review is intended to contribute to the development, evaluation and enhancement of the user experience of the different tribunal users and assess the impact of the reforms on stakeholders as well as the parties.

Objectives	Proposed Action	Desired Outcome
To review the impact of the modernisation programme on tribunal users applying ‘user experience’ methodology, including drawing on existing research;	Literature review Factfinding and evidence-gathering through Call for Evidence, evidence-gathering meetings with tribunal users including members of the judiciary, appellants, representatives and case workers.	To publish a report by Summer 2025 making recommendations to HMCTS to enhance experience of users who engage with online processes, addressing issues of accessibility, usability and trust in the process.
To identify jurisdictions that require the most attention;	Meetings with Chamber Presidents	
To recommend best practice solutions from other jurisdictions and the private sector	To garner an understanding of digital services that are working well in jurisdictions and to share examples in the final report.	
To identify pressure points and drop-off points in the end-to-end process;	Through evidence from representatives and appellants	
To work with HMCTS to identify gaps in research which will assist in the evaluation process;	Regular meeting with HMCTS insight officials, HMCTS representation on the working group	
To ensure the modernisation programme is accessible to all users.	Make recommendations in the final report to HMCTS on how to increase accessibility based on findings from fieldwork	

2. Disadvantaged Users in the Administrative Justice System

Scope: The working group will examine whether the administrative justice system operates inclusively and equitably for users whose personal characteristics or circumstances adversely affect their engagement with the system. These vulnerability factors affect some people all the time and can affect any of us at times. The review will seek to understand the impact of the current changes in the HMCTS court and tribunal modernisation programme as well as the wider social changes on such users which may lead to differential justice outcomes.

Objective	Proposed Action	Desired Outcome
Identify 'pinch points' in the system that compromise the experience for these users;	Take evidence from representatives about the barriers of going through the redress system through Barriers sub-group Hold a Roundtable event to bring different parts of the justice system together to discuss issues around vulnerability Literature review	To publish a report by Autumn 2025 making recommendations to different parts of the administrative justice system to make simple changes to enhance the effective administration of justice for these users.
Identify and promote examples of best practice used by those working in the administrative justice system	Explore areas of best practice suggested by the working group and use them as initiatives that could be adopted by other services in the system	
Explore practical ways in which those working in the system could be better supported to assist these users to access the administrative justice system whilst being mindful not to place further burden on those working in the frontline	Discuss solutions in Staff Wellbeing sub-group and turn into recommendations to improve the system for disadvantaged users in the final report	
Look to the wider justice system for examples of good practice that could be adopted;	As above	
Consider how the modernisation programme has impacted on this particular cohort of users and suggest ways in which the impact may be improved	Through sub-group meetings, surveys and Call for Evidence to advice sector	

Highlight the ways in which the pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis has impacted on these users, the advice sector and, more widely, on service provision	Through Staff Wellbeing sub-group.	
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3. Ombudsman and Tribunals collaboration

Scope: To facilitate dialogue between public service ombudsman schemes and tribunals to improve understanding of each other's remits and to enhance signposting to users to the most appropriate redress mechanism for their dispute, ensuring users are not only on the correct pathway but also reduce unnecessary appeals going to the tribunal.

Objectives	Proposed Action	Desired Outcome
To share learning between ombudsman schemes and tribunals	Monitoring the progress of collaboration between ombudsman schemes and tribunals in social security, housing and SEND following a Roundtable event in June 2024	A more joined-up administrative justice system and improved pathways for users by better signposting and cross-referrals between redress mechanisms
To improve the user journey	Promoting the use of public legal education to help users understand where to go to resolve a legal issue; and promoting the need for institutions to raise awareness of their jurisdictions.	A better understanding by users, advice organisations and MPs on which pathway to take/signpost to when resolving a dispute.

4. Academic Research

Scope: To identify areas of the administrative justice system that would benefit from research.

Objectives	Proposed Action	Desired Outcome
To provide quality assurance of AJC research	Act as an advisory board to the working groups to assist in their proposed methods of collecting evidence.	AJC reports have a robust methodology and provide evidence-based solutions
To provide research projects led by the Panel	Gain funding to undertake a project which synthesises existing empirical evidence on key administrative justice institutions in a comprehensive but accessible way, to support all aspects of the Council's work. Gain funding to undertake a project on where AI can be productively and safely used in	The Council is up-to-date on existing administrative justice research. Development of research and understanding about the benefits and pitfalls to AI in the administrative justice system.

Objectives	Proposed Action	Desired Outcome
	the administrative justice system.	
To provide research briefing on topical issues	To identify topical issues which will be of interest to the Council and provide research briefings to the Council including presenting them at bi-annual Council meetings.	The Council is abreast of issues which could be considered for future projects.

5. Forum for exchange of information

To provide a forum for the exchange of information between government, the judiciary, ombudsman schemes, academics and those working with users of the administrative justice system; and to share learning and areas of good practice across the UK.

Objective	Proposed Action	Desired Outcome
To provide an exchange of information between those working within administrative justice to share learning and best practice across the UK	To hold two bi-annual Council meetings with at least one presentation at each meeting on a topic of interest to the Council. Organise an end of legal year event (AGM) to bring together AJC members	Information is shared across sectors, organisations and individuals working in administrative justice. AJC members collectively reflect on work undertaken over the year and topics for discussion for the year ahead.
To organise Roundtable events and workshops	To arrange a SEND Roundtable event to follow up from the SEND report. To arrange a Roundtable event relating to disadvantaged users in the administrative justice system.	Identification of impact and whether improvements have been made since the publication of the report and what further work is needed. Stakeholders in this area come together and discuss disadvantaged users report for shared reflection and learning