

**PUBLIC
INTEREST
LITIGATION
SUPPORT**

PILS' Strategic Plan 2025-2028

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Introduction

As Chair of Public Interest Litigation Support (PILS) and on behalf of the Board and Staff Team, I am proud to present our new strategic plan. This document outlines our ambitious vision for the future, a future where the legal system is accessible to all.

For fifteen years, PILS has been supporting our member organisations as they pursue cases that challenge injustice, protect human rights, and promote equality in Northern Ireland.

Building on that strong foundation, this strategy charts a course for the future that reflects our ongoing commitment to communities facing barriers to accessing justice. We have carefully considered the evolving legal and social landscape and developed targeted strategies to address them.



Introduction (cont.)

As we embark on this new chapter, I am confident that PILS will continue to be a force for positive change.

We invite you to join us in this important work. Whether you're a donor, partner, member or supporter, your involvement is essential to our success.

Fiona Doherty KC



Our Strategic Approach for the future of public interest litigation in Northern Ireland

While there is not one globally agreed definition of public interest litigation, we at PILS have made a conscious decision to focus our efforts on legal action that:

- raises a human rights or equality issue of broad public concern;
- provides an opportunity to clarify, develop or change the law;
- seeks to ameliorate the position of individuals and groups who have been disadvantaged, overlooked or treated unfairly; and
- if successful, will benefit society as a whole.

PILS is recognised as expert in public interest litigation.

Known for our collaborative approach, professionalism and reliability, we excel at supporting important cases that will have a positive impact for many.

This is carried out via a range of activities including direct representation, providing funding and securing the most effective pro bono support.



Our Strategic Approach for the future of public interest litigation in Northern Ireland (cont.)

We strive to secure groundbreaking legal victories that drive positive societal change for the people of Northern Ireland.

Through our membership we build strong partnerships with key stakeholders in the legal and community and voluntary sectors.

With this collaboration at the centre of everything we do, we have solidified our position as a trusted partner for legal practitioners, and the community and voluntary sector in Northern Ireland.

As we celebrate our 15th anniversary, we have taken time to assess PILS' unique and substantial achievements since we were founded in 2009.



Key Achievements



2009

Founded as a pilot project

2011

Started building our Pro Bono Register

2013

Widened our membership network to include solicitor firms

2014

PILS received its first set of instructions as solicitor and represented Drumragh Integrated College as it successfully challenged the Department for Education in a landmark judicial review

2019

A UK Pro Bono Week event took place in Northern Ireland for the first time, hosted by PILS

2022

staff team grew to four full-time employees



Key Achievements (cont.)



2022

our Country of Origin Report service - an innovative pro bono partnership with Clifford Chance – was launched to support immigration lawyers

2023

the first episode of 'To Be Fair NI' – PILS' podcast series – was released

2024

co-designed a unique training course on climate justice with the Law Society of Northern Ireland

We are proud to launch our **2025-2028 strategy** which will see us continue to focus our strengths where we can deliver the best results and build stronger relationships with our members and throughout the wider legal and community and voluntary sectors.



PILS' vision

is a Northern Ireland in
which the legal
system protects
equality and human
rights.

Our Vision

Our vision is a Northern Ireland in which the legal system protects equality and human rights.

PILS is working towards a society in which people have equal access to the legal system and where human rights and equality are protected and realised.

We want a legal system that ensures that everyone, regardless of their background, is treated fairly and justly and has equal access to justice and legal representation.

Through public interest litigation, we will challenge systemic barriers, empower groups to champion change, and create a society with an enhanced quality of life and stronger and more inclusive communities.



Our Mission

Our mission is to promote and support the use of public interest litigation to ensure equality and the protection of human rights.

We recognise that public interest litigation is a complementary strategy that sits alongside grassroots campaigning, advocacy efforts, the promotion of better laws, policies and structural changes to the legal system.

With that in mind, PILS uses its legal skills and expertise to help build the capacity of our members so that they can better support their clients and service users.

We want to ensure that no gaps in respect of the protection of human rights and equality, which impact communities and groups in our society, go unchallenged. PILS exists to help rebalance the scales of power.



Our Mission (cont.)

The work of PILS helps to embed a well-informed community and voluntary sector equipped to use public interest litigation when necessary.

Ultimately, we hope that through our work, public interest litigation will be easily accessible to everyone, where they understand that this is one of the core tools for bringing about effective change and holding the government to account.



Our Strategic Pillars

Supporting Public Interest Litigation

Break down legal, financial and knowledge barriers for our members to ensure effective Public Interest Litigation.

Capacity Building

Empower the legal and community and voluntary sectors to drive and deliver effective Public Interest Litigation through support, networking, training and education.

Creating a Movement

Communicate the impact of Public Interest Litigation to maximise the potential for positive change.



Supporting Public Interest Litigation

Break down legal, financial and knowledge barriers for our members to ensure effective Public Interest Litigation.

Fundamental to achieving our vision of a Northern Ireland where the legal system protects equality and human rights is the provision of support to our members to take on public interest litigation.

We know first-hand that there are significant barriers that prevent the legal, and community and voluntary sectors from seeking legal redress on important matters of public interest.

Our ambition is to cultivate a supportive environment by offering financial assistance, providing case law guidance and expert advice, and facilitating the provision of pro bono services by law firms and individual lawyers.

Where representation is not available elsewhere for critical cases, we will provide solicitor representation to ensure that our member is properly supported and can still access the legal system.

Through this approach we will directly support an increase of public interest cases.



Case Study

Mid & East Antrim Borough Council's April 2024 decision to approve the Cloghan Point oil terminal expansion sparked outrage in the Whitehead community.

The proposed redevelopment poses significant environmental risks and raises concerns about Northern Ireland's decision-making processes.

The Stop Whitehead Oil Terminal (SWOT) group criticised the council's decision, citing potential environmental damage, negative health impacts on the community, and the contradiction with the Climate Change Act 2022. The planned expansion would allow colossal 120,000-ton oil tankers to dock at Cloghan Point.

SWOT, supported by PILS, pursued legal action to challenge the decision. PILS provided direct legal representation, a barrister through our Pro Bono Register, and financial support to lodge the judicial review proceedings.

In what we consider to be a “public interest victory of seismic proportions”, in early September 2024, the High Court granted a quashing order in respect of the Council’s approval of the planning application.

SWOT’s advocacy has garnered significant media attention, including coverage from BBC News NI, the Belfast Telegraph, and Belfast Live.



Capacity Building

Empower the legal and community and voluntary sectors to drive and deliver effective Public Interest Litigation through support, networking, training and education.

We recognise that building the capacity of our membership and the legal sector will enhance the potential of the legal and community and voluntary sectors to effectively identify and pursue public interest cases.

We will look to strengthen skills and knowledge with training and education and provide access to online open-source resources and toolkits.

We will facilitate networking opportunities where collaboration and knowledge exchange can enhance the extensive skills and experience of our membership.

Through all of this, we will help groups address important and complex legal issues and sustain their impact over time, ultimately contributing to a more just and equitable society.



Case Study

Our novel Climate Justice series of workshops, co-designed by PILS and the Law Society of Northern Ireland specifically for NI legal practitioners in this emerging area of law, ran from March – May 2024.

Featuring leading experts from the legal profession and civil society, the course inspired, empowered and supported local lawyers keen to engage with climate justice work.

Each session was attended by local solicitors and barristers, with 100% of the attendees confirming they would recommend the series to a colleague. Attendees described the speakers (engaged by PILS) as “very knowledgeable and impressive”.

There is also a clear appetite among legal practitioners in NI for more practical training, as attendees listed several topics that they would like to learn more about.

The challenge for us now is to feed that hunger and continue to connect the expertise of environment defenders with supportive, confident solicitors and barristers.



Creating a Movement

Communicate the impact of Public Interest Litigation to maximise the potential for positive change

Mainstreaming public interest litigation to ensure equality and the protection of human rights is at the heart of everything we do.

However, to realise the vision of a Northern Ireland in which the legal system protects equality and human rights we know we need to build a movement throughout the legal system in Northern Ireland and beyond.

We believe that adopting a movement-building approach will help us enhance our role as a catalyst for driving systemic change.

By engaging with the public more widely, we will have the opportunity to generate broader awareness and support for public interest litigation as a means to secure changes that address root causes of injustice in their communities.

Our movement will also focus on providing post-litigation support to members, tracking the outcome of the cases, to ensure that change has been effected and is having a positive impact for the communities concerned.

By effectively engaging key stakeholders and building a strong movement we will create significant change and improve access to justice for all.



Case Study

To Be Fair NI - [the first-ever PILS podcast series](#) about the life-changing legal cases that create positive impact – was launched in September 2023.

The nature of podcasts gives PILS more space to explain our public interest cases and collaborations, the context and their potential.

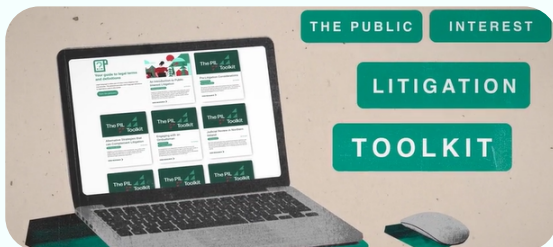
Our overall vision for the podcast is to create a positive platform celebrating the people who are doing public interest work under the radar, often on a shoestring, to provide legal solutions to large-scale, real-life problems.

Each episode is informative, enlightening and conversational.

PILS started our podcast journey with a behind-the-scenes look at a major climate case that PILS is actively supporting. Holding Our Breath - a special three-part mini series – introduced listeners to the Clean Air NI judicial review. This case was taken by Friends of the Earth NI, supported by PILS, in an attempt to stop a dangerous 18-year long air quality failing.

The series brought the case to a wider audience, with one listener describing it as: “incredibly well put together.... I’m sure it was A LOT of work but it has certainly paid off, unbelievably good podcast, flows really well, explained in a language we can all understand, nicely paced and good length, keep up the great work! We will have to take some learning from this great style of podcast!”.

Gallery



PUBLIC INTEREST LITIGATION SUPPORT

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