



## **MINUTES OF ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2017**

Minutes of the Annual General Meeting of the members of the Law Society held at the Society's Hall on Thursday 6 July 2017 at 2.30 pm. The President, Robert Bourns, was in the chair.

### **Quorum**

The President stated that there were more than 50 members of the Society present and declared a quorum.

### **Notice of meeting**

The notice of the meeting was taken as read.

### **Minutes of 2016 Annual General Meeting**

The minutes of the Annual General Meeting held on 14 July 2016 were taken as read and were confirmed. There were no questions.

### **Election of Council Members**

The President said that this year there were vacancies to be filled in 46 constituencies. In 23 constituencies there were no more candidates than vacancies, and accordingly he declared the following candidates duly elected unopposed for the constituencies referred to:

- No 2 - The City of London: Paul Barnes
- No 3 – Holborn: Alexander Fraser Whitehead
- No 8 – The City of Westminster: Jeffrey Allan Forrest
- No 12 – Inner Sussex: Patrick Wilfred Richards
- No 16 - Hampshire and the Isle of Wight: Nicholas Charles Arthur Gurney-Champion
- No 18 – West Country and Gwent: Steven John Hudson
- No 22 – Coventry and Warwickshire: Alan Thomas East
- No 26 - Merseyside and District: Sarah Louise Lapsley
- No 29 - Central Lancashire and Northern Greater Manchester: Joseph Bernard Egan
- No 31 – Yorkshire: Mark Newby
- No 33 - Nottinghamshire: Ashish Bhatia
- No 36 - Bedfordshire and Cambridgeshire: Michael David Frape
- No 37 – Hertfordshire: Paul Bernard Davies
- No 39 - Suffolk and North Essex: Roger Buston
- No 42 - Bristol: Ian Christopher Pearce Kelcey
- Child Care Law: Denise Alison Lester
- Civil Litigation: Mark Julian Humphries
- Commercial Property: David Robert Steed
- Government Legal Service: Simon Timothy Harker

International Practice: David Michael Greene  
LGBT Division: Christopher Lloyd Morgan  
Residential Conveyancing: Peter John Rodd  
Voluntary Sector: Sara Jean Mary Chandler

The President said that in six constituencies, contests had been necessary and voting papers had been sent to all members in those constituencies. Internet voting had also been available. Electoral Reform Services (ERS) had acted as scrutineers for these elections and copies of its reports had been published on the website. Copies were also available at the meeting.

The President then declared the successful candidates in the elections to have been duly elected for the following constituencies:

Ethnic Minorities (three seats, voting by email): Sundeep Singh Bhatia, Nwabueze Nwokolo and Koser Shaheen  
EU Matters: Jonathan Philip Goldsmith  
Housing Law: Daniel Joseph Fitzpatrick  
Immigration Law: Evelyn Ofori-Koree  
Junior Lawyers' Division (Solicitor Member): Laura Jane McKoy  
Junior Lawyers' Division (Trainee Solicitors/LPC Students): Prisca Wharton

The President said that in three geographical constituencies no candidate had come forward by the due date, and therefore a nomination committee had been established in each of those constituencies to nominate a candidate who would then be deemed duly elected. The constituencies concerned, with the name of the candidate nominated in each case by the committee, were as follows -

No 32 - Derbyshire And East Staffordshire: John Michael Williams  
No 36 - Bedfordshire And Cambridgeshire: Michael David Frape

In the third geographical constituency (No 24, Wolverhampton and Staffordshire) no nomination had been made and the Society would therefore proceed to hold a further election.

In constituency no.4 (North East London) the current member, Helen Joyce Merriam, was standing down because she was planning to practise in Sheffield. There would therefore be an election in that seat also.

The President said that in one non-geographical seat, namely the Crown Prosecution Service, no candidate had come forward by the due date. A nomination committee had therefore been formed in that seat also.

The President said that a number of other non-geographical seats which were intended to represent particular organisations were filled by nomination from the organisation concerned. The members nominated were as follows:

Association of Personal Injury Lawyers: Colin Benjamin Ettinger  
Black Solicitors' Network: Paulette Maria Mastin  
Commerce and Industry Group: John Francis Bleasdale and Smita Oza  
Criminal Defence (where the nomination was made jointly by the Criminal Law Solicitors Association and the London Criminal Courts Solicitors Association): William Ogden Waddington  
Employment Lawyers Association: Clive Brian Dobbin  
Forum of Insurance Lawyers: Nichola Karen Evans  
Law Management Section: Nigel Haddon  
Lawyers in Local Government: Beverley Cullen and Maria Immacolata Memoli

Lawyers With Disabilities Division: Yasmin Sadia Sheikh  
Legal Aid Practitioners' Group: Carol Anne Storer  
Private Client Section: Melinda Giles  
Solicitor Sole Practitioner Group: Lubna Shuja and Clive Sutton  
Women Lawyers Division: Sarah Jayne Austin, Christina Blacklaws and Ingrid Stephanie Boyce

The President offered his congratulations to those Council members who had been elected, re-elected or nominated to Council.

### **Tributes to retiring Council members**

On behalf of the meeting the President thanked those members who were leaving Council at the conclusion of the Annual General Meeting, or who had retired during the course of the year, for all their work on behalf of the profession and the Society. Those members were:

Andrew Howard Arthur Caplen, who had represented the Hampshire and Isle of Wight constituency since 2000 and had served as President of the Society during a highly successful term of office in 2014 – 2015

Constituency no 36 - Bedfordshire and Cambridgeshire: Michael Elwyn (Mike) Williams  
Commerce & Industry: Clare Leanne Belcher  
Constituency no 22 – Coventry and Warwickshire: Colin John Witherall  
Crown Prosecution Service: Hilary Susan Marsh  
EU matters: Davina Jane Garrod  
Junior Lawyers Division (Solicitor): Beth Forrester  
Junior Lawyers Division (Trainee): Matthew Allan  
Legal Aid Practitioners: Nicola Mackintosh QC(Hon)  
Private Client Section: Helen Judith Clarke  
Constituency no 18 - West Country and Gwent: Helen Davies  
Solicitors Sole Practitioners Group: Ian Hugh Lithman  
Lawyers with Disability Division: David Maurice Merkel  
Ethnic Minorities: Shama Gupta  
Immigration Law: Laura Devine  
Constituency no 4 - North East London: Helen Joyce Merriam

The Society expressed by acclamation its thanks to all these members for their services to the Society and the profession.

### **Resolution 1 (Annual Report)**

The President moved Resolution 1 on the notice of the meeting, which was -

*That the Annual Report of the Council be received.*

The Vice-President (Joe Egan) seconded the resolution.

The President then invited the interim Chief Executive of the Law Society (Paul Tennant) to address the meeting. He added that Paul Tennant had joined the Society's staff in February 2016 and would be staying until 2018.

Paul Tennant emphasised the importance of strong leadership and said that the Society had enjoyed strong leadership during the year. He paid tribute to Council, the office holders and the staff of the Law Society. Because of its strong leadership the Society had been able to face the challenges of Council reform and the setting up of a main board. The Society had a clear

change programme in place and, by developing its value proposition and income streams and by focusing on driving down costs, was facing up to the potential challenges of future funding.

Paul Tennant also drew attention to the Society's role on the public stage. It had taken a key role in the Brexit debate and had engaged with the government and opposition parties. It had successfully made the point that legal services were a significant contributor to the UK economy. The Society had also submitted responses on behalf of the profession to 125 consultation exercises during the year.

Paul Tennant also observed that there were continuing challenges, referring to the Socrates Training case, data management, and the LSB investigation. He felt that the Society was well placed to respond effectively to these important challenges.

Lord (Paul) Phillips, who said that he had been a solicitor since 1958, stated his view that public respect for the profession had not increased over time. He asked what it was that solicitors actually did that the public recognised as professional rather than business. He said that 'integrity', 'public benefit' and 'justice' were terms which he thought did not appear in the report at all; but justice and the public interest must be at the heart of what solicitors did. The meeting warmly welcomed this view.

The President said that these matters had been a major part of his presidential year. Solicitors had a duty to the integrity of the system of justice. They were also required to give advice that clients might not always welcome, but doing so was the essence of acting professionally. A strong and independent profession was fundamental to the fabric of society.

There being no further comments the resolution was put to the vote. It was resolved on a show of hands that the Annual Report of the Council be received.

## **Resolution 2 (Accounts)**

The Treasurer (Michael Garson) moved Resolution 2 on the notice of the meeting, which was -

*That the Accounts signed by the Auditors be approved.*

The Vice-President seconded the resolution.

The Treasurer alluded to the theme of leadership which had emerged during the course of the meeting. He said that the Council, boards and committees recognised the important work done by the office holders and by Law Society staff. The role of the Management Board, he suggested, was 'seeing that the wheels go round'.

The Treasurer presented the accounts and explained that they had been prepared according to FRS 102, the new accounting standards for the UK. This meant that the previous year's figures had had to be restated for comparative purposes. Under FRS 102 the year's financial surplus was £6.1m compared to £6.6m for the previous year. He explained that income had to be forecast by reference to PC fees and that expenditure had been lower than forecast due to IT programme slippage. In addition the compulsory levies that the Society had to pay had also been reduced. Because fewer costs were now being capitalised, there was a greater visible balance between Group income and expenditure.

The Treasurer confirmed that the levels of provisions for the costs of litigation and interventions were reassessed every year. He also confirmed that the Compensation Fund costs incurred were recharged in full by the SRA to the Compensation Fund. As a matter of accounting policy it was not appropriate to consolidate the Compensation Fund into the Group accounts because it

was seen as a separate fund held on trust.

The Treasurer reported that the accounts of Solicitors Indemnity Fund Ltd, which were consolidated into the Group accounts, showed a small deficit for 2015/16.

The Treasurer confirmed that the Society still held the freehold of 113 and 114 Chancery Lane and of 60 Carey Street.

The Treasurer thanked the auditors (PwC), the Audit Committee, and Matthew Robinson and his finance team for their work on the financial statements. He also thanked those who worked for the Group structure, namely the Business and Oversight Board, the SRA Board and the Management Board.

No member wished to speak on the resolution.

It was resolved on a show of hands that the Accounts, signed by the Auditors, be approved.

### **Any other business**

No member had anything to raise.

### **Valedictory address by the President**

The President began his valedictory address by referring to the privilege of having served the Society as its president for 2016/17. His presidency had begun shortly after the referendum on leaving the European Union and had seen three Lord Chancellors. These momentous events had not shaken his belief that the profession was a great one which shared the fundamental values of serving the public interest and the rule of law. The central theme of his presidency had been pride in the profession, which, he said, should be much more confident in what it did and in the public interest value of what it did. Criticism levelled at the profession had been rebutted vigorously by members of a profession that was vigorous, dynamic and world class. That included questioning the value of the reforms proposed to the SRA handbook and to the education process. It was telling that the Competition and Markets Authority had commented that most members of the public were unaware of the difference between regulated and unregulated activities. If problems are caused by the trend for legal services to be provided from unregulated environments, then post hoc guidance would not solve the issue.

The President commended the work of the Human Rights Committee in supporting lawyers working in endangered conditions, notably Turkey. He also emphasised the related theme of access to justice. The government had suggested that the profession should do more on a pro bono basis, but the President suggested that the Civil Justice Council had a responsibility to remind government of its obligations regarding access to justice.

The President expressed his concern about what he called 'executive justice', online courts that dispensed with lawyers and could leave defendants not realising that they had gained a criminal record at the end of the process. The President drew an analogy with a car finance agreement, which at least allowed the consumer a cooling off period. The government had, however, listened to some of the concerns raised by the Law Society, such as those over fee increases, legal aid, housing advice, and the time limit for domestic violence claims. The President commended the launch of the pro bono charter, to which 46 firms had already signed up. He also commended those who were tacking action to meet legal need following recent incidents in Manchester and London. He expressed his concern that claims management companies were already targeting the victims of the recent fire at Grenfell Tower in Kensington and Chelsea.

The President said that diversity and social mobility had also been important themes of his presidential year. He was proud that the diversity and inclusion charter had over 300 signatories, including 78 of the largest 100 law firms. He commended the work of the minority sections and observed that the solicitor judges pathway had just been launched, providing access to further career opportunities to members of the profession.

Finally, the President noted the current work on Brexit, in which the Society was fully engaged in protecting members' interests. It was, he said, vital that rights of practice across the EU were not adversely affected, whether for English and Welsh solicitors or for the members of the 200 foreign law firms that operated in this jurisdiction. That legal community benefited all parties and should be protected. The Law Society, the President concluded, delivered in so many ways day after day and was much stronger than the sum of its parts.

### **Vote of thanks to the President**

Edward Sparrow of the City of London Law Society addressed the meeting and paid tribute to the outgoing President. He was visibly and loudly proud to be a solicitor, and had emphasised the contribution made by solicitors on his visits to 15 countries across three continents. His presidential year had been a thoroughly good thing, encouraging solicitors to assert that they were part of the solution, not the problem.

A vote of thanks to the outgoing President was carried by acclamation.

Robert Bourns then invested Joe Egan with the President's badge of office.

### **Address by the incoming President**

Joe Egan welcomed those present and spoke of the honour he felt at being called to lead the profession. He said that his philosophy of life was to get on with things and not worry too much. He paid tribute to Robert Bourns as a modest man with very little to be modest about, given the events that had occurred over the past year. Robert's presidency would be a hard act to follow.

Joe Egan set out his priorities for the coming year. In a recent interview with *The Times* he had used the expression "keeping the ship steady". That meant running smoothly, and doing what the profession wanted it to rather than what the Society thought the profession wanted. Other priorities would be:

- promoting the profession at home and abroad, building on the good work done by local law societies;
- continuing the battle over regulation with the SRA;
- continuing the access to justice campaign, since a country where people could not exercise their rights could not truly be considered democratic; and
- promoting social mobility. No-one with the ability to do a solicitor's work, he said, should be discouraged from entering the profession.

Joe Egan concluded his speech by thanking his wife Claire for her support and by renewing his election promise to work for a bright future for the profession.

Members of the Society warmly applauded this speech. Joe Egan then invested Christina Blacklaws with the Vice-President's badge of office.

### **Address by the incoming Vice-President**

Christina Blacklaws thanked Robert Bourns and Joe Egan for their support during her year as Deputy Vice-President. She said that she saw her main tasks as being to support Joe Egan as President and to work with staff and Council to deliver for the profession and the Society. Christina Blacklaws said that her particular focus would be on diversity and inclusion, with particular reference to women in leadership in the law. Women, she said, made up over half the profession, but were not commensurately represented at the most senior levels of practice. Christina Blacklaws added that her presidential term would include the centenary of women getting vote and of being able to become solicitors. She would also be supporting the President in thought leadership work and in issues relating to technology and the law, with a particular focus on ensuring that technology was an enabler for access to justice for the vulnerable and disempowered.

Christina Blacklaws congratulated Simon Davis on his election as Deputy Vice-President and invested him with his badge of office.

Members of the Society warmly applauded this speech.

### **Address by the incoming Deputy Vice-President**

Simon Davis spoke of his pride at being a member of the profession. He said that a strong sense of service bound those present and the rest of the profession, and he would bring that to his role as an office holder. Simon noted that he was due to become president shortly after the UK left the EU. He was proud that the Law Society had promptly asked the government how it could help when the EU referendum had resulted in a vote to leave the EU. This speech was also warmly applauded.

### **Conclusion of meeting**

Robert Bourns declared the meeting closed at 16:00 and thanked members for their attendance.