



Law Society Council meeting summary: 15 September 2016

Council's September meeting was an opportunity to welcome seven new Council members, and to congratulate the Chief Executive, Catherine Dixon, on being recognised as one of London's top 1,000 influential people in the Progress poll in the *Evening Standard*. Council also discussed the ongoing work of the review of the Law Society's governance, and had an initial discussion about emerging themes for the 2017 business plan. Both of these matters will come before Council again at what promises to be a very busy meeting in October.

Promoting the profession - market and regulatory change

The Chief Executive reported on a range of activities in relation to the SRA consultations on a new Handbook and accounts rules, to which a comprehensive response is (at the time of writing) being finalised. We have been actively seeking member feedback through roundtables and roadshows, a webinar, and an online survey. The Chief Executive also updated Council on the submission by the Law Society on 28 August of our response to the Competition and Markets Authority study on the supply of legal services, including the publication of a press release setting out our position in relation to the CMA's proposals for a market solution rather than a regulatory one.

Council also heard about the legal aid deserts campaign which is particularly focusing on the extremely limited supply of legally aided housing law advice. This has achieved a high profile, including an appearance by the Chief Executive on the *Today* programme and high social media engagement. The Law Society has also been representing its members' concerns to the Legal Aid Agency in relation to the current tendering exercise for 2017 crime contracts.

Considerable stakeholder engagement activity was reported on, including building relationships with new members of the Government, the attendance by the President at the swearing-in of the new Lord Chancellor, and the making of a valedictory speech for the outgoing Master of the Rolls by our immediate past President.

Representing and supporting the profession

The Chief Executive updated Council on our continuing engagement with key decision makers on the Brexit agenda, as well as our consultations with our members in roundtables across the country, and our work to provide practical support to members. She met with the Permanent Secretaries at the Ministry of Justice and the Government Legal Service and, as well as setting out our members' views, offered the government the expertise the Law Society has in our Council and committees: this was well received and further engagement will follow. As agreed by Council in July, a Brexit Task Force is being established made up of experts in their fields from the profession. A manifesto on Brexit has been prepared for use at the forthcoming party conferences.

Council was updated on the Investigatory Powers Bill, which is now in the House of Lords. Lord Pannick QC tabled probing amendments on our behalf at Second Reading, reflecting our view of how the Bill needs amendment to give greater protection to legally privileged communications. The Law Society has prepared a draft practice note on legal professional privilege which is currently out for consultation and to be finalised in the autumn.

Council received an update on the solicitor brand campaign. This focuses on the key solicitor brand values: experts in their field; client focused; value for money; honest and honourable; approachable and accessible; and making a positive contribution to society. A wide range of materials has been prepared, targeting both businesses and the public.

Following a roundtable in July, the Law Society is continuing work to develop a pro bono charter and manual that are due to be launched in November, allowing practices to make firm commitments to support and encourage pro bono work with a clear understanding of the contribution it makes to their communities.

The President gave a brief report on the Westminster Forum debate on the legal services market in which he participated. He indicated that his contribution was well received and that there appeared to be wide acceptance of the principle that, in any reforms, solicitors needed to be recognised as professional people who can deal with matters confidentially and, in many cases, resolve disputes without going to court.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

The Chief Executive reported on the 'soft' launch of the 2016 Social Mobility Ambassadors project, with 37 applications, and 10 new ambassadors appointed. The official launch will be at the Excellence Awards. She also reported on the successful conclusion of this year's Diversity Access Scheme, with 10 new students who will have LPC bursaries, and one who will also have their training contract paid for by the Law Society.