



Law Society Council summary: 2 April 2014

The 2 April 2014 Council meeting was an opportunity to remind ourselves that the Society is the Law Society of Wales and England. The hospitality of Cardiff also gave the chance to network with a large number of the Society's stakeholders including a wide range of Welsh solicitors as well as judges, academics, and Assembly members. The Council was also addressed by the Right Honourable Mrs Justice Nicola Davies DBE, presiding judge on the Wales circuit, on the importance of recognising the increasingly distinctive nature of the law in Wales. The Revd Professor Thomas Watkin, formerly First Welsh Legislative Counsel, the legal officer principally responsible for drafting the legislative programme of the Welsh Assembly Government under powers conferred by the Government of Wales Act 2006, spoke to Council also. Council also heard a report on the work of its Wales Committee, for example in pushing for appropriate representation of solicitors with knowledge of Wales on relevant policy committees, as well as the customary reports from the Boards and an update on continuing work to improve internal controls within the Society's administration.

Also held during a break in the formal business of the Council meeting were the hustings at which the seven Council members who are standing as candidates for Deputy Vice President (DVP) this year had the chance to make short speeches and respond to questions from fellow Council members. Under the Bye-Laws of the Law Society, the DVP is elected by the Council, and the election is expected to conclude towards the end of the month when we will announce the results.

Ongoing work on legal aid proposals

The Government Response to *Transforming Legal Aid: Next Steps* was published on 27 February, accompanied by the independent reports from Otterburn Legal Consulting and KPMG which informed the Government's proposals. In line with Council's motion of 24 February we responded by reiterating our firm opposition to fee cuts, stating our serious reservations about the proposed contracting model and expressing concern about the challenging future for many of our members. In our response we recognised that the Government had listened to the concerns raised by our members and noted that it was helpful that they had made a number of changes that would mitigate to some extent the impact on our members. In addition the Society has been working to provide a package of advice to firms considering bidding for contracts as a consortium. We have also put together a toolkit for solicitors wanting to raise awareness of the impact of proposed criminal legal aid cuts and to dispel the myth that all solicitors are high earners.

More effective engagement with the profession

We have moved quickly on implementing Council's assertion, on 12 February, that the Society must work hard at becoming a truly member-focused organisation. A project manager has been appointed and staff will be seconded from across the organisation to manage the day-to-day work. To achieve our ambition, we must re-engage members, better communicate the value of membership of the Society, and, by delivering valued services and products, give all of our members reasons to recognise that being part of the Society is an essential part of being a solicitor.

Other engagement activity

Council heard about a debate on the Government's proposals for judicial review organised by the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Legal Affairs, which is co-sponsored by the Society with the Bar Council. The Relationship Management team had arranged a number of chief executive and officeholder visits at local law society events and dinners in the City, Midlands, North East, North West, South East, Yorkshire and Wales. We are organising a dinner for City members and other stakeholders on social mobility, with guest speaker Rt Hon. Alan Milburn. We have also set up and hosted a breakfast for the ten Law Society Council members who work in or represent the City.

Raising the profile of our member services

Council heard that the Law Society will be participating in the National Legal Exhibition & Conference (LegalEx) on 15 to 16 May 2014. This two-day event will include an 80-stand exhibition, eight theatres focusing on topics such as legal technology, how-to sessions, practice growth and legal updates. Our theatre will include seminars on the Conveyancing Portal and CQS and Law Society Consulting, promoting Lexcel, commercial investments and accreditations. Council also heard about the 25th anniversary of the Practice Advice Service (PAS), which had been marked with articles in the *Gazette* and on the Law Society intranet. The team plans to capitalise on the success of the anniversary and related articles to market the service over the coming year.

Diversity and Inclusion Charter annual review

Council heard of increasing participation rates in the annual review process - 239 firms participated in 2013 compared to 177 firms in 2012. The annual review is integral to the commitments firms make under the charter, and the 2013 review demonstrates that the great majority of charter signatories are maintaining momentum on the diversity and inclusion agenda, although further progress remains to be made in terms of the diversity profile of the solicitor workforce, and on training and impact assessment.