



## Law Society Council meeting summary: 21 March 2018

Council met on 21 March in Manchester, emphasising the Law Society's role in representing, promoting and supporting solicitors across the whole of England and Wales. As well as the normal business of Council, the opportunity was taken to engage with a wide range of local stakeholders from across the legal sector, including a meeting with a group of local law students. There was a well-attended evening reception on 20 March in the Manchester Art Gallery for members of the profession and other key contacts. Council then spent the day on 21 March on its business agenda. This included a substantial discussion of work which is under way to position the Law Society for the future, including transforming the Society's IT systems, making better use of the Society's property, and enabling staff to work more flexibly, all with the aim of making the Society a truly member-focused organisation.

### Changes to governance for 2018

Council passed a complete set of amendments to the General Regulations, which are in effect the Law Society's 'standing orders', consolidating all of the recent changes in the governance arrangements of the Society including the creation of the new Board and its two supporting Committees. This created what is basically a new set of General Regulations and marked an important stage in the transition. Council also received its first report from the new Board, covering matters including an update on organisational performance, the Law Society's communications, preliminary audit findings, and the Board's future agenda. The Board membership is now complete, with Lubna Shuja, one of the Council members for the Solicitors' Sole Practitioners' Group, joining the Board *ex officio* as chair of the new Membership and Operations Committee.

### Lobbying on Brexit

There was a presentation to Council on the Law Society's work on Brexit which continues to feature prominently on the agenda. Council affirmed the Society's continuing commitment to market access, now calling for a deep relationship with the single market as a guarantee of this. The Society also continues to focus on continued civil and family justice co-operation; collaboration in policing, security and criminal justice; robust and clear transitional arrangements; and the ongoing promotion of the jurisdiction of England and Wales. Continued high-profile engagement with government and with parliamentarians more widely was noted by Council, with the Law Society receiving many mentions in parliamentary committee reports. Engagement also continues with the EU and other European stakeholders.

### Presidential year plan

Council endorsed the presidential year plan for Christina Blacklaws' forthcoming year as president which is due to begin in July 2018. Among the areas of focus will be continuing to lead the 'pride in the profession' campaign, a workstream on diversity and inclusion including a programme on women in leadership in the law, and a wide range of activities to encourage access to the profession for the best candidates regardless of their social background. Work on the future of legal services will focus particularly on technological innovation as a driver of change. And there will also be a focus on championing the Law Society's programme of work on mental health, wellbeing and resilience in the workplace.

### Member communications and engagement

Council noted that a new joiners' pack is now being sent to all members on admission to the roll, including a welcome letter from the president and a copy of the Society's member handbook. Council was also pleased to learn that a refreshed digital monthly e-newsletter for over 100 local law societies and for Council members was to be launched from April 2018 including accessible and timely content focusing on key overall themes for the profession and on regional and topical spotlights. The Law Society has also continued to develop guidance, products and services for the profession on the EU General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR).

### Political engagement

Council heard of continued relationship building with the new ministerial teams, including the new Lord Chancellor David Gauke MP, and the new Justice Minister, Lucy Frazer QC MP, covering priorities on access to justice, court modernisation, personal injury reform, and the Society's early advice campaign. In January the Law Society and its campaigns were positively mentioned in Parliament on 17 occasions. The early advice campaign has so far resulted in significant parliamentary interest and a commitment by the Labour Party to reintroduce legal aid for early advice in family cases. It was noted that close collaboration continues with the Welsh Revenue Authority continues, including a joint survey on awareness of the new Land Transaction Tax.

### International engagement

In addition to the work on Brexit mentioned earlier, Council noted a seminar organised by the Society on the Day of the Endangered Lawyer, with focus on Egypt, as well as engagement with the British Italian Law Association, a delegation of students from the India Think Council, and a visit to Russia in response to ongoing discussion about the reform of the legal profession there.