



Law Society Council meeting summary: 26 October 2017

Council report

Council met for the second meeting of the new 2017-18 'season', with another full agenda.

Changes to governance for 2018

Council was updated on the progress still under way to implement the Law Society Board and its two main supporting committees (Policy and Regulation Committee, and Membership and Operations Committee) in early 2018. Council was informed that the advertisement for the role of Board Chair had closed on 15 October with a strong field of interested candidates; with final interviews planned for late November it is hoped to appoint the successful candidate at the December Council meeting. Other external recruitment is getting under way, and planning is also in hand for the election process among Council member for some places on the Board and committees. Council is also turning its mind to issues about the composition and representativeness of Council itself though proposals in those areas are still at a very early stage.

Business plan and budget

Following discussions at Council in July and September, Council in October signed off the Law Society's business plan and budget for 2017-18. The business plan recognises the difficult and unpredictable times that lie ahead, including the increasingly challenging market for many of our members, and uncertainties around Brexit and the impact of technology. It also focuses on the need for internal changes if the Law Society is to become a genuinely member-focused organisation as we aim to be. In that context, we have, as well as the one-year plan for the coming year, developed a five-year corporate plan with a clear vision and purpose, to be the voice of solicitors, driving excellence in the profession and safeguarding the rule of law. As well as the Law Society budget, the SRA budget also came to October Council, as approved by the SRA Board and the Business and Oversight Board. This, too, was signed off by Council.

Political party conferences 2017

Council heard reports of the extensive activity undertaken by the Society to engage with key political stakeholders during the party conference season. The Society hosted a number of events on Brexit and access to justice, sharing platforms with leading figures including the Lord Chancellor, the Justice Minister, and the Solicitor General as well as a number of shadow spokespeople. This provided a platform for the Justice Ministerial team to make important announcements on justice and Brexit. In setting out his priorities at our event held at the Conservative Party conference, the Lord Chancellor emphasises continued market access and civil justice co-operation post-Brexit, together with the ongoing programme of criminal justice and court and tribunal reform. We had supportive interventions from opposition parties also, including praise for our legal aid deserts campaign from the Shadow Lord Chancellor.

International engagement

Council noted a wide range of events as part of the Society's ongoing programme of international engagement. This included a round-table discussion on legal regulation followed by a formal dinner for bar leaders and guests from the CIS region attending the Opening of the Legal Year, to strengthen our relationships and explore areas for future collaboration. The Society also finalised the Kazakh judicial training programme, organised a panel discussion on doing legal business with China that was attended by English, Welsh and Chinese lawyers, and signed a memorandum of understanding with the Law Society of Hong Kong. At the Opening of the Legal Year we also signed memoranda of understanding with Iran and Kyrgyzstan.

Support to the profession

Following extensive lobbying by the Law Society and others, HMCTS announced that the flexible operating hours pilot would be put on hold until February 2018 to allow further engagement with court users and to carry out another tender exercise to choose an independent evaluator. The Society also responded to the SRA's consultation on its draft corporate strategy, making points that included the need to demonstrate a clear case for change before introducing regulatory changes and the importance of focusing not only a speed but also quality of decision making. Council noted that the Society had published guidance for the profession on the new 2017 Money Laundering Regulations and on compliance with Part 3 of the Criminal Finances Act 2017, as well a note prepared jointly with HM Land Registry on property registration fraud.