

Update from Law Society Council Meeting on 25 March 2015 – Lubna Shuja

I attended the Law Society Council meeting on 25 March 2015 in my capacity as Council Member representing sole practitioners, along with Ian Lithman. I attach below a summary of the issues raised and key decisions made by the Council during that meeting. If you would like any further information, or wish to discuss any matters affecting sole practitioners, which you would like me to raise at future Council Meetings please do not hesitate to contact me on info@legalswan.com or on 0121 551 7866.

The Law Society Strategy

Council members had the opportunity to contribute towards the development of the Law Society's strategy and to hear about plans for further work and consultation. The six key work streams under consideration are:

- Defining members' interests across the profession
- The future of legal services
- The solicitor brand
- Education and professional standards
- The regulatory position
- External relationships and influencing.

There will be a comprehensive programme of engagement with the profession at large over the course of the coming months, including informal meetings and discussions throughout England and Wales, engagement with local law societies, and the use of the Gazette, the website, and a range of social media. If you have any thoughts or ideas on how the Law Society can better promote, support and represent you as a sole practitioner, please contact me with your views. This will help to inform the development of options which will be put before Council in October 2015.

How the Law Society is Currently Representing, Promoting and Serving the Profession

Significant work reported to Council included:

- The issue of a pre-action protocol letter to the MoJ, by a coalition of eight legal representative bodies including the Law Society, challenging the increase in court fees
- The initiation of a Business and Human Rights project to provide members with guidance to deal with this important emerging area of law, including the production of a practice note and practical toolkits to assist members
- The Society's participation in the recent Global Law Summit and the use that had been made of that opportunity to highlight concerns over the rule of law and access to justice
- The Society's campaign to retain the Human Rights Act as the best way to protect human rights and the rule of law, and use of the Society's new UN special consultative status for the first time to raise concerns over human rights violations against lawyers in Turkey
- The Society's responses to several consultations on regulatory issues, in which it highlighted the consequences of unnecessary regulation costs for firms and the need for closer monitoring of the performance of the front-line regulators
- A number of activities promoting diversity in the legal profession, including hosting the Stonewall Lecture in February, and the Society's Diversity Access Scheme which now offers two training contracts
- Developments in relation to Veyo, including the fact that the joint venture company responsible for its development had now announced its pricing strategy: £20 per transaction, and £50 for an annual user licence. Significant numbers of expressions of interest and some firm orders had been received, with a 'soft launch' now expected in the late Spring.

Criminal Legal Aid Tendering

The Court of Appeal dismissed the appeal by the Society, the CLSA and the LCCSA against the decision not to allow judicial review of the Ministry of Justice's plans for criminal legal aid tendering. The Society continues to support and update members in light of this.

President's Update

Andrew Caplen updated Council on his recent activities as President following the last Council meeting, under the three key themes of his presidential plan:

- Access to Justice - he met the recently appointed Shadow Attorney General, Lord Bach, to discuss Labour plans for legal aid if elected, as well as the current Attorney General with whom he discussed the Law Society's Manifesto for Justice, court fees, and the impact of possible changes to consumer credit regulation
- Rule of Law - including continually promoting the importance of access to justice and the principle that without access to justice there can be no rule of law. Planning continues for commemorating the 800th anniversary of Magna Carta in June.
- Diversity and Inclusion - including speaking at the Leaders in Law lecture at Birmingham University regarding the importance of diversity and inclusion within the legal profession, and opening a seminar to mark International Women's Day that discussed key issues regarding the progress of women in the legal profession.

Hustings for Deputy Vice President of the Law Society

Five Council Members had put themselves forward as candidates for the next Law Society Deputy Vice President - Sundeep Bhatia, Christina Blacklaws, Joe Egan, Joy Merriam and Tim O'Sullivan. They all made presentations to Council and answered questions on key issues. The results of the election will be announced on 22 April 2015.

Lubna Shuja
Law Society Council Member
March 2015