**Report from Law Society Council Member – Lubna Shuja**

**Update from Law Society Council Meeting on 28 October 2015**

I attended the Law Society Council meeting on 28 October 2015 in my capacity as Council Member representing sole practitioners. I attach below a summary of the key issues raised and decisions made by the Council during that meeting. If you would like any further information, or wish to discuss any issues affecting sole practitioners, or you would like me to raise any matters with the Law Society, please do not hesitate to contact me on [info@legalswan.com](mailto:info@legalswan.com) or on 0121 551 7866.

**Strategy Development and Budgets**

**Following discussions in Council in September, work continued to refine the Law Society's strategy, three-year plan, and one-year business plan. Council formally signed off these documents in October, and the strategy and three-year plan was publicly launched in November. The Law Society’s strategic aims are:**

* **To represent solicitors by speaking out for justice and on legal issues**
* **To promote the value of using a solicitor at home and abroad**
* **To support solicitors to develop their expertise and their businesses, irrespective of whether they work for themselves, in-house or for a law firm.**

**These aims are supported by the Law Society’s shared vision for the profession, and commitment to spending members' money effectively and efficiently. The Council also confirmed that a review will be undertaken to establish whether the Society's governance is fit for the purpose of delivering the agreed strategy. The Council also approved the budgets for the Law Society, the Solicitors' Regulation Authority, and the shared services provided by Corporate Solutions. This confirmed the decision in July that solicitors' practising certificate fees are unchanged from last year.**

**President’s Update**

**The President, Jonathan Smithers, presented an update on his first 100 days in office, mentioning meetings with members across the country as well as welcoming international delegates for the Opening of the Legal Year. He has been proactively using social media, including his Twitter channel and three monthly video updates, to improve communication and stakeholder engagement. In September, he launched the Law Society's business and human rights engagement programme in London and Cardiff, as well as addressing the issue in his keynote speeches at the Opening of the Legal Year and the International Association of Young Lawyers. He has also used public platforms to promote the value of the legal services market to the wider economy, and to support the Society's wider campaign to raise the profile of *pro bono* work undertaken by solicitors. The party conference season was a chance to engage with decision makers on a range of topics, notably access to justice.**

**Criminal Legal Aid**

**Council heard about the very substantial continuing concerns over the tender process, and over the impact on significant numbers of the profession. In addition to raising these concerns at the highest political levels, support measures are being made available for criminal practitioners who have been unsuccessful in securing a contract.**

**Criminal Advocacy Consultation**

**It was also noted that the government's consultation on criminal advocacy raises a number of questions, including whether there should be a statutory ban on referral fees, and, critically, whether the instruction of in-house advocates by solicitors constitutes a conflict of interest. The Law Society is in active discussion with the Ministry of Justice, and has also contacted local law societies asking them and their members to respond direct to the consultation.**

**Court Fees and Court Closures**

**Council heard about the Society's robust responses to the government's proposals for further increases in court and tribunal fees, and to the introduction of the criminal court fee charge. The Law Society has also made a substantial submission on court closures, informed by over 800 member responses and with a special focus on helping members campaign against closures in their own areas.**

**Consumer Credit Regulation**

**Council was pleased to hear that the SRA has announced that it will continue to be a designated professional body for regulating consumer credit activity, thus accepting the Law Society's strong representations, and avoiding the need for dual regulation on the part of many firms.**

**Veyo**

Council was informed that the Law Society is continuing to work with Legal Practice Technologies on Veyo so that it can ensure that the product has the right level of functionality and usability before it is launched. The Law Society will not launch the product until satisfied, as the product must meet members’ expectations and serve them well.

**Lubna Shuja**

**SPG Law Society Council Member**

**November 2015**