



ASSOCIATION OF COUNCIL SECRETARIES AND SOLICITORS

ANNUAL REPORTS

Presented to the AGM on Thursday 9 November 2006
Belton Woods, Grantham

Contents

President's Annual Report
Annual Reports of the Executive Officer and Policy and Development Officer
Annual Report of the Treasurer
Annual Reports of the Lead Officers
Annual Reports of the Branch Secretaries

PRESIDENT'S ANNUAL REPORT

9TH NOVEMBER 2006

I have much pleasure in presenting my annual report at the end of an interesting, enjoyable and sometimes exhausting Presidential year. When I took up office it was with the intention that the main emphasis during my year of office would be on shared learning. To this end a revised version of the Parish Council Toolkit was produced and launched at the Monitoring Officers' Conference in February of 2006 and I have produced an Independent Members' Recruitment Pack which was disseminated at the Standards Board Annual Assembly in October. Charlie Adan, together with colleagues both inside and outside the Association has begun putting together the framework of a Member Development Toolkit and we have introduced a regular bulletin, which I hope you have found useful and informative. The web site has been re-designed and re-launched and, hopefully, you will now find it more accessible, informative and user friendly.

Progress on business planning and a review of the appropriate legal structure for the Association has not moved forward as quickly as I had envisaged but the debate is now firmly under way and, it is hoped, will come to fruition in the next twelve months. Moreover, the Association's activity is steadily assuming a more businesslike and structured focus and the contribution of the Association to local government is increasingly recognised. It is encouraging to see so many ACSes members proactively contributing to conferences and events.

During my term of office I have received tremendous support from Tony Kilner our Policy and Development Officer, who has accompanied me to many meetings and greatly assisted me in contributing to discussion and debate. Ian Locke our Executive

Officer has also been there throughout my Presidential year to provide help and support.

On the financial front we entered into arrangements with Nottinghamshire County Council to assist in administering our financial affairs at the beginning of my term of office last November. There were some initial teething problems but everything is now working efficiently and smoothly with Mark Hynes continuing to oversee our finances on behalf of the Association. I would thank him for his hard work and particularly for his prompt approval of my expenses claims!

Member Defence and Support

Sadly there have been a small but significant number of members who have found themselves in difficulty during my term of office and I am happy to say that we have been able to provide them with help and support through out Member Defence Scheme.

Relationships with Key Stakeholders

During my term of office I have tried, as a priority, to consolidate our relationships with other key stakeholders. I am particularly pleased that we have developed a much more collaborative working relationship with CIPFA, resulting in a joint governance event to be held on 27th November in London to include SOLACE, the IDEA and the Standards Board. Tony Kilner, Mirza Ahmad and I also participated in the

CIPFA/SOLACE Working Group on Good Governance and were grateful to those organisations for extending an invitation to us to participate.

Another key success has been in developing a much closer relationship with the Society of Local Council Clerks, culminating in the signing of a Protocol on Joint Working at the SLCC Conference in Plymouth on 20th October where I also presented two workshop sessions on ethics and standards. Together with colleagues I have continued to attend regular liaison meetings with the Standards Board and have participated in an External Stakeholders' Practitioners Group to look at the implications of the code review. I would particularly like to thank Mirza Ahmad for his sterling work on keeping members up to date on developments through his Ethical Governance Debriefs.

Together with the Vice-President and the Policy and Development Officer we have developed an ongoing dialogue with DCLG, which has proved helpful and informative.

Tony Kilner and I have also attended a preliminary meeting with the LGA with a view to us assisting them, through a small e-mail group comprising ACSes members, in shaping thinking on the White Paper "Strong and Prosperous Communities". I hope this will lead to further areas of joint working in the future. We have also continued our close working relationship with the LGIU. I have also worked closely with the Local Government Training Unit, arranging a successful Monitoring Officers' Conference on 2nd February 2006 and being in the advanced stages of

planning a similar event in February of next year. I have also organised a Shared Services Conference, which will take place on Friday 1st December.

I am grateful to Meic Sullivan Gould for moving forward the qualifications issue for Monitoring Officers and those involved in local governance. The welcome the “Academy” idea has received by members and private sector colleagues will provide a platform for developing arrangements over the next year.

Conference, Functions and Events

I was privileged to attend the IIMC Conference in Anaheim, California, from 13th to 18th May and the VGS Conference in Tiel the Netherlands on 28th and 29th September. Full conference reports of both of those events have been placed on the ACSes web site.

I was invited to speak at both a plenary and workshop sessions at the Standards Board Annual Assembly in October and the Association was invited to host a fringe event. I am grateful to Mirza Ahmed for organising this event and to Tony Kilner and Ian Marshall for contributing to it..

I held my President’s Lunch on 20th January and was delighted that so many representatives of organisations with whom we have a close working relationship accepted the invitation to attend.

I was privileged to attend a range of functions on behalf of the Association:-

8 th December 2005	Society of County Treasurers' Dinner
11 th January 2006	County Surveyor's Annual Dinner
15 th February	SOLACE Dinner
23 rd February	CIPFA Dinner
2 nd March Dinner	Association of County Chief Executives' Annual Dinner
13 th March category	LGC Awards – where I was a judge in the legal category
17 th March	Annual Dinner of Solicitors in Local Government at the Local Government Weekend School, Warwick University
7 th June	SOCITM Dinner
27 th June	MJC Awards – where I was a judge in the legal achievement category

Meic Sullivan-Gould attended the SOLAR Conference on 16th and 17th March on my behalf.

Conference Planning

I have spent a considerable amount of time planning the programme and events for the Annual Conference. I would like to pay particular thanks to Charlie Adan who has been invaluable to me in helping put together the conference programme, has organised the golf event and has made the arrangements for the “Race Nite”. Together we have put together what I hope you will consider to be an excellent conference programme, with an impressive range of speakers and what I hope will prove to be an enjoyable social programme. Thanks also to Graeme Wade who assisted me considerably with the partners’ programme which regrettably we had to cancel due to lack of interest. The theme of this year’s conference is “securing a position of influence”. As local government lawyers and administrators we are at the corporate heart of our councils. We must seize the opportunity to make a real difference and to shape the future agenda for local governance and local government.

2006 ANNUAL REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE OFFICER

This is my second Annual Report as Executive Officer. It has been a very busy year. There have been a number of major projects/changes. It is the first full year I have been working in tandem with Tony Kilner. Apart from the benefits to Members and the Council in helping keep all up to date with the latest pronouncements/ consultations Tony has been very helpful to me in general and in particular in relation to the new Website and organisation of the Conference and AGM and I thank him for that. I have also had excellent support and encouragement throughout the year from this year's President Kirsty Cole who has been very easy to work with. I thank her as well.

The major elements of my work this year were:

- **The development of the new ACSeS website.** This is now live. There is more to do when time permits to get the full benefits of the site but a good deal has been achieved. With hindsight it might have been better not to try and develop and launch the site at the same time as the other 2 main elements of my work were at their busiest – collecting subscriptions and organising the Conference. However we are now through the worst and further progress will be made after the Conference.
- **Membership Subscriptions.** There are currently 505 names on the membership database and I am continuing to collect annual subscriptions. There are several applications going through at the moment. I have been working with Branch Secretaries to clean up the Membership database by removing those names who are no longer Members but where we had not been informed of the change. Thanks are due to LGG who efficiently sent out the initial subscription letters and reminders for me.
- **The Conference.** By the time this report is officially received the Conference will be near its close. As ever the administration of Conferences is a learning experience and so much depends on getting the detail right. I hope that statement will not be a hostage to fortune. In terms of interest in attending both as a delegate and as a sponsor there has been a very healthy increase. The gross income has increased by about 20% overall. Of course there will be increased costs as well but the figures demonstrate the importance the Annual Conference has to Members and to colleagues outside local authorities.
- **Consideration of the Future Format of the Association and Business Planning.** These issues include the legal status of the Association and whether it should be incorporated in some form. Also relevant is the relationship with LGG Ltd and its co owner SLG. Again, work on this will be continuing after the Conference. On the Officer side Tony Kilner has been leading on these areas and will no doubt comment more fully in his report. I would add however that while these issues are being discussed I do wish to investigate how we can use the resources of LGG to assist in carrying out some of the administration of the Association. We have got some way with this particularly in relation to the website but pressure of the other work has prevented as much progress as I would have liked. I am committed to reporting to Council in the Spring 2007 on these matters.

- **Contact with Members.** The ongoing contact with members throughout the year has been very rewarding. The number of emails/telephone calls asking for information or just where to find something is considerable. This is not a problem. It is one of the reasons Members join. Making sure the website contains the information Members seek and in a form they can easily find is one of the challenges of the coming year.

I thank Members and Colleagues for their continued help and support and look forward to the coming year and the challenges ahead.

26/10/2006

Ian Locke
Executive Officer

ANNUAL REPORT OF THE POLICY AND DEVELOPMENT OFFICER

It seems that both local government and ACSeS are on the threshold of major change and it has been a stimulating year contributing towards the development of both.

Strategy and Action Plan

A positive start has been made to the business planning process for the Association with the approval by Council for the structure of a strategy and action plan for the future. Whilst the formal strategy is still in the course of drafting, much of the contents of the business plan are in progress.

Preliminary legal advice has been obtained which should inform the direction of incorporation of the Association, which has become a necessity in order to limit the potential liability of the Association's members.

Under the theme of improved communications, the new website opens up the Association to a wider interested audience and improves the availability of resource material for members. The weekly bulletin emailed to all members provides an effective communication link and a regular summary of information for members. Contact has been improved with several key organisations within the local government family. The forthcoming workshop in November with CIPFA and SOLACE on the relationship between the three statutory officers in local government is perhaps a first in terms of the three Associations working collectively. It seems logical that the local government associations and professional bodies should seek to work together towards the public good, having regard to the fact that their income is mainly from the public purse.

Under the theme of contribution, the Association is moving forward in several ways in developing its relationships with the public bodies with which it has a stakeholder interest. Involvement in the preparation of the recent questionnaire of the SBE, and the positive response by members to it, will provide a valuable picture of standards

committees and the perceptions of monitoring Officers and standard committee members that will inform the work of both the SBE and the Association in the next year. Responses to consultations and an increasing number of liaison meetings with Departments and agencies provide ample evidence of the extent of the contribution being made by the Association.

In terms of member development work is well under way with the production of a career development toolkit and a positive start has been made towards formulating new qualifications to reflect the advances made in the field of local governance.

Branch meetings

It has been a pleasure to attend branch meetings of the five northerly branches and I have found this to be an excellent means of letting members know what is happening within ACSes and obtaining views and feedback on common issues. Notwithstanding a nine hour round trip to the centre of Wales, it was impressive to see Welsh members tackle issues at their branch meeting with great enthusiasm that featured a different slant to English law.

Representative role

In addition to contributing to meetings with Departments and agencies, I have represented ACSes on the Public Awareness & Communications Subgroup which was one of the bodies established by the DCA comprising interested parties intended to inform a cross-departmental initiative aimed at tackling the perception of a 'compensation culture'. This perhaps unique arrangement has led to a variety of collectively supported initiatives in the field of risk management, claim management and public awareness.

I have also represented ACSes on the CIPFA Better Governance Forum Advisory Panel. This Panel consists of members coming from all sides of governance, providing a useful network and exchange of ideas, as well as informing the training programme for IPF members.

I am very grateful for the support given to me by the President, Kirsty Cole and Council members in my first year of office as Policy and Development Officer for the Association. Already next year looks a busy year with the White Paper to assimilate and a major Local Government Bill going through Parliament that will substantially affect both the ethical and corporate governance of local authorities. I look forward to working with the Association's members to meet the challenges ahead.

Tony Kilner
Policy and Development Officer

REPORT OF THE TREASURER

ASSOCIATION OF COUNCIL SECRETARIES & SOLICITORS INCOME & EXPENDITURE ACCOUNT Y/E 31 MARCH 2006

	<u>£</u>	<u>£</u>
INCOME		
Subscriptions	74,497.25	
Conference Surplus	17,614.84	
Interest	<u>2,438.28</u>	
		94,550.37
Total Income		<u>94,550.37</u>
EXPENDITURE		
Employee Expenses:		
Salaries	41,935.01	
Other Employee Costs	<u>1,404.53</u>	
		43,339.54
Other Expenses:		
Management & Development	7,706.25	
President's expenses	4,351.11	
Insurance	994.71	
Depreciation	1,996.55	
Other Expenditure	<u>35,466.03</u>	
		50,514.65
Total Expenditure		<u>93,854.19</u>
Net Surplus/(Deficit) for Financial Year		<u>696.18</u>

Mark Hynes
Treasurer

ANNUAL REPORTS OF THE LEAD OFFICERS

Charlie Adan Member Support and Development Portfolio

During the last year the main focus on my activity has been in two areas:

- Shared Services – Legal Services
- Personal Development Toolkit

Shared Services

In January 2006, I presented a paper to Council. The paper outlined the issues facing local government legal services in the future and advocated a strategic approach to future planning and delivery of legal services led by ACSeS nationally. The paper was intended to provide a basis for a wider debate within the ACSeS membership.

The paper outlined some ideas about creating a national strategy delivered through joint working across the sector; locally, regionally and nationally and re-engaging our private sector partners more effectively. The paper also suggested that ACSeS could collect and disseminate information about best practice in the field of shared services.

Council discussed the paper and agreed that work should begin to develop a best practice database and that the proposed personal development toolkit should aim to address some of the recruitment, retention and succession planning issues highlighted in the paper. However, Council did not believe that it would be possible for ACSeS to lead the development of any national strategy for the provision of local government legal services.

The paper has now been sent to all branches and all members should have access to it. I have recently been visiting branches to seek feedback from colleagues. Whilst most people recognise the challenges outlined in the paper, there is a general view that a national or regional strategy for shared legal services is a step too far. Most prefer the local approach and there is a lot of activity already underway to join up services in a number of localities.

Since January some work has begun to collate data about shared services initiatives and I have been keeping up to date with developments in a number of areas of the country through informal networks with colleagues. However, the landscape is changing so fast that it is proving difficult to keep abreast of developments. It has yet not been possible to develop a formal database accessible by members but work is continuing to explore this proposal.

The most notable development in this area in the past year has been the establishment of several joint procurement arrangements, with EM Law Share being the first. It is reported that these arrangements are providing real tangible benefits to the partners, both public and private sector and the “soft” benefits built into the partnership arrangements are valuable.

There are also several formal joint working/shared services initiatives being developed across the Country.

I attended two conferences run by the private training provider ARK early in the year at which I made a presentation on the shared services issues. Other colleagues from ACSeS were also presenting at those events. The events were run jointly with colleagues from the government legal service and a lot of helpful information was shared and disseminated.

A joint ACSeS/LGG Training Shared Services Conference is taking place in London on 1st December at which I will be chairing an open debate on the issues facing us now.

The challenge has now been laid down in the recent White Paper. The 2007 Comprehensive Spending Review is set to provide further challenges in terms of efficiency gains. The government sees cross sectoral and inter authority working as key to achieving its efficiency goals as well as meeting some of the broader aims in the White Paper.

The “shared services” challenges are set to continue for some time.

Personal Development Toolkit

Work is underway to develop the toolkit. However, before producing any materials or designing the format and content of the toolkit, a steering group has been formed made up of interested volunteers (more welcome!) which has discussed the purpose of the toolkit, the issues that it should address, the competencies that are likely to be needed within our services in the future and how the toolkit can help develop those competencies. The group also highlighted the need to attract new young people into our service and considered whether the toolkit could also help in this area.

The emerging proposal is to create a toolkit that provides a personal development framework for colleagues from entry into local government legal and democratic services, in whatever way, through the various career choices that might arise, to exit from the service, in whatever way. It is envisaged that the toolkit will provide guidance, explain some personal development tools and techniques and will act as a signpost to the plethora of training and development opportunities that exist already.

The Conference workshop should provide feedback from ACSeS members on the proposed format and content of the toolkit and it will then be time to start work in earnest on its production.

I would like to thank all colleagues who have contributed to this work so far and invite any other interested ACSeS members to volunteer their future support. The production of the toolkit will require a lot of effort and the more people that contribute the less burdensome the task is likely to be.

Other activities

We have obtained advice from Queens Counsel on the Law Society Practising Certificate (PC) requirements. That advice is available to ACSeS members. It confirms our understanding of the position and clarifies the law regarding the distinction between government legal service Solicitors treatment and the arrangements for those of us in local government.

The cost of PCs for local government legal services sector is substantial. The ongoing drive for ever greater efficiencies mean that we must try and make savings on this head of expenditure. However, ACSeS members are not supportive of any move to avoid the provision of PCs; this is an integral part of the employment package which is highly valued. Any attempt to not provide PCs is likely to exacerbate recruitment and retention issues.

However, our QC’s advice recommends a dialogue with the Law Society who have a discretion to reduce fees. This advice is being followed up.

Another avenue is to lobby government for a change in the law to bring local government lawyers in line with those in the government legal service.

I have enjoyed the last year and am very grateful to many colleagues in ACSeS and beyond for their help and support. Although, I am handing over the portfolio to Maria Memoli at this meeting, I will continue to take an interest in the shared services agenda, will remain part of the Development Toolkit project team and offer Maria and ACSeS my continued support in whatever way I can.

Charlie Adan

Mirza Ahmad Ethical Governance

As per last year, I am delighted to confirm that this Portfolio has seen great activity during the year and I have had great satisfaction and pleasure in representing the best interests of ACSeS.

Ethical Governance Debriefs

8 Debriefs were issued, along with some other “general information” e-mails (which were not strictly Ethical Governance matters but which I felt would be still of interest to leading members). The Debriefs now appear on the ACSeS website and on MONOSUG so that the whole of ACSeS membership has access to this information.

The Debriefs have included information on the following subjects:-

- Code of Conduct for Employees etc. Consultation Papers and White Paper developments;
- CPA and Corporate Assessment;
- Debriefs from regular meetings between ACSeS and the Standards Board for England;
- Graham Committee’s Annual Report and 2nd Attitudes Survey;
- CIPFA / SOLACE Corporate Governance Framework using the OPM’s Model of Good Governance;
- Review of the Code of Conduct for Members and liaison with the Standards Board for England;
- BMG / SBE / ACSeS research into “Monitoring Officers and the Standards Committees”;
- Audit Commission developments regarding Ethical Governance questionnaires;
- Annual Monitoring Officer Conference on Governance held in London on 2 February 2006;
- Schedule 12A LGA 1972 Revisions; and
- SBE Annual Assembly 2006.

The Future:

The future for this Portfolio (and local government) looks most promising! Further legislative details are likely to emerge with regard to a “comprehensive package” of change for local government – which may include:-

- the Government's proposed changes to the Code of Conduct for Members (and hopefully, Officers!);
- local filtering and greater powers for Monitoring Officers;
- generally, ensuring that all members are kept informed of emerging issues; and
- a merging of "ethical" and "corporate" Governance.

I look forward, therefore, to serving the Association, and its membership, as a Vice-President and Lead Officer on Ethical & Corporate Governance Issues during the remainder of 2006 and into 2007.

Mirza Ahmad
 (Birmingham City Council)
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Andrew Frosdick

Freedom of Information

The last twelve months has seen a consolidation of the practical implementation of the 2000 Act. This has been reflected in the engagement of ACSeS on the issue in consultation with other stakeholders.

Some useful principles of interest to ACSeS members have started to emerge from the developing case law through appeals to the Information Commissioner;

- The use of the section 36 exemption – which must be exercised by the Monitoring Officer – has been accepted when dealing with a major investigation into allegations of child abuse. This is an important precedent for disclosure requests in respect of future major investigations.
- The principle of respecting legal professional privilege will not be readily disregarded although it is a matter for consideration in each case as to what is in the public interest
- The request for financial information about remuneration of senior officers is likely to be viewed as reasonable in the public interest but the arguments for disclosure will be less compelling in the case of the majority of employees. (However the public interest is likely to require disclosure of information contained in registers of interests for employees.)
- The price of disposal of publicly owned land is likely to be viewed as a matter of public interest after the transaction has been completed

The Association is represented on a national Working Group established by the Department for Communities and Local Government. The Group includes regional local authority FOI representatives, and also representatives from a range of other stakeholders such as the IDEA and the Office of the Information Commissioner. Civil servants from the DCLG, DCA and DEFRA with FOI responsibility are in attendance

and the Group therefore provides a valuable forum to debate the practical implications of the implementation of the new legislation.

The Group has examined the findings of an IDEA survey which suggest that whilst local authorities have responded positively and in most cases to the spirit as well as the letter of the legislation this has not been without some operational impact; in particular with the smaller authorities. The cost generally to local government and other public bodies of dealing with the legislation remains a concern. Members will recognise the trends that have emerged from the survey in terms of two areas where it is felt that the legislation is being used inappropriately. These are organisations requesting information for essentially marketing or other commercial purposes, where there is no obvious public interest behind the request, and also journalists and researchers making very broad requests; to assist more in collating research material rather than with reference to a more specific public interest issue. ACSeS has continued to express the view that there should be some initial public interest justification for any request which the relevant Authority would need to consider as a way of addressing these problems.

The Constitutional Affairs Select Committee has taken further evidence on the impact of the legislation and the concerns arising from the IDEA survey were presented to the Committee. The report of the Committee is awaited as is any firmer indication from the Government following some general statements in the press by the Lord Chancellor as to possible revisions to the legislation including the fees regime.

The Government has now postponed the date for the approval of revised Publication Schemes for two years to 2008 to allow more time to develop design criteria for revised Schemes which will make them more accessible to the public. The Government has also announced that it is seeking to improve public understanding of the Data Protection Act which it is concerned may be used wrongly as an excuse for more general administrative failings. It is to embark on a “DPA Simplification Project “ and there will be further discussion within the Working Group on both of these issues giving ACSeS the opportunity to continue to influence the agenda and ventilate the concerns of its members.

Andrew Frosdick
(Barnsley)
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Philip McCourt

Local Government Powers

I took this portfolio over from Graeme Creer earlier this year upon his move across the divide to Weightmans, so I must thank him for the work he has put into this area and all the other areas he has contributed to on ACSeS Council.

As Graeme reported last year, he was able to hand on a job largely done in many of the areas of ongoing concern to members within this portfolio. The conference on well being powers in June '06 was cancelled for lack of interest, for example, and we

await further the outcome of the shouts from central government that these ‘powers of first resort’ are being under-used.

The real matter of concern is the wait to see what the White Paper brings when the debate settles and it’s turned into a Bill.

In the meantime, I have tried to run with the following.

- Continuing enquiries with DCLG and others on the necessity to update the model constitution.
- Liaising alongside others with IDeA, and through them to the other relevant organisations, on a proposed toolkit on partnership working and governance to guide authorities and their Members
- Making contact with colleagues in Northern Ireland to learn from their experiences on forthcoming reorganisation and to share information generally
- Help in responding to the Cornerstone report and clear up their and others’ myths about the workings of local government law and good governance. This has run alongside developing training materials and presentation for authorities’ members on “how to make a lawful decision”.

Philip McCourt

(Milton Keynes)

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Stuart Turnock

Local Government Bills (Including Gambling and Licensing)

Whilst the Portfolio is called ‘Local Government Bills’, what that is taken to mean is proposed legislation affecting local government and that is a formidable list indeed. The ebrief which Leeds City Council produces each month attempts to monitor the progress of all relevant legislation which is no easy task. The general approach of modern central government is to see legislation as the answer to all ills and to believe that once there is a law in place the problem will disappear. The reality is that often it just adds to the confusion and is as likely to create problems as resolve them.

Over the past 12 months there has been much focus on the new Gambling Act and we have continued to regularly be represented at the LACORS Policy Forum meetings. LACORS are an extremely hard working organisation who fight the corner of local government extremely well and their Website is extremely informative. Much of their work on the gambling legislation looks at the detail of the regulatory regime and for a non-specialist licensing lawyer can be difficult to keep up with. My approach

generally has been to consult with specialist colleagues here at Leeds to formulate a response as that is the most effective way of providing feedback to LACORS and then on to government. Gill Marshall who heads up our Regulatory and Enforcement Section has been an invaluable aide to me and has received much deserved praise from LACORS.

Whilst I believe that I have been fairly successful in tracking legislation and doing my best to keep members up to date with its progress and effect, I would have to say that I have probably been less effective at the earlier stages of legislation, apart from gambling, and in collating views to influence the content of the proposals. Happily Tony Kilner has been doing some splendid work in that area and I am very grateful to him. We now have a White Paper which presents us with a fresh challenge which hopefully we shall rise to.

Stuart Turnock
(Leeds)
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ANNUAL REPORTS OF THE BRANCHES 2005/06

EASTERN BRANCH

After taking on her role early due to Joy Postings moving on to pastures new, Barbara Morris has had a successful year and a bit as the Chairman of the Eastern Branch. Barbara has found the full Council meetings to be of particular interest and value, especially the networking and feedback from colleagues from local authorities around the country.

The Eastern Branch held four meetings during the year- at Ipswich in December with Alison Donald giving a presentation on the Suffolk shared services initiative 'Doing Business Better'. Alison is to speak at the Annual conference and I am sure that delegates will find her presentation useful in considering the future direction of legal services provision.

February 2006 saw the branch hold a joint meeting with regional members of SLG at the offices of Mid Beds District Council in Ampthill. Mathew Pink led a workshop on the new Licensing Act and provided a large audience with much food for thought. The May meeting took place in Chelmsford when Dudley Lewis spoke about the work of the LGG/ACSeS unit in providing training. Dudley made a number of points relating to the use of innovative methods of arranging for training such as part of branch or inter-branch meetings with themed subjects.

Our final meeting took place at Peterborough in July. This was somewhat disappointing as a speaker on the implications of the new age discrimination legislation for local authorities had been arranged but then had to be cancelled as the number of attendees was small. Instead Tony Kilner attended and informed members of the current and proposed ACSeS policies and initiatives.

All the meetings were interesting and attendance at them had been variable with an average of 14 members. The Joint meeting with SLG had seen a much better attendance and it has been decided that more meetings will be opened up to SLG in the future.

Membership of the Branch has remained stable during the year, although it has been encouraging to see a few more new members in recent weeks. Jonathon Reed has been elected as Branch Chairman for the coming year and will be supported by Sue Lyons of Mid Beds who is the new Vice-Chairman. Eric Whitfield continues as Branch Treasurer and I am to continue as Secretary.

Chris Hall
(Suffolk CC)
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EAST MIDLANDS BRANCH

The branch AGM was held on 7th October 2005 at the offices of Derbyshire Dales District Council where members heard and entertaining and instructive presentation on the new licensing regime from James Button of James Button & Co Solicitors. The following branch officers were appointed:-

Chairman	Peter Nicholls (Leicester City Council)
Vice Chairman	Anne Brown (Lincoln City Council)
Secretary	Jonathan Goolden (Past Service)
Treasurer	Graeme Wade (Past Service)
Council representative	Paul Cox (Rushcliffe Borough Council)

The following meetings were held during the year:-

3rd February 2006 – Lincoln City Council – speaker Barry Warne of hlw solicitors in Sheffield on employment law

2nd June 2006 – East Northamptonshire District Council – speaker Richard Clayton QC on recent developments in local government law

7th June 2006 – West Lindsey District Council – speaker Peter Mckay of Eversheds Solicitors on corporate manslaughter

The branch also held a very successful joint training seminar at the Law Society East Midlands Office with the regional branch of Solicitors in Local Government on the local government code of conduct and other topical issues with Peter Keith Lucas of Bevan Brittan and Jonathan Goolden of Jonathan Goolden Solicitors

The branch has considered many issues over the year, but the following come especially to mind:-

- Shared services
- Licensing
- Standards (a standing item!)

Average attendance at branch meetings was down a little at 13 compared to last year's 17, with the total branch membership remaining at 68.

After a number of years, both Graeme Wade as Treasurer and I as Secretary are finally handing over to former SLG regional chair Simon Aley of Corby Borough Council as the new Secretary and Treasurer.

Jonathan Goolden
Jonathan@Goolden.co.uk

NORTH EAST BRANCH

The past year has seen an improvement in attendance at Branch meetings since the last AGM, although attendance of 10-12 is still disappointing, bearing in mind that the total Branch membership stands at 63. Once again the Branch has seen a wide range of topics discussed, including the Gershon efficiency agenda and collaborative

working, the ethical governance framework, and the continuing tale of local land charges, the OFT report and PSCs.

Of particular note were the presentations given by Nick Dobson (of Pinsent Masons, Leeds) and his colleague Rosemary Jay, at the March meeting. Nick provided us with a thorough and timely update of public law matters generally, and governance and audit matters in particular, while Rosemary gave an excellent summary of the law as it relates to the re-use of public sector information – an issue which it was clear was new to a significant proportion of the audience!

Although without the benefit of guest speakers in December (Calderdale) and June (Gateshead), both meetings saw interesting discussion and debate on local and national issues, in which the contributions of Tony Kilner (formerly of Bradford City Council, now Policy & Development Officer for ACSeS) were particularly insightful. I hope the Branch will continue to benefit from Tony's attendance at meetings in the coming year.

Also of note was the adoption of a new logo for ACSeS (the design favoured by the North Eastern Branch) at the AGM in November, and now used by the Branch on all agendas, minutes and correspondence. More recently, ACSeS has launched a new website: easier to navigate, and with a modern and professional look, it is hoped Branch members will make more use of the website as it continues to improve.

The Branch's new members to join this year were: Ms Ashley Rocks-Menon (Derwentside District Council) and Moira Beighton (North Yorkshire County Council).

The Branch enjoyed excellent hospitality from those authorities and partner-firms providing venues for our meetings, namely: Tynedale, Calderdale, Pinsent Masons and Gateshead. My thanks go to the Branch members and their colleagues who have assisted in making those arrangements.

The Branch has also benefited from the very able chairmanship of Peter Kearsley, during his last year as Solicitor to Darlington Borough Council before his recent retirement; while Branch funds continue to have been in the safe hands of Honorary Branch Treasurer, Garry Pointer (Solicitor to Tynedale Council) who has ensured they continue at a very healthy level.

I would like to thank colleagues in Gateshead (namely Gillian Warnes, Ian Burns, and Anne Jennings) for the excellent support they have provided to me and to the Branch over the year.

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NORTH WEST BRANCH

Another year of change for the Branch with a number of members moving on or transferring to a life of leisure. In particular we will miss the contributions of Peter Wilson, now West Midlands Branch, and Paul Stonehouse, retired. However, the Branch membership stays at a healthy level and attendance at Branch meetings remains good.

In December 2005, we were hosted by Michelle Chard at Manchester and Michael Mousdale of Eversheds advised on changes in procurement and their effect on PFI. March 2006 saw us at Preston, courtesy of Lorraine Norris, with a presentation from the then comparatively new Local Government Ombudsman, Anne Seex, previously a Director at Lancaster City Council! An interesting discussion took place on the emerging role of the Ombudsman and changes in the approach being adopted in investigations.

June saw us at Skelmersdale Business Park, arranged by Gill Rowe, West Lancashire. Graeme Creer, now at Weightmans, gave us a presentation on Partnerships from the local government perspective. During the meeting we had Tony Kilner, ACSeS Policy & Development Officer present and he generated much discussion on the changes taking place within the Association. Finally our AGM was held at the recently renovated Castle Park, Frodsham for the installation of the 'home' member as Chairman, Fiona Crane, Vale Royal. Our training session saw a joint presentation by David Prince and Paul Hoey of the Standards Board for England, updating us on actual and anticipated changes to the Board's role, the Code and investigations. We received the not surprising news that one of our principal councils was at the top of the complaints table but it did come as a shock that one of our parishes held a similar position in the town and parish councils' list. Not a welcome double!

We thank Mark Lewis for chairing meetings and representing the Branch at Council and, as I said last year, look forward to the improved website as I am sure that more use of it will be made by the Branch.

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SOUTHERN BRANCH

The branch has had a very interesting year that has culminated in 18 of its member authorities forming a consortium to let a call-off contract for legal services to a panel of 9 firms of solicitors.

The whole process really started in September 2005 when Julian Morley, the Director of the South West Regional Centre of Excellence attended the branch meeting to explain more about their role in relation to procurement. This led to Marianne Abley from the IDeA attending the next branch meeting in December to facilitate discussions on areas that could benefit from collaborative working. The three areas

identified were a call-off contract for legal services, a consortium approach to an electronic library and more co-ordinated training.

An extra meeting was held in January 2006 that was attended by the Director of the South East Regional Centre of Excellence (the branch has a part in each of the RECE areas) who offered assistance with regard to both the call-off contract and the electronic library consortium. In the event this assistance was not forthcoming.

A small working party based in Dorset and Wiltshire decided to carry on with the call-off contract and invited all other councils in the branch area to join with them. In the event 18 came together and from some 80 plus firms expressing an interest in tendering a panel of 9 was chosen. The firms range from one that covers all the work areas tendered to one or two that are niche firms covering only a few areas.

The high point of the process was a coming together of representatives of all the councils involved with personnel from the panel firms in Devizes at the start of September that was attended by Fiona Woolf, the President of the Law Society.

The progress of the contract was reported on at each branch meeting so all members were kept up to date.

In addition to this we have also had talks on various other subjects.

In March, Helen Randal and Malcolm Iley from Trowers and Hamlin gave a well received and thought provoking talk about governance issues in relation to local authority 'partnerships'.

In June we had a talk on Home Information Packs and their relevance to local authorities, especially in relation to local land charges searches.

Attendances through the year were generally good and the Branch is in good spirits.

Susan Tovey
Chairman

SOUTH EAST BRANCH

Marie Kelly-Stone of Dartford was elected as Branch Chair in September 2005. Other officers for the year were:- John Heys, Branch Secretary, Trevor Elliott, Treasurer and Duncan Milne, Auditor. Mark Bowen was elected as Vice-Chair, but had to stand down part way through the year as he moved on to Bromley and out of the South East Branch. Ian Davison was appointed as Mark's replacement. Our ACSeS Council representatives and nominated substitutes were Marie, Mark, John, Trevor, Andrew Pearson and Mark Reynard.

There have been 4 meetings between September 2005 & August 2006. The main speakers and the attendance at these meetings were:-

- 23 September 2005 at Dartford with Barrister Jonathan Clay of 2-3 Gray's Inn on affordable housing, 14 attending;
- 16 December 2005 at Hove (Brighton & Hove) with Melanie Carter and Tina George of DMH Stallard on standards sanctions, and Dudley Lewis of LGG on LGG, 16 attending;
- 23 March 2006 at Horsham with Richard Cooke of Hammonds on modern trends in public procurement of construction and engineering projects, 16 attending;
- 23 June 2006 at Kingston upon Thames (Surrey) with John Heys on the amended Accounts and Audit Regulations, 9 attending.

We had excellent speakers in every case (the Chair has kindly endorsed this comment as I was one of them!) and the presentations were followed by the usual exchange of information sessions. Licensing Act issues were big at the start of the year, but have tailed off somewhat, a reflection on how well local government has absorbed this new work. However, ethical standards problems have remained a constant source of lively debate.

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SOUTH WESTERN BRANCH

The Branch continues to provide opportunities for members to meet and network at some of the most attractive locations in South West England.

This year branch meetings have been held at:

Taunton Deane Borough Council, Taunton in February 2006,
The National Lobster Hatchery, Padstow in June 2006 and
The Roman Baths, Bath in November 2006.

Guest speakers have included Ian Locke, ACSes Executive Officer and Dudley Lewis from the LGG Training Unit.

Attendance at branch meetings is often influenced by the location of the meeting and the travelling distances for members – a previous meeting in Bath was badly affected by an accident, which closed the M5.

Despite the difficulties in members attending branch meetings, more local county based meetings flourish. Information is also regularly circulated to members by e-mail.

Future plans include a joint training event with SLG, being run by the LGG Training Unit in Taunton during February 2007.

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WELSH BRANCH

The branch has once again had an active and successful year. Despite the distances in Wales with some members having journeys of over 3 hours to our meetings, we have had a 75% attendance of local authorities at our meetings and good attendance from national parks, fire and police authorities too.

As local government law of Wales becomes increasingly different from the law in England, a lot of our time in the branch is spent trying to influence the Welsh Assembly Government policy agenda and responding to Welsh consultation papers and draft secondary legislation. We have examined Welsh proposals for indemnities, protection of monitoring officers, changes to the Ombudsman's jurisdiction, access to information and functions regulations and made comments.

We have continued to put pressure on the Assembly to revise the members' code of conduct. We are fortunate to have excellent relationships with the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales who combines the role of the Local Government Ombudsman and Standards Board for England in one position. We worked closely with the Ombudsman during the Assembly's consultation on the draft revised code of conduct for members and responded with similar proposals which we had agreed.

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WEST MIDLANDS BRANCH

The last twelve months has been a fruitful and productive year for the West Midlands Branch. We have had four meetings – September 2005 held at Lichfield Borough Council, December 2005 held at Birmingham City Council, March 2006 held at Birmingham City Council and June 2006 held at Tamworth Borough Council. The meeting during December 2005 held at Birmingham City Council had a trilogy of presentations. Dr Jose Kelly from Aston Business School shared her reflections on "Policy Disasters" and the role of Local Government Officers in assisting government and local government in making better policy decisions, Peter Keith-Lucas gave an update on Standards Issues. In March the President Gifty Edila attended and Sarah Clover addressed the Branch on the Licencing Act 2003) and the meeting in June in Tamworth focused on the Planning Gains Supplement following a presentation by Eleanor Dedy, Partner at Cobbetts Solicitors.

The forthcoming year for the Branch looks to be equally as stimulating and exciting.

Attendance at Branch meetings has improved during the year. A combination of a more focused approach to the topics being discussed and ensuring that meetings are held mostly in the centre of the West Midlands. Ongoing persistence by the Branch Secretary encouraging Branch members to attend may also have helped!

Currently Branch membership is at 54.

The future of the Branch looks positive and productive and the ongoing commitment of all Branch members is valued. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the current Secretary Philip Lloyd-Williams for all his efforts in organising Branch meetings.

Ian Marshall
Chairman – West Midlands Branch
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REPORTS OF REPRESENTATIVES ON OUTSIDE BODIES

Commissioning Joint Committee

In the course of 2005/2006, the CJC has worked towards publishing a new version of its Standing Guide to the Commissioning of Local Authority Work and Services.

The most recent revisions to the Standing Guide reflect major developments such as Public Contracts Regulations 2006, which emerged from Directive 2004/18/EC of 31st March 2004.

Other revisions of the Standing Guide cover tender evaluation, Freedom of Information, the delegation of health care, social care and children's services, housing companies and partnerships, tenants' management organisations and co-operatives, and TUPE.

New material is included on Use of the Third Sector, Use of Small Businesses, the Social Issues in Commissioning, Community Interest Companies and Limited Liability Partnerships.

The CJC's website can be accessed at

<http://www.cipfa.org.uk/pt/cjc/index.cfm>"

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