

ACSeS Council
Meeting 19 January 2007
Report of Policy and Development Officer

Strategy and Business Plan

At the meeting of Council on 14 July, I was asked to prepare a first draft of a Strategy and Business Plan for the Association in line with the discussion document before the meeting and points made at the meeting.

The following draft has been circulated to members of the Business Plan Group and amendments made as a consequence. It will be appreciated that most of the Business Plan aims are already being undertaken as part of the current year's activities.

The purpose of the Strategy is to provide a clear focus for the Association towards achieving the Association's objectives. The Business Plan identifies the shorter term targets to enable this. The Strategy and Business plan is intended to be reviewed on an annual basis, so that it becomes a rolling strategy enabling the Association to become strategy led in its activities.

It is recommended that the draft Strategy and Business Plan be circulated to members for consultation and discussion at branch meetings, with a view to its further consideration and adoption at the next meeting of Council.

In relation to the proposed incorporation of the Association, preliminary advice has been obtained by the Business Plan Group and the next stage is to formally instruct solicitors to draft Memorandum and Articles for company formation. It is recommended that Council authorise the appointment of Pinsent Mason for this purpose.

Recommended that

1. The draft Strategy and Business Plan be circulated to members for consultation and discussion at Branch meetings with a view to further consideration and adoption at the next Council meeting.
2. Pinsent Mason be appointed to assist with incorporation of the Association and the Treasurer be authorised to incur costs not exceeding £5000.

Tony Kilner
Policy and Development Officer
January 2007

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Association of Council Secretaries and Solicitors

STRATEGY 2007 - 12

AND

BUSINESS PLAN 2007-08

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Draft 1

2 Jan 07

Tony Kilner

Policy and Development Officer

About ACSeS

The Association of Council Secretaries and Solicitors was formed in 1996 arising from the merger of the Association of District Secretaries and the Society of County Secretaries.

The Association is

A membership body whose members include chief officers and deputies of principal local authorities in England and Wales responsible for managing legal and administrative functions. Most members are the statutory Monitoring Officers or deputies for their authorities.

A professional body providing training and networking to ensure the highest standards and skills are developed and maintained by its members.

A stakeholder in local government working with Government Departments, agencies and local government organisations for improvement and best practice development.

A stakeholder in the legal profession striving to maintain and improve professional standards in local government legal practice and to ensure the availability of qualified and trained legal resources.

Membership is open to local government officers heading up governance, legal services, democratic services, administrative, scrutiny and standards functions, including monitoring officers and their deputies. Members are drawn from County, District and Unitary Councils, Police and Fire and Civil Defence Authorities and National Park and other joint committees.

The Association has limited central support (an Executive Officer and a Policy and Development Officer) and operates primarily through its elected Council Officers at national level and ten branches at regional level.

Forward
(President)

Introduction

The purpose of this document is to focus on the vision and priorities of the Association and identify longer term objectives and the means of achieving them. ACSeS is one of a number of professional associations whose members are committed to serving local government and the public service. At a time of rapid change and development it is essential that the Association organises its activities in an efficient and effective way in order to meet the needs of its members and to enable the optimum contribution and influence to be made. This strategy and business plan provides a framework for identifying the direction and work of the Association over the next five years. As a working document, it requires reviewing and updating on at

least an annual basis in order to keep up to speed with the changing face of local government.

This document is constructed in the following way.

Part 1 contains a discussion of the broad challenges facing the Association and the opportunities that emerge from these challenges.

Part 2 draws themes from Part 1 that provide a structure for the Association's strategy and proposes the broad strategy for each theme, with more specific listed components of each.

Part 3 contains a Business Plan for the current year 2007-8 listing specific aims under each theme.

Subsequent revisions of the document will contain a Part 4 which will measure performance against aims.

Challenges and Opportunities

The Change environment

Global issues such as climate change and sustainability are beginning to have a major impact on the provision of public services. Pressures on the fabric of society inevitably have an impact on service priorities. The rapid development of new technology is creating new dimensions for public service provision. All these change drivers have an impact on the structure and governance arrangements of local authorities creating precious little time for deliberative experimentation. The speed of change inevitably enhances the element of risk and the potential for mishap. The need for sound counsel and efficient corporate governance has perhaps never been greater. Maintaining a focus on the bigger picture has become essential in order to respond to this need.

Structure and resources of the Association

The role and significance of members of the Association in their employed capacities in local government is not reflected by the structure and resources of the Association. It is only in recent years that the Association has employed its own staff and sought to develop its influence at national level. The practical experience of members across a variety of local authorities can provide a valuable network of support and learning for all members as well as providing a valuable consultative contribution and influence to Governmental and agency proposals for change

Services to members

The provision of support and networking by members for members has been a major strength of the Association enabling learning and development from practical experience. The development of the Association's annual conference, together with other training events and its training partnership with SLG, coupled with the recent improvement of the website and other member communications, has contributed to this strength and quality. There are opportunities for maximising the knowledge and skills of members for the overall benefit of local government. The Association needs to make the most of new technology in furthering its own development, particularly in managing its information base and communication arrangements.

Governance as a science

The development of governance arrangements as a means of improving the quality of decision making, and in particular the emphasis on ethical governance, has provided greater focus on this area of activity for the Association's membership, but at the risk of clouding the wider picture of corporate governance skills and leadership essential for further career progression for members. The emphasis given to good governance varies from authority to authority and adequate skill and resource provision remains a challenge.

Our Strategy

An analysis of the challenges and opportunities identifies five key themes that encompass the wide spread of internal and external activity of the Association. These are;

1. Skills, knowledge and expertise of members
2. Role of the Association
3. Influence of the Association
4. Communication between the Association and its members and relevant external parties
5. Organisation of the Association

In order to provide structure, the threads of strategy have been developed under these themes.

1 Skills, knowledge and expertise

Broad strategy

The efficient and effective development of the skills, knowledge and expertise of the Association's members for the benefit of members and local government generally.

Components

1. To develop and maintain an overview of the education training and development of members.
2. To develop and maintain an overview of the qualification, training and development needs of persons involved, and interested in becoming involved, in providing legal and governance services in local government.
3. To develop a framework that will provide members with clear career path opportunities within local government.
4. To ensure the availability of training options for members covering all relevant aspects of local government legal services and governance.
5. To develop and maintain the facilities in local government legal and governance services that provide attractive career opportunities to new entrants and career development opportunities for existing participants.

2 Role of the Association

Broad strategy

Maintaining a focus on the role of the Association in order to ensure the Association meets worthwhile needs, and to review and develop the role to reflect changing needs and the changing environment.

Components

1. To ensure that a periodic review and discussion is undertaken of the objects of the Association, with regard to the changing environment.
2. To ensure that the activity of the Association reflects those objectives.
3. To review periodically the membership of the Association to ensure the optimum opportunity for membership for persons with a common interest in the Association's objectives.

3 Influence of the Association

Broad strategy

Improving the influence of the Association as a key stakeholder in local governance.

Components

1. Identifying other stakeholders and the common interests shared with them.
2. Developing a relationship with other stakeholders in order to better contribute to the development of local government.
3. Working collectively with other stakeholders towards agreed objectives in furtherance of the development of local government.
4. Contributing constructively and authoritatively to Government Department and public Agency consultations where relevant to the skills and interests of members.
5. Contributing, in particular, to ethical standards issues by providing a practical and experienced contribution to consultation by, and discussion with, the Standards Board for England, the Adjudication Panel for England and the Audit Commission.
6. Encouraging members to speak and contribute to conferences, training and workshop events.

4 Communication between the Association and its members and relevant external parties

Broad strategy

To develop the communication arrangements between the Association and its members and Government Departments, agencies and other stakeholders.

Components

1. Maintain and keep up to date an effective website providing information and interactive forum facilities for members and information about the Association and communication points for external viewers.
2. Provide a regular means of communication with all members to provide information and encourage feedback.
3. Maintain readily available points of contact for members and external parties to ensure the Association is able to provide an immediate response.
4. Maintain points of contact with other relevant bodies to facilitate immediate communication.

5 Organisation of the Association

Broad strategy

The improvement and development of the organisation of the Association in order to meet its changing needs and objectives and to maximise its efficient and effective operation.

Components

1. The development of the constitution of the Association to more effectively meet current needs and objects and anticipated needs.
2. Maximising the opportunities for membership to optimise inclusiveness of members having an interest in the Association's objects.
3. The improvement of the governance arrangements of the Association to meet best practice requirements.
4. Develop a strategy for the Association and a programme for its operation and review that enables the development of a strategy led approach to direct the Association's activities.
5. Developing the Association's relationship with SLG.

Business Plan 2007-08

The following aims are intended as practical targets for the year and reflect immediate priorities in achieving the broad strategy and components of each key theme of the Strategy.

Skills, knowledge and expertise of members

1. Review the current position and need for further qualifications for the role of Monitoring Officer and other persons providing legal, democratic and governance services, and, if required, develop arrangements for the commissioning of further qualifications.
2. Negotiate with SLG and LGG a statement of objectives for LGG and the adoption by LGG of a strategy and plan that reflects those objectives.

3. Produce a career development toolkit for members and prospective members of the Association.
4. Develop arrangements for providing support for members experiencing difficulties, and ensure members are aware of the arrangements.
5. Ensure the Annual Conference of the Association is focused on priority issues for members in order to maximise the training and development aspect of the conference.

Role of the Association

1. Review the broad objects of the Association and formulate revised objects that meet the perceived role and vision for the Association.
2. Formulate more detailed objectives that reflect the changing environment in which the Association is operating.
3. To review the membership base of the Association.
4. To encourage maximum take up of membership of the Association.
5. To review the activity of branches and encourage activity that supports the Association and its objects.

Influence of the Association

1. Develop a constructive working relationship with SOLACE and CIPFA at national level, having regard to the statutory roles of Head of Paid Service, Chief Finance Officer and Monitoring Officer that the respective associations represent, with a view to encouraging an effective working relationship at local level as the officer custodians of good public governance.
2. Improve the working relationships at both national and branch and district level with NALC, SLCC and the County Associations of Local Councils.
3. Establish arrangements to provide an authoritative contribution to the revision of the Members' Code of Conduct and its adoption by all local authorities.
4. Establish arrangements to provide, jointly with other stakeholders, an authoritative contribution to the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Bill and to develop arrangements for its effective introduction.
5. Establish and develop liaison arrangements with The Standards Board for England, the Adjudication Panel for England and relevant Government Departments and Agencies that enable an effective means of communication and improves the involvement of the Association in discussion, consultation and debate on local government matters.
6. Develop liaison arrangements with the LGA, LGIU and other relevant bodies that enable improved involvement in local government matters.

Communication between the Association and its members and relevant external parties

1. Explore and evaluate options for developing a closer relationship with SLG.
2. Complete the commissioning of the website and review its operation in order to secure optimum impact and effectiveness.
3. Encourage use of the forum facility for discussion and feedback.
4. Maintain the bulletin and ensure its distribution to all members, and review the value of its content and format.
5. Develop clear contact arrangements for both members and external parties, and ensure the availability of an immediate response to members, external parties and the media.
6. Maintain contact arrangements with other relevant bodies.

Organisation of the Association

1. To formulate proposals for the incorporation of the Association and to consult all members with a view to implementing as soon as practicable.
2. To review and consult members on the objects of the Association.
3. To review the membership criteria of the Association.
4. To review the governance arrangements of the Association.
