

## SHEFFIELD & DISTRICT LAW SOCIETY



### REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE FOR THE YEAR 2008-2009

The Society has continued its efforts to provide an increasing range of high quality services of benefit to all members of the local profession. The year as a whole has been a challenging but successful year and builds on the progress made in recent years in raising the profile of the Society and reinvigorating its activities. The support given by the local profession to all the events organised has been encouraging and bodes well for the future. The Officers and Committee have again been active in the role of representing and promoting the profession in the city and region and have ensured that active links have been maintained with other local organisations and professional groups. The year has been very busy with a large number of activities taking place, particularly involving those working in the public and employed sector, the establishment of the Next Generation Group and strengthening of the relationships with Sheffield University and Sheffield Hallam University.

#### MEMBERSHIP

The membership of the Society currently stands at 440. A full list of the Society membership as at 1 April 2009 is attached to this report.

#### FINANCES

The Profit and Loss Account for 2008 shows a pre-tax loss of £9395. Once tax has been deducted, there is a loss for the financial year of £13793. The main reason for the financial loss in 2008 is because the shop at 7 Campo Lane has been empty for the majority of the financial year which has meant that the rental income for the Society is considerably lower than initially expected.

The priority, as in previous years, is to generate additional income from courses to fund ongoing refurbishment and major repairs to the building.

#### THE PRESIDENT'S YEAR

The President has represented the society throughout the year at many events. A small sample of these include :-

- The Society's Annual Dinner;
- The Cutler's Feast;
- The Legal Service;
- Sheffield Hallam University Conferment Dinner;
- University of Sheffield LPC Graduation;
- The Sheffield Hallam University Graduation Ceremony
- The Edward Bramley Law Lecture
- The opening of the Legal Year in Westminster Abbey.

The President has also been pleased to support the social committee at quiz nights, the treasure hunt and the Charity Golf Day at Lindrick Golf Club.

The President has also worked closely with Leeds, Barnsley and Doncaster Law Societies and worked very closely with the High Sheriff, including attending the High Sheriff's Awards and support to the South Yorkshire Community Foundation.

We have provided considerable support to two charities this year, the President's chosen charity, The Spirit of Sheffield Children's Trust and also raised over £1,000 (contributing to a total of £12,000) for "Lost Chord", a charity which supports those suffering from dementia. The President had great fun with the Master Cutler, the High Sheriff, the Chief Fire Officer and the Assistant Chief Constable when she was "arrested" and taken to Judge Murphy's Court. All the old lags were released on payment of bail.

The Law Society is very lucky to have the support and hard work of Committee Members, our Office Manager (Katherine Powell) and Support Staff (Brenda and Gwen). We are also supported enthusiastically by Fiona Tatton our Regional Law Society manager and Andrew Tucker who sits as our Regional Representative on the Law Society Council.

## **THE WORK OF THE OFFICERS AND SUB-COMMITTEES**

The Officers and Sub-Committees of the Society have been active on many fronts, including matters relating to the profession generally as well as issues of local concern. The Society has been represented at meetings of a variety of local bodies and committees. The Vice President and Deputy Vice President have attended various events and meetings with the President and have deputised for him on occasions.

### **Contentious Business Committee**

This year the committee have continued to attend the various court user meetings. The agenda has been circulated to all local practitioners in order for the committee to raise various queries and concerns members have with at the various meetings. The minutes of these meetings have been sent by email to all members keeping them up to date with all news.

*Holly Dobson (Chair)*

### **Dinner Committee**

The annual Dinner on the 1st February was a huge success with over 300 people attending. The Society was honoured by the attendance of many distinguished guests, members of the judiciary and other professional groups with whom we have a very good working relationship.

The evening at the Cutlers Hall began with a champagne reception, followed by a lovely meal and later in the evening a disco took place in the Old Banqueting Hall.

The speeches made by Linda Lee, Deputy Vice President of The Law Society, Sir Robert Kerslake and the society's own President were very well received by all. The speeches were not only interesting and entertaining but also left plenty of time for those attending to enjoy the evening as a social event which seemed to be enjoyed by all.

Thanks to the generosity of all who attended and the great raffle prizes that we hope people enjoyed, the evening raised in excess of £1400 for the President's chosen charity, The Spirit of Sheffield Children's Trust. The huge success of the event is due to the support and generosity of guests, members and Sponsors and our thanks go out to all.

*Sally Rissbrook (Chair)*

## **Library Committee**

The number of people using the law library in 2008 has reduced slightly compared to 2007. The number of people requesting case law and precedents from Lexis Nexis has also reduced slightly.

The Library Committee has looked at ways of reducing the overall library budget. As a result, part of the Lexis Nexis subscription has been cancelled. The Encyclopaedia of Forms and Precedents is still available online and the Society also has access to case law and legislation on Westlaw. It is anticipated that even with the reduction to the online subscription the library will still be able to meet the requirements of our members.

In addition to the reduction to the online service, a number of looseleaf subscriptions have been cancelled. The subscriptions that have been cancelled are books that haven't been borrowed from the library in the previous 12 months. There the Society's budget for the library has been heavily reduced and now stands at approximately £13,500. This revised budget is approximately 60% less than the previous year's library budget of £33,000.

*Nick Tudor (Chair)*

## **Next Generation Group**

Following acceptance of the new constitution at the EGM on 23 July 2008, and resulting mandate from the committee to establish a new group to represent young legal professionals at the Sheffield Law Society, 'Next Generation' (NG) was created.

Terms of Reference were submitted and the remit of the group is, in simple terms, to act as an Umbrella group creating unified (South Yorkshire) representation for Students, Solicitors, Legal Executives, Barristers, and Paralegals. The group acknowledges that each of these bodies is likely to have at least one representative group of its own right, and does not seek to interfere with any one group, rather to work collaboratively to provide opportunities for combined projects for the benefit of the local profession generally.

Capitalising on the skills and experience of all aspects of the South Yorkshire legal profession, the Next Generation Group therefore strives to:

- Support the growth of a strong Sheffield and South Yorkshire based legal network, from Students to qualified professionals, making South Yorkshire the first choice for all legal work;
- Unite all strands of the local legal profession in winning and retaining all elements of legal work in South Yorkshire;
- Recruit and keep the best Sheffield graduates into the South Yorkshire legal system – and encourage them to stay in the city;
- Build closer and long lasting bonds with businesses, again encouraging work to stay in the city, and contributing to the growth of their own firms;

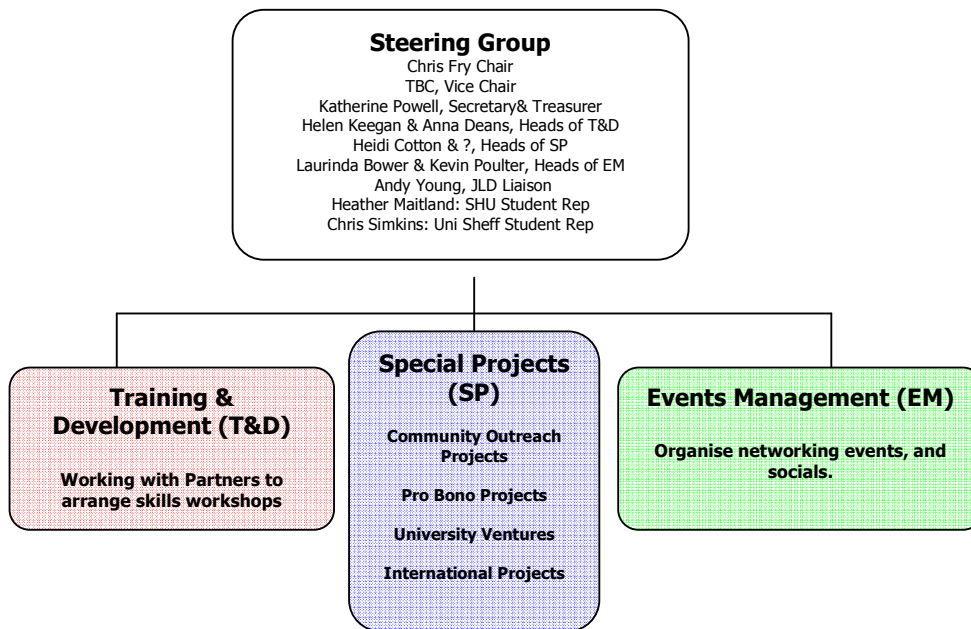
I have had the honour of Chairing the group through its founding months, and have been responsible for attracting interest in NG, and building a team to help achieve these objectives. The team originally consisted of the following valued, hardworking and talented individuals:

1. Katherine Powell;
2. Fiona Tatton (Regional Manager, Law Society);
3. Helen Keegan (MD of NQ UK, sponsor of Next Generation);
4. Heidi Cotton (Barrister at Bank House Chambers);

5. Laurinda Bower (Barrister at Paradise Chambers);
6. Peter Wright (Nabarro);
7. Kevin Poulter (Wake Smith & Tofields);
8. Chris Simkins (Student Representative, University of Sheffield, Legal Practice Course);
9. Heather Maitland (Student Representative, Sheffield Hallam University Law Society);
10. Lauren Fulcher (Trainee Solicitor, HLW, and JLD Liaison);

The group is therefore broadly representative of the young professionals that we are seeking to support.

Owing to the natural transition of Student Representatives, and JLD Liaison who hold only annual positions on behalf of their respective groups, and also in order to develop the group further, incorporating other lawyers who wished to become involved whilst maintaining a viable committee structure we have now voted to create the following structure, as follows:



**Steering Group:**

The Steering group will meet on the second Tuesday of each month, to receive reports and proposals from each of the other groups, and to concentrate on furthering our stated objectives. The Chair of the Steering Group is responsible for preparing a monthly report to the Law Society Exec, monitoring expenditure, and representing the Group at Law Society functions as required. The Chair is to be elected each year from the Steering Group, and holds a seat on the Sheffield Law Society Executive Committee. The position runs in time with the academic year and I propose to stand down in August 2009 to enable a new Chair to be in place as the face of the group for the beginning of the lectures to students in Welcome weeks. There are presently two candidates for Chair – Peter Wright & Kevin Poulter. An election is to take place at next month’s Steering Group meeting.

**Training & Development:**

This group has flexibility to co-opt people as required for the purpose of identifying appropriate and relevant skills workshops and training, to include mentoring. It can meet at times to suit. The aim is to provide a calendar of events which meet this objective. A monthly proposal and report will be submitted to the Steering group to ensure progress. Anna Deans (now Hallam Univeristy), and Helen Keegan head this group.

**Special Projects:**

The structure of this group is the same as above, as are the reporting requirements. It's scope is by far the widest, and groups are likely to be project specific. The group is headed by Heidi Cotton and we understand that a representative from the University of Sheffield will assist. Projects under review at present include a tender to bring the European Young Bar Association Conference to Sheffield and for Next Generation to facilitate an event at that. Also Pro Bono events are being investigated, as are the production of draft membership packs for Universities.

**Events Management:**

The structure and reporting requirements remain the same as the other Special Interest Groups. The ambitions of this group are to look at hosting events to build profile, increase membership and promote contacts with business. The group also aims to liaise with and support Sheffield JLD, and Law Society events.

**Calendar of Events to Date**

Civic Launch

Date: 19 January 2009

Venue: Town Hall, Sheffield

Time: 6:00pm

Members Launch Party

Date: 26 February 2009

Venue: Bia Hoi, Sheffield

Time: 5:30pm

Dress for Success', by TM Lewin

Date: 8 April 2009

Venue: Law Society Hall, Sheffield

Time: 5:30pm

**Future Events:**

'Advocacy for Young Lawyers' by Holly Dobson, Wake Smith & Tofields

Date: 21 April 2009

Venue: Law Society Hall, Sheffield

Time: 4:00pm

'NQ Survival Guide', by Helen Keegan, NQUK & Peter Wright, Nabarro LLP

Date: 23 April 2009

Venue: Bar 360, West One, Sheffield

Time: 6:00pm

'Commercial Skills for Young Lawyers' by Chris Fry, Wake Smith & Tofields

Date: 6 May 2009

Venue: Law Society Hall, Sheffield

Time: 6:00pm

'Make Friends with the Media' by John Highfield, Highfield PR

Date: 9 June 2009

Venue: Law Society Hall, Sheffield

Time: 6:00pm

**Profile:**

NG has its own page as part of the Sheffield Law Society web site, and also has a Facebook site which is administrated by the Steering Group members. Katherine Powell co-ordinates press releases. We have also met with Fiona Firth, Editor of the Sheffield Star's Business Monthly publication and she has sent along photographers to some of our events so far.

At each of the events we have collected contact addresses for members and Katherine Powell continues to build a database for regular mailings.

**Costs:**

Our aim is to make all of our events entirely self funded by sponsorship, and that has so far been successful. Katherine Powell keeps a separate set of accounts, and I understand there to be a small surplus.

Notable expenditure has been the purchase of a 'Next Generation' stand for events, which is also to remain on display in Law Society hall when not in use for events generally.

In our first year we have concentrated on building our profile, and establishing our group as valuable to students and young professionals. We are still learning from the events that we have run so far, in terms of timing and relevance primarily.

We have attracted a couple of Student membership subscriptions to the Sheffield Law Society, but have not really mounted a campaign. We are hoping to have a full calendar of events and workshops available for the beginning of September, which will be free to members but which will have a nominal charge for non-members.

We are also looking into the possibility of the Universities paying the Student subscription on behalf of its students.

The formation of this group has involved a lot of hard work and support from most of the Exec, and the Steering Group in particular and we have now consolidated that and are planning further development.

Thank you for your support over the year.

*Chris Fry (Chair)*

**Premises Sub-Committee**

Due to the financial pressures the Society is facing during the current climate, no major refurbishment projects have been undertaken in 2008. The Society has however been able to make some improvements to update the building in relation to DDA compliance. Work undertaken includes improving the signage to the exterior of the property, fixing the matting in the entrance hall and improving the door entrance in general.

*Donald Coutts-Wood (Chair)*

**Probate Sub-Committee**

Due to economic changes affecting everyone in 2009, greater emphasis has been placed on the short, informal training sessions to be held over lunchtimes, rather than the formal training sessions given by well known speakers. We hope that this will provide good coverage of the issues affecting our area of law and plenty of CPD points at very low cost to firms. By continuing our programme of informal training sessions we also hope to increase the profile of the Sheffield Law Society and encourage support from lawyers in the city and the surrounding area.

We hope to arrange an informal session every month lasting one hour each. There is a small charge for the informal sessions which will be reduced for Law Society members. We have already had three successful and well attended talks by Lynne Bradey from Wrigleys, Simon Chalk at Mortgage Portfolio Services and Geoff King from Shepherd Independent Financial Advisers. Our next talk will be on the Administration of Trusts by Neil MacGillivray from Santander.

*Kate Maybury (Chair)*

## **Property Group**

At the beginning of the year the group wrote to Sheffield City Council regarding the historic issue of the Council's fee for executing a deed of covenant on the transfer of a freehold title originally held by Sheffield City Council.

The approach was encouraged and supported by the President. The group is waiting to hear from Leigh Kent (head of residential property at SCC) with a detailed response following consultation.

Leigh Kent will be joining the property focus group this year. This connection is hoped to improve communication between private practices and Sheffield City Council.

Member firms and individual solicitors are invited to put forward Council related property issues direct to Leigh Kent at Sheffield City Council and to send a copy of the enquiry to Katherine Powell, manager of SDLS at the Law Society Hall, Campo Lane.

Members are also invited to attend property focus group meetings in person. Please contact Julia Watkinson, Wrigleys Solicitors LLP (0114) 267 5588 [julia.watkinson@wrigleys.co.uk](mailto:julia.watkinson@wrigleys.co.uk) ahead of meetings (see below).

During the year the group reviewed the costs for further developing the SDLS website to incorporate the following:

1. Public access section - providing general guidance on procedural aspects of property transactions
2. Paid up members/corporate members section - providing legal updates, case summaries, guidance on practice and local news and developments.
3. Property forum for local solicitors.

After consideration, the treasurer suggested that the further development of the site should be put on hold until 2009/2010. The coming year will certainly see the development of point 1. The incorporation of points 2 and 3 will be subject to SDLS income.

The Property Focus Group meetings are scheduled for 4pm on the first Tuesday of every month at the Law Society Hall on Campo Lane.

*Julia Watkinson (Chair)*

## **Social Sub-Committee**

I am pleased to say that the Social Committee has had a great year. Firstly, my thanks to the team, Katherine Powell, Graham Rothwell and Mel Hadwin for their hard work, ideas and most of all enthusiasm for the projects that we have undertaken in the last 12 months. I would also like to welcome Lance Dodgson on board. Looking back over the last 12 months the social committee has grown from strength to strength and has significantly raised the profile of the S&DLS not only throughout the legal profession but throughout other professions that complement our own, such as recruitment, accountants and estate agents.

Given the current climate, strengthening links with other professions can only benefit the members of the society and the Society as a whole. The events have been increasing in their success and their ambition and the last 12 months have seen the social committee stage some

of its biggest nights out. We have continued with the quiz night, which has always proved popular, the last one being held in September 2008 and proving a success.

The charity golf day also took place in September this year and was once again either a great day's golfing or the best way to ruin a good walk, depending on your viewpoint. Wherever you stand on the matter, the participants enjoyed it and money was raised for charity. In an attempt to try to cater for a broad range of interests, we have tried to diversify the events this year to attract a different demographic of the profession. The wine tasting event in the Law Society hall was attended by around 30 people and on a separate evening, around 30 or so people were educated about chocolate at Cocoa on Ecclesall Road, tasting many different varieties of chocolate and flavoured teas.

In relation to the larger events, the second annual summer barbeque provided us with a major increase in attendees. This year the event was held at the Forum on Devonshire Green and lasted from early evening until well into the night. The first summer barbeque had around 35 people attend. This year that number rocketed to just over 150 people and provided us with great publicity. The Christmas party was held at the Law Society Hall again this year and maintained a steady attendee rate of around 50 people.

However, the major event in the last 12 months which grabbed not only everyone's attention but the attention of the local media was the Halloween Ball held at the Cutlers Hall. Some 180 people attended (not bad for a Thursday evening) nearly all of whom entered into the spirit of the evening by attending in fancy dress. This was perhaps the most ambitious project the committee have staged and we are pleased to say that it was a huge success, even making it into the Leeds & Yorkshire Lawyer Magazine and Westside Magazine. Overall, the committee has grown from strength to strength and, with the events planned for 2009/2010, it is anticipated that this growth will continue over the forthcoming 12 months.

*Paul Szabo (Chair)*

### **Training Committee**

The Training Programme is a core service of the Society and a total of 46 seminars and workshops were held during 2008. These were attended by a total of 568 delegates drawn from more than 75 firms and organisations throughout the region.

Training in 2008 was again successful financially with net income from training exceeding £28,942.00. This is slightly lower than the total course income in 2007.

It is still noticeable that certain types of courses are becoming harder to sell than others. Also, some speaker fees are proving to be rather expensive. The Training Committee is continuing its efforts to identify speakers and topics for future events with the objective of providing value-for-money training opportunities for local practitioners on relevant and interesting topics.

Due to the current financial climate, it will be increasingly difficult in 2009 to sell the CPD courses to our members. The Society is currently looking at offering even cheaper courses to its members by sourcing speakers who are willing to talk free of charge or for a very small fee. While these courses will be beneficial to our members, the profit will be inevitably lower than 2008 and therefore additional courses will need to be incorporated into the programme to accommodate this.

*Nick Tudor (Chair)*

21 April 2009