

# SHEFFIELD DISTRICT INCORPORATED LAW SOCIETY



## REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE FOR THE YEAR 2007-2008

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.

### MEMBERSHIP

The membership of the Society currently stands at 465. A full list of the Society membership as at 1 April 2008 is attached to this report.

### FINANCES

The Profit and Loss Account for 2007 shows a pre-tax profit of £3381. Once tax has been deducted, there is a loss for the financial year of £170. On the whole 2007 was a successful year financially with the Society able to spend over £10,000 on refurbishment of the Law Society Hall, launching a new website and installing a new telephone system.

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 Edward Bramley Law Lecture.

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 represented the Society at the Law Society's Leadership Summit Conference at Chancery Lane.

## **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 and links have been forged with Sheffield Hallam University and BPP Law School. 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. The training programme has included training sessions for all members who specialise in contentious work which have been well attended. It is hoped that more informal sessions with the local judiciary and other speakers can be arranged next year.

*Anna Deans (Chair)*

### **Dinner Committee**

The annual Dinner on the 1st February was a huge success with over 420 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 fantastic meal. The evenings entertainment was a String Quartet, magicians and the ever popular disco.

The speeches made by Bob Heslett Deputy Vice President of The Law Society, His Honour Judge Michael Murphy 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 £2000 for the Presidents chosen charity The South Yorkshire Community Fund Flood Appeal. 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**

Library usage has fallen over the past year by approximately 30%. The Society is currently undertaking a Library Services Survey and a questionnaire has been sent to all members. It is hoped that the Society can ascertain how the Library can be more of a benefit to members and also ascertain what can be done to encourage more users.

The number of people requesting case law and precedents from Lexis Nexis has also reduced slightly. The Society is looking at better ways to advertise this service to its members.

The Society has also launched a new website which has a facility browse the Law Library catalogue and request books online.

The budget for the library remains at £33,000 despite an increase in our Lexis Nexis subscription costs. This is due to the fact that some hard copy book subscriptions have been cancelled.

*Nick Tudor (Chair)*

### **Premises Sub-Committee**

The Premises Committee is continuing to monitor the renovation and refurbishment project in respect of the Society's premises.

In 2007 the Society was able to proceed with an extensive programme of alternations and improvements due to the additional finances raised. The work undertaken by the Society includes:

- Encapsulation of the asbestos in the cellar area
- Installation of a Fire Alarm System to the whole building
- Installation of a new telephone system
- Updating the electrics in the whole building including fitting emergency lighting to the stairwell.

The Premises Committee has prioritised work to be undertaken in 2008 and it is hoped that enough income will be generated from courses to complete all of this work.

*Donald Coutts-Wood (Chair)*

### **Probate Sub-Committee**

The Probate Focus Group was formed in 2005. Our aims have been:

1. To provide an opportunity for private client solicitors in the area to meet
2. Share ideas, discuss current issues and hot topics
3. To represent local private client solicitors
4. Provide topical training courses

Since its creation, the Probate Focus Group has succeeded in achieving every aim. Interest in the group has come from paralegals and trainees to partners and solicitors of several years qualification. Our intention from the outset was to encourage support and interest in the local Law Society from all private client lawyers in the area.

### **Training Programme**

Our training programme has consisted of two types of training event:

#### Formal Training Sessions

An outside speaker is booked and a fee is charged. The Probate Focus Group suggest courses and consider those that are most appropriate in view of current legal issues. Courses are chosen to ensure the highest attendance levels, thereby assisting the aims of the Training Committee. CPD points are available for these sessions. Suggestions are welcomed from all of our members.

#### Informal Training Sessions

These are sessions held at lunchtimes and are free of charge. Lawyers or other professionals dealing with private client issues in the local community come to talk to us and the sessions are mutually beneficial. The meetings are as relaxed and informal as possible. No CPD points are attributed to the informal sessions.

Attendance levels at both kinds of training events are very good, and our aim of encouraging interest in the local Law Society has been achieved. We hope to build on this in the future by

applying a more structured approach to booking requirements and fees. At present, some non Law Society members benefit from the Informal Sessions free of charge, and it would be appropriate to review this now that the Probate Focus Group has become better established.

### **Representative Role**

Our representation of the private client solicitors in the area has become necessary in recent months after concerns raised about the changes to the Office of the Public Guardian. The Probate Focus Group met recently to discuss this issue and take the appropriate action.

Since the development of the website, greater communication between members could be achieved and the possibility of a Probate forum may be considered in the forthcoming months.

*Kate Maybury (Chair)*

### **Property Group**

At the beginning of the year the property group concluded the negotiations with Sheffield City Council in respect of planning histories.

Sheffield City Council confirmed that the present planning policy allowing planning histories to be revealed back to 1975 would not be altered. This is the original date agreed with Sheffield District Incorporated Law Society during the 1980's. The Council's proposal had been to modernise the date and only reveal planning histories back to 1 January 1995.

The group confirmed the Council's positive announcement in the SDLS magazine for November 2008.

The group's focus is now to further develop the SDLS website to provide for a specific section for each area of practice covered by the sub-committees.

The suggestion is that the property section would have two sub-sections:

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

This section will have the potential to develop a property forum for local solicitors.

*Julia Watkinson (Chair)*

### **Social Sub-Committee**

The Social Sub-Committee has enjoyed another year of successful events.

In July the annual treasure hunt around the city centre was well supported by members. The new format of a shorter hunt followed by a short form of pub quiz proved to be popular.

In August, the Sub-Committee organised what will hopefully be the first of many summer barbeques. The event was held at Bluwater Bar, and luckily the weather held out just long enough for members to eat their dinner outside.

Pub quizzes took place in November and March, both as popular (and competitive!) as ever. The Sub-Committee did do some research to see if alternative venues could be found, but the outcome of this was that Cavells still satisfies most of the requirements.

Thank you to everyone who assisted the Sub-Committee, and supported events, this year.

*Rachael Glover (Chair)*

### **Training Committee**

The Training Programme is a core service of the Society and a total of 40 seminars and workshops were held during 2007. These were attended by a total of 609 delegates drawn from more than 75 firms and organisations throughout the region.

Training in 2007 was very successful financially with net income from training exceeding £34,300. This is a 97% increase on 2006's profit of £17,388.90 and a 12.83% increase of 2005's profit of £30415.47.

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.

*Nick Tudor (Chair)*

16 April 2008