



*The Leicestershire Law Society
Business Plan May 2011 – April 2014*

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1. Introduction

This business plan aims to assess the current situation of the Society and set its key objectives for the three year period commencing May 2011.

The plan also sets out means of achieving the objectives.

The intention is that the plan should be reviewed and updated annually.

The plan recognises that the Society needs to do more to engage with its members.

It follows discussions within the Financial & General Purpose Sub Committee and in its current form is to be viewed as a draft for consultation purposes.

There will be a consultation process involving the main committee and the members of the Society.

2. The Current Position

By membership, Leicestershire Law Society is the second largest local Law Society within the East Midlands Region (after Nottinghamshire). It is the oldest.

The Society is an unincorporated association.

Membership is either corporate or individual. In 2011 there are

- Approximately 364 solicitors who work in firms which are corporate members; and
- 139 individual members

Members break down in geographic terms as follows:

Leicester - 416
Leicestershire¹ - 87

although the committee breaks down in geographic terms as follows:

Leicester - 17
Leicestershire - 1

In 2010 the Society restated its aims as follows:

- To promote Leicester as a centre of legal excellence
- Through lobbying locally, regionally and nationally to give a voice to our members
- To be committed to promoting equal opportunities, diversity and human rights amongst the legal profession and those who employ their services
- To provide social and business networking opportunities within and amongst the local profession and business community
- By our relationship with the local universities to encourage and support the study of law and to promote interaction and an exchange of opportunities

The new aims (which are remarkably similar to those of history) conclusively answer one important question . that of whether the Society perceives itself as a membership organisation (primarily serving its membersqinterests) or a public interest organisation (primarily focused on serving the public). It is of course the former and the extent to which the Society becomes a champion of the public interest will be determined solely by the level of membersqdesire for it become that.

The Society engages in a range of activities offering benefits and services to its members:

1. Lobbying & Representation
2. Education & Training Programme
3. Social Activities including Annual Dinner & Awards Ceremony
4. eNewsletter
5. Website

¹ Excludes Leicester but includes Rutland

6. Sub-Committees
7. University Relationships
8. Corporate Social Responsibility

Over perhaps the last 4 years or more the Society has engaged in efforts to modernise and give relevance to what was perceived to be a somewhat old-fashioned and out of touch organisation existing primarily for the benefit of those running it. These efforts have included

- An overhaul of the annual dinner format which had led to a gradual decline in numbers attending²
- Changes to the committee structure
- A move to e-communication
- A revamp of the society website to attempt to create a more interactive facility

The Society has a well supported patronage scheme and a small reserve.

It has one part time member of staff who is home-based working.

The Society is a member of The East Midland Association of Local Law Societies (EMALS) along with Nottinghamshire, Northamptonshire, Derbyshire and Lincolnshire Law Societies.

It is independent from The Law Society of England and Wales but has agreed a protocol which summarises the ways in which local law societies and TLS may work together. The Society sees itself as having a good working relationship with TLS via its Regional Manager.

² in fact in 2007

3. Objectives for 2011-2014

The committee of the Society sets the following objectives for the next three years:

3.1 Membership

- increase the number of members; and
- get more members (and in particular more members from outside Leicester) actively involved in the work of the Society.

3.2 Working together

- work better with the universities and professional bodies representing other branches of the legal profession to promote Leicester as a centre of legal excellence

3.3 Profile and Press

- improve the profile and perception of the Society in the eyes of the legal profession it professes to represent and in the eyes of the public; and
- attempt to improve the profile and public perception of the legal profession in Leicester and Leicestershire;
- lobby politicians and other decision makers on matters of concern to our membership

3.4 Social Interaction

- improve attendance at events and in particular the annual dinner;
- ensure a rich and diverse mix of attendees;
- consider new approaches to encourage interaction between members.

3.5 Education and Training

- provide relevant and useful courses for practitioners locally and without a view to profit.

3.6 Diversity

- ensure that the diverse characteristics of the Society's members, committee and officers reflect the diversity of the legal profession in Leicester and Leicestershire

3.7 Finances

- balance the books
- maintain and develop our sponsorship income

3.8 Structure

- make no radical changes to the committee structure or the roles or terms of office of officers
- give greater executive responsibility and powers to the Chair of the Finance & General Purposes sub-committee.

4. Membership

Objectives:

- increase the number of members; and
- get more members (and in particular more members from outside Leicester) actively involved in the work of the Society.

Increased membership and involvement of members will flow from the increasing engagement of the Society with members and the legal profession at large, see below.

Involvement of solicitors outside Leicester in the activities of the Society is to be particularly encouraged.

The committee and subcommittee must communicate more electronically; video or telephone conferencing for meetings of subcommittees must be considered.

The Society must hold at least one social event in each of Hinckley, Ashby, Loughborough, Market Harborough, Oakham and Lutterworth in the period 2011 - 2014

Membership is divided in to two categories:

- Corporate

For firms wishing to enjoy Corporate Membership all partners must be enrolled as members of the Society, however all Assistant Solicitors and Trainees are entitled to become members of the Society free of charge.

- Ordinary

For those firms and individuals wishing to enjoy Ordinary Membership any number of firm members may be enrolled as members of the Society. This category also includes ~~employed~~ solicitors.

We have considered this structure and concluded that it makes sense to leave it as it is for the being.

We will not extend membership to Barristers or other lawyers but we will offer a form of associate membership which will give the following benefits:

5. Working together

Objective:

- work better with the universities and professional bodies representing other branches of the legal profession to promote Leicester as a centre of legal excellence.

We need to focus on promoting Leicester, the reputation of which has lost ground against its regional competitors as a professional centre. We must establish closer ties with the universities, the local bar association and ILEX branch and use these jointly to promote the expertise available here.

We should arrange to meet opposite numbers in the local bar association and ILEX branch and consider how to carry out some joint promotion.

We will invite a member of the teaching staff of each university to serve as a standing observer/member of our committee.

We will promote our work experience programme.

6. Profile and Press

Objectives:

- improve the profile and perception of the Society in the eyes of the legal profession it professes to represent and in the eyes of the public;
- and attempt to improve the profile and public perception of the legal profession in Leicester and Leicestershire;
- lobby politicians and other decision makers on matters of concern to our membership.

We will use our e-newsletter more positively to sell the Society, shout about its achievements, benefits of membership etc and to try to promote a sense of pride around membership.

We will engage in a more vigorous PR campaign aimed at raising the Society's profile among its members, potential members and the public, driving local radio and local press towards the Society, whilst recognising that our member firms will wish to prioritise their own firms' PR.

We will continue to engage with The Law Society and SRA responding to consultations on matters that affect the legal profession.

We will continue to have a Parliamentary Liaison Officer available to brief local MPs on matters of interest to the Society, and to arrange an annual dinner with local Parliamentarians in the House of Commons each year

The committee recognises that its influence on local and national government is limited but nonetheless considers it to be of value to continue to lobby our local politicians, including at the annual parliamentarians dinner, and will raise issues of concern as and when they arise.

We will seek to engage members more actively in lobbying and commenting on consultation papers.

We will support a Charity nominated on an annual basis by the incoming Society President.

7. Education & Training

Objective:

- provide relevant and useful courses for practitioners locally and without a view to profit.

The Education & Training Sub-Committee plans a comprehensive programme of courses throughout the year. Courses are provided in partnership with Central Law Training (CLT) and also by the Society. Education & Training is no longer seen as an income generation stream more of a service to members with many courses provided free of charge or at minimal cost. Gross profit on courses in 2010 was slightly under £2k. No change to the policy is envisaged

8. Diversity

Objective:

- ensure that the characteristics of the Society's members, committee and officers reflect the diversity of the legal profession in Leicester and Leicestershire

We will develop strategies for actively attracting and engaging with a diverse membership base.

We recognise that the Committee and Officers of the Society do not currently reflect the diversity of the legal profession in Leicester and it is our aim that the composition of the Committee should by 2014 more closely reflect that diversity.

9. Finances

Objectives:

- balance the books
- maintain and develop our sponsorship income

The Society enjoyed a growing and healthy income during the period 2004 . 2008 as a result of monies received from its Education & Training programme and in particular relations with Central Law Training (CLT). The changing approaches and modernisation within the Learning & Development industry and indeed within Law firms themselves has resulted in a significant reduction in this funding stream. Against this background the Society has spent time successfully sourcing other finances and the current position [at the time of drafting this plan] puts the Society in a good position to 'balance the books'.

Corporate Membership subscriptions were increased by 13.33% and Ordinary Membership subscriptions were increased by 8.33% at the beginning of 2011, the first increase since 2008. We currently do not foresee any expenditure increases to the Society other than traditional 'cost of living expense' increases.

We are aiming to renew or extend our existing sponsorship arrangements this year and will continue to look for new ones to partner with the Society.

10. Structure

Objectives:

- make no radical changes to the committee structure or the roles or terms of office of officers
- give greater executive responsibility and powers to the Chair of the Finance & General Purposes sub-committee.

The sub-committee structures have been reviewed and it is felt that they work well in the format in which they are currently configured. However, there is an urgent need for each sub-committee to have its own Terms of Reference in which to operate

We have considered at some length the options of trying to give some continuity to decision making in the Society . hence the creation of a Business Plan and suggestions for providing greater responsibility and powers to the chair of F&GP.

We will scope out the responsibilities and powers of the chair and seek to identify changes from the role as it exists today.