

## ANNUAL REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE 2009 -2010

Last year's report began with the words "We are living in challenging times with many threats and opportunities for the profession..." It seems fitting to repeat these words here as yet another turbulent year has passed by. Some local firms have thrived despite the recession, the problems affecting legal aid firms and the hike in professional indemnity insurance. Some have found it too much of a challenge and where individual solicitors or member firms have run into difficulty we will help where we can or liaise with the SRA and keep other members informed.

We are pleased to confirm that we now communicate with our members in electronic format only as all firms have supplied at least one contact email address. The ability to communicate directly via our **website** is also widely used and a convenient method for both members and others to contact us with general enquiries. We continue to improve the updating of information on the website and to broaden its appeal. However, there is always further work to be done and Nick Llewelyn is now supported by a sub-committee specifically tasked with enhancing the value of the website for members, including its potential for income generation via sponsorship opportunities. As ever, please check out our website ([www.swansealawsociety.co.uk](http://www.swansealawsociety.co.uk)) and let us know what you would like to see or what you would find useful as this is an ongoing project.

A copy of our updated **Business Plan** was provided with the AGM papers last year and we continue to make progress against the objectives. The committee remains keen to ensure that the society offers services of real value to its members and welcomes feedback on this objective by way of formal or informal means. We have this year seen an increase in requests for support and the sharing of information and were pleased to take on a complaint about a misleading leaflet regarding the services of a Bereavement Advice Centre. Following our contact with the City & County of Swansea the leaflet was removed. We have also sought to alert members to other practices that threaten us or any information that is worth sharing. This is done via email alerts and/or notices on our website. We also continue to represent the local viewpoint in responding to consultation documents issued by the Law Society or Solicitors Regulation Authority and to send representatives to attend national conferences for Local Law Society officers.

We have continued to support and encourage the younger members of our profession this year. Beginning with those still studying law we are pleased to report closer links with the School of Law at Swansea University with the recent co-option of Michaela Leyshon (Professional Tutor) to our committee. We have also supported the School of Law as it seeks accreditation to provide a qualification for Higher Rights of Audience which will benefit local practitioners. We are once again supporting the "Work Friday" scheme that was so successful last year. Firms are encouraged to allow a student on the LPC course a taste of life at the office as a volunteer worker each Friday. This scheme has benefits for both student and firm and is particularly valuable for the students in a time when Training Contracts are so difficult to obtain. We also remain keen to support local trainees and young solicitors via the **Junior Lawyers Division**. Their first President (Sophie Pincott)

has remained a member of our committee alongside the current President (Alison Tay). We support their events (by publicising them, attending them and offering financial back up where necessary) and they have a page on our website.

In accordance with our business plan, we have continued to raise the profile of the profession through **charitable support**. This year the membership were again asked to nominate local, under- funded charities for consideration. The chosen charities for this year of office were Cancer Information & Support Services (CISS); Swansea Children Contact Centre, Alzheimers Society – Swansea and Lliw Valley Branch and Families/Friends of Prisoners. Fund raising events have included various walking challenges and raffles. As in recent years, the first £500 of the Annual Dinner raffle was donated to the Swansea Legal Charitable Foundation with the balance divided between the other named charities and significantly increased by match funding from the society's bankers, Barclays.

Our local programme of **Continuing Professional Development** remains popular and well supported by practitioners in Swansea and West Wales. However, this has been a particularly difficult year for all involved in the training industry with bookings down across the board and with all providers. We have been fortunate that our arrangement with Central Law Training has protected us from financial exposure on any courses run in association with them. We have also benefited from the support of Barclays who again kindly sponsored one of our independently run courses this year. Our objective remains to provide high quality courses at a reasonable price and we have kept our prices as low as possible in order to assist local solicitors in straightened circumstances but who still need CPD hours to retain practising certificates.

This year's **social calendar** included the following

- The Annual Dinner at the Brangwyn Hall is always a highlight in the local professional calendar and this year's event did not disappoint in this respect. Unusually, our guest speaker delivered his speech before the meal but that appeared to work well. Carwyn Jones has of course moved on to higher things (First Minister) since our dinner but we were delighted to welcome him back to his roots for one evening.
- The Presidents Drinks Party is being organised as this report goes to print. Whilst we have decided on the same venue, the Dragon Hotel, there will be a distinctly Welsh feeling this year as we swap our pianist for a harpist.
- A special celebratory dinner was held in October for Marjory Taylor (now District Judge) in honour of her many years service to the society as a committee member. All Presidents with whom she had served were invited to join in this celebration which provided a wonderful and much appreciated opportunity for past Presidents to get together and to wish Marjory well in her new role.