

MINUTES OF ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING (AGM) 2024

The Annual General Meeting of members of the Law Society was held at the Society's Hall on Wednesday 9 October 2024 at 2.00 pm. Members attended the Annual General Meeting in person or by Microsoft Teams. The President, Nick Emmerson, was in the chair.

Quorum

The President stated that there were more than 50 members of the Society present either in person at Chancery Lane or by Teams and he declared a quorum.

Notice of meeting

The notice of the meeting was taken as read.

Minutes of 2023 AGM

The minutes of the AGM held on 11 October 2023 were taken as read and were confirmed. There were no questions. A copy of the minutes was duly signed by the President.

Minutes of 2024 Special General Meeting (SGM)

The minutes of the SGM held on 23 July 2024 were taken as read and were confirmed. There were no questions. A copy of the minutes was duly signed by the Deputy Vice President, Mark Evans, who had been in the chair on that occasion.

Election of Council Members

The President congratulated the candidates who had been elected or re-elected to Council in the recent Council elections. They were:

1. Richard Adams (Devon and Somerset)
2. Matt Aleksic (Central London)
3. Reanne Anthony (Junior Solicitors (under 6 PQE))
4. Lauren Basham (Junior Solicitors (under 6 PQE))
5. Mark Davies (Mid and West Wales)
6. Karen Dovaston (Essex)
7. Louise Duckett (Solicitors 6-12 PQE)
8. Guy Goodings (North East)
9. Sophia Hanif (Junior Solicitors (under 6 PQE))

10. Phillip Horsfield (Yorkshire and Humberside)
11. Marque Janneh (Junior Solicitors (under 6 PQE))
12. Rosemin Keshvani (North East London)
13. Jeff Lewis (Manchester)
14. Claire Logan (Cumbria and North Lancashire)
15. Sangita Manek (Central London)
16. Jeremy Myers (Liverpool)
17. Uche Osemeke (Solicitors 6-12 PQE)
18. Lubna Shuja (Sole Practitioners)
19. Bethany Walker (Junior Solicitors (under 6 PQE))
20. Peter Watson-Lee (Dorset)
21. Martin Whitehorn (Junior Solicitors (under 6 PQE))
22. Gareth Gwyndaf Jones (Criminal Defence), who was elected to fill a casual vacancy arising in-year.

In the constituency of Warwickshire and Worcestershire, no candidate had come forward by the due date and therefore a nomination committee had been established in accordance with Bye-Law 64. With her consent the nomination committee had put forward the name of Elizabeth Miles and pursuant to the Bye-Law she was declared duly nominated and elected.

In the constituency of Lincolnshire no candidate had come forward and the nomination committee procedure contained in Bye-Law 64 had not produced a nomination. A fresh election process would be opened in due course.

Tributes to retiring Council members

On behalf of the meeting the President thanked those members who were leaving Council at the conclusion of the Annual General Meeting, or who had left during the course of the year, for all their work on behalf of the profession and the Society. Those members were:

1. Carolyn Kirby, the first woman to be President of the Law Society
2. Tony Fisher
3. Pavel Klimov
4. Alan East
5. Ben Brown
6. David Barraclough
7. Nicola Rubbert
8. Saima Hirji
9. Lizzy Lim
10. Bal Singh Atwal
11. Jonathan Andrews
12. Daria Dybov
13. Johnny Shearman
14. Nina Ferris
15. Chris Vigrass

The Society expressed its thanks with applause to all these members for their services to the Society and the profession.

The President also reported that Council had been sorry to learn of the deaths during the year of:

1. Nick Fluck, President of the Society in 2013-14 and the Council member for Lincolnshire at the time of his death
2. Suki Binjal, who had passed away suddenly the week before and was the Council member for Local Government at the time of her death
3. Sir Jonathan Clarke, President of the Society in 1980-81
4. Pat Lush, a former Council member who was on the roll of solicitors for more than 50 years
5. Dr Nuala Brice, who was on the roll for more than 60 years
6. Michael Loup, a former Council member who was on the roll for more than 70 years.

Resolution 1 (Annual Report)

The President invited the Chief Executive of the Law Society, Ian Jeffery, to introduce the annual report. Mr Jeffery wished to highlight some of the Society's achievements under each of its four strategic objectives for the year:

"Under our first objective to promote the value of the profession and provide a compelling member offer:

- we commemorated 100 years since women were first able to enter the profession with a fantastic campaign that looked forward as well as back,
- we published guidance to our members around climate change – the first such guidance of its kind in the world,
- and we launched our Legal Hero awards, which highlight members going above and beyond to make exceptional contributions to their local communities.

"Under our second objective to protect the justice system and make sure it applies to everyone equally:

- we continued our campaign for the implementation of Sir Christopher Bellamy's independent review recommendations on criminal legal aid, including by taking the government to court.
- we secured an amendment to the Illegal Migration Act, successfully arguing for a 15% increase in legal aid fees for work related to the Act.
- and particularly significantly, we secured the first increase in means test thresholds for legal aid in 13 years, resulting in six million more people becoming eligible for legal aid.

"Under our third objective to maximise our commercial potential and our efficiency:

- we streamlined the application process for our Conveyancing Quality Scheme to make it easier for members to apply and re-accredit.
- we delivered 31 bespoke webinars led by our commercial partners on topics important to members, such as cybersecurity, AI, and recruitment and retention of staff.

- and we increased the number of members signed-up to our Law Society Learning platform by almost 50%, while expanding our offer by launching several new modules, particularly around risk and compliance.

“Finally under our fourth objective to become an employer of choice for people who want to make a difference:

- We launched our ‘Leading with Impact’ programme, supporting 90 colleagues across different roles and departments to develop their leadership skills.
- We launched anonymised recruitment, to help reduce unconscious bias in the talent acquisition process.
- And we developed our action plan for equality, diversity and inclusion, which helped us secure a silver award in an assessment by Inclusive Employers – something that is very rare for any organisation to achieve in their first assessment. ”

The President then moved Resolution 1 on the notice of the meeting, which was -

That the Annual Report of the Council be received.

The Vice President, Richard Atkinson, seconded the resolution.

Mr Neil Rose asked about the basis for the Chief Executive’s 13% pay rise. Mr Jeffery said that it was a matter for the People and Remuneration Committee sitting as a Remuneration Committee.

There were no further questions. It was unanimously resolved that the Annual Report of the Council be received.

Resolution 2 (Accounts)

The chair of the Board, Amerdeep Somal, moved Resolution 2 on the notice of the meeting, which was -

That the Accounts signed by the Auditors be approved.

Ms Somal thanked the auditors, the Finance team and the Executive team for their work in preparing the accounts, which had been signed by the Board. Key points in the accounts were:

- The Society had recorded a surplus of £4.5m, comprising an operating surplus of £2.4m and net investment gains of £2.1m.
- The SRA had taken responsibility for the management of the Solicitors Indemnity Fund. However, as the SRA was part of the Law Society group its results continued to be part of the group accounts.
- Costly interventions during the year by the SRA had resulted in a significant increase in associated provisions at the year end.

The Vice President then seconded the resolution.

There were no comments or questions and the resolution was put to the vote. It was resolved that the Accounts, signed by the Auditors, be approved (50 for, none against, no abstentions).

Business introduced by the Council

The President reported that the Council had two items of business to introduce, namely the redesignation of characteristic Council seats and payments other than expenses to Council members.

Redesignation of characteristic Council seats

Melinda Giles, chair of the Council Membership Committee, presented proposals to make relatively minor amendments to the wording of the definitions of certain Council seats. This was desirable because reforms to Council in 2020 and to Law Society communities in 2022 had resulted in the situation whereby some of the Council seat definitions were now expressed in language inconsistent with that used in relation to networks covering the same demographic characteristics.

The Council Membership Committee had considered this matter on 13 June 2024 and agreed to make recommendations to Council, which Council had in turn endorsed at its meeting on 2 July 2024.

In accordance with those decisions the Annual General Meeting was being asked to approve the proposed amendments (shown as tracked below) to Appendix 1 of the Society's Bye-Laws:

Characteristic Constituencies	Number of seats
LGBTQ+ Solicitors	1
Disabled Solicitors with Disabilities	1
Ethnic Minority Solicitors (of which one is a member of the Black Solicitors Network)	5
Women Solicitors Lawyers	5
Junior Solicitors Lawyers (0-6 years Post Qualification Experience)	6

There were no comments or questions.

The matter was put to the vote and it was resolved to amend Appendix 1 to the Bye-Laws as proposed by the Council (53 for, three against, five abstentions).

Payments other than expenses to Council members

The President first reminded those Council members present that, on the advice of General Counsel, they had a prejudicial interest in this matter on the basis of having the prospect of substantial personal gain. They should neither speak in the debate – save for those Council members delegated to present the proposals on Council's behalf – nor vote on the matter. **(Secretary's note: the President had earlier been advised that, notwithstanding their prejudicial interest in the matter, Council members could still be counted as part of the quorum for this item of business.)**

Linda Lee, chair of the Society's Professional Indemnity Insurance Committee, asked for clarification whether committee chairs and members were conflicted in this matter and whether they could speak and vote, since they could be adversely affected by the decision. Having taken advice from General Counsel the President confirmed that they could speak because they did not have the prospect of personal gain.

The President then invited Jonathan Wheeler as one of the Council members delegated by Council to present the report of the Council on Expenses and Payments Other than Expenses **(Secretary's note: the report is appended to these minutes as Annex A)**. Mr Wheeler said that not paying an allowance effectively put junior members of the profession at a disadvantage if they could not afford to take time out of work to participate in Council meetings. That had the effect of diminishing Council by removing it from part of the profession. Paying an allowance would help to redress this and would promote fairness and equality of opportunity for all members to stand and represent their constituency on Council.

Professor Sara Chandler, a former Council member and former chair of the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Committee, was in favour of adopting the proposals and said that for the same reasons Mr Wheeler had advanced an allowance should also be paid to committee members. Maria Memoli, a former Council and committee member, likewise spoke of the need to recognise by some means the contributions of elected and appointed members, who were all volunteers.

In response to a question from Vivien Stern, Tom Fothergill, the Chief Operating Officer, confirmed that tax and National Insurance were deducted at source for employees and non-employees alike paid through the Society's payroll. He also confirmed that no employee rights were conferred as a result of doing so.

Council member Scott Bowen, who had also been delegated to present the report to the AGM, commended the proposals to members and said that Council recognised the importance of what committee members did and that work was ongoing under the Get Involved programme to recognise the commitment of elected and appointed members to the Law Society. However, extending an allowance scheme to include committee members would require an amendment to the Society's royal charter.

There being no further questions the matter was put to the vote and it was resolved that the recommendations of the Council Working Group on expenses and payments other than expenses, together with associated changes to the bye-laws, be approved (14 for, one against, five abstentions).

Appropriate motions received under Bye-Law 18(1)

The President reported that no motions had been received.

Any other business

There was no other business. The President thanked members for their attendance and declared the formal business of the Annual General Meeting concluded.