

SUSSEX LAW SOCIETY

**REPORT OF THE
GENERAL COMMITTEE
FOR 2019/20**

OFFICERS AND COMMITTEE 2019/20

President:

Ms J. Hardaway, Uckfield

Vice-President:

Ms L. Tarrant, Brighton

Immediate Past President:

Ms J. Hardaway, Uckfield
(President for part of 2018/19 year from February 2019 & for the whole of 2019/20)

Honorary Treasurer:

Mr. O. Maxwell-Jones, 15 Prince Albert Street, Brighton, BN1 1HY

Honorary Secretary:

Ms. E Richards, Brighton

General Committee:

Mr J. Bradshaw
Mr. D. Dickson
Ms H Goacher (to February 2020)
Mr S. Rozzier
Ms G Waller (to February 2020)

Mr. P.W. Richards (Council Member)

The following were co-opted onto the Committee:

Ms. G..Tisshaw, Ms E Weir

**SUSSEX LAW SOCIETY
REPORT OF THE GENERAL COMMITTEE FOR 2019/20**

PRESIDENT'S REVIEW OF THE YEAR

To say this last year has been a challenging one, is an understatement!

Whilst mental health and wellbeing were themes that I planned to continue with this year, the reality is that these issues have, in fact, been forced to the forefront as the pandemic has taken hold. Having been keen to raise awareness of the national Law Society's resources on these topics, I was pleased to see how quickly they tasked themselves with, not only promoting our profession in so many ways through these difficult times, but also providing material for us all to focus on the specific problems and considerations relating to our profession. Whether it was the wellbeing blogs, toolkits for returning to the office, or the promotion of Solicitors adding value to society with the Solicitor Brand Campaign, the Law Society have continually provided us with information and resources to help us through.

The Sussex Law Society have had regular 'virtual' meetings with the national Law Society, relaying your concerns to enable issues to be tackled at both a local and national level and feeding back information to our members via our newsletters and courses. We have had some amazing feedback from you, confirming that this information and level of communication has been helpful.

As we all seek to find a new 'normal', with virtual courses, video conferencing and remote working, I wonder if some positives may have come from the pandemic too - perhaps new efficiencies in processes, more flexible ways of working which did not appear viable a year ago, or just a sense of togetherness within firms as we rise to the challenges before us.

I really look forward to being able to get together once again and enjoy the collaboration and community spirit of our profession – fingers crossed that this can be by our next Annual Charity Ball in May 2021, if not before.

Finally, I would like to thank all our members for the support of the Sussex Law Society and most particularly the amazing committee who have met (by zoom) every month in order to serve our members. My biggest thank you goes to Jeanette Lacy Scott, the Society's COO, whose continual hard work keeps the wheels turning at all times. I will soon be passing the mantle over to Lucy Tarrant at the upcoming AGM and take this opportunity of wishing her well for the year ahead.

Thank you to you all.

JACQUELINE HARDAWAY

HON SECRETARY'S REPORT

At the end of my first year in the role of Honorary Secretary of the Sussex Law Society I would like to thank my fellow committee members for maintaining our regular meetings and progressing tasks, in what has been a very challenging year for us all.

We have been able to conduct monthly committee meetings via Zoom and to share information and knowledge in the newsletter, to support our members, as the pandemic has taken hold.

President, Jacqueline Hardaway, COO, Jeanette Lacy Scott and I have taken part in Zoom meetings with senior representatives from the central Law Society in London. We have provided them with feedback on the issues faced by our members; from lack of IT equipment to enable members to work effectively at home, to difficulties in getting practice loans from banks. Our input has been gratefully received by them.

I very much hope that the next year will allow us to progress some of our ongoing projects and to resume events and live training.

ELEANOR RICHARDS

HON. TREASURER'S REPORT

The draft accounts for the year ending 31st August 2020 are included with this report and it goes without saying that the Covid-19 pandemic has impacted the society's business as it has every other business in the country.

Nevertheless, even though sponsorship fell by 38% other sources of income remained steady or increased. Forever grateful for the support of our members, subscriptions remained solid at £12,858.00 (6% up on the previous year). This year has also seen a halt to the decline in revenue from seminars which, at £10,926.00, is up 98% when compared with 2019. Driven to online webinars by necessity, the increase in revenue illustrates the memberships' appetite for the Society's courses is not diminishing. Testament to the perennial hard work of the Society's COO, Jeanette.

Understandably, the inability to hold social events and the annual dinner is disappointing and is reflected in the small deficit for both. Generally, expenditure remained unchanged resulting in a small shortfall of £435.00. On the whole, not too bad.

As always, this is your Society and with your continuing support of its courses, events, and this committee, it will continue to thrive.

OLIVER MAXWELL-JONES

COUNCIL MEMBER'S REPORT

An Annus Horribilis to say the least! It began with a fire at Chancery Lane. This turned out to be an unexpected rehearsal for the extraordinary adjustments to communications with the Profession and the speed with which this necessary support was achieved.

Having failed to pinch myself awake from the nightmare which followed, I have trawled through my monthly Reports and re-lived the experience suffered by we all and our Clients. In doing so, and for want of agonising repetition, I am left with nothing but admiration for the quality and content of our packed local law society newsletter and the Law Society's "Return, Restart and Recover" campaign launched in June to support Solicitors to return to a safe office, re-ignite the economy and drive the eventual recovery. Its new style website is now fully operational. The now reconciled also SRA has also been in remote and virtual overdrive. Its monthly Updates are a must read to monitor compliance and alerts.

With no foreseeable light at the end of this bleak tunnel and the prospect of anni horribiles please keep up to speed, sane, remain Professional and observe the Rule of Law. If able to do so seek to help disadvantaged colleagues, junior lawyers, trainees and all that unemployed talent out there.

My successor, Oliver Maxwell-Jones, undergoes induction and takes office on October 2020. With geographical constituency seats about to be culled, there is no doubt that he is going to hit our enlarged territory very hard and running. I am confident he will carry the baton forward with distinction and to an annus mirabilis in the near future.

PATRICK RICHARDS

REPORT OF THE CONTINUING EDUCATION COMMITTEE

The training year started so well in November 2019 with around 50 attending a course on the new SRA Handbook, presented by Joanna Morris. The feedback was excellent particularly about Jo who was such a clear and engaging speaker and so we quickly booked her to present more courses over the coming year on Anti-Money Laundering, The Solicitors' Accounts Rules and an update on Data Protection and GDPR. Regular presenters Richard Snape and Dominic Regan came to Brighton to give their invaluable updates on conveyancing and civil litigation respectively and attracted both their loyal followers and some new blood. We were delighted by the good numbers attending the courses over the Autumn and Winter period, particularly following the disappointing fall in courses income in the previous year.

A varied programme was planned for the Spring and Summer of 2020 and advance bookings were very encouraging. So, as I flew off to South America in early March for my 'holiday of a lifetime', I felt confident

that all was organised and in place for my return in 3 weeks and hopeful that the delegate numbers and related income would continue to be as good as they had been for the first part of the training year.

As I sat in my hotel at Bogota Airport just 2 weeks later with the World fast entering lockdown facing a Global Coronavirus Pandemic, not only did I wonder if I would make it home before Colombia closed its borders, but I also started to think about the changes we would all be soon be facing in both our work and home lives and what we would all soon be citing as the 'new normal'

Back in Brighton, quick decisions had to be made about the Society's courses. Venues were closed, we were unable to meet in large groups and many of our members had been furloughed. The committee met (virtually) and it was agreed to try and move as many of the planned courses as possible to a webinar format. And so a steep learning curve (particularly with Zoom!) began. Many of our speakers had never presented virtually before, many of our delegates had not attended virtual training before, many people now working from home had inadequate equipment and poor internet connection. So, needless to say, there were some hiccups in those early days. Problems mastering the 'mute' and 'camera' buttons often resulted in unplanned and often amusing interruptions and on one occasion a speaker had to pause his session to answer his persistently ringing doorbell and take his Amazon delivery. But this shared experience was all done with patience, understanding and good humour and 7 months in we are all seasoned Zoom professionals! Our speakers have rapidly gained in confidence and members are now clearly accepting this way of training with our bookings now seemingly on the increase.

There are both positives and negatives arising from all of this. On the plus side, virtual training saves so much time travelling to and from venues and, particularly for those outside of Brighton, this is a huge bonus. Webinars incur less expenditure on venue hire, travel, printing and refreshments and so we can run them with lower participant numbers as our break even point is not so high. We are also being kinder to the planet by emailing course notes and not printing them. However, we are now facing a lot of competition from companies offering free webinars as a way of connecting with lawyers, especially when they use the same speakers and offer the same topics. Clearly we are not in a position to do this having to cover the cost of the speakers' fees and administration and so that is one of the problems we are now having to face. But I think the thing we miss most is the face to face interaction that takes place at a course – the opportunity to ask the speaker that question in the coffee break you didn't want to ask publicly, the chance to catch up with colleagues and friends and the chance to get out of the office and have a change of scene.

Who knows what the future has in store! In the meantime please continue to let us know what topics and speakers you would like to see in the programme and please continue to support us by taking part in the Society's training programme.

JEANETTE LACY SCOTT

REPORT OF THE SOCIAL & NETWORKING EVENTS COMMITTEE

Following the 2019 AGM on 17th October we held our Autumn quiz once again at Al Duomo in Brighton. The team from Griffith Smith "Comfortably Numb" could not conceal their joy in regaining the trophy from Cunningtons and triumphing over teams from Dawson Hart, Hennings, Martin Searle, Coole Bevis, Dean Wilson, Rix and Kay, ASB Aspire, Old Bailey Law, Colemans and DMH Stallard. As always it was a great evening and a lot of fun with over £200 raised for the President's charities. Later in October we organized a visit to Phileas Fogg's World of Adventure, a relatively new challenge based attraction in Brighton, which was very much enjoyed by those who attended.

The annual Past Presidents' Dinner took place on 15th November, 2019 at the Grand Hotel in Brighton.

The Managing Partners' networking group met at Malmaison in Brighton Marina on 29th November for Breakfast followed by a really useful and interesting talk from Alex Kiernan at Loch Associates who talked about employee absences with particular reference to stress management and mental ill health.

The committee had lots of ideas for social events in 2020 alongside the Annual Charity Ball which was booked for 15th May at the Grand Hotel in Brighton but then along came Covid! Initially we moved the Ball to September 2020 but it was very soon apparent that social events of the size of the Society's Annual Ball were extremely unlikely to be able to take place by then and so we moved it once again to 21st May 2021. Fingers crossed it will

happen but sitting writing this report in October 2020 with news of coronavirus cases rising every day and talk of our current restrictions remaining in place for at least another 6 months, I have my doubts! We will keep members up to date.

Obviously since March we have not been able to organize any face to face events but have held 2 further Managing Partners' networking meetings by Zoom. The first in May looked at issues around employment in the current climate and the second in July, presented by our main sponsors Howdens, looked at issues around PII renewal. Both were extremely well received and the feedback was that the participants found the group very supportive and valued the opportunity to share some of the problems they are now facing in their firms which have arisen from the current situation. We plan to build on this and arrange more meetings over the next year. As for on-line social events, the committee have discussed this but feel, at present, everyone is a bit 'Zoomed out'!

As I said regarding the training programme – who knows what the future holds and when we will be able to meet again. Let's hope it isn't too long and this will all be just a distant memory!

JEANETTE LACY SCOTT

**MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF THE SUSSEX LAW SOCIETY HELD AT
AL DUOMO, 7 PAVILION BUILDINGS, BRIGHTON, BN1 1EE,
ON THURSDAY, 17TH OCTOBER, 2019 AT 6.00 PM**

Present: The President, Hon. Secretary and 12 members.

1. Apologies were received from 5 members whose names were read at the meeting.
2. The minutes of the AGM held on 18th October, 2018 were accepted as a true record. Proposed by Mr O Maxwell-Jones and seconded by Ms E Weir.

3. Matters Arising

None.

4. Report of the General Committee for 2018/19 and Annual Accounts for the year ending 31/08/2018

It was proposed that the above report and accounts be accepted. Proposer: Mr O Maxwell-Jones. Seconded by: Ms E Weir with all present in favour.

5. Election of Officers

It was noted that because Ms Gillespie had had to step down as President in February 2019, Vice President Ms Hardaway had taken over as President from that time, agreeing to stay in post until the 2020 AGM to help provide some stability for the Society. Ms Hardaway said that she had already had a fantastic time in office and had particularly enjoyed meeting so many people. She said that she had continued with the themes started by Ms Weir and Ms Gillespie around gender and diversity and felt that the new Solicitors' Qualifying Exams would help 'open up' the profession to become more diverse, which could only be a good thing. She said that she would like to look at more ways to improve relationships with local courts, probate registries, land registries and other such organisations.

Turning to the election of office holders and general committee members, Ms Hardaway said that Ms C Sayer was standing down as Honorary Secretary as she was transferring to the Bar. Ms Hardaway thanked her for her seven years of hard work in office and wished her well. She also thanked Ms J Pain who was leaving the General Committee and said she had made a great contribution. She said she was very pleased that Ms L Tarrant had agreed to stand as her Vice President and looked forward to working with her over the next year. Formal elections then took place as follows:

President: **Ms J Hardaway** (proposed by Ms E Weir. Seconded by Mr J Bradshaw with all present in favour)

Vice-President: **Ms L Tarrant** (proposed by Ms J Hardaway. Seconded by Mr P Richards)

Hon. Secretary: **Ms E Richards** (proposed by Mr F Lacy Scott. Seconded by Mr J Healy with all present in favour)

Hon. Treasurer: **Mr O Maxwell-Jones** (proposed by Ms G Waller. Seconded by Mr P Richards with all present in favour)

6. Election of General Committee Members:

Mr D Dickson (proposed by Ms E Taylor & seconded by Mr W Norton with all present in favour).

7. Any Other Business

None.

After the meeting the Society held a Quiz Night and Supper at Al Duomo.