

## MINUTES OF ADSO INTERIM COUNCIL MEETING

### 27 September 2010 at Leicester City Council

**Attended:** John Austin – Director/Chairman, Clive Parker – South East/ Vice-Chairman, Sue Keogh – Director, Mark Towers – Director, Laura Latham - Director, John Lynch – Director/Treasurer, John Quinton – Director, Tom van der Hoven – Director/Secretary, Michael Robson – North East, Colin Sweeney – East of England, Helen Gee – North West, Sue Crosland – South West, Helen Abraham – West Midlands, Matthew Kane – East Midlands, Rebecca Owen – East Midlands, James Doble – Cherwell District Council (Observer), Zoe Crane – Islington Council.

**Apologies:** None.

#### **26. Welcome and introductions and apologies**

John welcomed members to the meeting and advised that Zoe Crane, a learner from the London region would be clerking the meeting. The Board thanked Zoe for her attendance.

#### **27. Minutes of the last meeting and action points**

The minutes of the meeting on the 2 July 2010 were agreed. The majority of the action points from the meeting were covered on the agenda or had been completed and the following comments were made:

- John Lynch had received positive feedback from all those who had placed an advert on the website.
- No progress had been made in getting costs for options for voting and online polls on the website.
- Joint badging events would be taken off the outstanding items list as informal discussions had taken place.
- Renewal letters had been drafted and would be sent out as soon as possible.

The outstanding action points were highlighted:

- a) Pursue Welsh representation on the Council (SK)
- b) Pursue Scottish representation on the Council (CS)
- c) Pursue Northern Irish contact (JA)
- d) Identify regional web publishers for any regions that did not have a web publisher (All)
- e) Provide more information for the regional pages (All)
- f) Set up regional databases and regional threads on the discussion forum (LL)
- g) Pursue expression of interest related to advertising on the website (CP)
- h) Set up suggested Payment Module on Association website (LL)
- i) Get costs options for secure voting and online polls on the website (LL)
- j) Put the Scheme of Delegation on the Members Forum (LL & JA)
- k) Amend the Business Plan, including adding Talent Pool and Mentoring and put on the Association website (MT)
- l) Talk to Nick Randall re Interim Managers (JA)
- m) Draw up content for the website regarding providing a mentoring service (JA, JL)
- n) Frequently asked questions re membership added to the website (LL)
- o) Development of a model constitution (GR)

**Resolved:**

**That the minutes of the meeting held on the 27 September 2010 be confirmed as a correct record.**

**28. Association Website**

Laura summarised the progress since the last meeting.

- The statistics obtained from the website indicated an increase in visits to the website, with 1,585 visits which included 388 new visitors. The average length of time each visitor spent on the website had increased to 4.52 minutes.
- The most popular pages were for conference bookings, the members forum, the membership offer/join page and Democratic Services jobs.
- Regional content should be kept up to date by web publishers. Where regions did not have a web publisher, one needed to be identified. HA would be the regional publisher for the West Midlands. Publishers were needed for the South West and North East regions.
- There had been difficulties in setting up the online payments facility but these had now been resolved. The solution had resulted in an unavoidable increase in the small hosting fee.
- ADSO had purchased the domain name, [www.adso.co.uk](http://www.adso.co.uk). Every two years a fee of £10 would have to be paid to retain the domain.
- Some members had problems accessing their Director email addresses. To resolve the issue the website would need to be moved to its own server and this would cost £828 per year plus VAT. It would remove the certificate error message some had been receiving but would not improve the functionality of the email facility. The Board agreed not to do this but would keep it under review. In addition some members were prevented from using the emails due to firewalls. Where members had access to their Director email address they should use it for any formal emails sent out on behalf of ADSO.

In the discussion the following points were made:

- Low membership areas should be targeted specifically.
- Robert Shepperd had contacted all members of Democratic Services staff in each local authority, promoting membership.
- In some areas there was little support for regional networks.
- The suggestion of having a Centre for Public Scrutiny representative on the ADSO forum could be considered.
- Leeds City Council were leading a workshop at the conference. However none of their officers were members of ADSO.

**Resolved:**

**1) That the website statistics provided in terms of monitoring the traffic to [www.asdso.co.uk](http://www.asdso.co.uk) be noted.**

**2) That the [www.adso.co.uk](http://www.adso.co.uk) domain be used on all future publicity.**

**3) That the update on ADSO Director email addresses be noted.**

**4) That the annual hosting fee for the website from December 2010 as £12.00 per month (£155.88 per year plus VAT) be approved.**

**5) That JA email those authorities who were leading workshops at the conference but were not members.**

**29. Conference 2010**

JA and SK updated the group on the arrangements that had been progressed since the last meeting.

In the discussion, the following points were made:

- 32 delegates had booked to attend the conference. It was not possible to cancel the conference and members would have to work on increasing the numbers within their region.
- 75 hotel rooms had been booked for Monday 15 November. A further 75 rooms were being held but had to be released by the end of the week. It would still be possible to book additional rooms either at this hotel or another, if required, however there could be an additional cost to ADSO if another, more expensive hotel, had to be booked.
- Attendees could attend for one day and those that lived near to Leeds could be targeted.
- The conference was being held in Leeds and not Birmingham as the costs in Birmingham would have been higher and therefore so would the delegate rate.
- Members were confident a further 20 delegates were planning to attend but had not yet booked.
- As it was proving difficult to get a Government Minister to attend the conference as a keynote speaker, Professor George Jones from Leicester University could be asked to speak. If he was unavailable there were other professors who could be contacted. It was more likely that a Government Minister would agree to attend next year's conference in London.
- SK would contact Teignbridge District Council, winner of the MJ award as they had been asked to attend the conference and had not responded. They had also not joined ADSO.
- One of the keynote speakers from Day 2 could be moved to Day 1 and the slot on Day 2 filled with a panel session.
- Ann Rehill who previously worked for Standards for England could run a workshop on the ethical framework and running the Standards Committee post 2010. Jane Martin from the Ombudsman could be invited to outline the Ombudsman's changing role.
- Sessions on scrutiny would be run as follows:
  - Scrutiny at Work in a Committee System – South Derbyshire District Council;
  - "Overview and Scrutiny in a Changing World" – What's Next? – London Borough of Enfield and Metropolitan Police Authority.
- SK was in discussions with Public I about webcasting the conference.
- There were three confirmed sponsors providing sponsorship totalling £1500. A further potential sponsor could increase this to £2,000. Last year sponsorship totalled £5,000.
- All local authority chief executives had received notice that the statutory guidance relating to e-petitions was being withdrawn. Certain requirements would remain but there would be more discretion locally. A workshop would be run to help those who wanted to set up e-petition facilities.
- Members should be emailed with the draft programme, the list of confirmed speakers and workshops and the key reasons they should attend the conference. James Doble suggested "Be Prepared for Localism Bill" could be used.
- The AGM's agenda items would be to consider how the process for election of officers would be managed in 2011, the Annual Report and Financial Report.

- The conference would be evaluated and the results used to inform the planning of next year's conference.

### Resolved

- (1) That JA invite Jane Martin to the conference.
- (2) That JA invite Ann Rehill to the conference.
- (3) That SK draw up a revised programme.
- (4) That SK contact Teignbridge Council to check whether they would be attending the conference.
- (5) JA to send text to LL for e-bulletin outlining key reasons why members should attend the conference.

## 30. Association Business Plan

MT summarised the main changes that had been made to the Business Plan 2010-2012 as a result of budget constraints and new legislative requirements:

In the discussion the following points were made:

- The diploma would be launched at the conference
- Some actions had been completed in relation to the development of the website.
- ADSO could be more proactive in responding to consultations.

### Resolved

- (1) That the report be noted.
- (2) That JQ, CP and MR collaborate on responding to consultations.
- (3) That TVH review the Articles of Association after the AGM.

## 31. Directors' Reports

### Treasurer's Report

JL updated the Board on the accounts and made the following points:

The cost for the accountants to produce the accounts was not yet known.

- The AEA cost of collecting membership fees and collating membership information would decrease from £10 to £8 per member this year.
- Bank charges were kept to a minimum but were incurred when cheques were paid in to the account.
- ADSO did not pay to sponsor the MJ awards this year. The normal cost would have been £19,500. ADSO had just paid for a table.
- VAT had been paid for April-June 2010 but ADSO had then received a rebate of £1,828.28.
- The Qualifications Account just broke even. There were currently funds in the account due to candidates paying up front but advisers not being paid the full amount until the learner had completed the course.
- The Board was of the view that it was important to include details of Board members expenses in the interests of transparency. JL had receipts for all of the expenses. A line could be added to remind readers that the Board members were not paid for their work.

### Resolved

- (1) That the financial update be noted.

- (2) That the report be presented in the current format, with the current amount of detail to the AGM with a line added to remind readers that the Board members were not paid for their work.
- (3) That the balance of money be left in the main account until the Board is clearer as to the membership figures for 2010/11 and the outcome of the conference is known.
- (4) JL would contact the 10 London Boroughs that had not signed up to ADSO and Encourage them to do so.

## 32. Regional Updates

- i. East of England  
Introductory meetings had been held in June and July. CS would identify a web publisher.
- ii. North East  
A meeting had been held in the summer and a training event would be arranged. Northallerton, North Yorkshire were keen to host an event.
- iii. East Midlands  
Meetings were held every quarter with the last one taking place in September. 25 people had attended. The region had agreed to undertake benchmarking and had discussed e-petitions, a report from ADSO, the conference and job evaluation.
- iv. London  
There were over 200 members in London. A steering group had been set up and an event would be held in November.
- v. North West  
An inaugural meeting had taken place and the feedback had been positive.
- vi. South East  
An ADSO meeting would be held following on from the next South East Employers meeting.
- vii. South West  
A conference with a slot about the qualifications had been held in July. The possibility of virtual branch meetings was being considered. There was support for ADSO but many authorities had concerns about costs.
- viii. West Midlands  
There were now 68 members with 27 people from 17 councils undertaking the qualification. There were venue and sponsorship issues. The next meeting was to be arranged.
- viii. Scotland  
Meetings had been provisionally been arranged in Glasgow and Edinburgh. 10 Scottish local authorities had agreed to attend.

## 33. Communication

- a) Newsletter  
Following a link to the conference being sent out the traffic on the website had increased. It was important that regional pages were kept updated. The Board agreed that newsletters should be sent out at least quarterly and that e-alerts should be sent out in relation to key topics e.g. consultation.

Opportunities would publish information for ADSO. Any relevant articles should be sent to SK. SK would ask Opportunities to publish information about the conference.

- b) Business cards  
JA and JL had obtained quoted for ADSO business cards. There would be an initial cost of £48 if 12 members had the cards and thereafter the cards would cost £15 per 100. The Board agreed that Directors should have the cards, that they should be printed on cream card, contain information on ADSO and comply with the statutory requirement to include the company registration number. It was suggested that internet companies might be able to provide the cards at a lower cost. JA and JL would look into this and if it was not possible, they would proceed with the above.
- c) Legislative update for members  
The Association of Council Secretaries and Solicitors (ACSeS) produced a weekly bulletin for members. They had agreed that for £2000 for one year, they would provide ADSO with a weekly bulletin to send to members. There would be 48 bulletins a year and at a cost £41.66 per issue, this was great value. JL would send a copy of the ACSeS Bulletin to LL so that it could be badged from ADSO. JA would agree the terms with ACSeS. An email could be sent to members to inform them that in future they would receive the weekly bulletin.

## Resolved

- (1) That SK send conference information to Opportunities for publishing.
- (2) That JA arrange for the printing of business cards for directors.
- (3) That JL send a copy of the ACSeS bulletin to LL.

## 34. Working with Others

- a) MJ Awards  
The MJ had agreed ADSO could sponsor the awards at a cost of £15,000 instead of the usual £19,500. Weightmans had offered to co-sponsor ADSO and pay £7,500 which would leave ADSO with £7,500 to pay. This could be paid over two years and would include the cost of the evening. Members discussed the benefits and drawbacks of sponsoring the awards before agreeing that ADSO would sponsor the awards for one year, after which the sponsorship would be reviewed.  
  
Concern was raised that three of the six winners of last year's awards were not ADSO members. JA would look into whether being an ADSO member could be a criterion for entry for an ADSO sponsored award.
- b) Centre for Public Scrutiny (CfPS)  
JA had attended the CfPS national forum in July to encourage CfPS to work with ADSO. Ed Hammond from CfPS was interested in working with ADSO and had suggested that the diploma be called a Professional Diploma in Local Democracy.
- c) UK Youth Parliament  
JA sat on a panel at the Parliament and answered questions on how the 100 youth workers in attendance could be supported in engaging young people in the democratic process. A further session had been held with 25 youth

workers to discuss the issue. JA would write up the event for inclusion on the website.

## Resolved

That JA send LL a report on the Youth Parliament for inclusion on the website.

- d) London Councils  
JA had met with the Chief Executive of London Councils to discuss how ADSO and London Councils could work together.
- e) SEE Conference  
ADSO had had a stand and ran a workshop at the conference.
- f) Scotland  
A discussion had taken place with Nigel Stewart, a retired director in Scotland, about how the qualification could be developed in Scotland. It was possible that the Society of Local Authority Lawyers and Administrators in Scotland (SOLAR) could invest some resources in taking this forward. SOLAR were interested in meeting with the Board.
- g) Democracy Counts  
A company called Democracy Counts had asked ADSO to endorse their products and offer ADSO members a discounted rate on these products. The Board agreed that in principle advertising space could be offered in the suppliers section of the website. There would be a disclaimer to state that ADSO did not endorse any of the companies or products listed.

## 35. Training and Qualifications

MT provided an update on the work undertaken regarding qualifications and training.

In the discussion the following points were made:

- There were over 50 learners and 28 regional advisers.
- ADSO had support from Skills for Justice, the recognised Sector Skills Council for ADSO. A £20,000 grant had been allocated to both the Democratic Services and Electoral Services to be spent on updating labour market information, promoting and supporting implementation of the Democratic Services National Occupational Standards and to give advice and support on development and approval of qualifications. Booklets for the conference would be covered by the grant.
- Funding would last until March.
- The Board discussed the different types of membership offered by Skills for Justice
- The Diploma would take longer than the Certificate and prices had not yet been considered. Learners would be able to pay in instalments.
- The pilot Training Programme was being developed and events would be held in January and March 2011. It was important that any training events suggested in an area covered by the South East Employers were discussed with them. More work had to be done in relation to costs and the costs for the pilot should be put through the main account.
- Three quotes had been received for the development of a qualifications portal. This would be particularly beneficial to those undertaking the diploma on a remote basis. There would be a learner area on the website and learners could save assignments within a secure section of the website with their regional advisers and assessors able to access the documents.

- The Board agreed in principle to purchase the qualifications portal from Barsbank subject to ADSO receiving the breakeven number of 80 bookings for the conference. This would ensure there was sufficient funding for the portal.

## **Resolved**

- (1) That the two reports be noted.
- (2) That the update on the ongoing progress of the Certificate and Diploma be noted.
- (3) That the feedback form the Skills for Justice meeting be noted.
- (4) That the Board were keen to see the relationship with Skills For Justice continue and would take a view on membership in March 2011. MT would inform Skills For Justice.
- (5) That the Board agree in principle to the launch of the pilot ADSO Training Programme on the basis set out in the report subject to possible conflicts of interest with employers organisations being resolved.
- (6) That the update on the CPD scheme be noted and that it be agreed that a report be submitted on this and the evaluation of the Training Programme at the March/April 2011 meeting.
- (7) That the Board agree in principle to the approval of the quotation for a qualifications portal from Barsbank and that the final decision be taken by JA, JL and MT once the number of conference attendees had been confirmed.

## **36. Benchmarking**

A pilot study involving 12 local authorities was underway. CIPFA had drawn up a questionnaire. Once comments had been received a revised version would be launched. If there were 80 authorities signed up, ADSO had been offered 15% of the fee. The Board would prefer if the fee could be reduced instead and would be kept updated about developments.

## **37. Future Developments**

### Model Constitutions

There was no update on the development of a model constitution.

## **38. Any Other Business**

### Health and Safety Policy Statement

The Board approved the statement.

### Job Evaluations

This would be considered at a branch meeting. Skills for Justice might be able to provide advice.

## **39. Next Meeting**

The next meeting would take place on 21 January in London. It was possible that the April 2011 meeting would be rescheduled to take place on 18 March.

## **Resolved**

That SK email members about the dates of future meetings.

ACTION	WHO
Pursue Welsh representation on the Council	SK
Pursue Scottish representation on the Council	CS
Pursue Northern Irish Contact	JA
Progress Members newsletter with Access	JA
Identify regional web publishers for any regions without a web publisher	ALL
Provide more information for the regional pages	ALL
Set up regional databases and regional threads on the discussion forum	LL
Set up suggested Payment Module on Association website	LL
Consider other payment options for conference	LL
Get further costs for options for voting and online polls on the website	LL
Put the Scheme of delegation on the Members Forum	LL/JA
Amend the Business Plan, including adding Talent Pool and Mentoring and put on the Association website	MT
Talk to Nick Randall re Interim Managers	JA
Draw up content for the website re providing a Mentoring service (Longer term aim)	JA/JL
Circulation of Sunderland membership lists	LL
Frequently asked questions re membership added to the website	LL
Information on accreditation to be added to the newsletter	LL
Development of a Model constitution	GR
Gather quotes for public liability insurance	SK
Authorities leading workshops at the conference to be encouraged to become members.	JA
Jane Martin, from the Ombudsman to be invited to attend the conference.	JD
Ann Rehill, previously of Standards for England to be invited to	JA

attend the conference.	
A revised conference programme to be drawn up.	<b>SK</b>
An e-bulletin outlining conference details be sent to members.	<b>JA/LL</b>
Responding to consultations.	<b>JQ/CP/MR</b>
Articles of Association to be reviewed after the AGM.	<b>TV</b>
Details on the conference be sent to Opportunities to be published.	<b>SK</b>
The printing of business cards for directors to be arranged.	<b>JA</b>
A report on the Youth Parliament to be included on the website.	<b>JA/LL</b>
Board members to be emailed about dates for future meetings.	<b>SK</b>