



Chair's Annual Report 2015/16

Author: John Austin – ADSO Chair

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Welcome to my Chair's annual report. Another year passes with ADSO growing steadily despite the austerity within the public sector. This is testimony to you as members in terms of your continued support, plus the professionalism and commitment of my Board colleagues and others. Thanks to all concerned.
- 1.2 This report looks back over some of our achievements during 2015/16 and provides an insight into some of our current and future plans. It should be read in conjunction with John Lynch's finance report also on the AGM agenda.

2. The ADSO Board and Business Plan

- 2.1 I mentioned in my report to last year's AGM that ADSO has grown to the extent that we can no longer rely on volunteers to carry out certain roles, as willing and committed as they are. We have consequently outsourced the day-to-day finance work, the training administration and the development of the new website. All are working extremely well and are providing the professionalism, skills and capacity we require, at value for money prices.
- 2.2 I have also mentioned previously that the Board had agreed three objectives to focus on over the next few years in addition to our operational priorities.
- re-positioning and upskilling the governance professional of the future
 - supporting and developing improved governance in different sectors
 - dealing with Devolution
- 2.3 We have made progress on all three.

- 2.4 The ADSO Certificate is being comprehensively reviewed to achieve a more modern, fit for purpose professional qualification (see also paragraph 3.3). This will be available to new learners early in 2017. This will not however be at the expense of current learners who will continue to be supported to complete their qualification as quickly as possible.
- 2.5 We have piloted work within the London Branch to connect with other parts of the not-for-profit sector to try to extend ADSO's footprint to beyond local government. This is not something that will happen overnight and we will try to continue the dialogue whenever we can to develop relationships and identify possible opportunities.
- 2.6 Devolution has been high on the Board's agenda during that last 12 months. We have held workshops at regional events and organised a seminar within the Eastern region devoted solely to the topic. We also introduced a separate thread on the members' forum to exchange information and views. It could be argued that the change in Prime Minister and Chancellor following the referendum in June has reduced the momentum nationally. It is still however very relevant in some parts of the country and ADSO will continue to keep a close eye on developments and respond accordingly.
- 2.7 The nominations for the Board for 2016/17 are included in the Secretary's report elsewhere on this agenda. For the first time, we have had an election for a Director's position. This was for the Director of Communications, with Wayne Chandai winning the ballot. This election is a positive step forward in making the Board as open and accessible as possible. Thanks to Jack Latkovic for putting himself forward.
- 2.8 Whilst we never want to lose hard working members from the Board, a few departures during the year has enabled new people to take on the roles. This not only brings new ideas to the Board, it also helps with succession planning.
- 2.9 We are very fortunate to have such an excellent Board. People who are prepared to give up their time, including weekends and evenings, to provide such quality services to you as members and to keep the cost as low as possible. I am very proud of all of them and wish to thank them on your behalf for everything they do.

3. Directors' Performance Management Framework and Remuneration

- 3.1 In July, the Board agreed the following in relation to Directors for recommendation to the AGM:
- role profiles
 - a new performance management process
 - annual remuneration

- 3.2 This involves the setting of objectives for each Director which will be evaluated on an annual basis. The objectives will be linked to their roles and the Business Plan.
- 3.3 The report to the July Board meeting and the relevant minute are enclosed.
- 3.4 It is recommended that each Director be paid £4000 per annum to recognise the responsibility and time spent by them in the performance of their duties. £3000 of this will be paid automatically - quarterly in arrears with effect from September 2016 - with the remaining £1000 being performance related and dependent on the satisfactory achievement of objectives.
- 3.5 The above annual payment is also seen as an incentive when trying to attract new people to take up Director roles.
- 3.6 I have agreed with John Turner, Chief Executive of the Association of Electoral Administrators, that he will provide the independent advice and challenge to the performance management process.
- 3.7 The Board also agreed that the AGM be asked to determine its role in approving future increases as set out in paragraphs 4.2 and 4.3 of the enclosed report. I am of the view that the AGM should approve any such increases above 10% and I recommend this accordingly.

Recommendations

1. The role profiles for each Director be approved;
2. The performance management process as set out in paragraph 3 of the report be approved and the Board be asked to evaluate the process after 12 months;
3. The total level of remuneration for each Director should be set initially at £4,000 per annum (paragraph 4.1 of the report);
4. 75% of the total remuneration for each Director (£3000) to be paid as a basic allowance, quarterly in arrears with effect from September 2016, outside of the performance management process, leaving the remaining 25% (£1000) within that process (paragraphs 4.1- 4.3 of the report); and
5. the Annual General Meeting should approve all future increases above 10% in relation to the £4000 payment.

4. Learning and development opportunities

- 4.1 We have continued to provide a comprehensive training programme, designed and delivered by democratic services professionals.

- 4.2 The programme is quality assured with courses being observed against a set of good practice criteria. Feedback is monitored with changes to content and delivery made as appropriate.
- 4.3 Unfortunately attendance at courses has dropped off in areas outside of London and we have cancelled some for that reason. Apologies to those who had booked on these events. Whilst we are willing to cross subsidise some courses, particularly in relation to our qualifications, we cannot continue to run some courses at a loss. We are looking at different options to deliver training and will be seeking members' views in the future.
- 4.4 I mentioned in paragraph 2.4 above that we are currently undertaking a comprehensive review of the ADSO certificate. The Diploma will be looked at later. The current qualifications are very popular but completion rates are still an issue. We are working hard to support and encourage learners to finish as quickly as possible. The new Certificate will be much more robust in terms of deadlines and learner accountability to meet the timescales set.
- 4.5 We currently have 69 active learners doing the Certificate with 58 more having completed the qualification. For the Diploma, we have 38 learners ongoing with 9 others having completed.
- 4.6 I am delighted that we will, once again, be presenting certificates to successful learners at the Conference.
- 4.7 Our Annual Conference is a highlight of the year and a key part of our development opportunities for you as members. Thanks to Sue Keogh for her hard work in organising the event. We have a new venue this year and have looked to freshen up the programme to provide a varied set of activities. Attendance is slightly down from previous years but that is not surprising given the financial difficulties faced by local authorities. Thanks to all who have attended for your continued support. We are fortunate to have loyal sponsors and I value very much the support they give to ADSO. It's important that we recognise this support so we have allowed plenty of the time for you to visit their stands and engage with them. Please do so as much as possible. You may even win a prize in the process! I hope you enjoy the conference and, as in previous years, we will listen carefully to comments received.
- 4.8 I know I may sound like a broken record when it comes to the ADSO awards but that is because I value them so highly. It's so important that we give authorities the opportunity to show good practice and to be proud of what they do. The awards allow both to happen. We received sufficient submissions to proceed with the Team of the Year award and thanks to all those who took part. The hardest part of the process is telling authorities that they haven't been shortlisted as I know how much effort they have made. But there can be only one winner and I look forward to congratulating them after the conference dinner. Unfortunately we did not receive enough nominations to proceed with the Officer of the Year award.

That is a real shame but hopefully we can do so next time. I will be recommending to the Board that we consider running the awards every two years rather than annually. This may help to increase the numbers taking part.

- 4.9 We still continue to produce Democracy Direct on a weekly basis but from our monitoring, a disappointing number of members read it. This is surprising as it is an excellent way of keeping up to date with key changes in legislation, relevant court decisions and Government announcements.

5. ADSO Website

- 5.1 The current website was completed in something of a rush when we established ADSO back in 2009. It served us well for a number of years but it began to develop problems and became well past its sell by date. If it was a motor car, it would have failed its MOT long ago!
- 5.2 The website is our flagship and a valuable source of information and networking for you as members. So earlier this year, the Board agreed to commission a new website and work is currently underway. A demonstration will be available at the ADSO stand in the conference exhibition area. Progress is extremely good and I am very confident that we will have an excellent site early in the new year. My thanks to Wayne Chandai and Dave Burn for their work on this important project.

6. The Future of ADSO

- 6.1 It's broken record time again I'm afraid but on a different subject. I have mentioned how much work the current Board do on your behalf. This is supplemented by support from a small number of other members in the regions to help to organise events. I am very grateful to those colleagues for the help they give. But any successful organisation needs to be strong and active at the grass roots and I think ADSO is struggling with this in a number of areas. We must have more members who are willing to play their part. Some of the current Board members have been in their roles since we began and they are not going to be around for ever. So my challenge to you is to ensure a successful future of ADSO and step forward to help. Don't sit back and leave it to others.

7. Raising the profile of the Association and working with others

- 7.1 We exhibited at the LGA Conference this year in Bournemouth and promoted ADSO to both members and officers from across the country. Thanks to Xpress/Modern.Gov for allowing us to join them once again at their exhibition stand. We also sponsored and attended the Notwestminster conference in Huddersfield earlier this year. I hope both will be a regular feature in the ADSO annual calendar.

- 7.2 We now have a very positive relationship with the Centre for Public Scrutiny and have joined with them and INLOGOV to run three successful scrutiny conferences entitled 'Scrutiny in Challenging Times'. Due to demand, a fourth is planned for early in 2017.
- 7.3 We are also in discussions with the Association of Electoral Administrators (AEA) over opportunities for joint working and development. This makes sense as more and more democratic services staff are now involved in the running of elections in some capacity.
- 7.4 I am also very keen to develop relationships with other organisations, particularly SOLAR from Scotland, the Lawyers in Local Government and Society of Local Council Clerks (SLCC).
- 7.5 Thank you to Xpress, our main conference sponsor, for their continued support and to all our sponsors for their support both at conference and throughout the year at regional events.
- 7.6 We continue to develop our links with the International Institute of Municipal Clerks (IIMC) and have agreed to buy into their bulk membership scheme. This means that all ADSO members are also IIMC members at no additional cost unless you decide to opt out. We are working with the IIMC to plan the second European Symposium in Brussels in September 2017. Those who attended the very first event in 2014 will testify just how good it was and we will be offering subsidised places for a number of members as we did previously.

8. Financial and commercial income for the Association

- 8.1 This has been covered in John Lynch's report and I thank him for his efficient stewardship of ADSO's funds. As mentioned earlier, Caroline Wood, our book keeper is doing a great job in managing our affairs on a day to day basis. We continue to work hard to ensure that we are financially stable whilst keeping to the principle of reinvesting funds back into the association and our members.

9. Conclusion

- 9.1 I am extremely proud of what we have achieved in developing ADSO. I included the following in my report last year and I don't think I can say it any better this time around. It is still relevant today. So rather than reinvent the wheel, here is a snapshot again.

"We have much to be proud of - both for how ADSO has developed and for the work you are doing within your authorities.Democratic Services teams across the country are playing an important part in tackling the problems within local government. You are demonstrating great commitment and professionalism and I see evidence of this being recognised in many Councils.Raising the profile of the democratic

services officer and upskilling the role to give it the professional status it so richly deserves is a major priority.”

- 9.2 You will by now have received your membership renewal notices. Membership numbers are so important to our strength and future development. Please therefore renew quickly. Also, please encourage colleagues to join and highlight the benefits of membership to your managers.
- 9.3 I look forward to seeing as many of you at the conference as possible. Thank you once again for your support and very best wishes.

John Austin
Chair ADSO Board

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