

News from the Board

Reflections on October Board - Anna Bradley

21 October | Anna Bradley

One of the key components of the work of any board is the opportunity to really get to grips with the complexities of the day to day work of the organisation. In past we have been able to, for example, sit in our Contact Centre and listen first hand to what our callers are saying to us, or to talk face to face with staff from specific operational teams and get a feel for their work. That is of course more difficult now, so we welcomed the chance at our Board workshop to have a 'deep dive' into our enforcement work and the types of issues and themes that are emerging. We will be covering the detail in our annual Upholding Professional Standards report later this year.

We also used our workshop to think about strategic financial planning and in particular what our financial objectives should be for the next three years. We also talked about how we might be working in a post pandemic world and what implications that could have. Finally, we looked at the independent one-year review of our transparency reforms and talked about what we could do next, very mindful of the CMA's next review and the LSB's strong interest in this area. All these discussions were early stage conversations to guide our executive as they develop proposals for the Board in due course.

At our formal meeting, we had an update on how PCRE is going. This year the exercise is being undertaken on new IT and telephony systems. There are the inevitable teething problems, but we are cracking through them as they arise. We heard about the support that staff are providing for the few firms who have experienced difficulties.

In a similar vein, we are mindful of the pressures on firms and the ongoing uncertainty being caused by the perfect storm of Covid-19 and Brexit. So, we have decided to give people more time to adjust to a forthcoming change which means that only admitted solicitors will be able to take the criminal or civil Higher Rights of Audience (HRA) assessment. We are postponing the implementation date of these reforms from 1 January to 1 April 2020 to help those affected to adjust their plans.

One of the key items on our agenda this month was the 2020/21 budget. We consulted on our forward business plan over summer and as promised we have been keeping a close eye on planned expenditure and value for money. The executive have delivered on an efficiency challenge presented in a previous version so we should be able to fulfil our plans.

As part of our role in monitoring the performance of the SRA, we discussed a report on corporate complaints and received the annual report of our Independent Reviewer (IR). The IR provides people who are not satisfied with our service with an independent view on their complaint. The IR also undertakes biannual reviews of case files from within our complaints processes. The Board were assured by the report, which makes it clear that our corporate complaints work is of a high standard and that learning is used to support continuous improvement.

Finally, I am glad to say that our Board member recruitment campaign is going really well. We have received interest from right across the sector and way beyond, with more than 200 applications from a real diversity of candidates, both in terms of background and the different perspectives they would bring. While shortlisting from such a strong field has of course been challenging, it's a challenge that I am delighted to have. We move to interviews in November and we will of course let everyone know the outcome later this year.

