

News from the Board

Reflections on May Board - Anna Bradley

20 May 2019

It's six months now since I joined the SRA and one of my first priorities has been to make sure that our Board is working in a truly open, accountable way.

This week I gave an update on this. My default position is to be as open as possible and I think that means publishing as much as we can as quickly as we can. There will always be information that we just can't publish, for example because it's commercially sensitive, but my Board and I will work to minimise that and to be clear about the reasons we can't share something.

This blog is one of the new steps we are taking. I will be sharing my thoughts on Board meetings - the decisions we make and the issues we are grappling with.

The main theme for our May Board meeting was money: our budget and the Compensation Fund.

Spending money wisely

We are acutely aware that we need to provide real value for money and we have worked hard over recent years to keep our budget down. This year, however, we needed a small uplift to bolster investment in our anti-money laundering work. The good news is that rises in the number of solicitors means the practising certificate fee can still remain flat - for the third year in a row.

The Compensation Fund is at the heart of trust in the profession – it's an essential safety net for the public who have lost money because of the actions of a solicitor. The fund has to be able to cover future claims without putting the profession through the inconvenience and budget challenges of unplanned collection exercises. The tough part is, of course, working out what those expected future claims could amount to.

The Board discussed the level for the annual contribution, looking carefully at future forecasts, including for high value claims linked to dubious investment schemes. We have had to close down fewer firms recently, which has reduced pressure on the Fund, so we decided to bring contributions down by a third for individuals, subject to confirmation by the LSB.

We have also published the 2017/18 financial statements so everyone can see exactly how the Compensation Fund money was spent in that year.

Looking ahead

We also had a good conversation around the SQE and are looking forward to sharing the results of the testing work on stage 1 SQE assessment in due course.

Importantly, Board spent some time in workshop session on our next Corporate Strategy. We have started by asking ourselves the big questions. What will the legal sector look like by 2023 and beyond? What do we want it to look like? What effect will technology have?

We don't have a crystal ball, but we need to be alive to issues on the horizon. If we prioritise the issues of yesterday and today, we are unlikely to have a corporate strategy fit for the future.

There is still a lot of work to do and the plan is that we will formally consult on this in the Autumn. I imagine it will be a subject I return to regularly in this blog.

You can read more details of our May Board meeting

[<https://www.sra.org.uk/sra/how-we-work/our-board/public-meetings/archive/>] , including the minutes.