

Progress update on the Strategy Review adopted by the SSALC Board, 14th November 2019

At the Board Meeting in November it was agreed that a progress report would be presented to the Board at each meeting. Whilst progress was being made up to March this year, out of necessity work was put on hold on the basis that Covid and its challenges would pass in a matter of weeks; clearly this is not the case and we are likely to live with the challenges for months or years to come. It is therefore suggested that the three current Chairmen revive the meetings with the CEO that occurred up to February and help to take the Review forward.

[a] Training, to examine

- Programme of subjects to be covered – to establish demand for subjects a survey has been undertaken inviting all member councils to identify areas that we do not currently cover and are important to those councils. It also invited comment on areas we offer that they view as less relevant.
- How do we attract clerks and councillors who do not attend training ?
- How we select, regulate and remunerate trainers ?
- Venues used, location, cost per head etc. A detailed analysis is maintained with each event as its own separate cost centre

*Methodology [a] response to identified demand, [b] seek expressions of interest from those interested in providing training support, including existing trainers by advertising and presentation to Board members *. All subject areas to be reviewed. [c] Consider alternative venues identified by Chairmen within their respective counties.*

** Those who put themselves forward as potential trainers will be judged on their practical experience, relevant professional qualifications and a 20 minute presentation on the subject concerned to a panel made up of Board Directors and representative Clerks.*

Priority 1 - initially to be undertaken by March 2020 but to continue as an ongoing exercise as other training needs are identified

Progress The Panel of Vice Chairmen met with those who had put themselves forward to deliver new clerk, finance and planning training and declared themselves content with those they had seen. A gap in our programme covering all aspects of communication including social media is being addressed and Breakthrough Communications have been invited to deliver pilot courses to enable clerks and councillors to give feedback on the effectiveness of the delivery and subjects covered. Vice Chairmen have been invited to attend and witness the style of training following which a decision will be taken regarding continued use of Breakthrough Communications.

Councillor, Chairmanship and Employment training are now delivered in house by the CEO and DCEO.

[b] Overheads

- Staff costs, travelling etc
- Accommodation
- Technical support – ie phones, IT, RISO

Methodology [a] review **staff** costs and how the service is maintained at the level prescribed. [b] is there scope to reduce space occupied when the lease is renewed or the break clause reached. [c] Look at vfm and market test when technical contracts come up for renewal.

Priority 5 – to be provisionally undertaken by October 2020 but in the light of Covid19 this will be ongoing as explained below

Progress – the Board will appreciate that since 24th March the ability of the SSALC team to work very effectively from their homes and maintain the high quality of support to member councils raises questions about future accommodation needs; this will require the Board’s attention when the Covid situation is clearer, perhaps in the spring of 2021. Since April staff travel expenses have reduced to zero but a Zoom licence cost SSALC £120 – an interesting contrast !

Staff members remain in post as previously reported, there are 2.9 whole time equivalent employees and 318 member councils, compared with Kent ALC 4.2 wte and 305 councils and Essex also with 4.2 wte and 272 members as at April 2020

Work has commenced on considering future needs relating to technical contracts, it is clear that wherever staff are based IT support from Trident or an alternative will remain a requirement whereas the large RISO print machine will have more limited use if remote training remains the norm and we are not providing hard copies of material; similarly if accommodation needs change, the phone network managed by Cavendish may no longer be required in the way it currently exists.

[c] Professional Services

- Value for money and appropriateness of legal, financial & HR support

Methodology – straightforward market testing against appropriate specifications of requirement.

*** Those expressing interest will be expected to produce testimonials from reference sites which must include CALCs and a cross section of town and parish councils.**

Priority 3 – to be undertaken by May 2020 [delayed]

Progress A draft specification for legal work has been prepared and six firms of solicitors claiming to offer support to local authorities in the SE have been provisionally identified, it is not clear if they all have experience of the local council sector. Similar specifications can be developed and approved for financial and HR support.

[d] Staff structure

- Does SSALC have the right level of staff to provide coverage * and deliver services ?

Methodology – as [b]

** With a very limited number of staff and a significant programme of events, the office is frequently unmanned; all staff are can work from home when necessary and the CEO has a funded mobile phone for contact off site. Is the Board content with this arrangement ?*

Is SSALC involved in activities that the Board might consider offer little benefit to member councils ?

Priority 2 – to be undertaken by April 2020 – events have rather overtaken the * paragraph above.

Progress At [b] above reference is made to comparisons with other CALCs, SSALC has 2.9 whole time equivalent posts covering the three counties. At a NALC Policy Committee in 2014 it was accepted that for a CALC to be able to provide a full range of support and cover to member councils, 1.5 wte posts were required. In SSALC not only is there strength in unity but economy of scale.

Whilst we all understand that the key role is to be accessible and available to our member councils to advise and assist, there are numerous other engagement and networking activities in which we are involved. It might be appropriate for a Panel – perhaps the Vice Chairmen to meet with staff, examine activities and using their experience as councillors within Sussex and Surrey give an indication as to the level of emphasis or value of each activity.

[e] Governance and Constitution

- After operating as we are for 6 years, does the Governance Model require adjustment ?
- Are we able to provide appropriate support for District Associations ?

Methodology – [a] by consultation with Board directors and legal advice, [b] are the DALCs operating to their best potential, do they need greater support from SSALC to be consistently effective ?

Priority 7 – to be undertaken by December 2020

Progress The Articles of Association have been circulated and a background paper providing the evolution of SSALC for the benefit of new Directors.

[f] Income generation

- To look at income generated by subscriptions, training and recruitment and examine areas of potential development

Methodology – is there scope for commercial sponsorship beyond the exhibitors fees currently received ? Is there scope for advertising without endorsement of a supplier ? Should we charge more for training or recruitment ? Do we actually require more income, if so what would we use it for as a not for profit organisation ?

Priority 6 – to be undertaken by December 2020

Progress – It is likely that Covid19 will prevent a great deal of progress on this; without lucrative events and exhibitor fees our income could be reduced by over £30,000 this year. There is also a limit on what can reasonably be charged for a two hour on line training session and we also have a reduction in recruitment with more Clerks remaining in post.

Opportunities will be kept under review.

Trevor Leggo, CEO

August 2020