

# SOLACE Wales Newsletter

## Summer 2009



### Chair's update

I am especially pleased, as the new Chair of the Branch to welcome you to the summer edition of the SOLACE Wales newsletter. I'm delighted to have taken on the role and to be working with Jo Farrar who was elected as Vice Chair. Jo and I circulated some information about ourselves and what we hoped to work on as we came into office, this can be viewed here; <http://www.solacewales.org.uk/webdocuments/SOLACE%20submission%20-%20Alison%20&%20Jo.pdf>

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This is an exciting time to be in the Chair and although we face a difficult year ahead I am also looking forward to the challenge and to the new opportunities that are opening to us. This is particularly true of joint working within local government and between central and local government where we are seeing a shift towards a more positive and productive relationship with a genuine desire to develop more effective partnership working. To play our part in this I will be working hard to develop SOLACE's relationship with WAG and the WLGA. I am meeting monthly with Emyr Roberts and Steve Thomas and will keep you updated with any significant issues that come out of these meetings.

Our conference held in Aberystwyth in May was very well attended and the feedback received was excellent. I'm sure that those of you who were there will agree that the event was a great success and has helped build momentum for activity and dialogue within public services in Wales. Many of you contributed to planning the day, running the sessions and promoting the event so thank you for your support. This newsletter contains a report from the day as well as the very positive meeting we had with WAG officials before the conference dinner.

During the summer we are working on a development plan that will identify the Branch's priorities going forward and where we should look to position ourselves in Welsh public services in the future. We'd like to get your input into this so please contact Lizzie with your comments and suggestions. A draft document will be shared soon and discussed at the branch meeting in September.

Please feel free to contact myself or Jo if you want to bring anything to our attention or discuss SOLACE Wales' work.

Kind regards

Alison





### WLGA annual conference 2009

Alison Ward addressed the conference which took place on 25<sup>th</sup> June as part of a session entitled *recession reality: only a radical redesign of public services will do*.

Alison presented an alternative view of this title, taking it out of a negative and threatening context and presenting it as an opportunity to re-focus our activity on the things that matter most to citizens and communities and the things that make our work most rewarding. She called for a radical rethink of what we are trying to achieve and how we get there. Using the outcomes that citizens want as the starting point for planning and delivering services rather than the end point of what can be achieved with systems put in place for our own comfort and convenience, Alison described her approach as “.....a very simple, but very powerful idea – you might call it ‘the radical application of common sense’ it means that everything that we do and every pound we spend has to justify its existence on the basis of being necessary to achieving that citizen-centred outcome.”

Read Alison’s speech on the SOLACE Wales website here: [http://www.solacewales.org.uk/webdocuments/WLGA%20conference%202009\\_Alison%20Ward%20\\_speech.pdf](http://www.solacewales.org.uk/webdocuments/WLGA%20conference%202009_Alison%20Ward%20_speech.pdf)

### Challenging times: an opportunity for change

This is the name that has been agreed for the project SOLACE is leading to look at the impact of future funding levels for local government and what options there are to mitigate the impact on citizens. The project is in full swing and Deloitte, who have been commissioned to work with us, are in the process of collating and analysing data and talking to stakeholders. Workshops are being held during July and August to get input from professional groups on the impact of the funding gap and the potential options and solutions for consideration.

A vital part of the project is also to get the strategic overview that Chief Executives can provide. We are holding a workshop for Chief Executives on Wednesday 12<sup>th</sup> August 10am – 12pm in Cardiff.

### Sustainable Development Engagement Event

Paul Smith spoke alongside Jane Davidson AM, Minister for Environment, Sustainability and Housing and Tim Peppin WLGA Director of Regeneration and Sustainable Development at the recent Sustainable Development Engagement Event for local government. In his speech he emphasized the need to make SD ‘core not chore’ and committed to working together in Wales to continue the momentum to become a sustainable country.

### Policy Portfolios

The SOLACE Wales policy portfolios have been updated and can be viewed on our website at: <http://www.solacewales.org.uk/about/policy.htm>

We are keen to involve a broader range of people in our policy development work so if you are a SOLACE member and are interested in getting involved contact Lizzie Swaffield.

On 15 July, the South East SOLACE regional dinner was held at the Celtic Manor in Newport and hosted by Deloitte. Attendees participated in a lively discussion over dinner about the budget challenges facing local authorities across Wales and the actions that are needed to make a significant difference. The discussion covered topics such as making the connections, performance management and incentivisation of staff, risk management practices and the cost of inspection. In addition, the conversation focused on the roles of local authority Officers, Members and the Welsh Assembly in enabling a climate for change.

Feedback about the event has been positive, with attendees from both local authorities and Deloitte believing it generated some interesting discussions. Deloitte would like to thank everyone for giving up their personal time to attend and for making the evening a pleasant and thought provoking experience.

Deloitte's publication on the financial challenges facing the Public Sector, Counting the Cost can be found at [http://www.deloitte.com/dtt/section\\_node/0,1042,sid%253D2857,00.html](http://www.deloitte.com/dtt/section_node/0,1042,sid%253D2857,00.html) along with a range of other articles and research of interest to the Public Sector.



### **Better Engagement: SOLACE Wales Conference 2009**

Dinner in the luxury marquee at the Conrah Hotel with views of the Ceredigion countryside kicked off the conference in style. The following delegates could look forward to a packed programme exploring a wealth of different avenues and angles on the theme of better engagement.

Isobel Garner, Immediate Past Chair of SOLACE Wales opened the conference with a look back at the focus of SOLACE's work over the last year and a nod to the challenges and opportunities to come that the changed world has bought with it.

Andrew Davies AM, Minister for Finance and Public Service Delivery began his address by reaffirming the importance of the Assembly Government engaging with SOLACE and signalled the commitment to this relationship through the high attendance of WAG's senior management team on the day. In the Minister's view there could be no better title for a conference which brought together senior public service professionals than Better Engagement. Engagement with democracy is particularly important in these financially challenging times, and one should 'never waste a crisis;' we should use it as an opportunity for a different type of dialogue between central and local government. The Minister's

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speech set the mood of the day firmly within the context of a commitment to a new, more mature central-local relationship and the need to focus on better outcomes for citizens, putting arguments about funding in the past.

Director of Involve, Richard Wilson, challenged public services to manage the civic unrest that often accompanies recessions and turn it into something positive. Key messages from his five point plan for better engagement were a need to focus on the areas that are really important - the critical issues and decisions; to avoid what he termed 'the consultation steamroller'; and to carry out an engagement audit of what relationships are important.

Philip Lewer of the Department of Health gave a personal, humorous and thought provoking presentation on engagement in health and social care. Philip captured the all-important human side to the conference theme which really hit home with some particularly memorable points and personal experiences of the system. For example, he shared how his elderly mother had become engaged in shaping the system and how older people's expectations of services are often lower, simpler and more cost effective than that of professionals. Another theme that became central to discussions at the conference was the importance of having a dream in order to make the vision a reality and to drive change. Saying 'I have a strategic plan' will simply not inspire the same kind of response.

A significant proportion of the day was devoted to workshops with a wide selection of specific areas to investigate further and the chance to hear from experts and practitioners on subjects including elected members, tackling climate change and social enterprise as well as learning about good practice and innovative projects and services.

Futurologist, Robin Mannings helped put citizen engagement into the context of the changing world and where it could take us. This included some of the risks as well as what engagement could look like in the future with the use of different technologies. BT's Technology Timeline makes future predictions and places them within a timeframe - they've often been accurate, so his ideas left delegates with plenty to think about.

A lively panel discussion picked up on several of the threads of discussion from the workshops including the role of elected members, understanding what customers want, how frontline staff can engage with citizens and dealing with the media. Several important and thorny issues were raised such as how we balance rising citizen expectations with reducing resources and how we can ensure that the outcomes achieved will be for the good of the whole community and that those who are often powerless and less articulate have a voice.

Alison Ward, incoming Chair of SOLACE Wales closed the conference with an upbeat message. She shared her dream for 'public service focus on outcomes that affect the quality of life of real people for the better.' Alison emphasised the need to really make a difference for citizens by collaborating and focusing collectively on the right things. Echoing the Minister's positive message at the start of the day, the incoming Chair finished by saying that this was a time of hope as well as a difficult time, that doors were opening to new opportunities in Wales and that she is excited to be taking on the Chair at this point in time.

To view the presentations from the plenary sessions and workshops go to: <https://secure.solace.org.uk/wales2009/programme.htm>



**SOLACE discusses joint working with WAG senior officials**

We also took the opportunity of the conference dinner and AGM to organise a meeting between Chief Executives and Emyr Roberts, representing the Permanent Secretary, and other senior WAG officials.

This was a very productive meeting to discuss how we can work together more effectively across the public sector and particularly the relationship between WAG and local authorities. Emyr emphasised that winds of change were blowing over Wales and there was appetite to consider different ways of working. WAG were keen to engage with local government about tackling the difficult issues we face, including actions to maintain service delivery with reduced budgets and how to change from a system based on outputs to one based on outcomes.

We are codifying the relationship with local government through refreshing the Essex-Jones Agreement. WAG have also been working to identify a set of high level strategic outcomes (they currently have a list of 19).

Emyr shared some of his thoughts on the issues he has been asked to look into by the Permanent Secretary:

- Developing a menu of actions for dealing with budget constraints, including shared services and collaboration amongst others;
- Integrated service re-design and modelling;
- Moving the Building Common Purpose discussions from ideas into action, with the Public Service Executive Leadership Group being tasked with turning this into delivery;
- Use of ICT in service delivery;
- Engagement with the public;
- Better alignment of performance frameworks for different services and sectors and a more outcome based system. Turing the recent policy statement on audit, inspection and regulation into action.
- Clarification of what WAG expects of organisations individually and locally and what the next stage of LSBs should be;
- Consideration of what would be better done at local, regional and national level.

During the discussion everyone emphasised a desire on all sides to take these strands of work forward. Some SOLACE members expressed concern that whilst they would like to see success it could be a 'false dawn' and challenged WAG to lead by example with service reform and efficiencies.

Other comments from members were based around the need to look at outcomes across public services and consider the budget and performance of place rather than multiplying existing systems. There was also a desire to enshrine the approach and process of working with local government which had been described in the refreshed Essex-Jones Agreement.

Two other key points made were the importance of trust, in local government to deliver the outcomes required, and working together as a team to find a way of releasing capacity at different levels to make the changes required.

WAG concluded by saying they now need to set out and agree the programme and that some elements can be taken forward faster than others. Importantly, there is a greater understanding of the need for key outcomes and priorities to guide the work of local government rather than initiatives and specific grants.



Diary dates

Date	Event & Location
12 August 2009	<b>Chief Executive Workshop</b> , Challenging Times: An Opportunity for Change, Cardiff
10 September 2009	<b>Branch Meeting and Dinner</b> , Ramada Plaza, Wrexham
11 September 2009	<b>Meeting with WLGA</b> , Ramada Plaza, Wrexham
20-22 October 2009	<b>SOLACE Annual Conference</b> , Brighton
Autumn 2009	<b>South West and Mid Wales regional diner</b> , TBC
10 December 2009	<b>Branch Meeting and Dinner</b> , Holland House Hotel
11 December 2009	<b>Meeting with WLGA followed by Annual Meeting with WAG Officials</b> , Holland House Hotel, Cardiff



[www.udite.eu](http://www.udite.eu)

EUROPEAN FEDERATION OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT CHIEF EXECUTIVES  
UNION DES DIRIGEANTS TERRITORIAUX DE L'EUROPE

**UDiTE Awards for Fresh Thinking Across Europe**

Innovative local authorities across the world are working together to develop a framework for cross-national lesson drawing to share best practice and to encourage improvements in performance.

In the current global climate of economic uncertainty, international knowledge sharing and collaboration of professional networks is vital in developing successful European local government and to inspire fresh thinking.

UDiTE plays a lead role in

facilitating the exchange of information, ideas and experiences between Chief Executives and Senior Managers within local government across Europe. This assists in knowledge sharing and in supporting the continuing professional development of local government practitioners.

UDiTE's website has been introduced to provide members with the latest benefits, EU news and policies and evidence of European local government good practice.

The UDiTE website continues

to establish itself as the professional networking organisation for local government chief executives across Europe and is currently in the process of developing a Knowledge Bank which will link together with international partners to share best practice information on key local government topics and is hoped to provide a useful database for chief executives in their day to day business.

The main areas that will feature on the Knowledge Bank include Financial Crisis, Strategic Risk Management, Economic Regeneration,



Information Technology, Social Regeneration, Leadership and Governance, Environmental Sustainability and Project Management.

The importance of knowledge sharing across Europe in these key areas will be outlined at the UDITE AWARDS 2009 taking place in Brussels in October 2009. The UDITE Awards has been set up to recognise innovative local government projects that have resulted in real and sustainable improvements for

citizens and their communities and to encourage the sharing of knowledge between European municipalities.

The four categories for the awards will recognise improvements in:

- Social well-being
- Economic well-being
- Environmental well-being, and
- Management

The event will also feature a series of masterclasses

covering topics such as navigating the financial crisis, sustainability practice, leadership strategies, and strategic risk management and will focus on other common challenges facing European regions and cities and discuss possible solutions.

For more information about UDITE and to view the UDITE Awards visit [www.udite.eu](http://www.udite.eu)



## EVERSHEDS

### Positive Steps to Drive Regeneration

*Paul Hothi and Sian Porton at Eversheds LLP look at some ways of mitigating the impact of the recession on regeneration.*

The "credit crunch" has brought regeneration into sharp focus as the public sector face difficulties in delivering outputs from development projects.

With increasing Government pressure to deliver on Government housing and employment targets the public sector are looking to challenge the "norm" and find ways of ensuring projects can be delivered. For example, one way for local authorities to keep their developments on track is to self-fund projects using their Prudential borrowing powers under the Prudential Code. Development

agreements can be structured so that a project is not reliant on third party funding and can then be progressed in the required timescale. Typically, the local authority would pay a fixed development management fee to the developer for their services, as opposed to the developer getting any profit payment from the sale of the land to a third party.

The headline issues to resolve are:

- does the public body have the requisite borrowing powers and can it pass the "affordability" test for the level of borrowing required?
- can commercial terms be agreed with an existing developer to vary an existing agreement?
- can the risk of any procurement challenge following any variation of an existing

contract be minimised? Another way of mitigating the effects of the recession is streamlining the procurement process of developers on potential regeneration projects. This will ensure a more positive response from the private sector. The public sector is now well versed on the competitive dialogue process as a form of tendering which particularly applies in major redevelopment schemes. Structuring the competitive dialogue properly from the outset is key. Thinking early about the numbers of bidders being invited into a procurement - more than 3 is likely to deter bidders from taking part - and using successive stages to slim down the number of bidders early on can help maintain interest and bidder participation. Planning the stages of the procurement in advance is absolutely vital to ensuring that the process is a success. The timing of launching a scheme is also



important. Bidder open days can help to stimulate the market's interest. By undertaking soft market testing an authority can often get a stronger handle on what it is that it requires from the procurement, making its requirements clearer and therefore the dialogue stage

itself shorter for all parties.

Ultimately, competitive dialogue requires bidders and contracting authorities to put a lot of effort in at the front end of the procurement. Careful project planning and assimilation of key facts and points that buyers are willing to enter into dialogue on is

essential. Those who publish notices first and think about project contents later will not find competitive dialogue an easy process to manage. That has never been truer than in the current market.



### Continuity Strategies in the age of Global Pandemics

*The potential business impact of the swine flu (H1N1) outbreak is real, current and must be addressed. Here, Bharat Thakrar, Head of Business Continuity in BT Global Services provides an update on the current status and offers some timely advice on updating Business Continuity plans.*



The international outbreak of H1N1 influenza, commonly known as "swine flu," continues to spread. According to WHO data, as of early July 2009 it had affected over 40 countries, with almost 100,000 confirmed cases resulting in over 400 confirmed deaths from people contracting the disease. And while this strain of influenza appears to be treatable with available antiviral medications, and person-to-person transmission can be significantly reduced by simple precautions such as careful personal hygiene, the

best advice is not to become complacent about the H1N1 virus and to continue to make all the necessary plans.

Only recently Dr Margaret Chan, Director-General of the World Health Organization (WHO), stated, "New diseases are, by definition, poorly understood when they emerge, and this is most especially true for influenza viruses which are the ultimate moving target. Their behaviour is notoriously unpredictable. No one can say how the present situation will evolve. This virus may have given us a grace period, but we do not know how long this grace period will last. No one can say whether this is just the calm before the storm". For this reason the WHO has raised the threat level for the outbreak to Phase 5, only one below Phase 6 its highest level which represent a full-blown global pandemic i.e. cross-regional

spread of a serious illness that is easily transmitted.

BT, having previously established a strategic pandemic planning process in response to the Avian Flu threat, has set up a central planning team to address the safety, health and wellbeing of its people as well as to take action required to mitigate these risks and to safeguard business continuity both for the company and its customers.

Today's highly mobile, interdependent and interconnected business environment provides a myriad of opportunities for the rapid spread of infectious disease. Updating and enhancing enterprise crisis management and business continuity plans will be crucial to protect employees, customers, supply chain partners, stakeholders and business assets. The following is a checklist of essential actions to mitigate against high incidences of absenteeism, stress and productivity loss:

- Get the executive team involved from the outset -



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planning for a pandemic is not an IT issue; it's a business issue and needs to be driven by senior business leaders (as part of the Crisis Management Team)

- Formulate internal communications/awareness plan for cascading critical messages to employees as well as updating them on news, protocols, travel restrictions, collecting feedback on the changing H1Ni situation using a combinations of emails, intranet postings, flyers/posters, knowledge calls, FAQs etc.
- Ensure employee communications contain timely, accurate information and state the facts which will help demystify fear. Articulate clearly the preventive actions the organization is taking to avert or contain an H1N1 outbreak focusing on employee safety and hygiene
- Create an external communication plan – a process for reaching external stakeholders, customers, media, shareholders, suppliers, local community, healthcare authorities and union representatives.
- Develop/update your

remote/teleworking plans and systems for employees. If the organisation has no previous history of teleworking a trial run with significant number of staff allowed to work from home will help iron out problems with systems and applications.

- Carefully assess supply chain weaknesses and identify second source suppliers where necessary
- Look at succession planning for all senior positions and cross-train employees so that enough people with the right skills and certifications are available to keep the mission critical applications functioning. A worst case scenario to consider is 40% absentee levels for a period of up to four months.
- Executives must ensure their employees are safe and then worry about resuming business. Companies also need to realise that employees will take care of themselves and their families first, and then think about their jobs and clients. Companies must have a plan in place providing clear instructions about what to do if employees suspect they are infected and who to

contact if they are too ill to come to work.

- As part of their ongoing BC planning, companies must have their Crisis Management team play out various scenarios – what if access to their overseas datacentre is restricted due to a flu outbreak, how can additional work be diverted to another data/contact centre, how could employees be transported out of the area?, Vendors should be included in the scenarios if an organisation has outsourced its operations.

The swine flu threat comes at a time when organisations are already stretched thin as a result of the recessions, layoffs and other cutbacks. By demonstrating effective business continuity planning as above, better personal hygiene and a calm approach with an emphasis on employee well-being, senior managers will be setting an example of behaviour that is both constructive and designed to minimise the worst effects of the crisis on the workforce.



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Contributions for the next edition of this newsletter are welcome. Please send to Lizzie Swaffield at the contact details above by 28th September 2009