

Magazine article lands SOLACE a job in Ukraine

AN article in *SOLACE Journal* has led to SOLACE Enterprises becoming involved in a development programme in the Ukraine.

SEL associate director (international) Mark Sheldrake said: 'It initially came about as a result of an article I wrote in *SOLACE Journal* (Spring 2000) entitled *Challenges of International Development*. The article was read by Ivan Fediv, CEX of Lviv City Council in the Ukraine and eventually I was invited to assist in the project that aims to strengthen institutions in the Ukraine.

'I was asked to speak at a seminar in Kiev and to meet with key local government personnel at the Ukraine Academy of Public Administration to share experiences and discuss approaches to forming and developing effective partnerships in local and regional government.

'My presentation was to share SOLACE's experience in building a successful professional organisation in the UK. This I presented through a case study drawing out key experiences and lessons learnt, covering the three elements of the SOLACE mosaic – the Society, Company and Foundation.'

The Ukraine Institutional Strengthening Project, funded by the Department for International Development, was initiated in 1994 under the stewardship of the University of North London (UNL) and UAPA. It has successfully established the Urban Management Network. A further injection of funding was recently awarded. It is to this, Phase Three of the project, that SOLACE has been asked to contribute.

The UNL team invited SOLACE to participate in a range of initiatives over the next three years. Alan Pask, associate director (international) is currently in discussion with UNL on the nature of the involvement but it is likely SOLACE will assist in the development of the Urban



▲ **JOBS ACROSS THE SEA:** Jacqui Ball of Arun District Council took a job exchange in California. Reports from the SOLACE International Exchange Programme pages 4 & 5

Management Network's business plan, and institutional links (including the strengthening of existing local authority

links - Kiev/Edinburgh, Livov/Rochdale, Odessa/Liverpool and Gorlovja Doubas Oblast/Barnsley). ■

Top e-business firm to lead seminar

THE practical implications of implementing the Government's e-government strategy is the focus for a special seminar in London. *Transforming Local Government into an E-business* is the agenda for the joint seminar with Oracle, leaders in the e-business market, and SOLACE Enterprises. MD of SOLACE Enterprises, Roger Paine, said: 'It is a chance to meet and talk with e-government suppliers. We expect it to be one of our most popular events in 2001.'

Oracle e-government director, Brian McCandless will look at the four major axes of implementing an e-government strategy: Government to Government, Government to Customer, Government to Supplier and Government to Employee. MD of Oracle UK, Ireland and South Africa, Ian Smith will talk about Oracle's own transformation to e-business and Joanne Stuart, an Oracle public services applications consultant, will look at how the citizen interface could work, using a specially designed local government scenario-based demonstrator.

Oracle public services BDM for internet procurement and exchanges, Peter Sparrow, will look at the changing procurement landscape including opportunities for consolidation, savings and improving efficiency. Chaired by James Hehir, SOLACE senior vice president and chair of the SOLACE e-government think tank, the seminar will be held in London on Tuesday 13 March. It is aimed particularly at CEXs, assistant CEXs, executive directors, heads of service, heads of policy, best value managers and service managers.

The cost of the day is £230 plus VAT.

Booking enquiries to Sue Rawlins tel: 01934 513704. Email: sue.rawlins@solace.org.uk ■

Local government is a 'huge resource' for international development

DEMONSTRATING to the Department for International Development and other international funding institutions that local government has a greater role to play in development, and making SOLACE a more 'natural partner' for development work, is the focus behind the drawing up of a more coherent 'international' vision for the Society.

International development issues should be a mainstream activity of 'joined-up' SOLACE and should be driven by the Society's values and contribute to the overall purpose of promoting local government, says the recent draft discussion paper on the international mosaic, currently circulating in the Society.

The report says that the DFID does not look to British local government as a partner in development work in the same way the USA looks to the International City/Council Managers Association (ICMA) because it does not view British local government as being committed to the international development agenda.

Towards the end of 1999, SOLACE, together with the LGIB, took a lead in forging a UK Local Government Alliance for International Development. The Alliance brings together a range of organisations into a 'virtual' association which has collectively signed up to a statement of intent.

This has helped to create a stronger and more cohesive climate, and has made it possible to project a 'stronger' presence to the UN, World Bank and DFID, albeit on a modest scale, says the report.

'UK Local Government practitioners constitute a huge potential resource for contributing to the international

development effort, which is not being tapped sufficiently', say the report's authors, SOLACE honorary secretary Clive Grace, and Mark Sheldrake and Alan Pask, both associate directors of SOLACE Enterprises.

'UK Local Government is well respected around the world, and some of the more recent developments in performance



▲ **LET'S TALK:** Work gets underway at Hope House to develop a new international strategy for SOLACE.

management, community governance and leadership, Best Value, and so on should enhance the potential value of that practitioner resource.

'If practitioners could be involved more, not only could they contribute they would also learn and bring back that learning and awareness into their own authorities – very much a 'win-win' situation. Elected members, too, have a potentially vital role to play in sharing experience and learning around key issues such as community leadership and better local governance.' ■

Video-link overcomes travel problems

MEETING video-link to video-link is now a reality for members of SOLACE in Wales. The huge travelling time that can be involved in travelling from one end of Wales to the other can make meetings prohibitively time-consuming.

When Huw Thomas, chair of SOLACE Wales, set reshaping local government to reflect modern ICT possibilities as the theme for his year, it was a logical step to hold branch meetings across the video links now installed in all Welsh councils.

A two-and-a-half-hour slot was booked and three locations established in Cardiff, Conwy and Neath. About six members travelled to each location. 'We established some groundrules to chair the meeting, so that everybody knew who wanted to contribute, and the meeting worked reasonably well,' said Huw.

Wrexham CEX Derek Griffin said: 'The travelling involved in getting from the north of Wales to Cardiff – or vice versa – makes meetings a whole-day job. More and more people in Wales are using video-links to overcome travelling problems.

'It used to be, that one of the problems with holding meetings by video-link is that you couldn't all look at the same document but with email that is no longer a problem. The links are so fast now that there is no time delay, it is just like being in the same room,' said Derek.

'Having experienced the great benefits video conferencing offers we have promoted it locally and now have people coming into our authority to use our equipment.' ■

Healthy response

THE important and widespread contribution local authorities make to the health agenda is to be the focus of a new paper from the SOLACE Health Panel.

Issues such as the role LAs play in the wider determinants of health - social, economic and environmental factors will be examined. So will the considerable role undertaken by LAs in supporting health care delivery by preventing hospital admissions, facilitating discharge and providing intermediate care.

The experience LAs have in working in partnership and in bringing together other partners needed to achieve health improvement and the focus local authorities have on well-being rather than sickness, are just some of the other issues explored. ■

Best value is a people game

INDIVIDUALS who can challenge the purpose and performance of key services – but who can do so constructively, taking colleagues and communities with them – need to be nurtured, developed and supported. This is the message coming through from a number of councils around the country, who are working with SOLACE Enterprises to support their best value programmes, said John Tench, SEL Associate.

'The best value focus is already shifting from the four Cs to the three Os – objectives, options and outcomes. But the longer-term emphasis will be best value as a people game. The shape of services in the future is critical and a vital role for chief executives and management teams is to recognise and reward individuals who can successfully challenge the purpose and performance of key services, while taking their colleagues and communities with them.'

Director at Nuneaton and Bedworth BC Alan Davies said: 'It is essential to recognise that people throughout the organisation have to be engaged if Best Value is to succeed. If we can explain that best value really is simple and is about improving what we do, we will make real progress. We must convince people that they have a genuine contribution to make.

'Appropriate training is a crucial part of this exercise, and an emphasis on positive outcomes has got to be re-informed at every stage. Our customers aren't really interested in the process – results – leading to better services are the matters they are likely to concentrate on.' ■

Move to help young people in care into jobs market

ACCESS to educational and employment opportunities are the passport to success for all young people. But many young people in the care system miss out. A move to improve their life chances by access to work experience and employment, launched last year by the Department of Health, will run again this year.

The initiative aims to increase the knowledge, confidence and self-esteem of vulnerable children and young people in the care system by improving their skills and employment prospects and helping them to prepare for lifelong learning.

Teenagers to Work is a Quality Protects initiative for all local authorities in England. Designed for young people aged 15 years and over, the programme is split into two parts - a day placement in April 2001 followed by a longer placement in the summer holidays.

Last year placements took place in chief executives departments, social services departments and other local government offices. Some councils extended the one-day work experience to three or four weeks. Young people also undertook day placements in central Government. One young person from Somerset spent a day with Betty Boothroyd at the House of Commons and another a day with John Hutton, Minister of State for Health.

The aims of the project include providing children in care with positive role models, encouraging them in relation to education and work and it demonstrates the corporate parenting responsibilities of central and local government.

One young person from Suffolk, who spent a day with a Director of Education, said: 'The day was cool. I got to send faxes and answer them. I also got to tell people by phone that meetings were cancelled. Using the latest computer graphics was fun.'

The initiative will be launched in April 2001 by Denise Platt, Chief Inspector of Social Services. It is supported by SOLACE and the LGA. SOLACE is keen to hear from any councils - not only those with social service powers - ready to support the initiative.

For more information about Teenagers to Work and the Quality Protects programme please contact: Barbara Herts, Quality Protects Co-Ordinator, Children and Young People's Participation. Tel: 02 07 972 4237 Email: barbara.herts@doh.gov.uk. ■

CD-ROM wins the recruitment battle

A REVOLUTIONARY recruitment campaign on CD-ROM has had a revolutionary result. Liverpool City Council netted double the number of candidates in its move to recruit new assistant executive directors to replace a 50-strong layer of middle management.

Fifty applicants per position came winging in from the CD-ROM. 'We would not have reached 25 from the traditional advert and printed pack,' said David Henshaw CEX and SOLACE President. 'But far more impressive has been the effect on the quality of applicants. Half way through the process, we have filled all posts so far with high quality applicants.'

David said the CD-ROM had helped to project a 'much more positive' image of Liverpool CC. It wanted to attract top flight people but its record was not good. 'We are third from the bottom in the league table of local government performance with a reputation as a failing authority. A move to Liverpool was viewed as the kiss of death to a promising career,' he said.

'But things are changing here, we are transforming local government in the city. We had to demonstrate that dramatically. It was surprising how many of the applicants were Liverpool-born but had left the city to build their careers. Those days are over.'

The CD-ROM contained a video about the changes taking place in the city. 'We made no attempt to hide the size of the task. We made clear there would be a daily challenge to manage change.' As well as information on the city council's new modernised decision-making structures, the CD-ROM had detailed information in drop-down menus on schooling, housing, the city environment, relocation expenses.

Many candidates said the CD-ROM message had persuaded them to apply. 'Liverpool has successfully delivered its message by this revolutionary method that has raised eyebrows throughout local government,' said David. But he felt the approach would not solve recruitment problems everywhere.

'Method must match the essential message. The CD-ROM perfectly matched the Liverpool message,' he said. 'We are changing. We are innovative. We are ambitious. We are using technology to transform the way we deliver services. The CD-ROM symbolised and conveyed those messages.' The CD-ROMs cost £2 each and were distributed with every copy of Local Government Chronicle.

Many local authorities find it difficult to attract sufficient numbers of high calibre applicants to posts. Liverpool CC should be congratulated on breaking new ground, said Dennis Artess of SOLACE Enterprises. We encourage clients to use modern technology in recruitment.

Email Dennis on: dennis.artess@solace.org.uk ■

IN SHORT...

Be e-transformed

IS there more to e-government than targets, technology and 'the usual stuff' about e-commerce? Find out at the SOLACE 2001 Conference. The E-Odyssey is designed to show how changes in technology will affect a whole council and not just the IT department.

'E-government is not just about technology,' said James Hehir, CEX Ipswich BC, who will host the conference, 'For e-government to be successful there must be leadership, cultural change and commitment. And it needs to start now.'

The conference will include workshops on e-issues for all size authorities, high-level input from business and outside observers and several workshops specifically for senior manager members of SOLACE.

It will run from 16 October to 18 October at British Telecom Aadastral Park, Ipswich, BT's advanced communication technology centre.

New director of Welsh LGA

FORMER SOLACE president Sandy Blair has been appointed as the new director of the Welsh LGA. The former CEX of Newport CBC will succeed Colin Jones, the current secretary who will retire in March. A WLGA council meeting towards the end of last year decided the title of director should replace that of secretary.

Sandy quit Newport last year when the council scrapped the post of CEX in favour of a new role of managing director.

Innovative partnerships

NEW research to develop local leadership in a partnership context is underway. The Idea, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, SOLACE and Demos are collaborating to explore how 'joined up' leadership can be nurtured and encouraged through networks of local leaders.

These leaders are not found exclusively at the top of organisations, but can emerge at any level in the system, either within or outside the local authority said Danny Chesterman of SOLACE Continuous Learning Scheme, who is keen to identify examples of innovative practice involving several agencies working together.

Contact Danny Chesterman on 01622 676453 or danny.chesterman@solace.org.uk

E-government bulletin

The E-Government Bulletin is a free, independent newsletter covering electronic government, teledemocracy and the information society, both in the UK and worldwide. It is aimed at internet users across central and local government, the social sector and private sector partners. To subscribe visit:

<http://www.headstar.com/egb>

Job exchange is an exciting and stimulating way to widen your work experience rapidly.

We report the views of some of the many members of SOLACE

who have taken advantage of the Society's International Exchange Programme

Council meetings in California go out on live TV – and people really do watch!

AT Novato City Council, 30 miles north of San Francisco, California, USA, Jaqui Ball, head of strategy at Arun DC found a council with a

population of 50,000, had only about 200 employees, including a Police Department, and just five councillors - elected 'at large' – to represent



the whole city, not a particular ward, and not on a party political ticket. 'The fact that Arun DC has 56 Councillors was a constant source of amazement everywhere I went in America,' said Jaqui, whose international exchange partner was Wally Bobkiewicz, Assistant City Manager.

'All City Council meetings in Novato are televised and go out live on cable TV - and people really do watch. Witness the man emptying Wally's dustbin one morning when we were on our way to work, hailing us with, I saw you on Channel 23 last night. The meeting I attended, sitting in Wally's usual place at the table, dealt with two particularly thorny planning issues and lasted until 1-45 a.m. At 1-25 a.m. I counted 25 members of the public still in the Public Gallery.

'While in America I attended with Wally the League of California Cities Conference in Anaheim, where Novato received the prestigious Helen Putnam Award for its redevelopment of the Hamilton Army Airfield Base. This base closed in 1974 and, without the leadership of the City Council, could easily have become a blight on the community rather than an asset for the entire North San Francisco Bay area.

'The project has resulted in the creation of 5,000 jobs, near doubling of the region's permanent moderate, low and very low income housing, a homeless rehabilitation centre - and the most significant tidal wetlands restoration in the country. Setting out on this path was a high risk strategy in financial, legal and political terms. The insight into the style of leadership and the effective private/public partnership which brought success, against the odds, was, for me, one of the best of many learning

experiences of the exchange.

'Wally and I chose to carry out our exchange programme almost 'back to back' so he arrived in Arun, on the second leg of the programme, just a week after I left America. It meant that we were able to take up where we had left off, almost seamlessly, in terms of comparing and contrasting the different cultures, style, and governance of our two organisations.

'Wally's presentation to the Arun Working Party, which is responsible for coming up with recommendations on the three options for a new political management structure, helped provide our councillors with a new, international dimension to enrich the debate.

'Meetings with DETR on community planning and new political management structures, and with Cabinet Office colleagues on the e-government agenda gave Wally an insight into the degree to which central government in England imposes direction on local government - perhaps one of his biggest surprises about "the way we do things over here".

'The two conferences around which the

Exchange Programme is built - the ICMA Conference in Cincinnati and the SOLACE Conference in Liverpool - were another contrast between our two countries especially in terms of scale: around 3,500 delegates in Cincinnati - just over 300 in Liverpool! Both Wally and I felt that both organisations could build on the whole international connection by encouraging greater overseas contributions to the conference programmes. A British perspective in some of the sessions in Cincinnati would have added value to the debate - and vice-versa in Liverpool. Perhaps something to be considered next year in Salt Lake City and here in this country, too.

'It is hard even to begin to explain the benefits from an exchange programme like this one - and Wally and I have no doubt that we will stay in touch and continue to learn from each other and enjoy each other's friendship. I am indeed grateful to Arun, for allowing me the time away from my desk and to SOLACE for arranging and sponsoring the programme and for giving me the experience of a lifetime.' ■

The view . . . in USA

'LOOKING back on my experience in Arun, I guess the most important thing I learned was how similar the delivery of municipal services are between the USA and England,' said Wally Bobkiewicz, Assistant City Manager at Novato CC. 'Both Novato and Arun staff are made up of dedicated, hard working people facing many of the same challenges (limited resources, demanding citizens, not enough time in the day to get the job done) in each country. The biggest difference was in the number of councillors (5 in Novato and 56 in Arun), but even this difference was not that much different. The committee system at Arun effectively allows issues to be discussed, just like issues are discussed in Novato at full City Council meetings.'



● **Anyone interested in joining the SOLACE International Exchange Programme should contact Richard Brasington at Torridge DC. Email: richard.brasington@torridge.gov.uk**

. . . . Down Under

SUSTAINABILITY and the protection of the environment are what matter to officers and residents alike in Cotswold DC says Ian McClintock, Divisional Manager of the Community Services Division at Wollongong City Council, Australia. Ian, shadowed his opposite number in the Cotswolds, Andrew Grant, Director of Community Services, last year.

Wollongong has a total area of 44 sq miles and a population of 187,000 compared with the Cotswold population of 87,000 in an area of 450 sq miles. The functions of the two councils are much the same with the exception of the number of members – CDC has 45 and Wollongong 12.

'During my visit it has become obvious that sustainability and the protection of the environment are of major importance to residents and officers at Cotswold DC. These issues are also important to Australians and are always taken into account when decisions are made and new policies implemented.'

Councils in Australia seldom exceed 15

LEANER, quicker, more objective and more strategic was the view Christopher Shepherd, CEX Dartford BC, had of the dynamics within the Australian system of local government after his visit in 1998. 'Greater emphasis is placed on the officer in delivering day-to-day services and greater accountability is demanded,' he said in his report.

A significant factor separating the Australian and British systems is the number of elected members. In Australia, even in large authorities, elected members seldom exceed 15. 'Horror was expressed at the UK prospect of a council with 50 to 100 elected members.

'The smaller number of elected members has a significant effect on the dynamics of the council, particularly at a political level. At two council meetings I attended, the form of the meeting was very similar to the UK but the means of doing business significantly different,' said Christopher.

'Normally the whole council would meet weekly to consider the whole business of the authority. It would confine itself to major matters of policy and service provision, retaining a strategic overview but delegating to officers much of the routine matters which often involve back benchers in the UK.'

Australian councils maintain public

contact through a sophisticated system of public consultation, public opinion surveys, public meetings, focus groups and designated officers. Christopher said the direct links with the public has resulted in a far wider understanding of the public response to local issues than often exists in the UK.

The relative isolation of Australia and Australian local government was mentioned on many occasions. 'It is easy to forget that in the UK and the USA we have large, densely populated communities with common problems and experiences and near neighbours within Europe or Canada for new ideas and support,' said Christopher. 'Australia's neighbours are not necessarily good models for western style local government.'

The Australian's knowledge of developments in UK local government are comprehensive. Much of the developments in local government systems in Australia have their basis in UK local government – except urban and rural regeneration and the Agenda 21 initiatives, said Christopher.

'It is often the case in sparsely populated countries where land is cheap and readily available that urban sprawl occurs, town centre and inner city regeneration is hard to achieve and sustainability is not high on the political agenda. In these respects, Australia is

the exception.

'It may have its origins in the fact that Australia is an incredibly dry continent with rainfall less than one tenth the European average (the water in all Australian rivers is less than that in the River Rhine). For this reason the Australians have learned to husband their water resources carefully and this attitude has spread to waste minimalisation, recycling, pollution and urban renewal. 'Local authority policies in these areas are at least as good as those in the UK and one might argue significantly better,' said Christopher.

But the question that remains is whether the impact of best value in the UK will move us closer to the Australian system. 'Best value will require UK local authorities to make direct contact with the public by undertaking their own customer satisfaction surveys. In many ways the councils will be appealing - directly to the public - over the heads of back benchers.

'A consequence of best value could be a reduction in the number of elected members, moving us more quickly, to the Australian model of a lean, strategic body.' ■



'User-pays' principle funds New Zealand councils

ANNUAL plans, new financial management, performance monitoring, annual reports to citizens and operating more transparently. These were some of the requirements built into the reorganisation of local government in New Zealand some 20 years ago in 1989 that Huw Thomas, CEX of Denbighshire, found interesting in 1998.

'Given the growth of emphasis on planning local government services in the UK, including community plans and the publication of standards and performance targets, this was perhaps inevitable,' said Huw in his report. Local authorities in New Zealand are more financially independent than the UK. 'New Zealand councils are not dependent on annual payments from central government and can thus better plan their own destiny,' said Huw.

As part of the 1989 reorganisations New Zealand local authorities must produce:

- Ten-year financial strategies, showing how developments and services will be funded, including borrowing and investment strategies, and asset management plans.
- Annual plans setting policies, objectives and performance targets, together with budgets and fundraising implications.

Most of the 10-year financial plans Huw saw had developed into strategic plans

complete with mission statements, with the annual plans providing a more detailed summary. 'Taken as a whole the documents make council priorities, service plans and financing much clearer than in the UK.'

There is concern that only the articulate and organised lobby groups, take advantage of the chance to respond, the bulk of the population tends not to express any view, said Huw. Accordingly, the New Zealand LGA funds an opinion poll on local government performance and priorities.

One council had gone even further and mailed residents with a summary of plans focused on those residents' interests to ensure items of concern to them were not lost in a bulky, general district council plan, said Huw. 'The aim of this consultation is to produce a council plan that reflects the views of its residents, or else that the council has taken a decision to lead its community in a particular direction.'

It is hoped the very process of consultation makes residents readier to support the plan financially – which in New Zealand is based on the 'User-Pays' principle. Broadly, the rule is that general rates only be applied where the 'user' who benefits cannot be expected to pay the whole or part of the cost. This principle has evolved out of the view that

there are public and private goods – public goods are those that left to private providers would not be supplied, ie roads and street lighting.

The combination of forward planning and greater clarity about how the cost of services are allocated has meant that New Zealand councils have examined more rigorously than the UK choices as to how services should be delivered and their relative costs. 'Practices developed in the New Zealand context cannot be imported blindly,' said Huw, who thought that UK councils could benefit from the application of the New Zealand strategic and financial planning system as regards best value.

'Publishing longer-term plans, together with detailed assessments of where the finance will come from, would improve understanding of local government powers and responsibilities. The New Zealand consultation processes would also repay study, particularly the use of opinion polling. Yet the full value of such consultation and planning will be limited over here by the dependence of local government on central government funding.' ■



Network report criticises lack of clarity

WITH a general election potentially less than six months away now is a good time for reviewing the impact of the modernisation agenda to date and asking the question, 'Will policies and practices deliver a renewed localism?'

Some of the answers are suggested in the recent draft report, *Towards a New Localism*, published by the New Local Government Network (NLGN). The product of a nine-month study into sub-national government, the report has been warmly welcomed by more than 20 council leaders, chief executives and heads of national bodies.

It is critical of central government for continuing to be unclear about the role and purpose of local government. The report reviews policy and practice in local government since May 1997.

The NLGN, which brings together senior councillors, officers, academics and business leaders to promote fresh thinking about modern local government, argues in the report that globalisation, technological change, devolution elsewhere in Britain, makes the development of a new localism in England a political necessity.

The report calls for:

- A clear new role for councils as community leaders with wider powers to determine strategy, to resolve local problems and to join up the activities of other agencies to improve the lives of local people.
- Partnership contracts for each council to motivate community leadership. These would be five-year community plans based on extensive local consultation which government would support through giving councils greater financial freedoms and extra grant worth on average £8m each year for every principal council.
- A nationally co-ordinated Democracy Day on which all the major English cities would hold referendums on whether to have directly elected mayors to help promote new leadership and electoral competition in local government.
- Freedom for leaders to make a difference with new tax raising powers, subject to local popular endorsement, including a tourist tax, lane rental charges to utility companies for digging up roads, supplementary business rates based on US style Business Improvement Districts and congestion charging.
- Transforming local services through application of the e-revolution in local councils and empowering citizens through a new local government Which? to monitor and compare service performance across councils and to allow dissatisfied service users to switch providers.
- PR for councils with elected mayors and a switch to fewer more powerful and better resourced councillors able to scrutinise the executive on the public's behalf. Promoting parish and neighbourhood councils to bring representation closer to local people.
- Resolving structural dilemmas creatively through organic development of city based sub regions which would co-ordinate economic, transport and planning policy and through more joint partnership working between shire districts and counties with no review of structures for the next five years.
- Establishing a new Department for Devolution and Decentralisation to co-ordinate government support for the new localism, which would merge the Scottish and Welsh Office with the local and regional functions of the DETR.

The NLGN is keen to work with senior officers to develop these ideas further before the publication of a final version of the report in March 2001. In January and February 2001 NLGN is organising a series of regional policy seminars with SOLACE to discuss and debate these ideas. If you are interested in these events or would like a full copy of the report please contact anna@nlgn.org.uk / 020 7357 0051. ■

Other forthcoming national one day NLGN Conferences include:

A Practical Guide to Political Management Consultation

31st January, Central London. Keynote Speaker: Beverley Hughes MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State, DETR

Best Value Preparing for Year 2: Delivery Real Improvements

5th Feb 2001, Central London. Keynote Speaker: Beverley Hughes MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State, DETR

Reviewing the Cabinet & Leader Model: Changes in Local Governance

Mid March, Central London

Winning the e-revolution in local government:

Late March, Central London

What Future for Local Government?

Central London, March 2001

All conference enquires to: Ann Gregson Tel 020 7222 5110

Short-term job - long-term job satisfaction

WHEN Tony Webster retired early as Director of Tameside MBC he planned to pursue interests outside work – particularly cycle touring in the summer months through France and the UK – but four months later he found himself accepting a post as interim director of education at Leicester CC.

'I hadn't been looking to do any work but SOLACE Enterprises approached me through the Society of Education Officers and the position just appealed to me,' said Tony who retired in April 1999 aged 54.

'I ended up being at Leicester from August 1999 to May 2000. I hadn't expected to stay that long but when they didn't appoint at the first attempt it was hard to walk away. You develop a loyalty.'

The people that brought out that loyalty in Tony were the education department of Leicester CC. Tony worked alongside consultants appointed by the DfEE and the city council to shape the future working of the education authority following OFSTED's inspection of the authority.

Looking back Tony breaks down his role into four main aims:

- Restoring morale in an education department, which had taken a knocking.
- Delivering a massive reorganisation of secondary education.
- Persuading staff to look forward and agree the Ofsted action plan.
- Recapturing the confidence of school headteachers and governors.

The report by the consultants suggested the creation of a Partnership Board with representatives outside the city council and outside the education department to give a strategic overview. The DfEE appointed Professor David Hopkins of Nottingham University as chair.

'The relationships between the authority and the board weren't easy. Professor Hopkins has strong views – accurate views – but strong and he pushes them hard. I felt the department and members felt very challenged. They were difficult relationships but they had to be managed,' said Tony.

'The two things that made it possible for me to manage those relationships was the enormous political will – across all parties – to work together to get it right and the people in the department and the schools who were anxious for it to work. The DfEE was watching us closely.'

'The key thing that Professor Hopkins brought to the equation was that improving education in Leicester was about improving teaching and learning. It was a powerful message and it really got things moving in the council.'

If short-term assignments appeal to you why not find out more on the SOLACE website: www.solace.org.uk ■

SOLACE Course Diary

PRESENTATION MATTERS (Part 1)

LEARN the skills and techniques to speak confidently and communicate effectively. London, 24 January.

COLLABORATIVE WORKING

TWO-day programme which provides an understanding of the principles involved in forming and sustaining successful partnerships. Sunningdale, 5-6 February.

AIMING TO BE A CEX?

WANT to be a Chief Executive? If so, how do you get there? This workshop explores the challenges of the role, the modernisation agenda and the best routes to the top. London, 15 February.

NEW CEX BRIEFING

AN opportunity to meet with colleagues, share experiences and explore key issues in an informal situation with the support of facilitators – a must for all newly appointed CEXs. Midlands, 18-20 February.

PRESENTATION MATTERS (Part 2)

AN opportunity for all to turn competence into excellence. London, 22 February.

WORKING WITH A CEX

IN A climate of ambitious change, the demands on Chief Executives are experienced by all that work with them. This workshop explores how to get the best out of that relationship. London, 1 March.

MEMBER/MANAGER RELATIONSHIPS

WORKSHOP opportunity to concentrate on the most delicate of balancing acts - how to develop adversaries into advocates. Learn how to develop positive political working relationships. London, 8 March.

AIMING TO BE A CORPORATE DIRECTOR?

NEW one-day workshop for anyone aiming to be appointed a Corporate or Strategic Director. London, 29 March.

ELECTION ISSUES FOR RETURNING OFFICERS

A one-day workshop for all first time Returning and Acting Returning Offices planning for elections in 2001. Full of practical advice and tips and the latest information on election administration changes. London, 14 March.

ELECTION ISSUES REFRESHER

A one-day refresher workshop for current Returning and Acting Returning Officers who want to update their knowledge and skills for elections in 2001. London, 28 March.

Courses run at intervals. Details from Sue Rawlins tel: 01934 513704 or email sue.rawlins@solace.org.uk.

New local government forms bring powerful political imperatives

With greater delegation will go demands for swift and reliable policy advice and the rapid execution of decisions, says Chris Skelcher

ANYONE who speculates on the future is always taking a risk. And for those of us getting to grips with the Local Government Act, it's a sure bet that we have only a glimmer of how this will affect our working lives. So be warned! The Act releases powerful political imperatives to create a radically different future.

The impact of the community strategy process on executive systems should not be underestimated. It will produce a cross-cutting agenda to which the power of well-being gives new flexibility to respond. Politically astute members will see this as a formidable resource to make a real impact on the community, but only if they are part of a powerful and effective executive. Elected mayor models provide such a platform, and their image will be heightened by the considerable self-promotion of early post-holders. The positive stories emerging from these pioneers will cause executive leaders to become dissatisfied with their apparent second-rate status.

The opportunities provided by the directly elected mayor constitution will appeal to single interest groups and to individuals wishing to stand as independent candidates. Populist candidates will have the appeal to gather the necessary petition signatures, and a good chance of being elected on a low turnout (only 32% for the London mayor).

The demands on the time of the executive, already apparent in transitional systems, will lead to extensive use of individual decision-making. Since this does not involve a meeting, there may not be a written report. Obtaining proper records of individual decisions will provide a new challenge. The system for regulating conflicts of interest in individual decision-making will also require rethinking – especially with a watchful council, Standards Board and Press.

How will these changes affect officers? There will be greater delegation to officers, but also executive members will be more interventionist on those aspects of the policy agenda which are of particular salience to them. They will expect swift and reliable policy advice and the rapid execution of decisions. Officers will inevitably be pulled into serving the executive first, and other members second. The tensions between working for the majority group and serving all councillors,

which already exist, will be accentuated by new politics of modernised authorities. The model of the officer serving all parties, and the executive and the council, will break down under the strains imposed on it. In mayor models especially, senior appointments will be on contract linked to the mayor's term of office. The value of such appointments is that everyone is clear where the officer stands. It does not imply a lessening of professional standing, but it does enhance transparency and accountability of officer advice and actions. Interestingly, the council manager model provides a way out of the impasse. Whether any officers would want to take up the challenge of being the first council manager is another question!

There will be major changes for the professions. The existing pattern of professions does not reflect the policy themes, which will arise from community planning – social exclusion, neighbourhood renewal, healthy communities, community safety, sustainability. Technical skills are required for specific tasks, but generic skills are essential at all levels. These are the skills of researching new agendas, networking and building coalitions of interest, working with and across diverse communities and organisations, and managing projects to successful completion. The key skill for today's local government officer is to become an immediate expert in the latest policy initiative and to be able to deliver appropriate outcomes.

There is an active debate about these issues in the US, stimulated by the emergence of pro-active mayors who have built strong community coalitions and reformed city government. Professionals have had to engage with the new community agenda, and to integrate this as part of their professional practice. In the UK, the possibilities offered by the combination of community leadership and powerful executives means that it will not be enough for professionals to rely on technical authority. They will have to demonstrate the generic skills to work in a more politicised and community-oriented environment. ■

Chris Skelcher, INLOGOV



Viewpoint is an occasional series aimed at broadening discussion on key issues. Opinions expressed do not necessarily reflect the views and policies of SOLACE. People wanting to contribute or comment on articles should contact the Editor.

Beat the interview blues

*Most of us practice things that are important.
So why not practice the selection interview*

MAKING the right career move isn't as straightforward as it used to be and as the science of recruitment and selection gets ever more complicated it often feels to candidates that they are at an insurmountable disadvantage. That's where the SOLACE Enterprises course Selection Matters can make all the difference.

Co-facilitated by Roger Paine, MD of SOLACE Enterprises, and Sue Newton, communication and presentation specialist, the course has an enviable track record of success.

Many candidates under-perform in selection processes, said Roger simply because they are unfamiliar with the exercises or approach, don't know what they are being tested for and simply haven't had the opportunity to practice. 'Most of us practice things that are important. I think a selection process comes into that category!'

Working on the basis that practice can make perfect (or at least improve performance) the course offers the opportunity to explore everything you may have to 'suffer' during a selection process – and you are offered the opportunity to 'have a go' at most of it. The theory is explained too, with invaluable insights into what recruitment assessors are really looking for and how they test for it.

Numbers for each course are strictly limited to ensure plenty of opportunity for individual feedback and coaching. Expert facilitators provide an honest assessment of performance, give coaching where necessary and career guidance where sought.

The course, which spans two full days, is relaxed, friendly, challenging and extremely hard work. At the end participants usually say that it is as tiring as the real thing!

Have you ever wondered how recruitment assessors decide who reaches the short-list? Secrets are revealed on day one as your own application for a 'mythical but typical' job is tested against a competency matrix. Sessions on interview and presentation 'theory' follow and then the focus turns to the dreaded 'in-tray'. Whether it's a written exercise or a briefing for the Leader you get the inside track – and an opportunity to practice.

Day 2 starts with a session on non-verbal messages and making a positive impact. Sue (who is also an image consultant) describes her approach to this session as 'practical, personal and realistic'. She doesn't hesitate to offer straightforward advice on what will (and what won't) fit the bill in terms of your

appearance. 'Whether it's appropriate to dress-up or dress-down you still need to get it right - and it's not difficult when you know how,' she said.

The day continues with you 'performing' in front of the interview panel and the



presentation panel – 'scary, but invaluable' was how one recent participant described it! What's most valuable about the two days? It is all about the opportunity to make mistakes – as many as you need to – so that when it comes to 'doing it for real' you can give it your best, said Roger.

Director of SOLACE Enterprises Recruitment & Selection service Dennis Artess, said: 'Career development can't be left to chance. Selection processes are becoming evermore rigorous and time spent in preparation with experience coaching staff enables you to get that edge.'

If you have any questions about the course you can e-mail Sue Newton at sue.newton@solace.org.uk.

Selection Matters is an updated version of Getting Appointed. It runs next in the Midlands for two days, starting 4 April. ■

Avoid 'a Florida' – get up to speed on election issues

ELECTIONS are high profile events closely scrutinised by politicians and the media, and the Florida experience is a reminder that when things go wrong they can be spectacularly difficult. Which is why SOLACE Enterprises is running a series of courses and seminars on electoral issues.

Two one-day courses for returning and acting returning officers are being held in March – one for first time returning officers (London, March 14) and the other to refresh and update existing returning officers (London, March 28). Elections are occasions when CEXs are expected to know all the answers – make sure you do.

Fundamental changes to the electoral registration and absent voting processes that come into force with the Representation of the People (England and Wales) in February will be reviewed in a series of nationwide seminars held by SOLACE Enterprises together with the Association of Electoral Administrators.

The seminar will be repeated at the following locations: London, 31 January & 9 February. Eastern (Huntingdon), 1 February. South Eastern, 2 February. North (Manchester), 5 February. Wales & West Midlands (Birmingham), 6 February. North (Tyneside), 6 February. Wales & West Midlands (Cardiff), 7 February. Southern (Bournemouth), 7 February. South West (Taunton), 8 February. East Midlands (Leicester), 8 February.

Registration enquires to Sue Rawlins 01934 513704 email: sue.rawlins@solace.org.uk ■

OBITUARY

William Jackson OBE, first CEX of Doncaster MBC and SOLACE president 1978/79, died aged 86 on 16 November 2000 after an illness. William, who was made a Freeman of Doncaster on his retirement, received an OBE for his 46 years in local government.

A chartered accountant, he began his career with Lancaster CC and held successively senior appointments with Lunesdale, Baildon, Ashton under Lyne and Crayford councils before moving to Doncaster RDC as treasurer. During the Second World War he served as an army officer in Burma.

He had three children. His daughter Pamela remembers him as being ahead of his time. 'He was quite an unusual man in that he was never sexiest or stuffy,' she said. 'He always encouraged women, who worked for him to qualify as accountants, which in South Yorkshire in the 1960s was not seen as a priority. When they went to meetings at other authorities they were known as Bill Jackson's girls.' ■



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