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race riot report
sparks national
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January/February 2002

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SOLACE
Society of Local Authority
Chief Executives and Senior Managers

'Cantle Report' on race relations hailed as a watershed

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Massive newspaper and broadcast coverage followed the publication of the Government commissioned report into the causes of last year's race riots in the northern cities of Oldham, Bradford and Burnley by an investigating team headed by SOLACE member Ted Cantle, former CEX Nottingham. Known as the *Cantle Report*, it was hailed as a watershed in race relations and caused tremendous comment and controversy.

The report attributed the violence to the tensions caused by the extreme polarisation of ethnic groups and was widely seen as boldly going where no social commentators had gone before. It was perceived as a powerful new insight into a deeply disturbing social situation, compared in its impact with Enoch Powell's 'rivers of blood' speech on race



relations but with the added authority of being commissioned by the Government.

It set the news agenda when it was published in December and will dominate debate for years to come. Home Secretary

David Blunkett focused attention on the report by his call a few days before its publication for new arrivals to 'adopt British norms' and his drive to inspire 'an honest and open debate on citizenship'. He said the *Cantle Report*, which urged a loyalty oath for immigrants and saw faith schools as a 'significant problem', raised 'profound issues'.

On the day the *Cantle Report* exploded all over television screens and newspapers, The Daily Telegraph was typical. It ran a major front page lead on the report's recommendations, four inside page leads on different aspects of the report, and an editorial on issues it raised. It was a major story for days and it seemed generally agreed that Cantle had written himself into the history book of race relations.

Ted Cante talks of the work of the Community Cohesion Review Team, whose controversial report on race riots caused such a storm of comment and controversy

Our first priority: to listen page 2 of 3



The Government certainly moved quickly after the summer disturbances in Bradford, Burnley and Oldham. I was asked to lead the Community Cohesion Review Team in August and with the first meeting in September we were asked to complete our work in just three months. Burnley and Oldham had commissioned their own independent reviews, with similarly daunting timescales.

I had little say in the composition of my Team and had to rely on the Home Office's Race Equality Unit, who fortunately did a brilliant job. Perhaps driven by the timescale, we focussed on the task ahead, rather than the needs of the team but still managed to gel very quickly - to the point that we did not want to part at the end (a reunion dinner is now planned!). Most of the Team had backgrounds in the community and voluntary

sector, but also included a Labour Baroness, a former conservative MP, CRE and trade union experience - and Darra Singh, CEX of Luton.

We quickly decided that the our first priority had to be to get out there on the ground and start listening, rather than rush to any preconceived conclusion. As we were also charged with coming up with recommendations for national policy and practice we also decided to visit areas who had not experienced the summer disturbances as well as those that had. This led to a series of whistle stop tours around the country.

We were very determined to engage with the main focus of the disturbances - young people - and therefore went to talk to them in schools, youth clubs, community centres and just on the street. Of course, we also

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talked to the key players in each community, including the police, local authority, local partnership and faith leaders.

Gradually a number of themes began to emerge - the divisiveness of regeneration schemes, lack of clear values and leadership, separate education and social networks etc- and we began to develop our hypothesis. We tested this through more meetings and much drafting and re-drafting.

We sent out questionnaires to a wide variety of local and national bodies, in which we set out our themes and invited comment on them and on other points that we might have missed. Once we had developed a reasonable looking draft we held a 'reference group' meeting for about 80 people that we had spoken to at earlier stages and tested our proposals out on them. We were particularly pleased to get some of the youngsters along to this. More

re-drafting inevitably followed and, meanwhile, we liased with the inter-ministerial group and the two local teams for Burnley and Oldham. That enabled the three independent reports to be published at the same time in December, together with the initial ministerial response (the *Denham report*).

The publicity was, in the event, somewhat overwhelming and I am still doing interviews. David Blunkett's intervention about values had fanned the flames somewhat - but we had said that a more open and challenging debate about these sensitive issues was overdue! Indeed, much of our earlier work had been made more difficult by a marked reluctance by many people to feel able to be open and honest. The desire on the part of the press and media to make a good headline or two out of difficult issues is always a mixed blessing. Some focussed on an 'oath' of

allegiance - something we did not recommend - but at least the key message about the division of communities into 'parallel lives' did get recognised.

There are no simple solutions - and certainly no quick fixes. Race riots could still happen and in many different areas. But there is now an opportunity to discuss the issues seriously and the Government seems very serious in its intent to tackle them.

Certainly I hope that the majority of the Team's 67 recommendations - which have generally been well received - see their way through to implementation. We were often told that previous reports had been left to gather dust on the shelves of one government department or another. We therefore wrote our recommendations in specific rather than general terms, directed at the different agencies concerned. The jury is still out.

Women CEX: room for more discussion

The issues raised in the recent report on the experience of women chief executives, *Room at the Top*, are to feature in a series of regional focus groups organised by The Employers Organisation with SOLACE

It is hoped the focus groups will provide an opportunity for dialogue about the 'often disturbing' issues raised in the report, said Danny Chesterman,

professional adviser to the SOLACE Scheme for Continuous Learning.

Chesterman has put together a discussion document on the issues, together with help from Mike Broussine and Pam Fox, the authors of *Room at the Top*, Helen Ball, vice chair of SOLACE HR Panel and Mandy Wright from The Employers Organisation.

'The document comprises a series of prompts that can be used to draw out perspectives on gender differences and encourage dialogue,' said Chesterman. Copies of the discussion document can be obtained from Chesterman free of charge.

■ **More information Danny Chesterman.**

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Email: danny.chesterman@solace.org.uk

Support for Wales and Northern Ireland

The appointment of SOLACE policy officers for both Wales and Northern Ireland is under consideration. SOLACE currently provides part-funding for the post of policy officer to the Scotland branch.

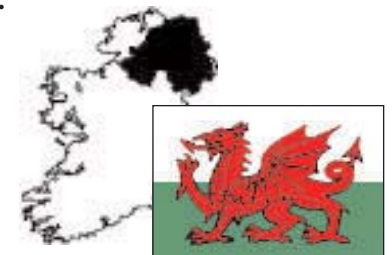
If agreed, the policy officers will be largely responsible for carrying out research and drafting policy papers; co-ordinating the views of members in

response to consultation papers from various bodies; and assisting in organising conferences, seminars and meetings as necessary.

The February meeting of the SOLACE Management Board heard that the proactive intervention and support from branches would strengthen the Society as a whole - as evidenced by the work that has been possible in the Scottish branch

with the help of a policy officer.

It is expected that branches would need to obtain funding for at least 50% of any additional staff.



Connecting with communities

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Good communication is about more than just PR. The role of communication is engaging communities, driving service improvement, and changing culture in authorities is crucial. That was the message from a group of SOLACE members who came together to discuss what they wanted from the DTLR project *Connecting with Communities*.

Promoting the communications role of all staff, especially service managers, was seen as important, but there was also recognition that communications is as much of a specialism as finance or IT. Many participants felt that if the right people were not recruited at the right level, there was no hope of getting the message across.

Examples were cited of where recruitment of high quality

communications staff had led to a step change in the way the authority communicated. It was felt more authorities, particularly at chief executive and leader level, are recognising the importance of branding and reputation management as part of the communications package.

The project, designed to support and improve good practice in local government communications, is backed by the LGA, IDeA and the Audit Commission. It involves research with 14 authorities, follow-up consultancy with six authorities facing particular challenges, and production of a good practice toolkit to be launched at July's LGA Conference.

'A good practice toolkit is all very well, but it must be more than just motherhood and apple pie'
- Carol Grant,
who led the seminar



Connecting with communities

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'SOLACE members were clear that they want the final toolkit to be concise, with information and ammunition to help make the case for communication. A good practice toolkit is all very well, but it must be more than just motherhood and apple pie,' said Carol Grant of Grant Riches Communication Consultants who led the seminar at MORI with fellow consultant Marina Pirotta.

'We'll be working with the group to make sure we road-test the final product before its launch in July. To make it really effective, we need to know what matters to chief executives and senior managers. People told us that more chief executives than ever are recognising the importance of communication. But they want the hard evidence that it actually makes a difference.'

'They want proven examples of what works and they want to know that effective communication has an impact on the bottom line - resident satisfaction. In an increasingly competitive climate for individual authorities, everyone at the meeting recognised the value of a bit of spin but there was widespread scepticism about what one member called the all-froth-and-no-beer syndrome.'

The DLTR project will feed in a range of data useful to chief executives and senior managers. 'It will tell us what works and what doesn't,' said Marina Pirotta. 'More important, it will tell us what it is possible to achieve, given available resources and other indicators like levels of deprivation. Action plans will be tested by before and after surveys to see the effect on residents.'

'Everyone at the meeting recognised the value of a bit of spin but there was widespread scepticism about what one member called the all-froth-and-no-beer syndrome...'

Hoping to influence the shape of any new grant distribution system page 1 of 2

Norfolk CC is reviewing the revenue grant distribution formulae on behalf of the Society of County Treasurers and the County Councils Network. It will look at aspects of the Personal Social Services general grant funding, and consider the need for a new grant distribution formula given the many changes that have taken place in the provision of Social Services since 1990. Here Peter Roe, Technical Manager at Norfolk CC, reports on progress to date.

The project has been designed to play an important part in the debate on, and hopefully influence the shape of, any new grant distribution system that the Government will implement for 2003/4.

Given the confirmation in the recent Local Government White paper that the Government intends to replace the existing system from April 2003, it is extremely important for local government that the deliberations on the replacement of the SSA current system are informed by such research. The output from the project, due at the end of February 2002, is therefore very timely.

Although sponsored and funded by CCN/SCT, it is not intended to be research for the benefit of a limited special interest group. From the start we have tried to involve a wide range of authorities both in



Anna Casson Peter Roe

the project steering group, and in the provision of data.

From the start of the work on the project we have aimed for involvement of the widest possible range of types of authority, whether this be as members of the Project Steering Group, the Project Management Team, and/or as data providers.

For example, the Steering Group was attended by representatives from ALG, Norfolk, Westminster, Birmingham, Kent, Oxfordshire, Manchester, West Sussex, Warwickshire. The intention is to gather

Hoping to influence the shape of any new grant distribution system page 2 of 2

data from as representative a sample of authorities as possible, including county councils, metropolitan and unitary authorities, and district and borough councils.

We are extremely grateful to those authorities that have contributed so far, and would emphasise the importance of contributions from the remainder to enable the research to be successfully completed.

The project was also designed to be complementary to research that government departments were undertaking themselves. We are grateful to colleagues at LGA, DTLR and DoH for their advice and input here.

The work currently being undertaken within Phase II of the project is focusing on two areas:

■ **Other PSS** - this develops a client-based approach to Other PSS, focusing principally on mental health clients, and to a lesser extent physical disability, and learning disability clients.

Principles of this approach may ultimately be more widely applied within other SSA blocks and sub-blocks.

■ **Population and domiciliary care** - this investigates the links between population distribution and travel time and costs in delivering services, and has been included partly due to a specific request from DoH/DTLR to extend the sample used in the previous ORH work to include more urban authorities.

While the principle focus has been on the grant distribution system additional work has been undertaken to widen out to

ensure that deficiencies in the quantum, changes in service provision, and impacts on front-line services are kept in focus.

The project is due for completion at the end of February 2002, and the output will be made widely available.

More information from Peter Roe, Technical Manager. Tel: 01603 222813. Email: peter.roe.dfi@norfolk.gov.uk or Anna Casson, Head of Strategic Funding. Tel: 01603 222816. Email: anna.casson.dfi@norfolk.gov.uk

SOLACE (Scotland) annual conference

Keeping 'em happy

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Customer satisfaction was identified as the key driver in the change management programmes of councils at the SOLACE (Scotland) annual conference by Chair and City

of Edinburgh CEX Tom Aitchison (pictured). It was the first of three major priorities he set for Scottish local authorities to meet Government modernisation targets. It was imperative, he said, to reverse the declining levels of satisfaction currently shown in survey.

His second priority was to emphasise the crucial importance of information and communications technology in the modernisation process. But it was also essential, he said, for councils to recognise and accept the related culture changes they demanded.

Thirdly, he identified the role of

community leadership in community planning. Effort was needed at both strategic and local levels if the goals of joined-up local government and joined-up public services were to be achieved.

Tackling these three priorities would test the leadership skills and abilities of local government chief executives who manage in a political environment, he said. It was not always easy but what was not an option was to abdicate leadership and responsibility.

'I am reminded here of the old adage that there are only three kinds of people,' he said. 'Those who make things happen, those who watch things happen; and those who wonder what happened. As chief executives, we need to be the people who make things happen!'

He said SOLACE (Scotland) felt it had unique strengths and expertise to offer to

the effective representation of communities and to the overall governance of Scotland. Immediate priorities were to prepare policy and research papers and to develop closer links with other local government professional associations.

Aitchison said: 'That work is ongoing and I hope that I shall be able to report positively by this time next year that substantial progress is being made and that SOLACE (Scotland) continues to be recognised as a major player on the Scottish scene.'

He told the conference the venue at Edinburgh International Conference Centre had particular resonance for him as it was managed by one of his council's own companies. Speakers on the theme *Modernisation - the Leadership Challenge* were drawn from both public and private sectors.

President's taste for 'Blackberry' page 1 of 1



One favour, as the saying goes, deserves another. Which is why BT, when it hosted last year's SOLACE conference, asked

SOLACE President James Hehir to put its latest mobile technology device to the test.

The Blackberry is a GPRS enabled device with an 'always-on' email connection weighing 139g. It consists of a large screen and a 33-key Qwerty keyboard which fits on your palm. You can receive and respond to emails wherever and whenever you want to. Users in the US are nicknamed 'crackberries'.

Hehir, CEX Ipswich BC, put the device to use as soon as he stepped out of the office when a number of issues needed to be

addressed while he was on the move. 'It was great not to have to phone the office after each meeting as access to important messages is open all the time. It also helped me to prioritise my work better through one communication outlet rather than receiving text information through a mobile phone as well as having to ring the office to obtain more information.

'Perhaps one of the best benefits of Blackberry is that is not as invasive as a mobile phone - you can receive information wherever you are in public places without it causing annoyance to others,' he said.

'Not all meetings are riveting and I have made use of those dead times to bombard my PA with short messages. I can hear her groan from here! It enables me to keep in touch with the office and make use of my time more effectively.'

■ More information:
Caroline Stanford, BT Local Government.
Email: caroline.stanford@bt.com

THE LOW DOWN:

- Blackberry can run continuously for 24 hours or five working days on 1.5 hours of battery power.
- It uses the Microsoft Exchange platform for single mailbox integration.
- You do not have to change your email address.
- It uses top security technology called Triple DES and it is considered so secure that the CIA, members of Congress and the US Military use Blackberries.
- As soon as you switch it on emails are immediately in your in-box.
- It has sufficient memory for 18 months of Outlook Diary information.
- It costs just under £400.
- It has an all-inclusive tariff of £39 a month regardless of usage time
- There is a software and training charge of £2,500
- 10 MPs and one local authority have bought Blackberries. Two other local authorities have it on pilot (excluding Ipswich BC).



SOLACE conference 2002

Conference to focus on transition

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New skills and new forms of managerial leadership must be central to local government if it is to learn, adapt and deliver the radical improvements in services and community leadership being demanded by the public, members and government, says SOLACE President-elect Mike Pitt.

Host of next year's SOLACE conference Pitt, CEX Kent CC, wants members to focus on *The Transition Zone*. 'This is the place to be: a place between bureaucratic order on

the one hand and chaos on the other,' he said. 'It can be a productive and exciting place to lead from and sometimes pretty scary!

'Our roles as chief executives and senior managers are changing. We need new skills and new forms of managerial leadership which can make a difference as we acknowledge the reality and complexity of 21st century local government.

'We know that delivery, delivery, delivery will only happen through the commitment and inspiration of our people. The best of us will be those that can harness the energy of instability, appoint challenging people and know how to manage them in the creative space of *The Transition Zone*.'

SOLACE 2002, which will be held in Bournemouth, will look at new ways of

working with strong Cabinets, hear national and international speakers challenge assumptions about leadership and management, and will be the first SOLACE conference to involve other professional societies through the Local Government Professional Network.

SOLACE 2002 will be held on 22-24 October.

Website: www.solaceconference.org.uk

More information from

■ **Event Manager Philip George.**

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■ **Sponsorship manager Sonia Rheinlander.**

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■ **Exhibition manager Monica Lee.**

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Last Beacon open day on **accessible services**

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National and local government have for a number of years been wrestling with the challenge of how to effectively engage with their communities. On Thursday 14 February 2002, Knowsley MBC is hosting the last in its series of Beacon Accessible Services best practice Open Days. The theme for this event is *Contact Strategies: The Member's Perspective*.

Knowsley has developed a reputation as an innovator in the ICT field in relation to community engagement through its Community Information Programme which also supported its One Stop Shops and Contact Centre developments.

The Open Day will include a series of site visits witnessing ICT in action, serving the Knowsley community, a choice of informal workshops on How Knowsley's leadership

is meeting the strategic challenges and drivers for change on democratic renewal and How ward members can increase their effectiveness through an extension of contact choice opportunities, for residents and other council customers.

Cost of the course is £75.00 + VAT To take advantage of this ideas-sharing and knowledge-building day, register now on www.beacon.knowsley.gov.uk or contact Beacon Officer, Karen Jones on 0151 443 3588 or by email: karen.jones@knowsley.gov.uk



in brief...

SENIOR MANAGER'S EVENT

A one-day conference is to be held for SOLACE members who are senior managers. It is the first time the Society has organised an event for senior managers. It will focus on how authorities will be judged in the light of the White Paper and on issues relevant to individuals who wish to become chief executives. The conference will take place in London at Stamford Bridge Conference Centre on Thursday 13 June.

MARATHON WOMAN

In December's LGC Viv Sugar wrote a piece about domestic violence. It produced a letter from Judith Cockcroft who is married to Richard Cockcroft, former CEX Gloucestershire. Judith has nominated Women's Aid as the charity she wants people to support when she celebrates her 50th birthday by running the London Marathon on 14 April.

Cheques should be made payable to Women's Federation of England and sent to them at PO Box 391, Bristol, BS99 7WS. For more information Judith can be contacted at Three Ashes House, Ledbury Road, Newent, Gloucester, GL18 1DE Tel 01531 820226.

Meanwhile Viv Sugar admits that she doesn't think she can run one mile, let alone 26, so she'll be sending her conscience money off straight away.

WORK PLACEMENT APPEAL

A Dutch student at the Polytechnic Academy of Utrecht is looking for work experience at a UK local authority. Marsha Wiltenburg, a student of safety policies and community relations, is hoping to set up six months work experience as part of her studies. If you think you might be able to help her please contact David Forster at Zurich Municipal Management Services. Tel: 01252 387811.

Email: david.forster@uk.zurich.com

The 2001 Local Government White Paper and beyond

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New platform, new contradictions



The White Paper is an important landmark for British Local Government, and a major staging post for future development. Clive

Grace, Honorary Secretary SOLACE, sets the White Paper in the context of the new platform which the Government has been constructing since 1997. He then identifies the key tensions and contradictions which remain or which have been created by this new platform and points to the questions of the future.

Looking back at the course of the Local Government Modernisation process since 1997, it is easy to recognise the fragmentation which took place by dividing off the key measure to improve performance (Best Value) in the Act of 1998 from the drive to create new political executives and strengthen ethical standards in the Act of 2000. And, of course, the other piece in the puzzle - strengthening community leadership through the power of well being - was only added to the Act of 2000 as an after thought, under pressure. So the major components of Local Government Modernisation - improving performance, strengthening community leadership, and creating new political executives - were never constructed as a single, coherent platform on which Local Government in Britain in the 21st century

could stand with confidence. As a result, there was always the prospect of falling into the cracks between them.

While the White Paper does not weld all the cracks closed, it does strengthen the links between improving performance and community leadership, notably by making council performance more accountable, and by incentivising high performance by linking it to stronger legal powers and capacities for community leadership. In so doing it may also focus the minds of the political executives now charged with providing community leadership and achieving high performance. To that extent the White Paper may be thought to help glue together all three of the principal elements of the new framework which the Government has been building from early in its first term of office.

The 2001 Local Government White Paper and beyond

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New platform, new contradictions

Tensions and Contradictions

The new platform has tried to deal with a number of the problems and tensions which beset the previous framework. It has made some progress in addressing the problem of politics in Local Government, the concerns about ethical standards, the absence of adequate levers to improve performance, and the fatally weakening links between Local Authorities and the places for which they were responsible. But, as so often happens, the new platform is itself giving rise to new tensions and contradictions. They include, at least, the following:

1. We have more autonomous Local Government ...but which is more strongly tied into Central Government on matters of both policy and delivery: The idea of 'spheres' of Government rather than 'tiers' is gaining acceptance, but the links

between these spheres appear to be increasingly muscular. The idea of a national Local PSA, and Local PSAs generally create mechanisms which will need careful handling to avoid becoming the means by which Central Government further dictates to Local Government. Constructing that relationship strongly within the framework of the Principles of Public Services Reform, with its emphasis on local leadership and devolution, may help to create the right relationship

2. We find a re-emphasis on 'place' and community ...but at a time when the development of technologies, markets and regional economies are dissolving the boundaries of place and community: The tensions created between technology and territory in particular are very strong. ICT-enabled transformational change in

service delivery is increasingly throwing into question whether the right unit for organisation and delivery should remain the Local Authority. Conversely, the new technologies create the possibility of local portal access to the full range of both local and central services, with local government shaping and managing that critical front end. At the same time, ideas of place and of community become even more important, and the community leadership role in shaping, guiding and inspiring the development of human settlements increases in significance. This puts enormous weight on the quality and character of local political leadership.

3. There is sharper accountability through elected Mayors and political executives ...but a blurring of responsibility in the proliferation of partnerships: It is

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New platform, new contradictions

increasingly difficult to identify responsibility when so many major projects, and even community leadership itself, are significantly subsumed within LSPs and other partnerships. There is also the risk that the lines of accountability for many participants in such partnerships have only an imperfect and very indirect element of democratic accountability. At some stage a statutory clarification of roles and responsibilities may help to garner the benefits of partnerships in terms of joining up and of forging a wider consensus while retaining clarity of accountability.

4. We have an ideology of sharper political accountability ...but which lacks the taxation responsibility to make those responsibilities real: Notwithstanding protestations to the contrary, this

contradiction is fundamental. The cry of 'no taxation without representation' shows that the link between the two is a central feature of democratic political systems. It may have been that - when local authorities were less concerned to change and improve - the options and possibilities for doing things differently, and better, could be pursued within the framework of a central grant funded regime. But as authorities generally get better, and as performance improves, key choices will increasingly revolve around the possibilities which can only be created by local choice and local tax raising powers to support such choice.

5. Political accountability remains focused on a mixture of Ward level responsibilities and political party affiliations ...when key responsibilities focus on the performance

achievement and the community leadership successes of Cabinet Executives who operate on an Authority wide basis: The disjuncture between Executive Members - operating across the whole of an Authority in powerful decision making roles - and the Ward-based representative role, is a contradiction which is difficult to hold under present arrangements. Clearly, one possibility would be to have a small number of Executive Members elected on an authority wide basis, combined with a Ward-based representative system which would also perform the scrutiny function.

6. The whole system aspires to greater accountability ...but the proliferation of models and approaches blurs in its complexity: It has never been easy for the general public to understand the

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differences between the different types and levels of authority. The use of different political systems of political executives makes it even harder for that to be accomplished. We may have to face the fact that local political and governance systems are going to seem even more remote for many people for the foreseeable future simply because there may not be the clarity which is so important to understanding, discourse and engagement. The greater complexity in the legal framework - both from the different forms of political executive and the differentiation of powers contemplated in the White Paper as correlates of the various performance categories - further blurs understanding.

7. There is a stronger emphasis on the performance agenda ... but with

(potentially) weakened managerial and organisational leadership: The strong emphasis on community leadership and on the role of political executives always looked to have the potential to weaken managerial and organisational leadership. The risk was that political and organisational leadership would be seen as an 'either or' (a zero-sum game, as opposed to a non zero-sum game in which both political and organisational leadership could become stronger). We are seeing evidence that in some places politicians see themselves as substitutes for professional managers. The White Paper gave insufficient emphasis to the part which managerial and organisational leadership and capacity will have to play in delivering what is largely a performance agenda. The answer, if there is one,

probably lies in the corporate assessment framework which the Audit Commission will use to assess authorities - they need to ensure that organisational as well as political leadership is properly assessed and reinforced.

8. There is an emphasis of self directed improvement and change ...but which continues to be combined with a muscular external inspection and review regime: Clearly there are changes taking place in the external inspection regime. Striking the right balance between internal self assessment (which maximises ownership and self direction) and external review (which provides stimulation, a benchmark, and a reference point of external reality) will be very important.

9. The public/private partnership approach remains central to the 'invest

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New platform, new contradictions

and reform' agenda...but the legal framework for public/private joint action remains uncertain: The uncertainty which continues to exist around the role of local authority companies, and the capacity of local authorities to trade on their own account and through joint ventures, inhibits the exploitation of creative possibilities.

10. The direction of change is promoted as transformational ...but it is combined with an agenda of change which focuses on incremental improvements in performance management: Increasingly, the major potential for performance improvement will come from step changes in the way services are organised, and through ICT-enabled change. However, it is at best unclear as to whether the frameworks for assessment to be applied to authorities

will focus on the capacities and possibilities for transformational change. The corporate assessment framework will need to be tailored closely to that, and those conducting the assessments will need to be people of appropriate skill and experience, to make effective judgements. There is also need for Government to take a stronger role in creating frameworks which can facilitate transformational change.

11. There is an emerging 21st century regional agenda ... and 19th century Local Government structures: Much depends, of course, on what form Regional Government might take, and the process by which regions might accomplish their aspirations for greater autonomy in their own governance. There is a need to ensure that Regional and its associated Local Government is planned and restructured

(if such proves necessary) on a coherent basis, and within a timescale that does not allow a lengthy descent into uncertainty. **12.** There is an aspiration to achieve accountable outcomes ...combined with uncertainties in the levers which operate from Government, through local community leadership, and through devolved delivery, to ensure that outcomes can be achieved and that the responsibility for achieving them can be sufficiently identified: This is a key dilemma. If exam results are good, is praise due to pupils, parents, teachers, schools, LEAs, or Ministers (no need to answer that...)? Devolved delivery puts responsibility close to the front line, but makes it harder to judge who has added what to the value chain. There is no visible VAT for public service delivery.

White Paper

Time to speak up

page 1 of 2



The Local Government White Paper - whatever your view - is a unique opportunity to engage in a debate about the future of local government, says SOLACE Senior VP Mike

Pitt. 'Ministers and civil servants are listening and realise they need help developing and firming up ideas. There is a chance for SOLACE to help the Government to be less cautious and close the gap between rhetoric and practice.'

Though there is much 'grand rhetoric' about a stronger role for councils the White Paper does little more than nibble at the edges of the Government's own centralising tendencies and the feeble state of local democracy, says Pitt. But how - and on what topics - should SOLACE

seek to engage constructively with the Government over the coming months, he asked, in a paper presented to SOLACE Management Board.

We might want to challenge the Government that there is something limiting and disappointing about a White Paper, which makes powerful constitutional statements but comes up with such modest incremental proposals for change. As welcome as they are, rather than draw up a package of 'freedoms to deliver', the starting point might have been a clean sheet and an exciting redefinition of local governance in the 21st Century.

What about the concept of 'free councils' and true local autonomy with minimal intervention from central government.

The possibilities could have stretched the imagination and provided new answers to the complex quality of life problems which confront people and their local communities. Would it be too ambitious for SOLACE to draw up a proposition along these lines?

Second, the White Paper seems to be driven by two (opposing?) beliefs. On the one hand local government can deliver vibrant local democracy, community leadership and excellent services if it is freed up from central government controls which stifle local innovation. On the other, some local authorities are regarded as so incapable that they must be 'named' and interfered with in order to drive up their performance.

None of us will have too much trouble with the first proposition although we

Time to speak up

might want the government to go further and challenge the degree to which the 'belief' is shared by all central government departments. It is the second proposition which makes the White Paper controversial; to what extent should SOLACE go along with proposals which seem to reinforce a controlling and judgmental relationship between central and local government?

Is there an irreconcilable mix of philosophies within the White Paper ranging from authoritarian to transformational? Can SOLACE help government to shift its thinking in this respect? How, for example, can ministers reconcile the inconsistencies between strong councils leading their communities and the removal of local discretion in the Education Bill? Could SOLACE formulate a much stronger package of ideas to put to government?

The public ranking of councils is a radical development and the tone of the White Paper and various ministerial statements suggests that these changes will happen whether we like it or not, he said. Surely SOLACE must be heavily engaged in the development and implementation of these ideas. How can a national assessment framework have credibility given its simplistic approach and the questions that have been raised about the quality of inspectors and inspections?

Authorities judged as 'poor performing' or 'coasting' may well be knocked backwards rather than forwards; how can such a negative system deliver positive results? If we have to tolerate the indignity of the regime, there just isn't enough extra on offer for striving and high performing councils to even begin to make it palatable!

■ Clive Grace's verdict on the White Paper and beyond: [click here](#)

■ SOLACE Director General David Clark reported to Management Board that the Society has had a great deal of contact with organisations and individuals concerning the White Paper including the Audit Commission, the IDeA and Local Government Minister Nick Raynsford. 'I am happy to be consulted by agencies about the role they will adopt, but I am not happy to lend the SOLACE badge to any particular approach,' said Clark.

Writing in MJ, Clark said the White Paper should be judged by whether it will improve the quality of life for citizens and customers. He asked how the proposed performance assessment framework for local authorities will work in practice and whether it will actually improve services. 'My real concern is that someone has advised ministers that this process will improve service outcomes. I sincerely hope they have not because there is simply no evidence that it will.'

Electoral Returning Officers in a quandary

page 1 of 1

David Monks, Chair SOLACE Election Matters Panel, reports on the less than satisfactory position on the Robertson judgement and where it leaves Electoral Returning Officers.

Many colleagues will probably have seen the reports on the Robertson Judgement from November last year. Mr Robertson, a retired accountant from Wakefield, was upset that the Electoral Registration Officer sold copies of the register to credit agencies and revealed his name and address to commercial organisations. He contended that this was an interference with the right to private life and privacy

(European Convention on Human Rights). Mr Justice Maurice Kay agreed and ruled that the electoral register should not be supplied to commercial organisations.

This now places Electoral Returning Officers in something of a quandary for they are under a statutory duty to supply the register to people who are prepared to pay for it (like Experian). There has been much lobbying by SOLACE and the AEA of the Electoral Commission and DTLR, asking for a definitive statement of action that should be taken. Indeed, many EROs sell their registers at the start of December.

Unfortunately, the position is still unsatisfactory and the current advice from DTLR, the Electoral Commission and the

Electoral Matters Panel is that copies of the register should not be sold to any commercial concerns pending clarification of the implications of this judgement. However, EROs should provide copies of the register to the political parties, the Electoral Commission and the Secretary of State. There are some interesting grey areas on which colleagues take a number of different views - eg should a copy of the register be provided to the Police for security reasons? If an ERO fails to do this is it a breach of the new mainstreaming duty arising from the recent Crime and Disorder legislation?

Hopefully the position will be clarified in the very near future and further advice sent to EROs.

e-government

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Robin Cook, the leader of the Commons, and David Monks, chair SOLACE Electoral Matters Panel, have both been interviewed about e-elections. Here we produce edited versions.

Digital solutions



Britain will become the first country in the world to use the internet for voting, as part of radical changes to the political system, Robin Cook, the leader of the Commons,

told The Guardian newspaper.

In an interview, Cook was scathing about the culture of parliament, describing its procedures as antique, ludicrous, Dickensian and as ritualised as 18th-century duelling.

Cook intends to 'enfranchise' those who want to vote online as a way of drawing back under-40s to the democratic process. Pilot schemes for local elections

begin in the spring, with a chance that voting by internet could be in place for the next general elections, though Cook admits that that is a 'tough call'.

Among his other plans is the use of the web for daily feedback to parliament on policy choices before MPs. He also confirms his determination to press ahead with increased powers and greater independence for select committees, despite the worries of Whitehall officials, the Speaker, Michael Martin, and some fellow cabinet ministers.

Read more at:

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/archive/article/0,4273,4330419,00.html>



How do you go about e-enabling the electoral process and does the future lie in e-voting? That was one of the questions put to David Monks, CEX Huntingdonshire DC and chair of SOLACE Electoral Matters Panel by the magazine Public Sector IT Insight.

He replied: As with all things in this country, we need to go steadily. The British are a very conservative race, with a small c. We plan to hold experiments in e-voting alongside the local elections in May 2002. We will select about six wards, made up of three pairs, say, two urban

e-government

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Digital solutions

ones, say parts of towns, and two rural ones, disparate parishes. In one ward, we would have an experiments: we would have no polling stations, we would say please vote on the phone or on the net, or please vote using a mobile phone. In the other ward, which is similar socially, economically and geographically, we would just run the regular polling-station type election. We would do the same for the rural wards, one ward in which people can vote on the phone, on the net and on the mobile phone, one ward with a regular polling station.

After the election, we would try and draw up a comparison between all those wards,

to see what turnout figures are. We are working on that now.

Other authorities are going to try similar experiments: Aberdeen, Sheffield, Liverpool, Bracknell Forest - they are all going to try different methods of voting. Bracknell Forest, for example, is going to introduce a smart card voting system.

Remember they are experiments, albeit experiments we take very seriously because of the fact that this is the electoral process, and the electoral process in this country is rightly held in high regard. People do trust the process, we do not want to lose that. We need to keep integrity and trust. Let's see if we can

get more young people voting. Let's see if we can increase turnout. Perhaps roll out more ambitious experiments over the next couple of years, increase the scale, deal with whatever teething problems there are. There are bound to be teething troubles in one form or another. If we can iron out these problems, then we could confidently say that we can hold an e-enabled general election after 2005.

Read the rest of the interview in: Public Sector IT Insight www.psigroup.co.uk

SOLACE guidance for new returning officers

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On course for an election

The conduct, administration and turnout of elections and the new referendums have a different emphasis thanks to the modernising agenda and Local Government Act 2000. Elections are high profile events closely scrutinised by politicians and the media - avoid 'a Florida' by signing up for a key course for new returning and first time acting returning officers.

Run by SOLACE Enterprises the course is one of the few opportunities to acquire practical advice and assistance. Course facilitator Mike Sanders said: 'For those involved in running elections, whether they

are experienced or new chief executives, the task can be daunting and even stressful. It is one of the few local government activities run entirely by the administration, not the council, and one where the returning officer carries personal responsibility.'

The keynote speakers for the course are David Monks, CEX Huntingdonshire DC, chair SOLACE Electoral Matters Panel and European Elections Training Project and David Cowan, CEX Winchester CC and South East Regional Returning Officer for the 1999 European Elections. Topics will include the main responsibilities of the

Returning Officers; Election Fees and Recruiting Staff; Pitfalls and How to Avoid Them; and Elections 2001...and Beyond, which will include new legislation, e-voting, Home Office pilots, the Electoral Commission and the Rolling Register.

The course which costs £275 plus VAT for SOLACE members will be held at Hope House on Wednesday 13 March, 2002.

[Click here to register for the course](#)

Why procurement is threatening the 2005 targets

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The biggest obstacle to timely delivery of modernised government is the current approach to procurement.

Procurement decisions surrounding e-government must be taken strategically and not left to staff at lower levels, more used to buying general goods and services, rather than adding value on the larger, more strategic deals of the type required for e-government says Andy Smith, Local Government Business Development Director for Oracle.

'Modernising government is about delivering joined-up modernised services that are designed around the needs of customers rather than the convenience of

the service providers. It is not about technology, though technology is an important enabler.'

Local authorities - like other parts of the public sector - will be looking to invest in new computer systems to help them modernise their services and meet the Government's target of providing all services online by 2005, he said.

'The majority of authorities will be procuring these systems from the private sector. But harnessing private sector expertise effectively to deliver results and services to the public, quickly and efficiently, requires high quality strategic procurement.'

On major issues like e-government authorities should be addressing procurement issues and options in tandem with decisions about business and technical solutions. But too often procurement decisions are taken almost as an afterthought once the business decision process is complete.

'Either procurement is not always widely understood at the higher levels of local authorities or councils often lack procurement staff with the necessary skills to handle this scale of procurement,' said Smith.

The default option for procurement services seems to be the OJEC

Why procurement is threatening the 2005 targets

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Procurement route, even when that is neither the only, nor the most suitable, way of achieving best value in terms of cost and timescale.

Thus we see examples of authorities taking nine months to think about procurement, nine months going through procurement and nine months negotiating a contract. The total cost to the authority of the procurement exercise alone could well exceed £500k - money that could be spent on actual IT products and services.

Whatever the reasons, said Smith, the consequences are potentially threatening to the timely delivery of ESD. To procure what they need more quickly in ways that conform to legislative requirements and provide best value local authorities need

to adopt an approach to procurement that is more joined-up, both within the authority and across organisational boundaries.

Local authorities - individually and collectively - must:

- Make procurement an integral part of the decision making process, so that issues surrounding procurement are addressed in tandem with decisions around business and technical solutions.
- Build strategic partnerships with chosen suppliers so that they work together on identifying opportunities and building solutions.
- Create national or regional framework agreements for supplying local government needs.

■ Use the full range of procurement options available - including greater use of government catalogues (G-CAT, S-CAT and GTC).

■ Maximise the flexibility that exists in existing contracts when it comes to purchasing related products and services. 'Modernising government is about neither technology nor procurement. But local authorities need to take decisions on both to enable them to modernise. And those procurement decisions need to be taken now in a strategic way, using the full range of procurement tools available, if modernised services are to have any chance of becoming a reality before 2005,' said Smith.

Commitment to community leadership

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DTLR Minister Nick Raynsford spelt out the government's commitment to community leadership, and - further to plans outlined in the recent White Paper - the vital roles to be played by both central and local government. Speaking at a New Local Government Network conference he identified the need for community leadership to be both community-facing and community-empowering.

'For local authorities to be genuine community leaders, they will need to listen to, and act on, the priorities and aspirations of their local communities. There is often an abundance of energy and creativity at the community level - which is crying out to be put to use. We ignore it at our peril'.

Recognising that while local authorities are well positioned to become true leaders of their communities such leadership will not happen automatically, he said. 'Councils should be empowered to take actions which

will deliver tangible benefits to their communities' well being. This enabling power is indicative of the can do mentality we want to engender'.

Referring to new constitutional arrangements - and with mayoral referenda taking place in another six councils over the next two months, heightened petition campaigns, and decisions pending on intervention in a number of authorities - Raynsford noted: 'People will have more confidence in their councils as leaders if they know who makes the decisions, how they are made and how the decision-makers are held to account. This is why we have attached such importance to streamlining council structures. We also believe people should be able to choose how they are governed locally'.

Raynsford was speaking an NLGN one-day national conference on Councils and Community Leadership. Other speakers included Cllr. Sandy Bruce Lockhart, Leader, Kent CC, Sue Goss, Director of Practice

Development, Office of Public Management and Mike Beasley, Managing Director, Jaguar Cars.

■ **The New Local Government Network is an independent think-tank, seeking to transform public services, revitalise local political leadership and empower local communities.**

More information: www.nlgn.org.uk

FORTHCOMING NLGN CONFERENCES:

■ **Nick Raynsford on Managing Strategic Service Delivery Partnerships: From Governance to Delivery.** London, Monday 18 March. Case studies include Dudley MBC, Islington, Lincolnshire CC, Blackburn with Darwen, Bedfordshire CC, Norfolk CC and Herefordshire CC.

■ **Minister, Alan Whitehead, will speak on Transforming Public Services: What Role for Local Government?** London, Thursday 14 February. Other speakers include SOLACE members David Henshaw and Gordon Mitchell.

INLOGOV's new series of keynote conferences

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A new series of keynote conferences has been designed and launched by INLOGOV.

New director of INLOGOV at Birmingham University, Sir Michael Lyons, a familiar SOLACE member, has arranged a special rate for SOLACE members to attend the first of the conferences.

Entitled **Buying Better Public Services for your Community - Lessons and Choices for Local Government** it will be held in Central London on Thursday 14 March. Keynote speakers will include:

- Nick Raynsford, who will speak about the progress of the Strategic Partnering Taskforce and the importance of good purchasing decisions if Councils are to secure the new freedoms offered by the White Paper;
- Rod Aldridge of CAPITA on what more the private sector could do;

- Sir Ian Byatt on Lessons from the Procurement Task Force;
- Peter Fanning of CIPFA on the scope to get more from Public Partnerships;
- Michael Lyons and Michael Hughes of INLOGOV will seek to shape 'A Menu of Choice'.

The conference will emphasise the choices available to councils that want to make step-change improvements in their services. It will look at the contribution that outsourcing, public/public partnerships and other approaches to buying public services can make to a radical agenda for improvement.

The conference is well supported by four case studies led by SOLACE members. Louis Victory, CEX Cumbria CC and John Foster, CEX of Middlesborough will speak about their experiences in creating radical

new partnership arrangements with external suppliers and what the next steps might be.

Michael Pitt, CEX Kent CC will survey the choices made by his authority and stress the importance of the 'strong and intelligent buyer'. Michael Britch, Director of Property at Norfolk CC will speak of his experience in winning a new contract from DFEE and the scope for a new generation of partnerships between public bodies.

It will conclude with a look to the future when Richard Footitt, DTLR, will join other speakers to draw practical lessons for councils and government. The conference is sponsored by Zurich Municipal.

- **If you are interested in booking a place go direct to INLOGOV seminar website at: www.bham.ac.uk/inlogov/seminar/.htm**

Partnership brings together private and public sector skills page 1 of 1

SOLACE and BT have agreed a three-year partnership to help local authorities meet the challenges of e-government.

'Knowledge sharing is the key aspect of the strategic partnership with BT,' says SOLACE director general David Clark.

'The objective of the partnership is to bring together the skills and expertise of the private and public sector to help members of SOLACE meet the challenges of transforming their organisations and maximising the opportunities that technology can deliver.'

The partnership will initially focus on two areas: the issues that need to be addressed in order to bring the e-agenda forward and the essential development of knowledge

and skills to embrace the changes facing the public sector.

BT Local Government general manager Steve Crabbe said: 'BT has enjoyed a close relationship with SOLACE for the past seven years, culminating in 2001 with the successful conference at BT's Adastral Park. This new partnership reinforces our commitment to local authorities in meeting challenges and delivering on targets.'

SOLACE and BT are currently creating a series of regional workshops aimed at sharing the experiences from the first round of the IEG statements. These workshops will provide a greater understanding and focus on the benefits eService will add to the performance of an authority and also value to citizens.



Wanted

CEXs prepared to learn more

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It takes more than a nine to five attitude to be appointed chief officer or chief executive - but what outlet does that drive and enthusiasm have after you get the top job? To remain effective top managers need to identify and address their learning and development needs.

The SOLACE Scheme for Continuous Learning (SCL) does just that. It is based on the premise that learning is a constant process - and that the most powerful learning produces insights into complex problems and the way we interact with them.

At the heart of the Scheme is a personal development planning process which helps top officers learn to work with the political

dimension; lead change and develop the organisation; maintain personal perspective and self-knowledge; develop effective external relationships; and focus on strategic and long-term issues.

To kick start the process, the SCL provides a two-hour confidential discussion, one-to-one, with an experienced facilitator. Thanks to a SOLACE subsidy the cost to SOLACE members is only £100.

A CEX, who admitted personal development never really featured on their agenda in the early years, said: 'It was a powerful and at times painful learning experience for me but one from which I have benefited enormously.

'It is a continuing struggle to find the time and discipline to take personal development seriously. It is all too easy - and more comfortable - to allow myself to be distracted by the latest crisis to hit the in-tray rather than reflecting on what I have learned and how I need to improve.

'It was invaluable to have someone independent challenge my thoughts, assumptions and plans. It led me to rethink my approach in a number of areas. I am determined to make sure I don't lose sight of my personal development needs again.'

A chief officer said it was the personal development planning that particularly attracted him to SCL. 'After being a chief officer for more than four years I realised

Wanted

CEXs prepared to learn more

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my horizons were changing and I wanted - and needed - some more concrete contemporary reference points.

'I outlined some of the parameters which, after a reasonable period in my job, I felt I faced. What constraints I felt there were in terms of future career timespan; personal professional aspirations; and family commitment factors. Being able to sound out half formed thoughts about the next 10 years, was time well spent, if a little exposing.

'There was no point in not being honest and some important factors came out in the discussions that took place on a one-to-one basis. All the listening, clarification and the links made between my different

personal life strands were excellent. Trying to be rather than to strive was an interesting piece of perspective that I shall not forget.

'There is also an opportunity for a 360 degree appraisal. Colleagues can make contributions anonymously, outside normal work environment constraints, which means there is a real opportunity to use the exercise as a purer piece of personal development in a more open manner than any such internal exercise in your own organisation.'

The SCL lies at the heart of SOLACE's overall objectives in both supporting its members and promoting effective local government. Participation in SCL is free of

charge and funded through subscriptions and other income sources. The Scheme provides no funding to directly support learning products and activities all members will be expected to fund their individual learning programmes in the normal way.

■ If you want to join the Scheme or simply find out more information visit the SOLACE website: www.solace.org.uk To arrange a personal development planning session contact Danny Chesterman. Tel: 01622 676453. Email: danny.chesterman@solace.org.uk

SOLACE **course diary**

BOOK ONLINE Click on the course title to access the SOLACE website - and register your interest

Presentation Matters - Part 2

Designed for competent presenters, or those who have attended Presentation Matters Part 1, this one-day workshop is designed to turn competence into excellence. Instead of relying on an 'all singing and dancing' PowerPoint presentation the best presenters rely on personality and performance. And anyone can do it!

London, Tuesday 19 February

Cost: £275 + VAT for SOLACE members,
£300 + VAT for non-members

Election issues for new Returning Officers

Facing your first elections? In need of a refresher? Then this workshop is an absolute must. It offers a unique opportunity to get practical advice and tips, share insights and experiences with colleagues, and get up to speed with the fast changing world of elections. Closely scrutinised by politicians and the media, elections are occasions where CEXs are expected to know all the answers - fast. A timely opportunity to make sure you are 'on the pace'.

London, Wednesday 13 March

Cost: £275 + VAT for SOLACE members,
£300 + VAT for non-members

PAs at the Top

A one-day workshop specially designed for PAs working with a CEX. Participants gain a wider insight into the CEX's job, are encouraged to focus on their own role, skills and expertise and invest in their own personal development. A great opportunity to network with colleagues.

London, Tuesday 26 March

Cost: £225 + VAT for SOLACE members,
£250 + VAT for non-members

■ **Courses run at intervals. Detailed information is available on the SOLACE website. Contact Course Administrator, Sue Rawlins on 01934 513704 or email sue.rawlins@solace.org.uk**

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On the contents page is an option to get to the SOLACE website, to find out more about the organisation. Apart from that one link to the Internet, this pdf file is completely self contained and operates off-line.

Wherever you see an email address, click on it to activate your email software and respond to the article's author direct.

Focus

About SOLACE

SOLACE is the representative body for senior strategic managers working in local government. The Society promotes effective local government and provides professional development for its members.

Members are drawn from a variety of professional backgrounds and are:

- Local authority Chief Executives
- Senior Executives of local authorities (or other related organisations)
- Members of related International organisations
- Past Service Members

The Society is funded from member subscriptions, profits from its commercial company (SOLACE Enterprises) and sponsorship.

SOLACE is particularly grateful to its sponsors for their support. Current major sponsors are BT, Zurich Municipal and Oracle. Sponsorship opportunities also exist for smaller or one-off purposes. Sonia Rheinlander (sonia.rheinlander@solace.org.uk) has full details.

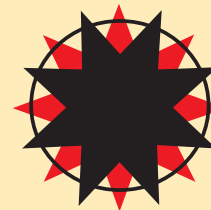


**SOLACE headquarters: Hope House,
45 Great Peter St, London, SW1P 3LT**

Located in the heart of Westminster [nearest underground is St James' Park] our new London headquarters offers a range of facilities for Members.

Provided as a 'drop in' facility for Members, we have a comfortable Members' Room - ideal for relaxing,

reading the current Journals, or simply having a cuppa. Or you can meet a colleague then use our dedicated computer terminals to access the Internet and pick up your email or phone, fax and photocopy.



SOLACE

Society of Local Authority
Chief Executives and Senior Managers

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Feedback: have your say

Read something that interests you? Concerns you? Annoys you? Want a chance to put your view? Want to find out more? Whatever your view, please share it with us.

SOLACE Focus is only as good as the contributions it gets. It is your newsletter, meant to reflect your Society. Let us know if it is (or isn't) doing the job.

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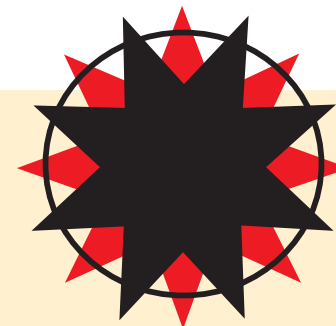
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