



SOLACE

Society of Local Authority
Chief Executives and Senior Managers

June 2006

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FOCUS

The **electronic newsletter** of the
Society of Local Authority Chief Executives and Senior Managers

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Live web link to
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We must be 'bovvered'

The need to change the voter indifference shown in low turnout into engagement with local government was the immediate and immense subject tackled by Barry Quirk, SOLACE president, at the second SOLACE Graduate Conference in London.

Popular indifference was seen in the modern attitude of Am I bovvered? It seemed the cultural motto had become Tesco ergo sum – roughly translated as I shop therefore I am. People only engaged with local government as service users.

But this happened, Quirk insisted, because local government, on its side, was a little 'too bovvered' about Government, their inspectors and auditors, and 'not bovvered enough' about the public in all its variety.

The focus on the public had been too narrowly focused on consumers of services. Councils polled this public for their satisfaction with services. In return they had seen, he said, 'a flat-lining in public esteem'.

Political parties bore a responsibility. Elections were portrayed as big fights because big fights drew crowds. 'But,'

Quirk argued, 'we live at a time of small fights between bantam weights.'

Quirk tracked a gradual progression in local government from institutionalism to community focus. Councils' obsession with satisfaction with services had changed to an interest in what a council's

'How can we build consent to our proposals?'

Barry Quirk

reputation meant to its public.

But to break through from institutionalism to real community focus, two more stages were needed, he said. We had to ask How can we build consent to our proposals? and How can we act when some dissent from our proposals?

He believed it was about having a sense of place and making the most of that place. He said there were four ills that bedeviled the

relevance of local government and people's engagement with it. First, there was what he called 'the tyranny of the majority'.

Then came the politics of arithmetic and machine politics; the dictatorship of the bureaucrat where professionals paraded expertise and claimed to act in the public interest; and debilitation through deliberation - or being paralyzed by too much analysis and an excess of meetings!

To remedy these, he stressed, councils needed 'to be bovvered' about the stewardship of places and people's life chances in those places, and about speaking for local interests without parochialism.

They had to work to connect local issues with wider issues of public interest and build ever more satisfied customers and approving citizens while enabling dissenting voices to be expressed and heard. They had to help citizens to connect with each other.

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Know yourself

Local government is a great place to work. It has lots of career options, the complex organisations offer variety and you are able to make a difference, Rita Sammons, director of SOLACE Enterprises, told the SOLACE Graduate Conference.

She focused on the importance of emotional intelligence. People should know their own strengths and weaknesses and be able to 'hear the spoken and unspoken'. That was important in empowering people, being able to adapt to challenge and change, and providing the vision that led to delivery.

Knowing what you wanted to have and planning what to do to get it was the easy part. To reach the goal, you also needed the right approach, the 'mind-frame'. Too few people focused on that part of their development. 'By being clear about who you are, you'll find the enthusiasm to inspire others,' she said.

In shaping a career, she encouraged

people to be 'proactive' in seeking out people to talk to – managers, colleagues, organisational partners, career development specialists. 'Be willing to engage in self-disclosure,' she said. 'Be open minded and able to look at yourself, be flexible about timing and tactics, take ownership.'

Essential skills for moving on in local government included a real understanding and empathy for the political process; an ability to manage relationships with members, partners, customers; a focus on delivery; an ability to understand all perspectives; integrity and honesty; listening skills and self-awareness.

In conclusion, she quoted from a leadership expert: 'One of the dangers of seniority is that it can reinforce ego. There are too many high-profile role models portrayed in the media who are egocentric and insular. Leadership is not about that. And it's not about ruling through others, and not about oneself.'

At the heart of leadership is profound humility. It's leading at the heart of the organisation, not at the head.'

'By being clear about who you are, you'll find the enthusiasm to inspire others'

Rita Sammons

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10 years old

Most people know the first all-race elections in South Africa hold a special place in history. Few know they hold special a place, too, in the life and times of SOLACE Enterprises. More than 60 local authority election experts and observers were recruited and sent out to South Africa to support the country's first democratic elections by SOLACE International, the first commercial arm of SOLACE the Society.

Since that first amazing dip into the commercial world, the company hasn't looked back. Ten years ago SOLACE Enterprises was set up as its UK commercial arm to help finance the exciting new vision to position SOLACE as the premier local government society and to promote the value and role of local government within a democratic society. The two companies formally merged soon after.

Today SOLACE Enterprises is a £14m commercial company with offices in Westminster and more than 900

'Since that first amazing dip into the commercial world, the company hasn't looked back'

retained associates – 200 of whom are former CEXs. In the 10 years since it held its first formal meeting at the SOLACE 1996 annual conference, SOLACE Enterprises has invested more than £1million to amply fulfill its mission of supporting SOLACE as a significant force in UK governance.

'Central to the vision of SOLACE Enterprises,' said Roger Paine, one of the first three executive directors, 'was the Society's first business plan. It included the appointment of a director general and a widening of the membership to include senior managers. If the Society were to achieve this vision it needed resources.

'The Society's income at this stage was negligible and the business plan would be meaningless without commercial input. The commercial arm of SOLACE was born with the twin objectives of providing a wide range of facilitating services and raising income for the Society.'

The other two directors were Andrew Boatswain, former CEX Swansea, and Geoff Bonner, former CEX Stirling. Paine, former CEX Cardiff CC and in 1993 SOLACE president, said: 'We used to meet up in railway stations – often at Warrington or Crewe because they were about half-way for all of us.

'We were so sure it would be a success, we agreed not to draw any money from the company until it was in profit. We were paid by results. We put all our energy into starting from a blank sheet of paper. We were all sure

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10 years old

there was a need for the services the company offered and were convinced the SOLACE name was a powerful enough brand to make it successful.'

First chair of SOLACE Enterprises Sir David Henshaw, former CEX Liverpool, remembers those early days and the railway station meetings. 'I can remember Roger being a real leader,' he said. 'He was very keen to get something going. We took it carefully in the beginning. We all had a sense that we had something

We were so sure it would be a success, we agreed not to draw any money from the company until it was in profit'

Roger Paine

here but I don't think any of us realised the huge value of it.'

Within six months, the company was operating at a profit. At the end of the first year, it had repaid the initial start-up loan and paid a dividend to the Society. Expansion continued and today the company has re-invested more than £1million into local government by direct support to SOLACE, the Society, and to the SOLACE Foundation, the charitable arm of the Society.

It is all a long way from the first commercial stirrings in the early 1990s, when a group of former chief executives with a wide experience in international work came together to establish SOLACE International and won the contract to support the first historic democratic elections in South Africa.

One of the 60 experts sent out to South Africa was Steve Jones, former CEX Wigan. 'It was a life-changing experience,' he said. 'It is something that stays with you. I watched thousands of

people stand in the hot sun for three days to cast their vote. It was amazing. Everything you read about those elections is true. It was like nothing I have ever seen before or since.'

The international arm was set up by Colin Jeynes, John Harris, Eric Dixon, John Barber, William Saunders and Steve Jones. Jones was responsible for organising the initial £12,000 loan from the Society to establish the company. 'It operated out of John Harris' home for a couple of years before they opened an office in 1993 in Pontefract,' he said.

Today's SOLACE head of membership services James Jeynes remembers starting his working life with the SOLACE family at John Harris' dining table. 'I can remember answering the phone with different voices to try to make it sound like we had more people working for us than we did!' he said.

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At first, SOLACE International and SOLACE Enterprises worked closely together but separately. In 1998 the two companies formally merged under the joint chairmanship of Sir David and Steve Jones. Sir David, still a board member, said: 'It was great to work with such a group of committed individuals in developing such a successful company. The challenge for SOLACE members now is to decide how they want it to develop further. It is a big question.'

When Roger Paine stood down as MD in 2001 he was succeeded by Andrew Coleman from private sector consultancy Kinsley Lord/Towers Perrin, who has found the increase in scale of the operation the most obvious change since taking over. 'Last year we undertook over 350 assignments for 250 public sector organisations. Those assignments covered the full range of the Company's activities, which has correspondingly grown in response to market needs

over the last few years,' he said.

'The scale of growth hasn't been at the expense of quality. Last week I was looking at the results of our monthly survey of customers. The results were outstanding with 100% of customers surveyed saying they'd work with us again.

'Of course, it's the quality of our staff and associates that continues to differentiate us from the competition. I'm proud of the fact that the best of the local government and consultancy market want to work with us and people of the calibre of Rita Sammons and Terry McDougall have joined us as Directors.

'Although the change has been dramatic, I also have a strong sense of continuity. I think the original vision of the founders is intact, as is our position as part of the SOLACE family and the values we share with the founders and the Society. We are very optimistic and ambitious about our plans for the next 10 years.'

'It was great to work with such a group of committed individuals in developing such a successful company. The challenge for SOLACE members now is to decide how they want it to develop further. It is a big question'

Sir David Henshaw

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Honing skills

The learning exchange between SOLACE and the Institute for Local Government Managers in South Africa (iLGM) has moved forward. The first three participants are expected to travel to the UK this year to spend up to three months with a local authority.

Kathryn Rossiter, SOLACE director of development & operations, said: 'Adverts for the first applicants have been posted. Once they have been selected they will be matched with a UK local authority. We have had offers from 13 possible host councils. Once we know who is coming we will chose the most appropriate authority according to the fit of the iLGM members' needs.'

The SOLACE iLGM partnership was officially launched in October 2005 when both organisations signed a memorandum of understanding designed to develop the voice for local government managers worldwide and to encourage the exchange of people, ideas and information. The partnership



focuses on: building capacity in iLGM; developing governance arrangements; and developing the potential of iLGM members.

'It is in line with the Commission for Africa report for capacity building,' said Rossiter. 'We should be promoting

learning across national borders and international work is an excellent way of exchanging best practice. The learning exchange will provide iLGM members with the chance to gain hands-on, practical experience and exposure to managing in a political environment. It will also give them the chance to develop and hone key management skills.'

Chair of the SOLACE International Working Group Byron Davies, said: 'This is a real opportunity for chief executives in the UK to be part of a professional support system for capacity building with our colleagues from South Africa. I am delighted progress is being made on this initiative. We need to build on this to ensure that shared experience at graduate, middle and senior management level can progress as well as shared experience at chief executive level.'

- For more information email kathryn.rossiter@solace.org.uk

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The golden thread



A new service to support local authorities working with partners to improve the health of local communities

and reduce health inequalities is being launched by the IDeA on 12 June. The Healthy Communities Programme, aiming to fit services to people and funded by the Department of Health, is a new two-year initiative, that will enable local government to play a new, substantially enhanced role in public health.

'The move towards fitting services round people, not people round services,' said Andrew Cozens, head of the healthy communities team, 'brings an enhanced role for local authorities in shifting resources into prevention and the seamless integration of health and social care provision to meet local community needs at a local level. The key to success will be effective local

partnerships led by local government and the NHS working to a common purpose and reflecting local needs.'

The programme aims to build the capacity of local authorities working within their communities to tackle local health inequalities; provide leadership to promote well being; and to foster a joined-up approach to health improvement across local government itself and through Local Strategic Partnerships and Local Area Agreements, including Primary Care Trusts and senior NHS representatives.

This is a new area of work for the IDeA, which is planning to draw on its established areas of expertise, and existing teams focusing on Children's Services; Adult Social Care; the Voluntary and Community sector; and Sustainable Communities. Cozens said it would build on the success of the Shared Priorities Programme, the Beacon Council Scheme, and the IDeA's successful, established approaches and products including peer review.

'We will develop a healthier communities peer review process together with an intensive organisational health check and action plan for local authorities against a benchmark of an ideal authority. A new module will be developed within the existing Leadership Academy Programme to include the role of elected members in leading the health improvement agenda,' he said.

'A network of peer experts, Service Advisors, will act as mentors to local authorities, or individuals within local authorities who have a specific role, to help mainstream public health and develop programmes/initiatives as an essential, corporate and strategic activity. The term golden thread is often used to stress the fundamental link that should exist between health, housing, social services, leisure, planning and finance. This peer-led approach will focus on self-help.'

■ More information at
www.idea.gov.uk

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Exchanging ideas

SOLACE hopes to make some bursaries available for members interested in attending the UDiTE conference in Malta this September. The conference, Efficiency in Local Government, will provide a pan-European perspective on efficiency with speakers from throughout Europe, including SOLACE DG David Clark.

Kathryn Rossiter, SOLACE director of development & operations, said: 'It promises to be a truly international event with speakers from Malta, Denmark, UK, France, Italy, Spain, Ireland and Cyprus, as well as the Council of Europe and EU Committee of the Regions, plus guests from South Africa, Argentina and Turkey.'

'Occasions such as these are fantastic opportunities to share professional experiences and to contribute to the role and function of local authorities internationally. SOLACE is so committed to learning with and from our international colleagues,

it hopes to make some bursaries available to support members wishing to attend.' Would-be delegates are encouraged to book their hotel accommodation early because it will be holiday season in Malta.

The aim of UDiTE is to promote relations between the professional associations of CEXs representing European local authorities, to develop exchanges of information, to share professional experiences, to contribute to the enhancement of the role and functions of local authorities, and to contribute to the European Union.

SOLACE UK delegate to UDiTE is Byron Davies, CEX Cardiff Council and vice president of SOLACE UK. As the chair of the SOLACE International Working Group, he is part of a working group exploring a pan-Europe MPA degree leading to a pan-Europe professional qualification in public service.

Davies is also the UDiTE observer

to the Council of Europe and through UDiTE will be aiming to influence the European Committee of the Regions to acknowledge UDiTE as the professional practitioner's voice on European matters.

'These are really exciting times for establishing purposeful professional links within Europe,' he said. 'UDiTE wants to help chief executives exchange ideas and learn from each other, create personal development opportunities, and assist developing countries and influence policy outcomes at European level.'

SOLACE International Working Group will shortly be addressing a policy review of all international links aimed at extending this thinking to other countries and professional bodies.

■ Find out more at:

www.uditemalta2006.com

For more about possible bursaries

email: kathryn.rossiter@solace.org.uk

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Two contracts won

Two major leadership development contracts have been awarded to SOLACE Enterprises. The company will run the new IDeA Academy for Executive Leadership and become a major leadership partner with the Leadership Centre.

The IDeA Academy replaces the Advanced Leadership Programme. SOLACE Enterprises Director Rita Sammons said 'We are delighted our approach to leadership development has gained such national recognition. The Academy, which will start this September, will set a new standard for national local government leadership development.

'The IDeA has asked us to work in partnership with Ashridge in creating a challenging skills-based programme that will help chief executives, directors and senior heads of service enhance their existing skills and develop new ones.'

She said the contract with the Leadership Centre attracted a wide range of leadership development

specialists and was an intensively competitive process. 'The Leadership Centre will use its partners to improve thinking and practice in leadership development, to explore innovative approaches and to be at the forefront of considering development responses to emerging issues,' she said.

'These new commitments will sit alongside our other leadership

development initiatives. Before our involvement in these two initiatives was announced, we were already reviewing our approach to leadership development. We will be launching a new open programme for chief executives and senior managers later this year, based on three distinct strands: Aspiring, Excellence and Exploration. We will be offering programmes and activities that cover leadership development and career management for all stages of senior management careers.'

- For more information on the Academy for Executive Leadership email liz.cole@idea.gov.uk
- For details of SOLACE Enterprises development programmes or leadership development consultancy, email rita.sammons@solaceenterprises.com or visit: www.solaceenterprises.com.



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London: Collaboration needs rules not just invitations

Over the past five years, SOLACE London, always numerically strong, has been stimulated by external opportunities and internal self-discipline. It has evolved into an impressive set of processes that seem to work well and might even be a model for others.

That is the view of Derek Myers, chair SOLACE London, who says it all started with two tricky decisions. One was that while the wider SOLACE membership is important, so is the grouping of Chief Executives. The second, that serious collaboration requires rules not just invitations.

The branch now invests in two or three well organised events each year for the whole branch membership but also sponsors a regular set of meetings for Chief Executives only. Myers, who is also chair of the CEX London Committee, says:

‘Chief Executives can only come if they agree to abide by the club rules: a commitment to attend regularly; no deputies; take a fair share of the work; miss three meetings in a row and you are out. Together, these have served to set

‘Chief Executives can only come if they agree to abide by the club rules: a commitment to attend regularly; no deputies; take a fair share of the work; miss three meetings in a row and you are out’

Derek Myers

some baselines for professional behaviour.’

He said the branch was delighted to have the CEXs of the ALG and GLA in membership. There were regular slots with permanent secretaries, the Metropolitan Police Commissioner and most of the other senior London players.

‘London’s politics have just changed radically and many new political players have arrived. This might bring loads of new energy – or it might lead to a testing time where new majorities and minorities flex their tribal instincts.

‘A good time, therefore, for SOLACE London to feel warmed up and nicely glowing, ready to ensure professional management is influential in dealing with the challenges that a capital city always has ahead.’

- For more information email: derek.myers@rbkc.gov.uk

South East: First conference a success

More than 40 people attended the first branch conference of SOLACE South East, held at the former Civil Service college in Berkshire. Branch secretary David Buckle, who organised the event, said: ‘Branch chair Christine Pointer and I set ourselves a target of attracting 30 delegates. In the event the total was 42. This was our first conference and as attendance at meetings tends to be low, we both took great satisfaction in the turnout.’

His secret, he said, was to base the format on the successful conferences organised by SOLACE South West: a

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'We had very positive feedback from delegates'

David Buckle

running time of 24 hours, a variety of speakers rather than a particular theme, copious supplies of tea and coffee – and a bar in close proximity to the delegates!

The role of mediation was the focus of a presentation by former CEX Bernard Quoroll, now a trained mediator. 'Much of Bernard's work is outside local government, but its value to situations that we all find ourselves in from time to time was clear,' said Buckle.

Recruitment expert Tim Lewingdon discussed the pros and cons of using recruitment consultants. Buckle said: 'His key message was that, if you don't know what you want your recruitment adviser to deliver, you'll probably end up disappointed.'

SOLACE President Barry Quirk gave an address entitled *Managing Everything*. David Foster, from sponsors Zurich Municipal, looked at risk management.

Buckle concluded: 'We had very positive feedback from delegates. It looks like we will have to come up with something even bigger and better next year. Just as long as no one suggests setting objectives or outcomes and success measures!'

- For more information email: david.buckle@southoxon.gov.uk

South West update

Plans are progressing well for the SOLACE South West branch annual conference in November. The conference will be held at Dartington Hall, South Devon, on Thursday and Friday, 9-10 November.

Secretary of the South West branch David Incoll, CEX West Devon BC, said: 'It is always a successful conference. Our national president Barry Quirk undoubtedly enjoyed last November's event, as evidenced by his reference to our keynote speaker from last year, Pen Hadow, the first Englishman to reach the North Pole unaided, at this year's annual SOLACE dinner at the Savoy.'

The conference is sponsored by BT and at well under £200 for

pure inspiration, great networking, accommodation in a 14th century manor. Email: dincoll@westdevon.gov.uk

Midlands update

The annual conference of SOLACE West and East Midlands covered a good deal of ground. As well as the stimulating address from Sir Michael Bichard (see April Focus), there were challenging sessions from voluntary sector colleague Laura Moynahon, of Sheffield's Netherthorpe and Upperthorpe Community Alliance, and Lynne Wilson of the Open University.

Examples of best practice were discussed by CEX colleagues from Rotherham MBC and Leicester CC. An opportunity to consider leadership style and skills came from Oliver Nyumbu of Caret and there was a thought provoking talk from David Prout, ODPM director of local government policy.

- For more information email: nigel. pursey@staffordshire.gov.uk

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Getting it together

Integration between inspection and regulation bodies in Wales looks set to be a key focus of the year for new SOLACE Wales chair Ian Miller. He used SOLACE Wales first conference to raise the Society's concerns about the commitment of various regulatory bodies to reduce the burden of inspection and regulation for local authorities and to call on the Wales Audit Office to ensure all regulatory bodies continued to move towards a co-ordinated and risk-based approach to inspection activity.

'In my year as chair, the Society will look to map the existing audit and inspection bodies in Wales, and to lead calls for a rationalisation of these,' he said. 'Only when inspection and regulatory work is proportionate to risk and fully coordinated, will the reality of minimising the burden start to be achieved. Progress towards achieving this reduction in practice has been slow and often compounded by the lack of integration and communication between the various inspectorates.



'In my year as chair, the Society will look to map the existing audit and inspection bodies in Wales, and to lead calls for a rationalisation of these' - Ian Miller

'There is clear evidence to suggest that there is a lack of co-ordination and integration between the current regulation and inspection bodies in Wales. Furthermore, whether inspection is co-ordinated or not, the volume of inspection in certain areas, in particular Social Services, creates a feeling of oppression and distraction that generally reduces staff morale and has a detrimental

impact on ongoing work within local government to improve service provision.'

In the case of the single-issue inspectorates such as Estyn and SSIW, he said, the commitment to reduce the burden was not being carried through into the reality of the inspection and review process. SOLACE Wales supported the Making the Connections policy agenda, and he argued this applied across the public service – including all regulatory bodies.

Miller, who took over as chair at the Society's AGM, was speaking on the eve of SOLACE Wales first conference. He said SOLACE Wales had grown tremendously in the past 18 months. It now represented a mechanism through which public service policy development in Wales could be effectively tested against professional views. It was imperative therefore, he said, that its voice was available to and heard by the key decision makers at the highest

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Getting it together

levels of Public Services in Wales.

'As our policy voice has grown we have established regular meetings with WLGA and WAG officers, and other public service organisations,' he said. 'In 2006 - 07 we will look to widen this and to engage with other professional societies, such as those started with both the Association of Directors of Education in Wales and CIPFA. Making such connections can only help in supporting a strong and coherent professional voice in Wales.'

Within SOLACE Wales there was now increased participation of non-CEX members, including senior managers and graduates. 'SOLACE Wales' most valuable resource lies in the skills, expertise and experience of its members,' he said. 'There is an argument that we have underused this in the past, particularly with regard to our growing number of senior manager members. The newly established Senior Managers Forum has the potential to be an effective group on the development

and implementation of policy.'

The Society would continue to support the Graduate Forum as it extended its membership beyond local authorities. 'We currently have members from Local Authorities, WLGA, LGDU and from WAG, and hope to extend this to other public service bodies and to strengthen our connections with other professional societies' graduate schemes,' he said.

'As chair I hope to create a more integrated Society which will reflect and where possible lead the change agenda evident in SOLACE across the UK, including welcoming the upcoming middle manager programme which I have no doubt will be as successful as our graduate programme.'

Honorary secretary of SOLACE Wales, Byron Davies, CEX Cardiff Council and Vice President of SOLACE UK, said he was delighted with the SOLACE Wales team. 'It is great we have such a strong team to take forward the work of establishing a professional practitioners voice in

Wales. The Conference was a spectacular success and the start of an annual event which will aim to attract policy makers and practitioners from across public service in Wales to discuss how to improve services to communities and citizens across Wales.'

Ian Miller has been CEX of Denbighshire CC since February 2002. A civil servant from 1987 to 2000 he worked in the Welsh office and then the National Assembly for Wales. Posts included legislation on council tax, local government reorganisation and devolution as well as spells dealing with culture and sport and local government finance. From 2000 to 2002 he was head of finance at the Welsh LGA.

- Read what advice Peter Hain, Secretary of State for Wales, had for Welsh public sector workers at SOLACE Public Service Wales Conference [here](#)

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Expert voice

SOLACE is making a major input into the Review of Public Administration (RPA) which will see councils in Northern Ireland cut from 26 to seven. The Society is providing an 'expert voice' in the local government reorganisation and modernisation process with eight members on the modernisation taskforce and four members chairing working groups.

SOLACE NI branch secretary Victor Brownlees chairs Governance; Thomas McCall chairs Community Planning; John Campbell chairs Capacity Building and Wavell Moore chairs Central/Local Government Relations. Other members sit on various working groups and SOLACE executive officer Stephen Finlay sits on the Central/Local Government working group.

'SOLACE's involvement is crucial,' said Finlay, 'in providing an expert voice in the maze of local government reorganisation and modernisation. It is important the Department of Environment recognises

such a large scale change management process will only be successful if it is informed and owned by local government practitioners who have the necessary knowledge and experience on the ground, officers and elected members alike.'

'SOLACE's involvement is crucial'

Steven Finlay

The terms of reference for the modernisation taskforce are to produce proposals for modern and effective local government in light of the requirements of the RPA and other drivers for change. The first phase, said Finlay, is to produce proposals to inform policy and legislation and identify the critical path required to deliver these. The second phase will address implementation.

The taskforce aims to create a local government that:

- Places the principles and objectives of 'A Shared Future' at the heart of all activity
- Gives the sector the lead role in the creation of sustainable communities
- Places the needs of citizens at the heart of all service delivery
- Encourages and supports a culture of efficiency and continuous improvement.

The modernisation taskforce will draw on independent expert advice and best practice from elsewhere but will seek solutions appropriate to local need and circumstance. SOLACE former honorary treasurer Richard Cummins is one of a group of IDeA peers involved in the process. He said: 'Six of us are SOLACE members with extensive past experience in reorganisation and modernisation in England and Scotland.'

- More information from SOLACE NI executive officer Stephen Finlay. Email: stephen.finlay@solace.org.uk

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Hot line to the House

Have your own 'eyes and ears' in the House of Commons. SOLACE has negotiated a special rate with Parliamentary News Service, a news agency in the House of Commons, to provide members with access to its exclusive news service.

There is no limit to the number of people who can receive tailored news and free trials are available. PNS offers a guarantee that NO news is missed and that individuals are kept informed at the earliest possible opportunity.

Each council receives its own ParliamentToday website where all local government news from Westminster would be posted and where it would remain for searching in the future. The system is designed to combat the problem of 'information overload', says SOLACE executive manager James Jeynes. 'Anyone at the council could do their own research, even if they themselves opt not to receive e-mail alerts.'

For further details contact PNS directly at enquiries@parliamenttoday.com or on 020 7219 4283.

Pilot programme to support LAAs

Volunteer councils are wanted to take part in a new pilot programme to help LAAs improve their performance management and partnership working. The Performance Improvement Programme - Real Improvement, Real Time, launched by ODPM and LGA, has been successfully trialled with groups of local authorities and fire and rescue services.

The programme aims to transform partnerships through effective performance management, says Andrew Coleman, MD SOLACE Enterprises, which together with PricewaterhouseCoopers designed the programme. 'Participants in the earlier trials are already beginning to see results,' he said.

The programme incorporates a series of face-to-face learning and development events together with specific tailored support for each partnership. It will focus on developing the skills, behaviours and cultures to drive and sustain continuous improvement. Learning is directly applied to current performance issues in 'real time' during the events.

- If you would like to volunteer or want more information on the programme please contact Andrea Martin, email: andrea.martin@solaceenterprises.com or Ciara Magee on 078 4336 8800 or ciara.m.magee@uk.pwc.com

Top lawyer

SOLACE member Mirza Ahmed, chief legal and monitoring officer for Birmingham CC, the UK's largest local authority, has been named Lawyer of the Month by the Black Lawyers Directory. He manages the legal and democratic services department of Birmingham CC which has more than 300 staff and an annual trading budget in excess of £60 million per annum.

In 2000, Ahmed was the first local government manager to obtain a three-star excellent rating under the Government's best value regime. His department won the LGC's legal team of the year in 2005 and in February 2006 his team was commended for innovative policies in the Birmingham & Solihull best business awards for the

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development of work-life balance by employers with more than 250 staff.

New course

Who runs the council? A new course aimed at CEXs, section 151 officers and monitoring officers, is offering a unique opportunity for all three statutory officers to explore current thinking on managing in a political environment in a confidential setting.

The determination of more and more policies by central government has created, at best, confusion and, at worst, real tensions between the officer-elected member interface, says the SOLACE Commission on Managing in a political environment, on which this new course is based.

Issues covered will include what elected members expect of officers; what the three key statutory officers should expect of each other in improving relationships with elected members; and the findings of the SOLACE Commission. There will be an opportunity for the sharing of experiences of building trust in the relationship between officers and members.

- **Managing in a Political Environment: Who's Running the Council?** will take place in London on Monday 26 June. Book online at: <http://training.solace.org.uk/viewcourse.asp?eventnumb=34>

The link between pay and performance

A new organisation has been created by the LGA to work with authorities, stakeholders and partners to lead, create and deliver solutions on pay, pensions and employment issues. Local Government Employers (LGE) will provide tailored solutions for councils on issues such as job evaluation, equal pay, employment law and sickness absence management, in partnership with Regional Employers and the IDeA.

Mayor Steve Bullock, chair of LGE said: 'The creation of LGE firmly embeds the issues of pay and pensions in the LGA's policy and lobbying agenda, adding strength to the development and implementation of solutions at a national, regional and local level. LGE will ensure we deliver the support that the local government sector needs to meet this challenge.'

Jan Parkinson, currently strategic

director of human resources at Gateshead Council, has been appointed LGE's new MD, and will take up her appointment in early June. She said: 'The sector needs to recognise the crucial links between how it pays and rewards its staff and their performance. To make continued improvements to services we need to get the employment contract right – both at an individual council level and on a national basis.' More information at: www.lge.gov.uk

Want to talk to a Minister?

A secure website where CEXs can exchange views with each other and with Government Ministers is part of a CEX learning community SOLACE Enterprises is building with the Leadership Centre 'SOLACE LEADERSHIP CONNECT will offer the electronic equivalent of a private conversation under Chatham House rules,' said Rita Sammons, director SOLACE Enterprises, 'the White Paper is likely to be the first topic for debate.'

Later developments on the site are

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expected to focus more on personal development and sharing ideas and experiences. Look out for further details in the SOLACE Member Briefing.

Warwickshire's fast track for succession

Do you want to be involved in a fast track management development programme? Warwickshire CC is discussing an idea with Warwick University that could lead to a pilot fast track management development programme aimed at third tier managers or those working below director or head of service level.

The aim of the programme is to support Warwickshire with its succession planning, build a closer relationship between the authority and the university through a recognised accreditation route, and equip future leaders with a broader base of knowledge and skills for operating post LAA.

Warwickshire CC CEX Jim Graham said: 'Warwickshire is spearheading a major change programme because it recognises the need to recruit, retain and develop its leadership capacity to be able to deliver services within

a different and wider environment.

'We would be very interested to hear from SOLACE members who may already have started innovative work with their partner agencies on succession and leadership development, or who would be interested in getting together to develop a national pilot programme under the SOLACE umbrella.'

- For more information email Linda Holland, OD Manager:
lindaholland@warwickshire.gov.uk

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Time for *all* -change

The SOLACE submission to the Lyons Inquiry stresses that reform of local government is not enough

Central as well as local government must be reformed if democracy is to be renewed, society improved and a more sustainable economy developed. The SOLACE submission to the Lyons Inquiry, prepared by the Setting the Agenda group, says that 'joint and simultaneous reform' of both central and local government is the 'one inescapable outcome' of its experience and discussions.

The submission declares: 'Changing local institutions is no doubt a necessary part of the answer. But it is not sufficient and it is not the whole answer. To renew

democracy, to improve society and to drive the economy, we need an approach to the whole system of governance.'

It says: 'Government does not have the answers, but it does have the resources. We need to get better at sharing these resources with citizens and communities to help them produce their own answers.' That would require 'fundamental shifts' in the way resources were allocated, decisions made, and performance assessed, 'across central government departments, local government and the rest of the public sector'.

The document sees this as a time for change. 'Change is needed and change is possible,' it says. It argues for a 'variable set of relationships' between parts of local government and central government departments. It says: 'The new partnership should assure central government departments that their programmes and national commitments will be delivered but allow local discretion to provide services above national minimum standards.'

The new agreement must also resolve the 'confused accountabilities' that managers experience at a local level by defining more clearly where managerial accountability led to central government and where it remained with local politicians. That would allow scope for independently set priorities for local services and the negotiated delivery of national services through a performance contract with resources attached.

The document points out that other European powers have led the way in decentralising decision-making to major cities. The growing disparities between cities and their regions in the south of England and elsewhere threatened the future of social and economic development. Better economic growth for cities outside London was central to the continued prosperity and well being of the whole of the UK.

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Time for *all* -change

Over recent years, the local government agenda had focused on the services provided by local authorities and the supervision and regulation of those service by central government and its inspectorates. It was an 'uncomfortably narrow focus' but it had established the credibility of local government as an efficient deliverer and commissioner of services. It was now time to raise the level of debate.

The new context had put citizens and the future of communities, cities, shires, public services, and local government, high on the political agenda. The paper says: 'We believe a bold transformation is needed to develop local government fit for the 21st century. This requires local authorities which modernise relentlessly, continually improve and are passionate about achieving more for less.

'It also requires energetic local authorities which attract attention externally; draw people in by reaching out; raise awareness of what is available

for whom, from where; and promote the value of public services working together with partners. We want to see local democratic government which is driving the economic development of its area, which is reducing worklessness, improving health, and spreading wealth.

'We want to see local democratic government which is rebuilding civil society, increasing the opportunities for local citizens to come together, strengthening bonds between communities of interest, building new bridges between communities of difference... We believe that local democratic government has as its goal the whole of an area's well being: economy and society, wealth and health. The new local democracy must raise its aim.'

The document points out the Government is highly influenced by Robert Putnam's analysis of the collapse of community in post-war America. For David Miliband, it says, Putnam's notion of social capital – networks of trust that

bind communities together – 'stands alongside financial capital and human capital in explaining economic and social history in industrialised countries'.

Whereas Government had, up to now, focused on economics and economic regeneration as the key political goal, some influential members of the Government had identified the revival of community in Britain as essential to progressive social change. They argued that while post-war social changes had led to greater wealth, they had also led to a collapse of social networks and weakened bonds within and between communities.

Tony Blair's former head of policy Geoff Mulgan had recently pointed out that, despite the huge social advances of the past 50 years, some things had gone badly awry. He had written: 'We have become a less integrated society: more divided by class, income and geography.

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Time for *all* -change

Inequalities persist, our lives are more fractured ... isolation is increasing; mental illness is more prevalent.'

The document says Mulgan's view that one of the great challenges was to remake 'these soft, often invisible social supports' seemed to underpin much of Miliband's analysis of why institutions and services should be reformed 'to drive the revival of neighbourhoods, communities and society'.

While community was a notoriously difficult concept to employ in social and political science, the document states: 'We believe a policy of community should focus on the improvement of the present, should accept the "kaleidoscope of groups and individuals" that exists in modern communities and should give people an opportunity to come together to shape what they share and hold in common.'

The submission calls the conjunction of David Miliband as Cabinet minister for Local Government and the local government review by Sir Michael

Lyons a 'unique opportunity' to set the framework for local government for the coming decade. It sees local services reaching beyond traditional service boundaries to embrace issues of public health, crime, disorder and respect and declares that 'inspiring local leadership' is essential in facing the new challenges.

It stresses: 'Renewed democracy and improved society require a greater sharing of power with those in whose name power is originally held. This is a huge challenge, and one that requires the whole of government to play a part. In SOLACE we are setting the agenda for our members, to change the way they lead their organisations, to influence their local members. By taking the lead we hope we will create the conditions for others to follow.'

- This document was produced before the recent Cabinet changes

'Renewed democracy and improved society require a greater sharing of power with those in whose name power is originally held. This is a huge challenge, and one that requires the whole of government to play a part'

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People matter more

It's the politics, Stupid! For city-regions to be successful local government needs to provide vision and strategy, work in partnership and show a political maturity. 'It's like football,' professor Michael Parkinson told conference, 'systems matter but players really matter. Arrangements matter but the people who operate them really matter.'

Parkinson, author of the State of the English Cities report, said the same initiative could work well or badly in different places because of the different people. 'It is always about the quality of people implementing the initiative. The relationship between the CEX and the chair, between the local authority and the initiative. It's always about politics, people and leadership. No more so than in this city-region debate.'

City-regions were back in vogue in England because they were a way to get local authorities to collaborate, particularly around economic competitiveness. 'Cities drive

'Arrangements matter but the people who operate them really matter'

Michael Parkinson

regional and national economies,' he said. 'They are very important animals. We've recognised that in England. Municipal boundaries no longer connect with real economic realities. The private sector doesn't operate on municipal boundaries and, increasingly, we need to work around those boundaries.'

'The evidence from Europe is the city-region is the best level at which to operate, particularly in terms of economic competitiveness. There is a lot of support at a national and local level. The idea has moved very quickly up the agenda. In England the Chancellor has bought the argument that cities

are crucial to the national economy.'

Looking at lessons from Europe, he said there was no one single approach. Most European countries had opted for an informal approach. 'What you really need is collaboration between partners on an informal basis, on the basis of trust, because you often find the cost of structures outweigh the benefits. Networks are better.'

He said the development of city-regions in England was still at an early stage – some people had grasped the idea, others had not. 'Start from where you are,' he said. 'It is quite clear different areas are at different levels of readiness for this level of collaboration. Some are ready, others find it more challenging.'

Two UK city-regions worth looking at were Manchester and Bristol. Manchester was a city that had re-

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People matter more

invented itself. 'It has reinvented the city centre, it has long-term development plans, stuff on regeneration, excluded communities and has done well on physical transport links,' he said.

'Manchester 10 years ago was doing Manchester city centre. It has now realised that it is actually the Greater Manchester economy that really is the driver. I think it has

'Manchester 10 years ago was doing Manchester city centre. It has now realised that it is actually the Greater Manchester economy that really is the driver'

gone from city to city-region. I would argue it has done it better than any other urban area in the UK.'

The bomb had helped Manchester get its act together. He said: 'People realised that 70,000 people couldn't get to work that day. They didn't live in Manchester but they worked there.'

Bristol, in contrast, had been an economic success. 'But I think in some ways because Bristol hadn't been through the crisis of Manchester you didn't have the collaboration across the piece and so I think the economic gains were not as well shared. The four local authorities in the Bristol city-region have begun to say, We can't go on like this if we want sustainable development. We need to change the way we behave.'

Changing behaviour wasn't easy. 'It takes vision, trust and time and it can be very difficult to get local authorities to put aside personal rivalries, place rivalries, party rivalries and economic rivalries,' he said. It wasn't cheap either.

He said: 'People don't want formal change but is voluntary enough? Not quite sure it is. I certainly know the Government needs to incentivise this kind of behaviour, whether it is through increased personnel capacity, greater flexibility or supporting projects or providing money. It needs to put real incentives on the table for this to work.'

It can be very difficult to get local authorities to put aside personal rivalries, place rivalries, party rivalries and economic rivalries'

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Wales needs wider view

Wales must work hard not to become parochial and insular as a result of devolution. This was the message of Peter Hain, Secretary of State for Wales, to the SOLACE Wales Public Service Conference. 'There is a sense in the world of public officialdom, both in local authorities and the Welsh Assembly, that Wales is a really nice place to live and work. People are not keen on being seconded to London for work experience or elsewhere to gain experiences they can bring back to Wales.'

To be successful Wales needed to look beyond its boundaries. 'I want everybody to remember the broader global sense in which we operate,' he said. 'I don't think conferences like this or any discussion of where local councils should be going should be exempt from looking at the wider British, European and global context.'

To compete with the growing economies of China and India – which between them produce four million new graduates a year, two-thirds in science and IT, and



We have to position Wales and we have to position Britain to be the most creative, innovative people on this earth. Nothing less will do - Hain

have some of the lowest labour costs with some car workers earning as little as 60p an hour – all local authorities, towns, cities and communities in Wales had to gear up to have the best possible infrastructure and skills available.

'The only way you compete with the kind of pincer movement of competition seen in China and India is to be the

best. If you are second best, forget it,' He said. 'We have to position Wales and we have to position Britain to be the most creative, innovative people on this earth. Nothing less will do. That is the ticket to our future prosperity and future quality of life in our local authorities and indeed in all sectors in Wales.'

The continuous growth in public spending delivered by the Labour Government was set to 'flatten off' in 2008 as the result of the next comprehensive spending review. 'There is going to be a much greater focus in the next year or two on public sector efficiency savings of the kind we are driving through at a central government level. It's very difficult and it's tough but if we don't do it we are in danger of losing the case for increased public spending, for a strong public sector and for the value of strong

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Wales to take wider view

public services over tax cuts,' he said.

'We've got to drive forward efficiency savings not least to give us the space to focus priority resources on the priority services, including education and health and infrastructure, in a way we will want to do at local government level and an all-Wales level.'

The focus on efficiency savings did not mean borrowing exactly what had been done in England. 'There have got to be Welsh solutions to Welsh challenges and problems,' he said, 'but if we don't tackle that agenda with some energy and courage and willingness to take tough decisions, I think we'll find ourselves, after 2008, in a very difficult situation.'

'The big choice for all of us is between where we want to go as a Government and strong economy, taking no risks with stability but making sure we continue to have a strong public sector with increased public spending at a rate which is consistent with the overall economic performance.'

'Or, following the opposition policy of

spending at a below trend growth rate, where we actually cut public spending by £16-17 billion a year. I think this would spell death for a world class Wales. We will not be able to deliver increased investment in the skills and infrastructure that we need to make Wales world-class. There is a big choice to be faced. It is a choice that will confront everybody over the coming years.'

Hain on: Police reorganisation:

It is absolutely clear we do not have the capacities in the smaller forces, excluding possibly South Wales, to deal with big modern crime problems. If we had a Soham-type murder in North Wales or Dyfed, Powys or Gwent, what you would find is exactly what happened in Cambridge. Police resources get sucked into the investigation from the neighbourhood level. They were sucked out for three months during that investigation. Neighbourhood policing all but disappeared. That would happen in three and possibly all four police authorities in Wales.

Wales:

Wales has an economy stronger than in living memory, with more prosperity and more jobs than ever in Wales' history. Wales is the only part of the UK where private sector growth exceeded public sector employment growth between 1999 and 2005.

Devolution:

Devolution is part of the landscape. It is inconceivable to imagine life in Wales without an Assembly. It has bedded down well and got a much bigger voice for Wales across the UK and indeed the world.

Local authority reorganisation:

One of the many issues we need to confront together in Wales is improving collaboration, especially between our small councils, and seeing whether that leads to any further pattern of reorganisation led by the Welsh Assembly.

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Wales needs more joint working

Local authorities in Wales must work more closely together because they are too small to provide quality services alone, Wales' most senior civil servant told conference.

Sir J on Shortridge, Permanent Secretary for the National Assembly, called for much more collaboration between the 22 Welsh councils.

'We all know the local authorities we have are too small for delivery of some services. If we are to have a public sector which will deliver a world-class Wales we need individual public sector organisations prepared to pool or share sovereignty to a much greater extent than they do now,' he said.

'Outstanding local services and outstanding local leadership go together but local leadership on its own and exercised separately and differently in 22 different local authorities is not enough. There needs to be much more challenge and much less cosiness in the system.

'The very limited progress we have made in Wales on joint working between local authorities since 1996 convinces me that the only way we will secure effective

collaboration and partnership at the local level is if we can change organisational behaviours. As CEXs we have a role in securing these changes but we will not change behaviour by agreeing to do so. Agreement itself is not enough.

'To change institutional behaviours you need to change the sanction and incentive systems that drive them. For me, one of the key tests of Sir Jeremy Beecham's review of local delivery of public services is what he says on such things as pooled budgets, earned autonomy and about the use of powers of intervention.'

A rebalancing of roles and responsibilities by both the Welsh Assembly Government and the 22 local authorities was inevitable, he said. The Welsh Assembly would need to provide fewer initiatives, simpler funding schemes, and less micro-management with a focus on the what as opposed to the how.

Local authorities would need to work much more collaboratively and to accept the Welsh Assembly had to develop its approach to performance monitoring and improvement so it could be more actively involved in driving up the performance of local service providers.

Too many initiatives

The Welsh Assembly has been 'overgood' at initiatives. **Sue Essex** AM, Minister for finance, public services and local government, told conference that the Assembly had had more initiatives than some people had had hot dinners. 'They have all had a good purpose behind them but they are often difficult for people and organisations to find their way through,' she said. 'We need to simplify them and make sure they are not in competition or duplicating each other.'

Simplifying its funding streams and getting much better at performance management were other challenges facing the Assembly. She said: 'We are all looking forward to the Jeremy Beecham review. It is critically important to us. There will be challenges for us. It won't be enough to say organisations must work alongside each other, we have to get better and more effective at delivering services.'

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Scrutiny under scrutiny

SFI shines a spotlight on different experiences of scrutiny



The new local authority responsibility of 'scrutiny' comes under scrutiny in the latest issue of SOLACE

Foundation Imprint. 'A non-executive cadre has been formed, with the job of holding executive colleagues to account,' says David Walker, editor of the Guardian's Public magazine.

The new duty, 'imposed on councils' in 2000, had 'altered the balance' of functions within councils. While backbench elected members had always scrutinised colleagues in leadership, the new arrangement, he says, for the first time 'created a specific role'.

In a wide-ranging essay, Walker reports on the discussions of a 'roundtable' of people working in and around local authority scrutiny,

brought together to reflect and share experiences. Themes that emerged included: How does scrutiny add value? What's the point of it? Why should I participate?

A 'shadow' over the roundtable was if councils would have chosen scrutiny as the 'principal means of redesigning accountability' and if they would retain it - 'freed from the thralldom of Whitehall'! But if councils did not originally

How does scrutiny add value? What's the point of it?

choose scrutiny, they - typically - had got on with it and made it work.

After five years, a key question for the roundtable had to be: Does scrutiny work? It had been a blank sheet - a threat to some rather than an opportunity. But it had blossomed. Councils had constructed a new function from scratch. In the best examples, there was a far more constructive approach to policy development.

Some leaders and cabinet members encouraged scrutiny but more often there was an attitude of 'grudging tolerance' and a subsequent lack of resources. But while some 51% of executive members believed scrutiny never changed policy, in many areas backbench councillors, thanks to scrutiny, had acquired new zest and purpose.

'At best,' says Walker, 'scrutiny is

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Scrutiny under scrutiny

an educational device for elected members, officers and the public alike.' Backbench members learnt more about how the council worked.

The public, therefore, felt 'more engaged' in the process because they were getting better explanations from their individual members.

Walker suggests that effective scrutiny, itself, improves the tone of local debate. He says: 'If non-executive councillors expand their knowledge of council affairs and as a result of their participation in overview and scrutiny

Some saw scrutiny as a self-contained function demanding specialist skills and staff; others feared the creation of a new layer of council staff.

then operate more convincingly as ward members – for example by answering constituents' questions better – than a useful purpose has been served.'

As scrutiny had become embedded in local government, it had inevitably acquired some of the attributes of a new profession. Some saw scrutiny as a self-contained function demanding specialist skills and staff; others feared the creation of a new layer of council staff.

One thorny question was: How partisan should scrutiny be? Scrutiny, it was argued, depended on bipartisanship and the willingness of non-executive councillors to work across party lines; another view said systems should not deny the political identity of elected members.

The roundtable identified preconditions for the success of scrutiny. The civic spirit had to be the 'opposite of adversarial'. All players had to commit to serving the interest of the area at large, rather than party or department.

Scrutiny, it was argued, depended on bipartisanship and the willingness of non-executive councillors to work across party lines

Space had to be retained for partisan affiliation, or at least for 'politics', but that space might have to narrow.

- Find out more about the SFI at: SOLACE Foundation Imprint website: www.solacefoundation.org.uk/imprint

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Cracking crime

LAA's should be viewed as a golden opportunity to make early prevention an essential part of achieving safer and stronger communities, says *Jan Forrest*, Director of Consultancy at Crime Concern

LAA's offer us the opportunity to move away from doing what we think needs to be done to spending our energy on listening to what local people know has to change. For LAA's to work well, we must be sure our analysis of what local people want and need is sound.

This analysis has to be done early so that it influences priorities and targets, and it needs to be done frequently so plans can be dynamic and responsive. LAA's offer the freedom to move away from stagnating strategies which seem set in stone. Local people must not simply identify, they should also influence priorities and targets.

The LAA must empower community organisations to deliver and scrutinise outcomes. In this way we can improve people's quality of life now and in the future. For us at Crime Concern, LAA's provide the potential to implement a joint approach to tackling the root causes of crime and disadvantage.

We must work across the four

areas of activity as identified by the Government: children and young people; safer and stronger communities; healthier communities and older people; and economic development and enterprise. It means new ways of working and new partners; and getting rid of old structures and systems that are unwieldy or inappropriate. It is a chance to start again.

We will have the opportunity to show the impact of local crime prevention projects in bringing down crime levels to prove the need for more and continued funding. We already know unemployment, ill-health and the lack of things to do and places to go for young people all have an effect on crime in a given area.

The LAA structure will give local authorities and partner agencies the chance to influence priorities and

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