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Wales

SOLACE Wales *development plan* 2010 - 13

SOLACE Wales development plan 2010-13



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Society of Local Authority Chief Executives and Senior Managers



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foreword

Our vision is to be an active and engaged membership organisation that makes a significant contribution to public policy shaping Wales' future, with the ultimate aim of improving outcomes for citizens and communities.

This document sets out our vision for SOLACE Wales and outlines the aims and objectives that are our priorities over the next three years. We aim to be an increasingly active and engaged organisation that, as the professional voice for Chief Executives and senior managers in local government, contributes significantly to shaping the future of public services in Wales. We are very encouraged by our developing relationship of mutual trust and respect with the Welsh Assembly Government, and by their welcome and encouragement to us to become true partners, alongside the Welsh Local Government Association, in shaping the strategic policy direction for Wales. We fully intend to embrace this opportunity.

SOLACE Wales is already an effective organisation that has achieved a great deal in recent years. Thanks to the commitment and support of colleagues and partners, we are well positioned to maximise the opportunities available to us and stand in good stead to take a leadership role in overcoming the challenges that lie ahead for Local Government.

Writing this Development Plan has allowed us to take stock of where we are as an organisation and to set our direction of travel for the next three years and beyond. It has given us the opportunity to think strategically about our contribution to the future of Wales and has helped us to ensure we have clear focus in all that we do; concentrating on the issues of most importance to our members and on which we can have the greatest impact.

Our ambition is to grow as an organisation both in terms of the size of our membership base and our level of influence and engagement across Wales. To achieve this, our Development Plan and the supporting Action Plan are central in enabling us to build our capacity as a professional society and a key contributor to policy development in Wales.

Everyone will agree that the context in which we work will be increasingly complex and demanding in the coming years and that there are tough challenges ahead for public services. This makes our relationships, especially with key partners such as the Welsh Assembly Government and the Welsh Local Government Association, even more important. It also makes the SOLACE network and the role of a strong, focused and articulate society for senior leaders more valuable than ever.

I look forward confidently to a bright future for SOLACE Wales and commend this Development Plan and its supporting Action Plan to you.

Alison Ward
Chair, SOLACE Wales 2009 - 10

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vision



Our vision is to be an active and engaged membership organisation that makes a significant contribution to public policy shaping Wales' future, with the ultimate aim of improving outcomes for citizens and communities.

As the professional society for local authority chief executives and senior managers in Wales, we represent the interests and concerns of our members' and share their overriding interest in ensuring efficient and effective public services and drive for better outcomes for citizens and communities.

SOLACE Wales has a wide remit and range of activity and aims to continue to play an important role as one of the key organisations in the local government family. Over the next three years we will work towards becoming an even more active organisation, by expanding our capacity and the scope of our engagement with senior public service professionals. We will ensure that we maintain a strong sense of focus in all that we do, in order to tackle the complex and substantial issues we face together with our partners. We will continue to provide a professional voice for the most senior managers in local government and ensure this voice is available to and heard by key decision makers at the highest levels of public services in Wales.

SOLACE Wales vision is to be an organisation that makes a significant constructive contribution to public policy and engages effectively with the national bodies shaping

Wales' future. We will ensure that we influence the future shape and direction of public services in the context of significant financial constraints and an increasingly distinctive Welsh agenda. We will articulate what local government is capable of being and achieving and seek to promote its leadership role amongst partners delivering services locally and nationally. We aim to support and facilitate the sharing of information, learning and ideas and to actively promote innovative approaches and solutions that will help achieve better more responsive and efficient services. We are committed to working together with other public, private and voluntary sector organisations to support excellent leadership and management in public services.

SOLACE Wales aims to be a vibrant and dynamic professional society that provides valuable networking, development and representation for senior professionals. We will increase the potential for members to take advantage of these opportunities and enhance the profile of senior professionals working in local government.



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background

About SOLACE Wales

SOLACE Wales is the Welsh branch of the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives and Senior Managers (SOLACE). It is the professional society for senior strategic managers working in local government in Wales. SOLACE is a UK wide organisation with 1700 members representing the most senior managers in the vast majority of local authorities.

The Society provides a forum for members to network and share information and ideas; organises a range of high profile events; supports professional development and seeks to influence public policy and respond to issues that are of importance to its members and to local government in general. SOLACE Wales is one of twelve regional branches that form the main network of the Society.

In the context of the ongoing devolution process there is an increasingly distinctive policy agenda in Wales and the strategic direction of public services continue to diverge from that of the UK government. SOLACE has therefore supported the development of a strong, autonomous and active branch in Wales that can respond positively and constructively to this agenda, with similar arrangements in place in the Scotland and Northern Ireland branches.

SOLACE Wales is governed by its quarterly membership meetings where decisions on branch matters and policy issues are taken. The Branch is led and managed by the annually elected Branch Officers with the Chair taking responsibility for overall strategic direction. The Branch Officer positions are Chair, Vice Chair, Honorary Secretary and Immediate Past-Chair. They are supported by a full time Executive Officer.

Recent progress

In 2005 SOLACE Wales published its first development plan to set out its direction of travel for the Branch. At that time SOLACE members in Wales met just once a year and did not have a significant profile in the devolved nation. The Branch set out its aims to engage

constructively with the Welsh policy agenda and develop a voice and enhanced profile for senior professionals. It also set out to build effective connections and partnerships at the highest levels of key organisations in Wales.

Since the first development plan was published, SOLACE Wales has successfully achieved many of its aims and enjoys a high profile and good relations with the Welsh Assembly Government (WAG), the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) and other important organisations. It has put in place the structures and mechanisms necessary to operate effectively such as the policy portfolio system, a program of regular meetings and other events including a successful annual conference. It has succeeded in becoming the body that provides senior professional representation on boards and workgroups for national strategic issues. It has been influential in shaping the development of policy through this system and has represented its members through responses to many important consultations. SOLACE Wales has initiated change and influenced decisions such as the rationalisation of statutory partnerships and reductions in the number of performance indicators. It has shaped the debate through policy position papers and through creating a forum for discussion at its events. More recently it has initiated a timely and high profile project to consider the impact of future funding levels on local government, investigate the kind of solutions required to address this and prompt a strategic response from the local government family and from WAG.

Challenges and opportunities

This development plan is published at a time when chief executives and senior managers are seeing public services face some of the toughest challenges in recent years and an unprecedented period of change and turbulence. We are going through the worst recession for fifty years and looking ahead to an extremely difficult period for public finances.

SOLACE Wales' own research on the impact of future funding levels for local government reveals a funding pressure of an order that is unprecedented in the life of the Assembly Government. Service pressures and demographic change can only add to the size of the gap.

The economic situation has also exacerbated the level of negative press about chief executives and senior managers, the value of their role and the terms and conditions of their employment. A challenge for SOLACE is to continue to support the interests and concerns of members through promoting the value of their contribution to public services and better articulating what the responsibilities of the role are.

We are also in a time of significant political change for all tiers of government. Whoever is in power will face some very difficult resource choices. Whilst a continued drive for greater efficiency and the best possible value for money remains vitally important, this alone will not be enough. There is a need to reshape public services and within this, local government's future role will also require redefinition. Local government, with its community leadership mandate, is at the heart of public service delivery. As Local Service Boards are embedding across Wales, it will play a central role in shaping localities and convening a forum for partners to tackle difficult issues together.

The current situation is an imperative to increase the pace of collaboration and the drive for efficiency. It is also an opportunity for transformational change and consideration of sometimes radical solutions. As well as redesigning service models we need to reconsider citizens and communities and their relationship with the state; what they can expect and what their responsibility is in return.

To address these major challenges all tiers of government and parts of the public sector need work together and show leadership through this turbulent period. WAG needs to show strong leadership and vision for the way ahead and to trust local government as the best placed to deliver.

The warming of relations and increase in open dialogue between central and local government has been a positive development. The emergence of a new understanding between the Welsh Assembly Government and local government and the developing policy framework that surrounds it has created the opportunity to redefine the relationship. A new approach based on shared local and national outcomes, prioritisation and focus, and meaningful dialogue is beginning to set us on the right path to a better future.

SOLACE Wales 2010 - 13

Since its last development plan SOLACE Wales has made significant strides forward. There have also been several changes within the Society, changes to the policy debate and political environment in Wales and the UK, and dramatic changes to the economic and other challenges we face in Wales and the wider world.

Faced with this rapidly changing environment and the need to stay relevant and responsive it is timely for us to take stock of our position, review our effectiveness as an organisation, and consider the future strategic direction of SOLACE Wales.

This document sets out our vision for SOLACE Wales for the next three years and the aims and objectives that will help us achieve this in the Branch's priority areas of influencing and developing policy; developing effective key relationships; providing a high quality programme of events; improving and developing the branch and developing effective internal and external communication.

The Development Plan is based on members' views and aspirations for the Branch after individual meetings with all chief executives and several other members, and was developed in consultation with the Branch members and with their input and involvement from an early stage. It is supported by an action plan, which will be regularly updated and reviewed as a working document and will be formally refreshed annually.



3 Influencing and Developing Policy

Objectives:

- be a key organisation in the formulation and review of public policy in Wales;
- be involved in the early shaping and development of policy;
- contribute constructively to the policy debate and influence the strategic direction of public services together with partners.

To achieve our policy aims we need to increase our capacity for engaging in policy work and ensure we make the best use of the skills, expertise and experience of our members and engage a wider base of membership. SOLACE members can offer a unique perspective that spans strategic objectives, as well as understanding implementation and delivery issues. We will promote their involvement and their valuable experience and expertise in the policy development process.

We will ensure that our policy activity is focused on the issues that are a priority for members. This means that each year a small number of policy themes will be identified based on the areas that SOLACE Wales can have the greatest influence. We will also take the opportunity to engage in relevant work initiated by others and will work closely with the WLGA, WAG and colleagues in other partner organisations to co-produce policies that deliver real improvements. To achieve this we will seek to build our capacity for engagement and contribute to the co-production of policy at as early a stage as possible.

We will aim to increase the opportunities for discussion and debate on these important issues to ensure that SOLACE can develop a clear and considered position. This will allow more members have an input into the policy development process, ensuring their views are represented accurately and that we provide an effective voice for senior local government professionals.

We will respond to consultations on relevant issues and will continue to use the Branch's portfolio system as a means for representing SOLACE Wales on various boards and workgroups and responding to consultations and similar requests. The system allows us to provide an informed opinion, making the most of the knowledge and expertise of members. We will consider actions to increase

participation in the portfolio system and improve communication between representatives of the Branch and other members..

SOLACE Wales will also work towards playing a more pro-active role in influencing the policy agenda and the strategic direction of local government and public services in general. The Branch will focus on priority areas and seek to stimulate debate, introduce fresh and innovative ideas and take forward research. In order to do this SOLACE Wales will carry out a small number of strategic projects every year that aim to influence the agenda and together with partners, take forward thinking on issues that have the potential to make a big difference to the challenges we face.

4 Developing Effective Key Relationships

Objectives:

- build and maintain positive working relationships with the Welsh Assembly Government, Welsh Local Government Association, external review bodies, public sector partners, and other professional societies
- work closely with key partners to ensure a strong voice for local government and Welsh public sector professionals;
- ensure SOLACE Wales is respected as a key partner in strategic decision making and has access to the highest level of decision makers;
- continue to ensure benefits to the Branch and our business partners through sustainable and productive business partnerships.

We will work closely with key partners; particularly the WLGA to ensure we develop a strong clear and consistent voice for local government within Wales; and WAG in order to develop better relations between central and local government. We will strengthen our capacity for engagement and joint working with WAG, the WLGA and wider public sector partners through actions to expand and increase our actively involved membership. SOLACE Wales Branch Officers will meet regularly with the most senior officials in WAG and the WLGA in order to ensure these relationships continue to be as effective as possible. We will seek to influence and define the relationship between local government and WAG in a positive way, as one of trust, collaboration and shared vision and we will involve a wider range of our members in early policy discussions and development.

It is also vitally important that we work together with other partners in Wales, including external review bodies, the NHS, the Police and other parts of the public, private and voluntary sector to shape and co-produce policy and develop SOLACE Wales' sphere of influence and network of leading public sector professionals.

We will build better links with other professional societies in Wales, including local government based professional groups and those that represent senior professionals from other sectors. This will help us to share learning and good practice and develop a more vibrant professional network with the opportunity to share common issues and draw on the expertise of professionals representing specific service areas to inform SOLACE Wales' strategic position.

We will work to foster good relations with colleagues from SOLACE in the rest of the UK through regular communication and opportunities for transfer of learning and good practice and ensure that the Branch and its members have the maximum opportunity to benefit from the network, capacity, expertise and professional development available within SOLACE.

SOLACE Wales values its relationships with business partners and the contribution they make to ensuring the Branch's ongoing success. We will continue to ensure our business partner relationships bring valuable benefits to both the Branch and our partners. We will help to facilitate the transfer of knowledge and experience between sectors through long term, sustainable partnerships that also secure the Branch's financial stability.

5 Developing Effective Internal and External Communication

Objectives:

- clearly communicate a positive message about SOLACE Wales, local government and public sector professionals;
- represent the views of members and their interests as a professional group by agreeing and communicating SOLACE Wales' position on priority policy themes and issues;
- continue to improve communication from SOLACE Wales to its members and internally between members.

We will actively communicate a few simple, clear messages agreed through a communication strategy that aims to promote; SOLACE Wales as an effective organisation that can add value to the policy debate and to professional development; the strengths of local

government and its central role in public services; and the important contribution of leading public sector professionals.

We will continue to work on approaches that improve communication within the branch and make it as effective an organisation as possible. In particular we will develop better communication between the policy portfolios and those who represent SOLACE Wales on boards and workgroups and the rest of the membership, and of the Society's activity to our members.

We will use a range of channels to communicate with our members and other stakeholders, including newsletters, written reports and documents, the SOLACE Wales website, the organisation's contacts and networks, events and meetings. We will aim to increase the range and quality of communication channels available to the Branch.

6 Providing a High Quality Programme of Events

Objectives:

- offer a relevant and engaging programme of events that benefits all branch members by facilitating a dynamic professional network, providing learning and development opportunities and raising the profile of SOLACE Wales;
- use our meetings and events as a platform to help SOLACE Wales achieve its policy aims.

SOLACE Wales will continue to develop our programme of events in a way that makes more space for discussion and debate on policy issues. This will allow us to increase our capacity for influencing and developing policy and a clear 'voice'. We will build on the success of the SOLACE Wales annual conference making it a key event in the public sector professional's calendar.

Our quarterly events which include a branch meeting, business dinner and meeting with WLGA and WAG officials will continue to play a central part to our activity. We will ensure these events are beneficial to members and effective in achieving SOLACE Wales' vision through providing opportunities to contribute to policy priorities and engage in dialogue with WAG, WLGA and other bodies, as well as network and share information and ideas. We will aim to improve the opportunities offered to SOLACE members at these events, the level of participation and the range and depth of content. The events will be used to catalyse further action and lead to further SOLACE Wales activity between quarterly meetings.

We will expand our programme of events and increase the level of activity between quarterly meetings, allowing a broader range of people to get involved in our activities and ensuring members can use

our events as learning and development opportunities, for example, by introducing new ideas and challenging thinking about principles and practices. This will include trialling a range of short events in different formats, such as half day seminars, round table discussions and lunchtime briefings to focus on particular policy issues and/or on leadership and management development. We will also investigate opportunities for events with other organisations and partners as well as events targeting different groups of members.

7 Improving and Developing the Branch

Objectives:

- a vibrant, active and sustainable membership that benefits from being part of SOLACE and contributes towards achieving SOLACE Wales' vision;
- ensure SOLACE Wales is well placed in terms of membership, finance and capacity to deliver its aims and vision into the future.

SOLACE Wales will ensure it can provide a clear and well-articulated membership 'offer' at chief executive, senior manager, middle manager and graduate level to professionals working in local government and related sectors across Wales. We will actively promote this 'offer' and the benefits of membership and consider incentives to encourage new members, with the aim of growing our membership base in order to support SOLACE Wales' long term sustainability and increase our capacity as a professional society and a key contributor to policy development. We will also promote the benefits of membership and value of involvement in SOLACE to existing members to encourage greater engagement from a wider range of individuals.

We will ensure the Branch's constitutional and decision making arrangements are clear and well understood. We will ensure a balance of leadership from Branch Officers and decisions taken by the Branch on Branch matters, policy direction and management of SOLACE Wales' projects, with the aim of fostering a sense of ownership and involvement in the organisation and its future direction.

A key priority for SOLACE Wales is to ensure that we are well placed to continue to be an important player in the strategic development of public services in Wales. This includes ensuring the Branch's financial

situation is healthy and sustainable allowing the capacity for growth in activity and membership. We will continue our commitment to business partners and will investigate options to increase income generation where appropriate through business partner relationships, sponsorship opportunities and events.

We will also continue our commitment to productive relationships with other parts of SOLACE including SOLACE Foundation, SOLACE UK and Scotland and Northern Ireland Branches and will ensure the branch continues to maximise the potential benefits of the wider organisation it is part of.

8 Resourcing, Monitoring and Reviewing the Development Plan

The aims and objectives in this development plan will be delivered through the actions set out in the supporting action plan. The plan sets out an ambitious but achievable vision for SOLACE Wales and seeks to ensure that the Branch can grow and develop and maximise its potential in the current climate. Its delivery in some areas will require an increase in size and scope of activity and a corresponding increase in capacity and resource. As well as the time of SOLACE staff and Branch Officers the delivery of this plan relies on the commitment and support of all members and other key partners. Members need to own the actions and objectives in the plan and share responsibility for their delivery.

Whilst this is a three year plan it is intended to be reviewed and updated to include members' feedback and keep it in line with the Branch's strategic direction and relevant to the context within which SOLACE Wales operates. The action plan is intended as a working document that can be regularly updated and reviewed based on members' feedback and will be formally reviewed annually. To monitor progress against the development plan we will develop a set of success factors that will allow us to demonstrate what we have achieved and provide a means of accounting to members for the delivery of the action plan and progress towards our aims and objectives.

