

Personal statement for election to the Council of the Law Society: Local Government

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It would be a privilege to have the opportunity to represent local government on the Law Society Council. With over 17 years' experience as a local authority solicitor, I am confident I can do so effectively because of my deep understanding of our practice and the genuine pride I have in our work in local government. As someone who has worked in private practice and different jurisdictions, I can truly say that working in local government brings me the most professional joy and satisfaction primarily because what we do gives us a platform to make a difference to the lives of residents, communities and the place we live in. A local government solicitor is values driven, capable of handling breadth and diversity in their practice, stands side by side with client officers on front lines, speaks truth to power and is loyal and dedicated.

As I write this, I am looking with admiration across the legal service here at Milton Keynes City Council where I am the Director of Law and Monitoring Officer. I see busy solicitors who are trying their hardest to obtain good outcomes. It is challenging and we are always balancing the public interest, loud sometimes hostile voices while staying true to our professional duties. It is not always a clear path. Further, what someone who hasn't practiced law in local government may not appreciate is that we are doing that at pace, with ever increasing workloads, unexpected deadlines and with the financial state of the sector, jobs aren't guaranteed like they once were.

My own route started as an attorney at law in Trinidad and Tobago 25 years ago and includes working in central government, in chambers and, after doing my master's in environmental law, as an environmental law consultant in the Caribbean. Since moving to the United Kingdom, I have worked at in local authority starting as a legal assistant and over the years progressing to my current role. I started in planning law and then branched out as Head of legal to procurement and property law and for the last 9 years leading the Legal, Democratic and electoral functions. Being a Monitoring officer is a unique and very fulfilling role and one that I carry out with the support of the entire legal service.

If I am elected, I want to raise our profile, bring an understanding of the unique issues and opportunities in our sector while ensuring that local government solicitors have a strong voice in national policy discussions that affect our profession. The specific issues I think we need to consider and as a member of the Law Society Council, I will advocate for are:

- The ethical position of local government lawyers: an issue we have in common with house colleagues which concerns me more and more because of the unprecedented nature and pace of financially driven decisions that local authorities are having to make and that we advise on. How do we navigate tricky waters while maintaining our legal integrity?
- Training and resources for local government solicitors to ensure we can face the ever-changing landscape and develop ourselves to progress - think devolution for a start but there's still the day job and not all of it is legal! How will we use AI? Where is the innovation in how we do things?
- Building capacity, growing our own. Supporting the talent and ambition in local government is close to my heart and really inspires me.

Some examples of me enacting this already include:

- I recently participated as the only local government panel speaker at the Law Society's In House Strategic Forum to discuss an ethical framework for in house solicitors. Interesting parallels from the Post Office to our political environments.
- My contribution as a peer for the Local Government Association working across councils with a wide range of colleagues to endorse good practice, support improvements and challenge constructively.

- Retaining the training principal role at my authority and actively involved in developing colleagues at my authority and mentoring others across other authorities.

I am collaborative and respectful, and very experienced in working across diverse teams, decision making bodies and lead partnerships in my day job. Outside of work, I chair a local charity, have been a parent governor and even a Beaver leader! All of this to say that I enjoy working with others and can be trusted to make a difference. As my style is naturally approachable and collaborative, you can expect that if I am elected, I will be available to you and would reach out to local government representative bodies such as Lawyers in Local Government and use my always growing networks to ensure that my role remains credible and relevant by listening.

I am passionate about the role of local government in our society and integral to its success sits empowered, confident, strong local government solicitors.

Thank you for reading my statement. I hope that you are think I am a strong candidate to represent local government solicitors on the Law Society Council. It is important to me to give back to a sector that has given me so much professionally and believe that with my experience, ideas and vision I can do so successfully on your behalf.

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