

## Planning Officers Society Annual General Meeting 2 July 2021 Report by POS Enterprises

### Headlines of 2020/21

- 1 2020/21 has seen a big drop in turnover, from £289,000 in 2019/20 to about £214,000. This was due to a steep reduction in direct support to LPAs, presumably a consequence of the pandemic. However, the fall in income was accompanied by a similar fall in expenditure on venue costs and expenses, as all learning groups and other activities went over to virtual operation. Consequently, preliminary figures actually show an increase in profit from £39,000 in 2019/20 to over £43,000. This matches the previous biggest annual profit by the company.
- 2 Work for local planning authorities accounted for the whole of our business in 2020/21. There was no work at all for the Planning Advisory Service, which had previously been a significant customer for local plan and viability support.
- 3 Once we have the formal accounts, the whole of the final amount of profit will be paid across to the Society by deed of gift. Together with a surplus on the Society's budget, this helps it to provide enhanced services to the membership.
- 4 Being a wholly-owned subsidiary of the Society we share its values and objectives, while providing services and support to authorities and others on a fee basis. Directors put great value on the relationship, and the way the reputation and standing of the Society reflects favourably on POS Enterprises as a trusted provider of support.

### Activities

- 5 POS Enterprises focuses on activities which support planning authorities and their staff in dealing with change and new challenges. The biggest area of support continues to be the supported learning groups, which are unique to us, and in 2020/21 accounted for over 75% of income. We continue with three CIL and infrastructure groups, two local plan groups, the minerals and waste group, the development management and localism group, and the neighbourhood planning group.
- 6 The remainder of activity takes the form of direct support to authorities. As noted above, the amount of direct support to LPAs was well down on previous years. However, 2021/22 has seen a surge in demand for development management reviews, which augurs better.

### Covid 19

- 7 The supported learning group meetings have continued on a virtual basis, with a range of formats to suit the preferences of the participating authorities. Thus some groups have two half day meetings where they previously met all day, whereas others have morning or part day meetings.
- 8 Membership of the learning groups has held up well, and the overall number of participating authorities is actually up a little on last year. This is very much a tribute to the project teams for those groups, who have worked hard to master virtual meetings and make them rewarding to group members. The indications are that groups will prefer to continue with mainly virtual meetings, with perhaps one face-to-face meeting per year.
- 9 Whilst direct support has been significantly reduced, elected member training has picked up, with trainers presenting virtually.

## Looking ahead

- 10 Last year we were expecting devolution proposals from the government which would significantly reduce the number of LPAs. In the event the Devolution Bill did not come forward, but there is ongoing discussion about possible reorganisation. Should it happen it may be expected to have a big impact upon both the membership of learning groups and the level of direct support activity, and consequently on the amount of profit which can be paid across to the Society. But it could also create the demand for support from merged authorities to get them set up to function effectively.
- 11 The Queen's Speech has confirmed that there will be a Planning Bill to take forward proposals in the White Paper, but there is no further detail yet of just what form the changes will take. One suspects that greater clarity may be some time coming, and that aspects of the Bill may be contentious for some MPs. So the current uncertainty looks as if it will continue, and that it will be difficult for LPAs to make decisions on how to respond in their plan making and organisation of development management.
- 12 However, when greater certainty does begin to arrive, POS Enterprises associates will make sure to develop expert understanding of the implications of the changed system. We can hope there will be an upsurge in demand from authorities for support to provide confidence that their new style plans and practices are robust.

## Our thanks

- 13 A key function of POS Enterprises Directors is to bring their knowledge and awareness about current challenges into our business planning and decisions on priorities for new services. Thanks are due to our Directors for their efforts on behalf of POS Enterprises over the past year: James Doe, David Evans, Peter Geraghty, Phil Kirby, Richard Morris, Sarah Platts, Paul Seddon, Karen Shaw and Penelope Tollitt.
- 14 The Directors are very grateful to our support team of Andrew Wright and Linda Durtnal for their hard work and commitment in sustaining services and developing new opportunities; and to our associates for their energy and exemplary commitment to supporting good planning.

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