

Virtual AEA Conference Address 2021

Croeso cynnes i chi gyd / A warm welcome to you all.

This year's Conference welcome address carries with it a deeper meaning than it usually does. Many of us will have been touched, in some personal way, by the dreadful pandemic the world is facing. A global experience that brings an individual and personal sadness for some of us and we give thanks to all those frontline staff who have guided us through the year. The term 'unprecedented' has been thrown around often recently and I think we may have become somewhat desensitised as to how extraordinary the last year has been.

Leaving Conference, last year, little did we know that, within just over a month, Covid-19 would rock our society to its core affecting how we would live our lives for the months to come. Consequences we are living with today as we get through this third major lockdown. Operational changes to our profession and the way we endeavoured to continue to deliver our service, including canvass reform, is a credit to you all. Redeployment, of electoral services staff, and remote working meant that we had to adapt to new working patterns and reflects the ongoing 'can do' attitude of electoral administrators.

As with local authorities, our Association has faced similar problems. Management Team have performed a sterling job in caring for the staff as well as maintaining the service to our members. The welfare of you our members, and the assistance required to enable you to perform your tasks, are constantly at the forefront of everything the team has had to consider. As with other corporate organisations, our Association will take a financial hit but as a result of historical, and current, fiscal management led by the Management Team and supported by the Board of Directors has ensured we are in a healthy financial situation.

I often reflect on the words written in Haruki Murakami's book, *Kafka on the Shore* of what we have experienced.

"And once the storm is over, you won't remember how you made it through, how you managed to survive. You won't even be sure, whether the storm is really over. But one thing is

certain. When you come out of the storm, you won't be the same person who walked in. That's what this storm's all about."

There is hope for the coming months and an expectation that vaccines will be administered in sufficient quantities to allow the May polls to be delivered in a safer environment for the most vulnerable at least.

The postponement of polls last year gave us some respite, especially after the preceding twelve months, but last year's deferment brings extra pressure to administering polls this May. A mind boggling variety of combinations will put electoral services, and suppliers, under enormous pressure. In some instances there will be combination of up to seven separate elections.

'When sorrows come, they come not single spies, but battalions.' (Hamlet)

Our Association will be there to support you and once more the tenacity and camaraderie of administrators that we have seen over the years will help us all through. Our post-election report will make interesting reading and will be one that stakeholders must surely act upon.

Following this lockdown, there will once again need to be a gradual transition of returning to office working with a combination of remote and in-person activities. If nothing else, the last twelve months have oddly made us find new ways to communicate and to keep in touch. It has even brought new skills to us all and we have used modern technology to continue to meet, share and enjoy each other's company in ways that would have been impossible only a few years ago.

Our Association's, Management Team and Board of Directors meetings have all been held remotely as have a number of highly successful training sessions. As a result it was agreed that the only way to deliver Annual Conference, and AGM, this year was using a similar medium and will prove to be an interesting, and rewarding, experience for those of you attending. Hopefully, it will not be the *'virtual insanity'* that Jamiroquai sang about!

Much work has been done, behind the scenes, to ensure the successful delivery of this year's Conference as well as ensuring a successful outcome to contract commitments with the Hotel Metropole in Brighton.

On the education front another 41 Certificates have been awarded to successful candidates and two Diplomas. These qualifications would have been awarded at Conference but arrangements have been made for them to be presented at other events. 853 Certificates, and 61 Diplomas, have now been awarded with the calibre of the qualifications recognised by local authorities and other stakeholders.

Appreciation must go to suppliers / exhibitors who have supported Conference over the years and are supporting this year's Conference virtually. As we have found the last year difficult so have software suppliers, sundries manufacturers and printers alike. The need to work with suppliers even more closely, in the coming months, can only assist in the delivery of what we are all facing.

I would like to thank both of my Chief Executives and my office team, in Pembrokeshire, for the unstinting support they have shown me during my year in office. It has been an 'alternative year' and one that has brought many challenges but more importantly friendships. I have been very honoured to have experienced it.

Finally, I would like to thank our Immediate Past Chairman, Rob Curtis, for his unique style, advice and support as well as next year's 'Chair' (the correct title of which is now built into our new Memorandum & Articles to be presented to the AGM), Alex Mammous and take this opportunity to wish her every success for the coming year.

I wish you all every success over the coming months and remember your Association will continue to be here to support you. Please continue to stay safe as the '*storm*' is not yet over.

Diolch / Thanks,

Glynne

Chairman (The last one!)