



**POLICY AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE -
16TH APRIL 2013**

SUBJECT: SHARED LEGAL SERVICES – SOUTH EAST AND MID WALES

REPORT BY: ACTING DIRECTOR OF CORPORATE SERVICES AND SECTION 151

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To report on the current position of the “Shared Legal Services project” for South East and Mid Wales.

2. SUMMARY

- 2.1 Caerphilly County Borough Council is one of ten Authorities participating across South East and Mid Wales in a project aimed at exploring the benefits that maybe possible from a regional shared service.
- 2.2 The following authorities are participating in the project:-

Blaenau Gwent, Cardiff, Merthyr Tydfil, Monmouthshire, Newport, Powys, RCT, Torfaen and the Vale of Glamorgan
- 2.3 The project has been managed by a project board consisting of the ten authorities Chief Legal Officer, together with a project manager and the WLGA Regional Co-ordinator for SE. Wales.

3. LINKS TO STRATEGY

- 3.1 An effective and efficient Legal Service supports the Authority in achieving its priorities and objectives.

4. THE REPORT

- 4.1 The project commenced in May 2012 following the appointment of a project manager, which has been funded by the WLGA. The project manager is based in Legal Services in Caerphilly, employed on a fixed term contract that will end in September 2013.
- 4.2 A strategic outline case was completed in November 2012, which identified a number of preferred models for collaboration. A further detailed appraisal of those models has been undertaken during phase 2 of the project as part of the development of an outline business case.
- 4.3 A broad range of options for potential legal models of collaboration was discussed during the preparation of the strategic outline case. Examples of collaborative legal services initiatives being undertaken by local authorities across Wales and England were considered during the

review. It should be noted that all twenty-two Welsh Authorities are considering how best to collaborate with regard to the provision of legal services. In addition to our project collaboration is also being considered by a group covering West Wales and a third group covering North Wales.

- 4.4 A short list of options was drawn up comprising variations of a formal collaborative legal services model and a multiple site single legal service. Other options considered but discounted included the creation of a separate legal entity to run legal services across the region and models incorporating private sector partnerships.
- 4.5 Phase 2 of the project involves the preparation of an outline business case, which will be completed in April 2013. The potential collaboration opportunities, which are afforded by each of the short-listed “legal models” identified in phase 1, have been reviewed in more depth by the project board.
- 4.6 It has been concluded that the option that best satisfies the needs of the partner authorities is the development of a formal shared legal services model.
- 4.7 A baseline framework for a formal collaboration has been defined, which comprises a number of work streams:-
- A memorandum of understanding has been signed that sets out a process for inter-authority working.
 - Strategic planning for a regional shared legal service, utilising data currently being gathered through a client consultation survey, which will provide an indication of anticipated demand for legal services over the next 3 years.
 - Development of centres of excellence, with a “pilot” being considered with regard to magistrate court prosecutions.
 - Feasibility study into the options available for a reduction in external expenditure on legal services, focusing initially on legal work relating to insurance claims.
 - Reduction in on-line legal library/research costs through joint procurement.
 - Continued investigation into further opportunities for collaboration both within the regional legal services and with other prospective partnership ventures such as the Trading Standards service.
 - Utilisation of sub-regional groups for collaborative initiatives where this maybe more appropriate, for Caerphilly the sub-regional group would most likely be the former Gwent Authorities.
 - Explore opportunities for financial support for regional shared legal service initiatives.
 - Strategic planning to enable the possibility of “pooling” of future vacancies across the region.
- 4.8 In addition to the framework identified in paragraph 4.7 a number of opportunities for development in the future have been identified.
- A procurement framework for externalised work. Some of the authorities (including Caerphilly) are currently utilising a contract that has been set up for the South West Wales region, this however is due to expire in April 2014.
 - Research into extranet provision/development of a dedicated website.
 - Further development of the special interest groups which have been established in the last

year.

- Software appraisal of case management, time management and court bundling.

4.9 The development of a strategic three-year plan for the provision of legal services across the region has commenced, to be completed by the end of September 2013.

4.10 The Project Board recognised the value that staff can add to the project and it was therefore decided to consult with all employees across the partner authorities in the autumn of 2012. The responses received have been used to inform project board discussions.

4.11 A series of newsletters have also been provided for staff and trade union representatives during the past twelve months, giving updates on progress and developments.

5. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

5.1 There are no equal opportunities implications directly arising from this report.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

6.1 The cost of employing a project manager has been met by the WLGA no other costs have been incurred.

6.2 As the project develops financial implications will be considered by the project board. If additional expenditure is required to develop any of the workstreams identified in paragraph 4.7 this would be the subject of a report to members for approval.

7 PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

7.1 None to date, however there could clearly be implications for staff as the project develops. It is for this reason that the trade unions have been fully briefed. It is not the intention of the project to make savings through compulsory redundancy of staff employed in the ten partner authorities.

8. CONSULTATIONS

8.1 There are no consultation responses that have not been reflected in this report.

9 RECOMMENDATIONS

9.1 Members are asked to note the contents of this report. As the project develops further reports will be provided for members consideration.

10. STATUTORY POWER

10.1 Local Government Acts 1972 and 2000

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