



# Legal Services

## Team Plan 2015/16

Team Manager: **Victoria Davidson**

Service Plan: Resources

Date signed off: 28/05/2015

Signed off by: **Debbie Marles, Head of Legal Services**

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## Team Overview – Legal Services

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The Legal Services team undertakes a number of key roles for the Council. The team provides a support service to the Council and its Directorates to give effect to and implement decisions necessary to meet the Council's objectives as set out in the Corporate Plan. The team in delivering the service ensure that the objectives of the Performance Plan and Directorate Service Plan are considered when any advice is given.

### **The Team's broad functions are:**

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- The Team's Head of Service oversees the strategic direction of the Team ensuring the provision of an efficient comprehensive legal service that is responsive to client's needs and proactive in protecting the Council's legal position and supporting corporate policy making.
- The Head of Service is the Council's Monitoring Officer and Proper Officer for the Data Protection Act and Freedom of Information Act.
- The Operational Manager ensures the delivery of legal services that are effective, efficient and economic and is responsible for developing and delivering effective and clear operational management arrangements to ensure the Council's statutory obligations and policy objectives are met.
- The Team's strategic aim always is to achieve improved performance, a culture of continuous improvement, encouragement of creativity and innovation in service delivery.
- The Community Services section are responsible for providing legal advice in respect of all community services and education matters including adult community services, childcare and mental health.
- The Litigation and Business Support section is responsible for conducting both claimant and defendant litigation on behalf of the Council across various civil and criminal jurisdictions and provides planning and highways advice, including representation at planning, highways and compulsory purchase order enquiries, criminal prosecutions and civil proceedings brought by the Council including conducting regulatory prosecutions on the behalf of the Council within the context of the regulatory services collaboration, providing generic advice to the regulatory services collaboration; legal support is provided to the licensing department and committee, employment law advice in respect of Council policy including advice for the appeals committee, representing the Council in respect of employment claims and delivering administrative support to the Legal Services Team, including the production and management of client billing reports.
- The Contract and Property section undertake the Council's conveyancing landlord and tenant work and the negotiation and drafting of contracts for goods and services including and advice service in relation to contract and property law generally, and in relation to Local Government law, charities, contracts, land issues, compulsory purchase, landlord and tenant, housing matters and town and village green applications.

## Our Contribution to Service Plan priorities 2014/15

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Our contribution to the Service Plan priorities last year:

- Successful adoption of the Local Dispute Resolution Procedure which was submitted to and endorsed by the Standards Committee and Council. This is a procedure which deals with member low level complaints concerning fellow members with the aim that these are dealt with locally, informally and swiftly (RS/A091NA24).
- The Team has continued to provide a high quality legal service responsive to client department needs and corporate priorities at a time of reduced budgets. This was achieved as a result of the delivery of appropriate and timely legal advice available when required, demonstrated by a high client satisfaction with service responsiveness (RS01/A001). This is demonstrated by case closure feedback with satisfaction ratings, and face to face consultation undertaken with Heads of Service. The client satisfaction survey assesses quality of service, timeliness of response and ease of contact with the department. Satisfaction remained in 100% of all cases.
- The Team has continued to broaden the skills of Legal Services staff to improve service resilience and cost effectiveness of services provided (RS01/A002). This has been achieved by staff receiving appropriate training and being equipped with the skills to work effectively across service areas in the provision of legal advice resulting in an improvement of the service resilience and the cost effectiveness of the services provided.
- The Team has continued to explore and has implemented further collaborative arrangements to improve the resilience of the Team (RS01/A003). This has been achieved by the Team's involvement in the setting up of the Regulatory Services Collaboration; the Regional Adoption Service collaboration; continuing to represent Cardiff Children Services in relation to childcare matters before the Court and the Team's involvement in the insourcing of work from other Local Authorities, including Caerphilly and Torfaen in relation to the provision of employment law advice, Cardiff in relation to the provision of Children Services advice, and representing HM Coroner in respect of proceedings commenced in the High Court in relation to the reopening of an inquest.
- The Team maintains the external quality assessment of Legal Services through Lexcel Accreditation. This is an industry standard accreditation scheme and provides the Council with assurance that the legal services being offered are of a high quality across various areas of legal practice including client satisfaction, risk management and case management.
- The percentage of information laid in Court for criminal prosecutions within 15 working days of receipt of full instructions (RS/M004). The target set of 100% for 2014/15 was met.
- The percentage of cases where the instructing department was informed in writing of the outcome of their case within 10 working days and the target of 100% was met by Legal Services (RS/M006).
- The percentage of Cabinet/Committee report instructions that had been advised upon within 5 days of receipt and the target of 100% was met by Legal Services (RS/M015).

## Our Team Plan 2015/16

<b>Service Outcome 2:</b>		The Vale Community benefits from the Council's sound and transparent decision making through effective management of resources.						
<b>Objective 3:</b>		To optimise our resources, exercise robust financial management and provide effective relevant services and facilities.						
Ref.	During 2015-16 we plan to:	Success Criteria/ Outcomes we'll achieve from this action are:	High, Medium or Low priority	Officer responsible for achieving this action	Start date	Finish date	How will the work be resourced?	Progress
	Provide high quality responsive legal service responsive to client department needs and corporate priorities at a time of reduced budget.	Appropriate and timely legal advice is available when required. High client satisfaction with service responsiveness.	High	D Marles	01/04/2015	31/03/2016	Legal Services budget.  By client departments when external lawyers are instructed (if the relevant protocol applies).	
	Broaden the skills of Legal Services staff to improve service resilience and cost effectiveness of services provided.	Increased service capacity and resilience, with minimal impact on client departments	Medium	D Marles	01/04/2015	31/03/2016	Legal Services budget.	
	Explore and implement further collaborative arrangements to improve resilience of Legal Services.	Improved service efficiencies and resilience.	High	D Marles	01/04/2015	31/03/2016	Legal Services budget.	

	Continue to offer Service Level Agreements for the provision of legal services to all Town and Community Councils and provide associated service (if appropriate).	Facilitating easy access to affordable and specialist legal advice.	High	D Marles	01/04/2015	31/03/2016	Legal Services budget and income generated.	
	Maintain Lexcel accreditation.	Maintaining accreditation to ensure quality of service.	High	V Davidson	01/04/2015	31/03/2016	Legal Services budget.	
RS/A109	During 2015/16 we plan to provide legal advice to officers in the Council involved in the commencement of the review of service areas contained in tranche 1 of the reshaping services programme.	Council staff understand the legal aspects of the reshaping services programme.	High	D Marles	01/04/2015	31/03/2016	Legal Services budget.	
	Recruit staff and implement appropriate technology to manage the litigated personal injury work when it is brought "in house"	Contribution by Team to efficiency savings whilst delivering a high standard of legal service.	High	D Marles	01/04/2015	31/10/2015	Within existing resources	