

Legal Services Peer Challenge **Birmingham City Council**

June 16th -19th 2019

Feedback Report

1. Executive Summary

The vision for Birmingham City Council's (BCC) Legal Services is to deliver a service in a way that supports the organisation's 'One Council' approach and makes a positive and innovative contribution to enable the Council to achieve its aims and objectives, with the best results for the citizens of Birmingham.

BCC's Legal Services is one of the largest local authority in-house legal departments in the country. In 2019 it has approximately 155 full time equivalent (FTE) staff consisting of 130 legal practice staff and 25 practice management/support staff a ratio of 5:1. There is high demand on legal services at BCC, with considerable numbers of judicial reviews coming from the community and long running industrial and other disputes gaining national attention. Difficulties with recruitment and the loss of senior strategic managers and admin staff in recent years has resulted in high numbers of agency legal practice staff being employed and some quality processes and systems not being followed as rigorously as when they were first introduced.

Peers recognise that the senior managers in the Service have strong ambitions to be the best in the sector and that within the Service there is real pride in working for the Council and delivering for residents. However, the reality is that confidence levels in the Service are low amongst the Cabinet members, senior organisational leaders and operational departments. The recent lengthy and high profile waste dispute in the City and the 'Trojan Horse' case have both damaged trust and confidence in Legal Services. It now needs to rebuild that trust and regain a more positive reputation.

Cabinet members do not feel they are well served by Legal Services. They feel insufficiently briefed on key legal cases and the risks associated with them. They say that the legal advice they receive is sometimes inconsistent and not timely enough. Legal Services have identified the need to upskill their teams on basic local government legislation and governance arrangements at the Council. A member enquiry tracking system has been newly established to answer criticisms that member enquiries get 'lost'. However not all members are aware of its existence and there is already evidence that it is not being kept fully up to date.

Both service departments and members feel that legal staff lack confidence in their own ability to give advice and work in a collaborative way. Legal Services are generally seen as overly risk averse, which can lead to delays and stifle innovation in the wider organisation. Managers want legal staff to be more solutions and outcome focused, offering practical options and solutions, rather than academic legal advice. The Legal Business Partner model which has been working since 2016 is effective in some parts of Legal Services but not in others. It needs to be applied consistently across the Service, with the Business Partner able to act as a single point of contact for cross-cutting pieces of work.

There is an over-reliance on external legal counsel at times which is both costly and which does not always add value. There is a feeling in the wider organisation that the use of external counsel is a symptom of a lack of confidence by the Service in its core products. However, we recognise that a large and complex metropolitan council will sometimes need

specialist external legal support, but we are not convinced the balance between in-house provision and external support is as optimal as it might be. The Service understands the need to demonstrate best value when procuring external legal support. It has an ambition to establish its own framework agreement for legal services which would be available for use by local authorities across the country too. Whilst ambition on this scale is to be congratulated, we do not feel that this should be a priority in the short to medium term. There are many other similar frameworks available to the Service with competitive charging rates and added value offers such as free legal training.

In general the Service needs to develop a learning culture that enables the sharing of best practice. There are some areas of really excellent legal service particularly from the Commercial Law team and the team supporting the Commonwealth Games. These provide examples of good practice from which the wider Service can learn. There is also some high quality individual performance amongst legal staff but this runs the danger of over reliance on a limited number of people. Across the Service there are some extremely dedicated legal staff who are working long hours to provide a service. It is really positive that many legal staff say they would welcome change and are keen to be upskilled.

The wider organisation is not well informed about the successes of Legal Services. The Service is engaging with its own workforce using a newsletter and electronic screens sited in the Legal Services offices to display service performance. Where there are successes, Legal Services need to share them with the rest of the organisation. This is important for its own reputation and to give the organisation trust and confidence in the Service. For example members were not aware that the division was selling its services to other councils.

Senior managers in Legal Services understand some of the shortcomings of the Service. They acknowledge that there needs to be a change in the way Legal Services works with both service departments and members. The process of improvement has started. Some key areas for improvement have been identified and a draft Improvement Plan has been drawn up by the new Assistant Director Legal Services and communicated to staff and some members. The intention is that the Plan will be amended following the results of this peer challenge. Peers feel that in its current form the plan has too many actions and is probably unachievable. It will be important to prioritise the actions that will have the most impact and to concentrate on delivering those improvements over the coming months. This should involve upskilling staff on key local government governance processes, increasing the opportunities for legal staff to learn how to operate better in the political space and embedding the legal business partner model with learning from the example of the legal teams supporting the Inclusive Growth Department and Commonwealth Games team.

Quotes

“Birmingham’s regulatory team stands out as the best amongst all the authorities I have to deal with”

“Legal Services are highly dependent on a few excellent members of staff”

“Legal Services has a siege mentality”

“Battle of wills to get a cabinet report through”

“Getting clear advice is like getting blood out of a stone”

“Legal see members as coincidental”
“Putting enquiries in is like sending things into a black hole”
“Always acting in your best interests”
“We are always in a win or lose situation”
“Trust goes both ways”
“Culture of chasing responses from Legal”

2. Summary of the Peer Challenge approach

The peer team

Peer challenges are delivered by experienced elected member and officer peers. The make-up of the peer team reflected your requirements and the focus of the peer challenge. Peers were selected on the basis of their relevant experience and expertise and agreed with you. The peers who delivered the peer challenge at BCC were:

- David Wilcock – Assistant Director of Legal, Governance and Workforce/ Monitoring Officer, Rochdale Borough Council
- Ben Mosley – Head of the Executive Office Bristol City Council
- Cllr Graham Chapman – Councillor, Nottingham City Council
- Gill Elliott – LGA Review Manager
- Raj Khara – Membership Engagement Officer, LGA
- Helen Murray – Principal Adviser LGA

Scope and focus

This peer challenge of BCC’s Legal Services was commissioned by the Council as a bespoke project. The scope and focus for the challenge was agreed with the Council and covered the following areas:

- How Legal Services adopts a One Council approach;
- Ensuring a high quality, modern legal service;
- Reducing external legal spend, the interface with other Departments and how service areas use legal services
- Assuring staff have the right capabilities

It has been agreed that the LGA will undertake a peer review of Governance at BCC in the autumn of 2019.

The peer challenge process

It is important to stress that this was not an inspection. Peer challenges focus on improvement and are tailored to meet individual councils’ needs. They are designed to

complement and add value to a council's own performance and improvement. The process is not designed to provide an in-depth or technical assessment of plans and proposals. The peer team used their experience and knowledge of local government to reflect on the information presented to them by people they met, things they saw and material that they read.

The peer team prepared for the peer challenge by reviewing a range of documents and information in order to ensure they were familiar with the Council and the challenges it is facing. The team then spent 3 days onsite at BCC, during which they:

- Spoke to more than 72 people including a range of council staff together with councillors and external partners and stakeholders.
- Gathered information and views from more than 30 meetings, visits to key sites in the area and additional research and reading.
- Collectively spent more than 170 hours to determine their findings – the equivalent of one person spending nearly 5 weeks in BCC

This report provides a summary of the peer team's findings. It builds on the feedback presentation provided by the peer team at the end of their on-site visit (16th-19th June 2019). In presenting feedback to you, they have done so as fellow local government officers and members, not professional consultants or inspectors. By its nature, the peer challenge is a snapshot. We appreciate that some of the feedback may be about things you are already addressing and progressing.

A number of recommendations and suggestions have been included at the end of each section. These can be mapped and cross referenced to the existing Improvement Plan which can then be amended.

3. Feedback

3.1. How Legal Services Adopts a “One Council” Approach

Peers found that there was no clear thread between the priorities of Legal Services and those of the Council. The Legal Services Business Plan 2018-19 does not align with the Council's own strategic plan in any way. Instead it focusses on its own strategies with no reference to the wider council outcomes in the Council Plan 2018-20. We would suggest taking the Council objectives and mapping how Legal Services can make a contribution to each of these. This interface will ensure Legal Services is anchored in the wider organisation.

Cabinet members said that they do not have a sense of working in partnership with Legal Services. Many were unfamiliar with senior key staff within the Service. They said that all too often they are presented with problems at a late stage and feel unsighted on important legal cases, leaving them vulnerable politically and unable to discuss potential risks and mitigations. Cabinet members are not made

aware of items on the legal risk register that relate to their portfolio. Often issues only come to light when there is a risk that a case or the outcome of a case could be reported in the media. Whilst there are structures in place for the Deputy Leader of the Council (as relevant portfolio holder) to meet with the City Solicitor periodically, this arrangement has lapsed due to diary pressures. This is a lost opportunity to engage with members at the highest level and it would go some way to address members' broader concerns about the Service. Cabinet members feel Legal Services are often too risk averse. An example was given of CCTV cameras that had to be taken down. Legal Services advised that this shouldn't be done as the remaining posts would pose a risk to drivers. As a result, the report was delayed and eventually both cameras and posts had to be taken down negating some of the savings that might have been made.

Members also said that legal advice often took too long e.g. a selective licensing pilot was held up by Legal Services for two months with no clear advice or direction offered. According to Legal Services it was too risky to go ahead. Finding out the reasons for this took several more months. In the end members went to Liverpool Council to see how they had dealt with the issue. Another example involved legal advice on who should attend ward meetings. This reportedly took two months and a draft letter to the public on the ward meetings issue took several weeks, again leading to delays to the business of the Council and frustration for members.

The vast majority of staff in Legal Services have no contact with members. Staff are therefore unaware and unsighted on members' concerns and priorities and the different influences and perspectives which they may bring to discussions and decisions. A better sense of political awareness would greatly enhance the work of Legal Services and improve these relationships as staff could more routinely appreciate political considerations. It is incumbent on staff to take the initiative here and find ways to be more proactive in working with members. This was evident during the waste dispute where staff at all levels were present to support the Leader with some good results. Legal staff need to understand the portfolios they work with so they can advise appropriately. Members want to work on reports with Legal staff as a team, rather than what currently seems like a 'battle of wills'. Legal staff should be talking to members early with issues and cases that could be politically sensitive so that they can consider the handling and response in good time. This includes a better understanding of the public relations and communications effect of any legal case.

Work needs to be done to rectify some basic processes to provide a strong foundation to start to build positive relationships and re-establish trust between members and Legal Services. There is a recognition of the need to better serve members with their queries with the recent development of a process for recording, tracking and responding to member enquiries, so that the enquires don't get lost. This will provide oversight of member enquiries ensuring that they are a standing item at the Legal Services departmental management meetings. These are welcome developments. However not all the Members that the peer team spoke to were aware of the new system. Moreover, the process does not seem to

be working as effectively as it might, given it was already out of date when we looked at it. This needs to get back on track urgently. Given the frustration of Members on this point, we also suggest a single initial point of contact either within Legal Services or alternatively, member enquiries should be integrated within the Council's arrangements for handling corporate complaints so there is visibility and integration of members concerns across the board at a corporate and organisational level. Legal Services should not underestimate the value of face-to-face contact with members. Increased visibility among members will help build relationships and help re-build confidence.

Legal Services' participation in the Corporate Clearance Model is working well. Reports for Cabinet and Council are dealt with separately by a team including Legal, Finance and HR staff as appropriate. This enables the Executive Management Team (EMT) of cabinet members and senior officers to concentrate on more developmental work such as the "horizon scanning" of new initiatives and policies.

The Business Partner (BP) model is working well in some areas of Legal Services. There was high regard for those who are integrated into wider project working at the Council. Where this works well, the support is timely and valuable, really adding value to the business. However this approach needs to be more consistent in the way Legal Services works across the whole organisation. Separately, there is evidence of silo working in some areas of the Service which is undermining the BP 'model' of working. The BP role itself could be utilised more effectively where there are cross cutting pieces of legal work, so that the BP acts as a single point of contact, co-ordinates input and is accountable for the delivery of the commissioned work as a fully integrated product.

More proactive engagement between Legal Services and the wider organisation needs to happen. Within Legal Services, teams that are effectively supporting the departments they service include the Commercial and Commonwealth Games team within the Inclusive Growth Department, where a matrix management model way of working involving professional colleagues from other disciplines has been developed. Experience of working this way needs to be shared more widely within Legal and with other departments so that this can be replicated and become the norm. Silo working between Legal and other departments is preventing an efficient service. e.g. the joint legal/communications department response to a large number of freedom of information requests about the Commonwealth Games was difficult to co-ordinate. The Service reported that even getting the right people together in the same room proved hard work.

There has been a history of high profile equal pay claims resulting in £1.1bn being paid out by the Council. Legal has worked well with HR around the issue and they are continuing to work well together on strategies to mitigate the potential for claims should any be submitted.

Recommendations

1. Ensure the Legal Services department plan reflects the Birmingham City Council Plan
2. Create an environment where Legal Services staff regularly come into contact with members to increase awareness of political priorities.
3. Ensure that the new member enquiry system works and that members know about it. Consider introducing a single first point of contact for all enquiries with a clear owner once the enquiry has been allocated.
4. Introduce regular briefings for Cabinet members on the progress of high profile cases, legal risks and forthcoming legislation. These could take place at the regular cabinet member briefings with their senior officers.
5. Consider a quarterly corporate newsletter which is sent to all members which includes 'burning issues' and future legislative changes.
6. Provide Cabinet members with a clear structure chart of Legal Services.
7. Where there is a need for legal presence at meetings between cabinet members and their chief officers, ensure Legal Services staff have the confidence to participate fully.
8. Be proactive with the Business Partner model and be consistent across Legal Services so that the Business Partner acts as a single point of contact.
9. Identify opportunities for departments to self-serve e.g. template contracts; simple model S.278 agreement.

3.2. Ensuring a High Quality Modern Legal Service

There are some pockets of excellent legal work, which is viewed by departments and external legal counsel as being on a par with any council in the country. There was widespread praise for the Legal Service's commercial work and advice, particularly in negotiating contracts; support for the Commonwealth Games Athletes Village and legal and commercial agreements e.g. legal work on compulsory purchases that enabled the process to be done in one year instead of four. Regulatory work is also of a high quality.

In teams where Legal Services are judged highly effective legal staff are seen to be taking corporate ownership of the projects and services they work with. Rather than having a rigid approach, they are facilitating successful delivery by proposing alternative approaches if needed e.g. developing standard heads of terms for contracts for Commonwealth Games agreements. Their advice is highly valued with legal staff readily accessible to be consulted with on the phone or face to face. Legal staff helped to set up the Commonwealth Games board and have had a seat on the Board since the start. The governance of the board is currently under review and legal services are playing a significant role in this review.

High quality performance from individuals is evident from some legal teams and this is starting to create a broader culture of excellence in those teams. There is also evidence of a real commitment to BCC's business. Other positives for the

Service include the triage system for whistleblowing which appears to be working well and the national money laundering and 'Scambusters' consumer fraud initiatives which are based in Legal Services. Partners regard them as an excellent quality team.

The peer team heard many examples of weaknesses in what should be basic legal issues e.g. understanding IT contracts; signing off reports – often advice was not very clear; lack of accuracy on core business issues like community safety e.g. the map for an area injunction. Adults Services said that the weight of legal advice often presents barriers rather than helping transformation processes e.g. legal insist that consultations are re-run for minor drafting reasons. Children Services said they found it difficult to get a decision out of Legal Services around (child trafficking advocates (CTAs) creating delay and frustration.

Within Legal Services generally there needs to be less emphasis on operating like a private legal practice and more on being part of a modern in-house legal service. Service departments say they will welcome the business partner model. They want legal staff to be more "embedded" in the services they work with rather than being rigidly instruction based. They feel that legal staff are often too rigidly focused on offering the legal advice they were specifically asked for, rather than working collaboratively with the department to understand what it is trying to achieve, being able to offer alternative legal ways forward and discussing the range of risks associated with the options. We would suggest that Legal Service change their use of language towards colleagues by not referring to them as 'clients.'

Service departments reported confusion and inconsistency over legal comments and advice in Cabinet reports. An example was given of a late report on Home School Transport that needed to make a Cabinet deadline. Five different lawyers were successively involved in commenting on the report which delayed the report further. The Service felt that all the legal "tweaking" had not really made a significant material change and had simply delayed matters. So, whilst changes may be understandable when more evidence or information comes to light forcing a change of position, if this is not the case and changes simply result from different legal interpretations within Legal Services, then it is not satisfactory. The process therefore needs to be streamlined with one person as the key contact and a system of quality control within the department. High quality legal advice will enable Members to take decisions affecting services fully cognisant of the risks associated with different options.

Legal Services needs to be able to provide support on new areas of law such as social media. The Communications team (Comms) reported waiting over three weeks for legal advice on a specialist podcast for the United States. There is also a lack of expertise on the more traditional media such as what can or cannot be published. At times the team has not been able to access legal advice quickly. e.g. it took two hours after a court decision for legal services to clear a press release from the council, by which time another part of the press had broken the story. The

Comms team feel that Legal Services needs to understand their responsibility to protect BCC's reputation as much as it does media law.

Legal Services needs to develop more of a learning culture so that mistakes are not repeated. More formal debriefs after difficult or complex cases would help learning. One good example of learning from experience we heard about related to equal pay claims. Generally the Service is not sufficiently exploiting the rich supply of case data and outcomes in an effective way which could add value to the whole organisation. For example, publicising successful prosecutions would be of interest to both Members and the residents of Birmingham. Moving from outputs to outcomes would ensure the Council is able to assess value for money from litigation.

In terms of managing demand, the Council has plenty of information about casework but it is not being used to best effect. Data on cases can inform where the repeat enquiries on basic information are coming from, enabling the development of self-service mechanisms such as intranet briefings. Identifying high resource areas, profiling work across the year, and sharing the pressures with the corporate centre will enable a broader view to be taken about how far Directorates are able to increase their understanding of legal issues and thereby relieve some of the pressure on Legal Services.

Legal staff need to develop a "sharing of knowledge" culture and a broader understanding of basic local government law and the Council's Constitution. They need a better knowledge of the key pieces of legislation affecting local government governance arrangements, e.g. the Local Government Act, the Localism Act, etc. and how this is applied to work in BCC, as well as conventions and normal practice around local government such as purdah during the pre-election period.

Cabinet members perceive a lack of confidence from legal staff to challenge members about key governance processes such as "call-ins" in scrutiny because they are unfamiliar with wider local government practice. It should also be noted that BCC call in arrangements as outlined in the constitution are very open – only a couple of members are needed for a call-in to go ahead. This is something they should review when updating the constitution. Legal Services' attendance at cabinet member briefings was described by members as "patchy" and this needs to change. Legal input at these meetings related too often to performance issues rather than to strategic or risk items. Members also feel unsupported by Legal Services when they are called upon to defend difficult or unpopular council decisions especially when they are subject to online and other abuse from residents.

Recommendations

1. Where appropriate develop a matrix approach to working with departments and partners.

2. Work in a collaborative way with service departments to get the best outcomes for the organisation.
3. Gain an understanding of the Communications effects of legal advice and decisions.
4. Develop a more outcome focused approach to legal advice with a range of options and potential risks being offered.
5. Ensure continuity and consistency of advice and support on cases through a single point of contact for each case.
6. Enhance the ability of departments to self-serve e.g. briefings on key points of state aid.
7. Create a suite of standard paragraphs to be inserted in report templates as appropriate e.g. Human Rights Act; Compulsory Purchase Orders

3.3. Reducing Legal Spend

In the last year Legal Services spent over £2m on external legal services out of its Core budget of £5m. This financial year it has a target to reduce external spend by £200k and is looking at the ways it procures external legal services to see where savings can be made.

Some of the expenditure had been well and appropriately used. There has been cost effective use of external legal advice in relation to the school injunctions. Legal Services is also using the Crown Commercial legal services framework and whilst the team were unable to check the consistency of its use, the peer team felt that the Service is “on the right track”. Legal Services also benefits from money recouped from the Proceeds of Crime Act and, if anything, we feel that more investment in this area may pay both social and financial dividends.

There are some good examples of successful income generation as a result of providing legal services to other councils, e.g. Right to Buy. Legal Services provide £0.75m worth of services to other local authorities including Milton Keynes, Sandwell and Coventry where they are seen as a trusted partner. External legal advice has also been shared with the wider organisation which has resulted in legal cost avoidance. There are opportunities for in-sourcing e.g. debt recovery. However, in order to maximise opportunities to secure further income, a more proactive strategy needs to be adopted.

Pressures and requests to Legal Services are recorded accurately in the Demand system. However, changing to a Demand Management system will ensure that data can more systematically drive service improvements and the way the services interacts with colleagues across the Council. The system has a number of potential uses: helping to determine corporate priorities; planning the level of resources needed to respond to future demands; identifying insourcing opportunities and helping to develop preventative measures. This has been shown to add value to the organisation e.g. S11 housing disrepair cases to identify opportunities to avoid legal and compensation costs. However, there is more that can be achieved. Insufficient attention is being paid to preventative

measures to reduce litigation e.g. consultation failures in Adult Services. There are opportunities to learn from good and bad consultation exercises. Case studies of tribunal cases can be produced to help preventative work, and conclude cases earlier.

It was recognised that to date, financial support to Legal Services has not been as effective as it should be. The Service needs better financial support to help it manage its financial business when looking at engaging Counsel and considering financial alternatives, value for money, and cost/benefit analyses.

The team observed that external advice may not always add value, can cause delays and lack transparency. An example of this was a third party waste review. This was a relatively simple piece of work, essentially a procurement exercise, where QC advice was sought. This delayed the report and added time and cost to the whole process. In other examples, barristers have been paid several times for commenting on their own initial work. There is a need to move away from this checking/consulting culture to a system of clear criteria to assess the rationale for outsourcing legal work. A more confident workforce will rely much less on this expertise. The quality of instructions to external Counsel is variable. Counsel were complimentary about some instructions they receive, describing them as fully formed and detailed. Other instructions which simply say “please advise” were considered inadequate and wasteful of both time and resources. It was evident that lawyers and others in Legal Services need some support, advice and training on giving instructions to Counsel.

One example which came to light was the level of external spend on legal advice for the Children’s Trust where the cost is likely to be in excess of £1 million. Peers identified an opportunity for an all-encompassing initiative to deliver legal services in the Trust, possibly including the setting up of an in-house advocacy unit to eliminate or reduce the reliance of external counsel to conduct advocacy. Since undertaking the review we now understand that there is already a stated intention by the Trust to develop an in-house advocacy service and that this is a clear priority. We are grateful for the clarification and welcome this development.

Recommendations

1. Make use of existing frameworks eg EMLawshare where there are added value offers e.g. free training
2. When considering the in-house advocacy unit for the Children’s Trust explore doing this in partnership with other West Midlands authorities.
3. Establish a library of external legal advice for future cases and share this with the wider team and departments.
4. Utilise junior members of staff more effectively as a point of contact on projects to deal with lower level queries.
5. Do more tactical income generation e.g. RTB for several LAs is producing an income of £250k, use of the Proceeds of Crime Act to recoup money
6. Examine the workload to eliminate low priority activity where Legal Services are unable to add value.

7. Improve the corporate recruitment process which is bureaucratic and slow and results in excessive use of expensive agency staff.
8. Use the Demand Analysis data to explore opportunities for preventative investment and in-sourcing.
9. Use legal case data to identify opportunities for corporate improvement e.g. S.11 housing disrepair cases to reduce legal costs and compensation
10. Examine the case for more Investment in Proceeds of Crime activity on the grounds that it may provide both better service and produce a rate of return.

3.4. Assure Legal Services Staff have the right capabilities

The council's freeze on recruitment is having an impact on the service. Legal teams were carrying a high number of vacancies and the recruitment process was slow. This should be reviewed to help bring new talent into the teams, reduce the reliance on interim staff and increase capacity.

Staff across the Service expressed a willingness to be upskilled in other areas of professional practice. This enthusiasm needs to be harnessed and opportunities provided quickly so that they can make a full contribution to BCC. There are already examples of staff "learning on the job" rather than through formal training. However this tends to concentrate on professional competence rather than on Council-wide business. With appropriate training and support, staff should also be given more exposure to politicians. The LGA can support a programme of 'political nous/sensitivity' if this would be useful. This would provide a more confident, flexible and resilient workforce. More corporate training is already being provided for legal staff including externally delivered training around governance issues and e-learning on equality.

Identifying the training needs of legal staff is a relatively new role for the Service. There are aspirations to develop a workforce and training plan for Legal Services. This work needs to be done quickly as there are a number of gaps in the structure and over-reliance on agency and interim staff. Legal Services has faced significant problems recruiting the right calibre of staff. The plan to use the apprenticeship levy to "grow your own" and upskill staff is a good one, however skills must be tied to business needs e.g. local government knowledge.

The peer team noted new initiatives such as introducing an internal newsletter for the Legal Services and creating an in-house network for legal staff. These initiatives could be used to share learning and celebrate success within the Service and the wider organisation.

The ICT available to Legal Services is unreliable and disruptive to effective working. Staff complain about both the infrastructure available and the reliability of connectivity. This is particularly an obstacle to remote working, for example court appointments or meetings where there is no access to the corporate network.

Recommendations

1. Identify a package of learning and development for staff around operating in a political environment.
2. Provide legal staff with a solid grounding in basic local government law and the operation of the Council's Constitution.
3. Make use of shadowing opportunities within Legal Services and external chambers to support professional development
4. Maximise opportunities for free training from private legal firms

4. Signposting

Self service

Rochdale Council's standard 'legal risks' report paragraphs

The 2017 business case for shared legal services for children's and adult care work - (Rochdale, joining Manchester & Salford Councils shared service)

5. Next steps

Immediate next steps

We appreciate the senior managerial and political leadership will want to reflect on these findings and suggestions in order to determine how the organisation wishes to take things forward.

As part of the peer challenge process, there is an offer of further activity to support this. The LGA is well placed to provide additional support, advice and guidance on a number of the areas for development and improvement and we would be happy to discuss this. Helen Murray, Principal Adviser is the main contact between your authority and the Local Government Association (LGA). Her contact details are: Email helen.murray@local.gov.uk

The team would also be happy to provide insights and challenge on your new redrafted Constitution. In the meantime we are keen to continue the relationship we have formed with the Council throughout the peer challenge. We will endeavour to provide signposting to examples of practice and further information and guidance about the issues we have raised in this report to help inform ongoing consideration.