

NORTH LINCOLNSHIRE COUNCIL/NORTH EAST LINCOLNSHIRE COUNCIL

**JOINT COMMITTEE FOR SHARED SERVICES
BETWEEN NORTH LINCOLNSHIRE AND NORTH
EAST LINCOLNSHIRE COUNCILS**

LEGAL SHARED SERVICES

1. OBJECT AND KEY POINTS IN THIS REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to update the Joint Committee on progress with the Legal Services workstream against the business case agreed for that workstream and to set out the next steps.
- 1.2 The key points are:
- The business case sets out, at paragraph 16, under 'Delivery of the shared service project' for the period September 2015 to December 2016 a number of items against which progress is reported below.
 - Good practical progress has been made in sharing resources across both functions. Options exist to build on those successes.
 - The savings target attributed to this activity is on track.
 - Staff at both functions have been consulted on the business case. There are reasons to believe that staff consider that the content of the business case represents opportunity as opposed to threat.

2. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

2.1 The points from the business case referred to above are as follows:

1. Appointment of an interim Practice Manager to coordinate delivery and progress of the shared service across both councils.
2. Assessment of and maximisation of the IKEN case management system used by both Councils.
3. Rationalisation of library and subscription resources.
4. Development of common practice standards and procedures.
5. Arrangement of operational practice meetings on a quarterly basis between relevant principal lawyers from both Councils.

2.2 Against the items above progress can be reported as follows:

1. A virtual interim Practice Management arrangement is in place. While it was intended that physical presence at both NLC and NELC was preferable the virtual arrangement has delivered benefits. The use of virtual arrangements places more reliance on technology and reduces travel time and expense.
2. The interim Practice Manager has liaised with IKEN providers and established that movement to a single instance, with attendant savings, is possible. Instead of both Councils each having a contract with IKEN there would be one contract with users at both which could generate a saving on licence and maintenance for this software. Work continues to make better use of IKEN across both Councils.
3. Library and subscription resources have been rationalised at NELC generating a saving of over £20k per annum. The interim Practice Manager has carried out an analysis for NLC demonstrating that, subject to user preferences, up to £30k per annum could be saved by further resource rationalisation in this area.
4. The development of common practice standards and procedures has commenced but further dialogue is required, particularly around customer needs. The interim Practice Manager has prepared a presentation on quality which is due to be delivered to colleagues at both NLC and NELC.
5. Operational practice meetings on a quarterly basis between relevant principal lawyers from both Councils have commenced.

The savings target attributed to the legal workstream of the shared services project is £40k per annum, shared across both NELC and NLC, with effect from 1 April 2016. This is in addition to the savings set out above. These savings will be delivered in accordance with options provided to finance colleagues.

In practical terms, a significant amount of resource sharing has taken place notably in childcare but also in property and land charges and in respect of the interim practice management arrangements discussed above. Previous sharing of high level planning legal resource was successful. It is planned to re-implement a similar system, following changes in personnel and subject to consultation with stakeholders.

Further background is the Ministry of Justice consultation on the proposed closure of courts which potentially impacts all three Courts located in Scunthorpe, North Lincolnshire. This consultation did not include courts based in North East Lincolnshire. In the event of closure of the Courts in Scunthorpe, accommodation solutions and practical solutions will be required to minimise travel and waiting time for any colleagues based in Scunthorpe who are required to attend court in Grimsby.

3. OPTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

- 3.1 Building on the successes within this workstream to date it is proposed to move beyond the items set out in the business case for September 2015 to December 2016 by placing existing arrangements on a more formal footing. It will be necessary to consult with staff, clients and stakeholders to implement the proposed more formal approach. To support this, NLC will put in place its own internal practice management resource. Both Monitoring Officers will undertake a review of key

operational practice areas to inform consultation on movement to the more formal footing proposed. Initial assessment indicates the following as potential key practice areas which may benefit from practice leads being identified to lead on across both units: childcare, commercial/procurement, coroners, planning/regulatory, property/local land charges, employment, litigation and Adult Social Care. This review will report by 31 January 2016.

- 3.2 Placing arrangements on a more formal footing requires clarification of fees and charges between the functions for work carried out by one authority for the other. An option for consideration is creating an agreed internal rate and netting off monthly.
- 3.3 Building on the successes within the legal workstream to date, an option for consideration is utilising the strengths of the combined functions to be better pursue options to generate income within the combined geographical areas of NLC and NELC.
- 3.4 Noting that the options set out above go beyond the progress detailed in the business case for September 2015 to December 2016, it is nevertheless considered an option to accelerate this progress and move to implement the model set out in 3.1, 3.2 and 3.3. The success factors set out in paragraph 13 of the business case should be reported against in the review proposed in paragraph 3.1 above. The plan to appoint a Head of Legal Services to manage a joint unit by 1 April 2017 will continue subject to all proper consultation.
- 3.5 Specifically, and in recognition of past success, immediate action is proposed to secure a planning lead across both functions in very short order. It is intended that this situation will be resolved by 31 January 2016 and may involve a joint approach to the recruitment process.

4. ANALYSIS OF OPTIONS

- 4.1 The options for consideration set out above are considered beneficial as they build on the excellent sharing of services carried out in practical terms between the legal functions at both NLC and NELC to date.
- 4.2 In consideration of the benefits realised to date, combined with the delivery of savings targets, the options set out above could maximise further, future benefits from the legal shared service work streams. In addition to the financial benefits realised through the delivery of agreed savings targets, the options, supported by common practice standards, streamlined ICT resources and support are considered more likely to enable centres of excellence to develop.
- 4.3 The options set out above are considered capable of reflecting and adapting to the proposed closure of courts in Scunthorpe in a manner that reduces practical impacts on NLC.

5. **RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS (FINANCIAL, STAFFING, PROPERTY, IT)**

5.1 The options set out above are considered to complement the delivery of agreed financial savings targets, to not have detrimental impacts on staffing or property usage and to continue maximising IT to contribute to the delivery of modern, shared legal services.

6. **OUTCOMES OF INTEGRATED IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

6.1 A formal integrated impact assessment has not yet been carried out on the options set out above. Options are therefore subject to completion of the required integrated impact assessment.

7. **OUTCOMES OF CONSULTATION AND CONFLICTS OF INTEREST DECLARED**

7.1 To date, informal consultation on the business case has been positive.

7.2 No new conflicts of interest have been declared.

8. **RECOMMENDATIONS**

8.1 It is recommended that the Joint Committee approve the principle of accelerating the business case and moving to a more formal basis, subject to all proper consultation.

8.2 It is recommended that the Joint Committee support the implementation of practice management resource by NLC.

8.3 It is recommended that both Monitoring Officers be requested to undertake a review of key operational practice areas, an appropriate charging and balancing mechanism and investigate income opportunities that could arise from the proposed business case acceleration to be completed by 31 January 2016 for subsequent presentation to the Joint Committee.

8.4 It is recommended that the Joint Committee support both Monitoring Officers working together to resolve securing a planning lead across both functions by 31 January 2016, subject to all proper consultation.

REPORT FROM THE SHARED SERVICES BOARD

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Background papers used in the preparation of this report – v0.3 Legal Workstream Business Case of 11 May 2015.