

Case Study: Legal shared service – working in partnership

Shared services among council partnerships are well established in Suffolk, however last year saw four councils go one step further by setting up a shared legal service which went live on 1 November 2016.

Babergh, Forest Heath, Mid Suffolk and St Edmundsbury councils have similar requirements when it comes to dealing with legal issues. These include working on planning, property, commercial and contract law, land and lease agreements, prosecutions, agreements with developers, and advising on everyday legal matters. Almost every project has a legal aspect to it, whether it is technical legal advice, understanding options and mitigating risk, or ensuring that the councils always keep within the law. There will always be times when councils need specialist advice from external sources but work done by our own legal teams reduces the spend on external law firms.

The new service is based at West Suffolk councils' offices in Bury St Edmunds and Mildenhall, with the use of video and teleconferencing facilities reducing the need to travel for meetings. The team of 10 lawyers as well as legal assistants, specialist business support and trainees, operate a business partner model enabling the lawyers to help the organisations achieve their strategic aims through collaborative working.

Through a successful collaborative approach, the councils have created a sustainable, fit for purpose and high performing in-house legal service which provides value for money. This demonstrates our commitment to being resourceful, resilient, innovative and proactively looking to extend skills to support the new ways that councils need to work in the future.

Although the service is still in the early days of delivery, the team are on track to deliver the core aims of the service; building team resilience, succession planning, increasing capacity through sharing resource, generating greater efficiencies, reducing external spend and creating income opportunities.