

Information/Discussion Paper

Overview and Scrutiny Committee - 19 April 2021

One Legal

This note contains the information to keep Members informed of matters relating to the work of the Committee, but where no decisions from Members are needed.

1. Why has this come to scrutiny?

- 1.1 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee has asked for a report about the current position and future plans of One Legal.

2. Summary of the Issue

- 2.1 The purpose of the paper is to enable the committee to consider what One Legal is doing well, where are the priorities for improvement and how the quality of service to clients, including Cheltenham Borough Council (CBC), is measured.

3. Summary of information

- 3.1 Members of the Committee requested that the following be covered in the paper:
- What is One Legal and what does it do?
 - What is One Legal doing well?
 - What is One Legal prioritising for improvement?
 - What are the challenges for One Legal?
 - What are One Legal's plans for the future?

What is One Legal and what does it do?

One Legal started in November 2009 as a shared legal service between Tewkesbury Borough Council and Cheltenham Borough Council. In 2015, Gloucester City Council joined the One Legal partnership followed, in October 2020, by Stroud District Council.

The shared arrangement operates under a section 101 agreement whereby the councils agreed to the discharge of their legal function by One Legal. Tewkesbury Borough Council hosts the service and is the main office location for One Legal staff.

One Legal's governance is provided by a Joint Monitoring and Liaison Group (JMLG) that consists of 2 Members, 1 Client Officer each from each partner council and the One Legal Finance Officer. The group meets 4 times per year.

One Legal currently has 35 permanent members of staff.

One Legal provides legal services across contracts and procurement, property and land transactions, planning, environmental, housing, licensing, leisure and culture, information management, corporate governance and elections. This 'day to day' legal work is provided to the partner councils, including Cheltenham Borough Council as part of the agreed legal budget.

One Legal also undertakes legal support ("Extraordinary Work") for one-off projects, Planning Inquiries (Hearings for 2 days or more), major contracts e.g. development / re-development and other work identified in consultation with senior managers. When commissioning Extraordinary Work, a separate amount is payable.

In addition to its partner councils, One Legal provides legal support to-

- Cheltenham Borough Homes
- Ubico
- Gloucestershire Constabulary
- Gloucester City Homes

One Legal charges third parties (including the above) when undertaking legal work for them.

What is One Legal doing well?

One Legal is a unified multi authority shared legal service that delivers financial savings, service efficiencies and resilience for partners.

One Legal provides a high quality legal service for Cheltenham Borough Council together with its other three partner councils and third party clients. In past 12 months, One Legal has:-

- Successfully expanded the service and welcomed Stroud District Council
- Continued to provide high quality legal advice and support across all areas of work
- Supported its partner councils across all Covid related work
- Developed a new case management system

In relation to Cheltenham Borough Council One Legal has:-

- Supported major redevelopment / regeneration project contracts e.g. CBC/ CBH new build programme
- Undertaken major land transactions including complex site assembly, various acquisitions & disposals, both freehold, leasehold and land exchanges e.g. Maud's Elm Swindon Road, MIE/Workshop,
- Provided support to Cheltenham Borough Council, Cheltenham Borough Homes and SOLACE to deal with anti-social behaviour across the borough
- Provided advice and support to the Council's planning policies, development management, CIL and responded to a High Court challenge to the Local Plan adoption

What is One Legal prioritising for improvement?

One Legal needs to review and implement a new Business Plan. The focus of the new business plan will be on supporting the partner councils to deliver their priorities, continue to improve services, deliver efficiency savings and increase third party income.

One Legal needs to complete the implementation of its new case management system. This will include a client portal. The client portal will improve the system for submitting new instructions and enable effective case management and updating between One Legal and its instructing officers at its partner councils.

Once One Legal has implemented its new case management system One Legal will need to establish agreed performance indicators with its partner councils implement and monitor those performance indicators and report the results to JMLG. Subject to the results, One Legal will need to implement any service improvements.

What are the challenges for One Legal?

One Legal will need to ensure that its operating model is 'fit for purpose' for the changing needs and visions of its partner councils, including Cheltenham Borough Council.

As Cheltenham Borough Council undertakes and implements its own review of its organisation, One Legal will need to be able to respond and meet any increased demand for legal services from Cheltenham Borough Council together with its other partner councils.

One Legal needs to increase its third party income.

What are One Legal's plans for the future?

To carry out a 1 year refresh of the Business Plan.

To undertake a review of the One Legal Operating Model with a view to providing the partner authorities with options on the future shape / scope of the service.

One Legal will need to work to ensure that it continues to embrace the benefits of technology and its case management system to provide high levels of support, both on-site and virtually.

4. Next Steps - possible next steps for the committee to consider e.g further report

- 4.1** The Borough Solicitor and the Head of Law (Litigation and Business Development) will attend the meeting and answer any questions.

Background Papers	None
Contact Officer	One Legal legal.services@teWKesbury.gov.uk