

UPDATE ON THE RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE LEGAL SERVICES WORKING GROUP

This report is an update to Members on the Legal Service following the last update report to the Scrutiny Committee in June 2015.

The workload of the Legal Service has continued to be extremely heavy over the last 6 months and this does not show any signs of reducing.

Some examples of the work undertaken by Legal Services include:

- Dealing with complex legal issues arising from the redevelopment of the Town Hall site in Tiverton
- Contracts for the letting of units in Market Walk, Tiverton
- Premier Inn development
- Acquisition on land on eastern urban extension for development of up to 75 social dwellings
- Review of community leases and Council's industrial and commercial portfolio
- Illegal slaughter and cutting up of animals case including an application under the Proceeds of Crime Act
- High profile planning enforcement cases including the Manor House in Cullompton and other cases
- Planning appeals Hackpen Stables, Blackborough and land west of Uffculme
- High Court case against large developer for payment of affordable housing contribution
- Commercial fly-tipping case
- Heavy demand for legal advice in housing law in the areas of ASB, flexible tenancies, possessions and injunctions
- Assisting Monitoring Officer
- Providing advice regarding large contracts

When considering the level of work in terms of property and assets, it is clear from the Estates business plan that this is only going to increase. As a result of this the Trainee Legal Executive (now returned from maternity leave and working part time) supports the Principal Solicitor with property matters.

The second Trainee Legal Executive is working closely with the Solicitor on Housing matters and is also supporting the rest of the team.

The Head of Communities and Governance and the Legal team had an away day back in August 2015. During the away day we considered the workload of the Legal team going forward, what the service needs to look like in the future and how we deliver and resource this.

A paper was taken to Management Team where a proposal for admin support for the Legal team was discussed and agreed. The post will be recruited to in the near future. The post holder will undertake admin functions for all

members of the team and this will free up the Trainee Legal Executives to enable them to give greater support to the Solicitors.

Succession planning is an important part of the plan going forward and opportunities to develop the Trainee Legal Executives form part of this plan.

The team will also be considering the most efficient and effective way of working going forward. We will focus on the requirements of the team in terms of digital transformation. This will include the scanning of all of the records in the deeds room. This will also form part of the role of the admin support post.

It is recommended that the Scrutiny Committee note the contents of this report and agree that the no further update in respect of the working group actions is necessary.