



Vale of Glamorgan Council

Service Plan 2016-2020

Delivering our vision for the Vale of Glamorgan
‘Strong communities with a bright future’

Service Area	Legal Services
Head of Service	Debbie Marles Head of Legal Services
Director	Rob Thomas Managing Director
Cabinet Member	Cllr. Neil Moore Cabinet Member – Corporate Resources
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1. Introduction

Legal Services forms part of the Resources Directorate. It undertakes a wide range of statutory duties, together with providing a high quality legal advice and support service to the Council and its directorates, to enable effective/informed decisions to be made to meet the Council's priorities as set out in the Corporate Plan. The Service is also responsible for overseeing and managing the Electoral Registration Service.

The Head of Legal Services provides a professional steer to the Information Manager and has also taken on the role of the Returning Officer and Electoral Registration Officer for the Council from 1 December 2014. Additional statutory roles of the Head of Legal Services include that of Monitoring Officer, Proper Officer for access to information, Proper Officer for Freedom of Information Act appeals and the Senior Responsible Officer for the regulation of investigatory powers.

1.1 About our Service – Legal Services

Legal Services undertakes a number of key roles for the Council. The Legal Services team provides efficient and effective legal service to our internal client departments and acts in accordance with the law by providing cost-effective, timely and accurate legal advice to Members and officers in order to support their decision making whilst ensuring effective representation in legal proceedings. Legal Services is a quality assured accredited service with annual inspection undertaken by the Solicitors Regulation Authority. The quality assurance system is in place to ensure that the Team delivers high quality standards and excellent levels of service at all times.

Forming part of Legal Services, the Electoral Registration Team is responsible for ensuring that the Register of Electors is maintained, and co-ordinates all elections within the Vale of Glamorgan constituency.

Our broad functions are:

- Updating the Register of Electors including the maintenance of an Absent Voters and Overseas and Special Category Electors lists as well as publishing the revised Register of Electors annually;
- Undertaking an annual canvass of properties in the Vale of Glamorgan including house visits to increase registration;
- Overseeing/administration of UK Parliamentary elections, Welsh Assembly elections, Police and Crime Commissioner elections, European elections, County/Local Government elections, Town/Community elections, referendums, community polls and NNDR postal ballot bids;
- Undertaking polling district, place and station reviews.
- Undertaking the Returning Officer and Electoral Registration Officer statutory duties;
- Undertaking the Monitoring Officer and designated Proper Officer roles;
- Providing guidance to Members regarding the Members' Code of Conduct and advising both Members and Officers on the Council's Constitution;
- Supporting the Standards Committee in undertaking its statutory functions;
- Overseeing the strategic provision of an efficient comprehensive legal service that is responsive to client's needs and proactive in protecting the Council's legal position and supporting corporate policy making;
- Providing legal advice in respect of all community services and education matters including adult community services, childcare and mental health;
- Conducting both claimant and defendant litigation on behalf of the Council across various civil and criminal jurisdictions, providing planning and highways advice, including representation at planning, highways and compulsory purchase order enquiries, criminal prosecutions and civil proceedings

brought by the Council including conducting regulatory prosecutions on behalf of the Council within the context of the regulatory services collaboration;

- Providing generic advice to the Shared Regulatory Services as host authority, advising and assisting the Licensing Committee (Public Protection, Statutory and Sub-Committee) and the Shared Regulatory Services Joint Committee, employment law advice in respect of Council policy including advice for the appeals committee, representing the Council in respect of employment claims and delivering administrative support to the Legal Services Team, including the production and management of client billing reports;
- Providing legal advice in respect of the implementation of new legislation in protecting the Council's legal position and supporting corporate policy making;
- Undertaking the Council's conveyancing, landlord and tenant work and the negotiation and drafting of contracts for goods and services including an advice service in relation to contract and property law generally, and in relation to Local Government law, charities, contracts, land issues, compulsory purchase, landlord and tenant, housing matters and town and village green applications;
- Providing advice on Council, Cabinet, and Committee reports and determining whether such reports contain exempt information for the purposes of the Local Government Act 1972.

1.2 The Purpose of Our Service Plan

This plan identifies how we will contribute towards achieving the Council's vision – **'Strong Communities with a bright future'**.

Our service plan outlines our key priorities for the next four years and how we will manage our resources to deliver these. The plan gives an overview of our service, what we aim to achieve, why this is important, how we will achieve it, how we will monitor progress and what success will look like.

It is important that as a Council we have shared values and our service is committed to delivering its priorities within the context of the Council's core values:

- **Ambitious:** Forward thinking, embracing new styles of working and investing in our future.
- **Open:** Open to different ideas and being accountable for the decisions we take.
- **Together:** Working together as a team that engages with our customers and partners, respects diversity and is committed to quality services.
- **Proud:** Proud of the Vale of Glamorgan: proud to service our communities and to be part of the Vale of Glamorgan Council.

Our Council's priorities are contained in the Corporate Plan 2016-20 and are expressed as well-being outcomes and objectives. These have been decided upon following consultation with key stakeholders including citizens of the Vale of Glamorgan. Our well-being outcomes and objectives are:

Well-Being Outcome	An Inclusive and Safe Vale	An Environmentally Responsible and Prosperous Vale	An Aspirational and Culturally Vibrant Vale	An Active and Healthy Vale
Well-Being Objective	Reducing poverty and social exclusion	Promoting regeneration, economic growth and employment.	Raising overall standards of achievement.	Encouraging and promoting active and healthy lifestyles.
Well-Being Objective	Providing decent homes and safe communities	Promoting sustainable development and protecting our environment.	Valuing culture and diversity	Safeguarding those who are vulnerable and promoting independent living.

The well-being objectives illustrate the contribution Council services will make to achieving the Well-being Goals for Wales. The Well-being Goals have been established to ensure all relevant bodies in Wales are

working towards the same vision as part of the Well-Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015. The Act is about improving the social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales. The Act is intended to make public bodies think more about the long-term, work better with people and communities and each other, look to prevent problems and take a more joined-up approach. The contribution our service will make to the well-being goals is highlighted throughout our service plan.

1.3 Developing Our Plan

Our service plan is set for one financial year and is informed by and reflects the environment within which our service operates. As well as contributing to the well-being outcomes and objectives from our Corporate Plan, our service has taken the following into consideration when drafting our plan:

- The Directorate's Annual Self-Assessment which provides an overall position statement for the year based on specific issues relating to performance, customer experience, and the use of resources (workforce, financial, ICT and assets);
- Priorities identified in our Corporate Improvement Action Plan (as part of our annual self-assessment).
- Our budget including planned service savings and efficiencies and the implementation of the Council's Reshaping Services Change Programme;
- Taking into account implications for the service arising from new legislative developments such as: the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act, Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act, Renting Homes (Wales) Act, the Regulation and Inspection of Social Care (Wales) Act and the proposed Local Government Bill.
- Taking into account the new Corporate Safeguarding Policy.

2. Our Priorities for 2016-20

2.1 Corporate Plan Priorities

Given the nature of Legal Services, comprehensive support is provided to enable the Council to deliver its corporate plan actions in line with associated Project Plans. The key areas we contribute towards are shown below. We will support these projects by:

- Providing legal advice, guidance and support on law matters that have implications for the whole Council.

Well-being Outcome	Well-being Objective	Ref	Action
WBO2 : An Environmentally Responsible and Prosperous Vale	O3: Promoting regeneration, economic growth and employment	ER01	Maximise economic growth, inward investment and employment opportunities through the Capital region and Cardiff Airport and St Athan Enterprise Zone.
WBO2 : An Environmentally Responsible and Prosperous Vale	O3: Promoting regeneration, economic growth and employment	ER03	Implement a comprehensive programme of regeneration across the Vale including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Rural Local Development Strategy • Town Centres Framework • Penarth Esplanade • Barry Waterfront including the Barry Island Link Road • Links between Penarth Haven and the Town Centre (2019/20).
WBO2 : An Environmentally Responsible and Prosperous Vale	O3: Promoting regeneration, economic growth and employment	ER04	Deliver transport improvement schemes associated with the Cardiff Capital Region Metro including bus prioritisation measures at Port Road and Cardiff Road (2018/19).
WBO2 : An Environmentally Responsible and Prosperous Vale	O4: Promoting sustainable development and protecting our environment	ER10	Work with Welsh Government to deliver improvements to Five Mile Lane (2018/19).
WBO2 : An Environmentally Responsible and Prosperous Vale	O4: Promoting sustainable development and protecting our environment	ER14	Work with partners to continue the regeneration of Barry Island and promote the development of land at Nells Point for tourism and leisure purposes (2018/19).
WBO3: An Aspirational and Culturally Vibrant Vale	O5: Raising overall standards of achievement	AC08	Progress the school modernisation programme by completing the new Llantwit Major Learning Community and the development of proposals

			for secondary school provision in Barry (2017/18).
WBO4: An Active and Healthy Vale	O8: Safeguarding those who are vulnerable and promoting independent living	AH07	Implement new ways of working in light of the Social Services Well-being (Wales) Act with a particular focus on the priority workstreams of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provision of information • Advice and assistance services • Eligibility/assessment of need • Planning and promotion of preventative services • Workforce • Performance measures (2016/17)

2.2 Integrated Planning Priorities

Our service is committed to maximising the use of resources so that we can deliver sustainable and cost-effective services that best meet people’s needs. In order to achieve this, we have identified a series of priorities ‘enabling actions’ that will support us to deliver the key outcomes identified in the Corporate Plan. The key areas of focus for our service will be:

Ref	Action	During 2016/17 we will:
CP1	Deliver the Council’s transformational change programme, Reshaping Services to enable it to meet the future needs of citizens of the Vale of Glamorgan within the context of unprecedented financial challenges (2019/20).	Undertake the preparatory work to ensure the service contributes to finding the £1.4m savings required from the Resources Directorate in 2017/2018. Provide legal support to enable the Council’s Reshaping Services Programme timetable and associated Project Plans to be adhered to.
CP2	Align the workforce plan to the Reshaping Services strategy ensuring staff have the necessary skills and training to adapt to the changes in how services are planned and delivered (2017/18).	Review and strengthen the performance management and support arrangements in relation to sickness absence within the service. Deliver our key workforce development priorities for the coming year as outlined in Appendix A (WL1-WL6).
		Support the Council’s services in responding to the implications of new legislation including the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014.

Appendix A contains the detailed plan which illustrates the enabling actions we will undertake in the coming year to deliver our priorities. The action plan includes information relating to how we will maximise our key resources through integrated planning in order to achieve our priorities.

3. How We Work & Our Resources

The following section sets out how we will manage our resources to achieve the actions in our service plan and support our service.

3.1 Sustainable Development

The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act puts in place a ‘sustainable development principle’ which tells organisations how to go about meeting their duty under the Act:

“You must act in a manner which seeks to ensure that the needs of the present are met without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs, by taking account of the sustainable development principle”.

The sustainable development principle means considering how actions are taken to support continuous improvement by:

- Looking to the **long term** – for us this means planning for the future and taking a strategic approach to ensure services are sustainable and that we understand the future need and demand for services.
- Taking an **integrated** approach – for us this means thinking about the needs of our customers and working with our partners.
- **Involving** the population in decisions – for us this means engaging with our residents and customers, including the business community and ensuring that we are listening to a wide range of views to inform our thinking.
- Working in a **collaborative** way – for us this means recognising we can achieve more and deliver better services by working as part of a team, for example by working with the Third Sector, Town and Community Councils and neighbouring authorities.
- Understanding the root causes of issues and **preventing** them – for us this means being proactive in our thinking and understanding the need to tackle problems at source for example by undertaking needs assessments to inform our priorities.

These considerations are reflected in the actions we will take as a service to deliver the Council’s priorities.

3.2 Integrated Planning – Managing Our Resources

The following provides a summary of the key priorities for the coming year. The following information has been taken from existing reports including our Workforce Plan 2016-20, sickness absence and staff turnover reports, budget reports and the service Asset Management Plan.

Workforce Development

Key Service Statistics (2014/15)						
Average headcount 2014/15	FTE 2014/15	Average days sick		Average days sickness per FTE	Turnover (no of leavers)	PDR completion rate (%)
		Long term	Short term			
26	22.59	2.83	2.33	5.16	3	100%

As at 9th March 2016, all PDRs for the service have been completed (100%). As at January 2016, the average days sickness absence per full time equivalent was reported as 6.95 against an annual Directorate target of 7.5; this is a slight under performance when compared to the figures for 2014/15 above. In line corporate direction we will review and strengthen the performance management and support arrangements in relation to sickness absence within the service.

It is important that we continue to maintain and develop the workforce necessary to meet future service needs both in terms of the numbers employed and the skills and competency required of those employees.

It remains a priority for Legal Services to continue to support staff development and succession planning despite the pressures of budget and staffing reductions. Our key workforce development priorities for the coming year are:

- Building resilience in our workforce over the next few years to manage the challenges and changes we face in a flexible and sustainable manner which also involves getting the right balance of skill set within teams to make appropriate use of resources;
- Building on existing collaborative working arrangements in order to fully deliver integrated working practices. This requires a greater focus on the flexibility and movement of people and their skillsets across the authority, coupled by the willingness of teams to share resources;
- Continuing to develop succession planning to address issues associated with an ageing workforce and reliance on small numbers of key staff through continuing to support trainee opportunities to ensure there is an pool of appropriately qualified and skilled staffed over the coming years;
- Thinking creatively on how to recruit and retain staff in business critical posts in key service areas;
- Shifting towards developing new skillset/competencies for our leaders that includes focusing on commissioning, contracting, collaboration, project management skills and creative thinking. This also requires leaders that are supportive of change and can demonstrate the willingness to take responsibility and make decisions; and
- Embedding a new culture that better supports the wider change programme (Reshaping Services agenda) and enables our staff to develop a renewed sense of corporate identity.

ICT

In line with corporate direction we continue to use ICT to work smarter and more flexibly. Our significant projects for the coming year are:

- Increasing use of available technology in order to access emails and documentation as well as continuing to utilise home working;
- Focusing on promoting sustainable IT usage by using technology that uses less space and power.

Finance

The budget for our service area is £1,174k (this includes the budget for the Electoral Registration Team).

Over the following three years, the service is required to deliver the following savings:

Scheme	2016/17 (£000)	2017/18 (£000)	2018/19 (£000)	Total (£000)
Legal fees uninsured personal injury claims	50	0	0	50
Community Services legal work- income generation	44	0	0	44
<i>Reshaping Services – Tranche 2 savings for Resources Directorate</i>		1,400		1,400
Total	94	1,400	0	1,494

Italicised figures indicate savings targets that have been set for the whole directorate in which this service area is based.

Agreed savings performance targets will be monitored quarterly from Q1 2016 as part of new corporate health reporting arrangements.

Assets

In line with the Corporate Strategy, we are focussing on ensuring the suitability and sufficiency of our assets to meet service and corporate objectives by targeting any underperforming assets; reducing the amount of accommodation used to deliver services; and identifying opportunities to provide multiple service delivery from an asset (co-location). Our key areas of focus for 2016/17 are:

- In line with the Space Project, reviewing and rationalising existing accommodation needs for Legal Services.

Procurement

In line with corporate guidance we are committed to promoting effective procurement using innovative, sustainable and modern practices to deliver value for money and contribute to the achievement of corporate well-being outcomes. Our significant projects for the coming year are:

- Establishing a framework agreement for commissioning legal advice and support from external barristers in collaboration with other Welsh Unitary Authorities and the National Procurement Service.

Consultation and Engagement

We support the respective Directorates in ensuring that they are engaging with key stakeholders in accordance with legal requirements.

Collaboration and Partnerships

We continue to explore and promote opportunities for working collaboratively locally and regionally in order to deliver improved services for the officers we represent, contributing to the Corporate priorities. Highlighted below are our planned activities for the coming year.

Activity Planned 2016/17	Brief Description of the Purpose and intended outcomes from the Partnership/ Collaborative Activity	Governance Arrangements and Details of Partners
Continued membership of the South East Wales Legal Consortium.	To explore further opportunities for collaborative working to aid an effective and cost efficient legal service.	10 Unitary authorities in South East Wales

Risk Evaluation

Highlighted below are our key risks as a service over the coming year. In identifying these risks we have also shown how we plan to manage them.

Risk	Likelihood Score	Impact Score	Mitigating controls
Loss of experienced staff and their knowledge base as a result of reduced staffing levels.	3	4	A strategic approach to managing budget reductions will be undertaken to ensure that the necessary organisational change is supported and achieved. Implementation of the Workforce Plan. Transfer of skills via shadowing and documentation of processes and procedures.
Risk of not having the skill base to deliver the Reshaping Services agenda.	2	3	Strong and effective programme and project management with realistic goals. Work with external support where the skill base is not available and ensure that there is effective knowledge transfer to equip staff. There will be consideration of skill sets when recruiting into skilled/technical posts. Implementation of staff development initiatives e.g. Leadership Club, Management Competency Framework.
Risk that services will collapse/fail due to inability to deliver alternative models of service delivery as part of the Reshaping Services agenda.	2	2	Strong and effective programme and project management with realistic goals. Monitoring/planning budgets that are aligned to the Medium Term Financial Plan. There will be an ongoing challenge process that involves reviewing performance levels and opportunities to deliver change.
Inability to recruit and retain suitably qualified staff in key areas.	3	4	Development and implementation of the Workforce Plan. Greater emphasis on recruitment of multi-disciplinary staff i.e. graduates/trainees who have a wide range of skills to meet the evolving needs of the Council.
Inability to deliver the Welsh Language Standards and associated fines and reputational damage for non-achievement.	2	2	Continue to raise awareness amongst staff around the requirements of the Welsh Language Standards. A corporate action plan is in place to support us in complying with the Welsh Language Scheme and an annual monitoring report is produced to assess progress in its implementation. The Council's Welsh Language Standards Action Plan will be monitored as part of the annual monitoring report to the Welsh Commissioner.

Scoring Service Risks	
Likelihood score	Refers to how likely it is that the risk will occur, that is, the probability of the risk happening. The scoring ranges between 1 and 4, with 1 being very unlikely, 2 - possible, 3 - probable and 4 being almost certain to happen or has already happened.
Impact score	Refers to what the impact would be if the risk occurred. Again the scoring ranges between 1 and 4, with 1 being low, 2 - medium, 3 - high and 4 being catastrophic. Impact would include things such as financial costs, public wellbeing, environmental/ social impact, damage to reputation, health and safety etc.

Appendix A contains the detailed plan which illustrates the enabling actions we will undertake in the coming year to deliver our priorities. The action plan includes information relating to how we will maximise our key resources through integrated planning in order to achieve our priorities.

Integrated Planning

Our Ways of Working	Long Term	Integrated	Involving	Collaborative	Preventing
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Ref	Action	Outcome & Key Milestones 2016/17	KPI (where relevant)	Officer Responsible	Start Date	Finish Date	Resources Required
CP1	Undertake the preparatory work to ensure the service contributes to finding the £1.4m savings required from the Resources Directorate in 2017/2018.	Proposals for making the required levels of savings are agreed and ready for implementation	Performance targets agreed as part of Reshaping Services projects.	Debbie Marles	01.04.16	31.03.17 (ongoing)	In house legal support, and if necessary due to capacity or lack of in-house expertise, external legal support from the public/ private sector.
CP1	Provide legal support to enable the Council's Reshaping Services Programme timetable and associated Project Plans to be adhered to.	Legal support /advice inform decisions on reshaping projects.	Performance targets agreed as part of Reshaping Services projects.	Debbie Marles	01.04.16	31.03.17 (ongoing)	In house legal support, and if necessary due to capacity or lack of in-house expertise, external legal support from the public/ private sector.
CP2	Review and strengthen the performance management and support arrangements in relation to attendance management.	Reduction in sickness absence rates in 2016/17	Percentage of leavers. (RS/M008) Number days/shifts lost due to sickness absence. (RS/M009)	Debbie Marles	01.04.16	31.03.17	Existing Resources.
WL1	Review of additional resource requirements in the Electoral Registration Team.	Outcomes: Potential for additional funding in the team; or SLA with C1V to be formalised. Milestones: Review workload Review capacity within Team Review any anticipated legislative changes		Debbie Marles	April 2016	November 2016	Existing Resources.
WL2	Increase service resilience by transferring specialist knowledge and	Outcomes: To ensure resilience and a delivery of an effective legal		Victoria Davidson	April 2016	April 2017	Existing Resources.

	legal skills across the legal Service's teams.	<p>services at a time of increasing demand. To meet the challenges faced in delivering an effective legal service in the context of the Council's Reshaping.</p> <p>Milestones: Identify key skillsets Identify means of transferring skills Identify posts and post holders to be skilled-up</p>					
WL3	Implement a succession planning approach that ensures JD / PS defines the requirement of the role and duties appropriately, and continue providing progression opportunities to support the internal movement of staff.	<p>Outcomes: To ensure resilience in the effective delivery of legal services. Retention of knowledge and skills acquired. Equip officers with these skills to meet the future challenges in the context of the Council's Reshaping Services project.</p> <p>Milestones: Review future demands for service Review Job Descriptions and Person Specifications Review Legal Service Structure</p>		Debbie Marles	April 2016	April 2017	Existing Resources.
WL4	Review approaches to increase role flexibility.	<p>Outcomes: Adopt innovative approach to working. Increased resilience.</p> <p>Milestones: Identify key skills Review Job Descriptions and Person Specifications</p>		Debbie Marles	April 2016	April 2017	Existing Resources.

		Review Team Structures					
WL5	Review Solicitors Regulation Authority Compulsory Professional Development requirements, tying the continuing competence process in with corporate needs.	<p>Outcomes: Adopt a new approach to continuing professional development ('CPD') in line with Solicitors' Regulation Authority (SRA) requirements Reflect on practice and identification of training needs and how these might be addressed. Record and reflect on training undertaken. Examples of good practice. Dissemination of training undertaken in line with corporate needs.</p> <p>Milestones: Review SRA options Consult team Implement a consistent approach Arrangements to monitor to be established</p>		Victoria Davidson	April 2016	April 2017	Existing Resources.
WL6	Equip officers with the wide range of skills required to respond to increased service demands across the service as a whole.	<p>Outcomes: Innovative approach to methods of working. Dissemination of knowledge and skills to equip officers in meeting increased demand for Legal Services in the context of Reshaping Services project. Innovative approach to training, and ability to reflect upon best practice</p> <p>Milestones: Engage with staff. Establish programme to</p>		Debbie Marles	April 2016	April 2017	Existing Resources.

		transfer skillsets					
LS	Support the Council's services in responding to the implications of new and emerging legislation.	Accurate and timely information enables informed decision making. The Council and its services respond appropriately and comply with statutory obligations as required.		Debbie Marles	April 2016	April 2017	Existing Resources.
LS	Continue to respond to budgetary savings as targets required.	Savings targets for 2016/17 achieved.		Debbie Marles	April 2016	April 2017	Existing Resources.
AC10	Improve equality monitoring data so that services can make more informed decisions about service delivery	Accurate and timely data which informs proposals and decisions about service delivery. Key milestones: - Service collects and analyses data for use in EIAs and service improvements. - More data included in EIAs to inform decisions.		Debbie Marles	April 2016	April 2017	Officer time/ within existing service resources