

Summary

Hackney Legal Services went through a radical change to streamline its operation, reduce spend and improve the quality of services provided.

Alongside the significant changes, Legal Services have managed high profile cases such as Olympics, Woodberry Down Housing Regeneration, Planning Core Strategy and built a dynamic Childcare Service.

Legal Services' vision is **'to enable and support the Council to provide effective and value-for-money services, and demonstrate to residents that they have power to influence how we deliver the services'**.



London Borough of Hackney
Gifty Edila, LLB, LLM, Solicitor-Advocate
Legal and Democratic Services
Town Hall, Mare Street, London E8 1EA

Great Leadership and Management

The Corporate Director of Legal and Democratic Services is Gifty Edila and until 14 January 2011, the Head of Legal Services was Graham White. Together they transformed the Legal Services team between 2009 and 2011. The Director restructured the service reducing the team from 70 to 55 staff. She created two main teams: Commercial and Litigation. In response to the challenge to reduce the budget, the Head of Legal Services and the Heads of the two main teams, recruited talented and experienced lawyers that resulted in the reduction of Agency staff from 40% of the workforce to less than 3% in just 2 years.

This has saved the Council £816,960. At the same time, the Director introduced quality-monitoring forms. Client satisfaction rating is monitored and some of the comments made by clients are appended to this submission¹.

The Chief Executive, Mayor of Hackney and Cabinet Member for Legal Services have all commented positively about the transformation of Legal Services. Expenditure has reduced, quality has increased and staff morale has increased. In a staff survey 83% said the quality of legal work in Hackney was high and interesting. It is a Lexcel accredited service and we work within a corporate liP accreditation.

The successful overhaul and restructure of Hackney Legal Services and the appointment of a strong top and middle management resulted in key achievements in 2009 and 2010. The streamlining of systems and a rejuvenated practice culture created the capacity to embrace unique problems requiring innovation in relation to transactions involving the Olympic Games and regeneration schemes.

The consolidation of Legal Services into two teams, Commercial and Litigation created multi-disciplinary teams of lawyers, which enables senior managers to act and respond proactively pulling together inter-related legal implications affecting not only the Olympics but also the delivery of excellent services to the organisation.

Innovation and Creativity

Legal Services are at the heart of the organisation. Hackney has won a number of awards for its transformation programme and Legal Services have played a critical role in many of its high profile projects.

We have achieved successes in the following:

- 2010 Decent Homes Procurement
- Anti-Social Behaviour project
- Reduction in Employment Tribunal cases and 100% success rate in employment cases.

¹ Client officer commendations

- One of the first few authorities to complete its Planning Core Strategy.
- Woodberry Down Housing Regeneration project – the largest housing development in Europe and is a 20-year project valued at £1 billion.
- London 2012 Olympics.

London 2012 Olympics

Hackney Council in partnership with four other boroughs, Newham, Tower Hamlets, Waltham Forest and Greenwich are working on one of the most exciting and complex sports project in the East End of London. Hackney is the Accountable Body and its Chief Executive chairs the Chief Executive's Group for the partnership. Hackney Legal Services have taken on the lead for a significant part of the legal work. This is a prime example of shared services between five boroughs.

The innovative legal work has included the following:

- Development of a Memorandum of Understanding between the Five Host Boroughs;
- Development of an Inter - Authority Agreement;
- Setting up of a Joint Committee of the 5 boroughs;
- Looking at a branding agreement;
- Planning issues;
- Joint Local Authority Regulatory Agreement. (JLAR);
- Joint Local Authority Building Agreement. (JLAB);
- Compulsory Purchase Orders and land swap arrangements between the Council and the London Development Agency, including Compensation Agreements;
- Hackney Marshes – complex Commons Consent application to enable the use of the Marshes for Olympic events;
- Advice on sponsorship, branding and trademark issues, including licensing of business;
- Drafting and negotiating Grant Agreements on behalf of the Five Host Boroughs.

The aim of the Olympic Host Boroughs is to host a successful game and more importantly leave a lasting legacy in the boroughs for residents. Initiatives such as improving employment opportunities; environmental improvements; housing and culture are being worked on.

A third of the Olympic site is in Hackney and a significant development in the form of the Media Centre will be located in the borough. This will bring employment as well as business opportunities to the borough.

The complexity of regeneration and procurement within the borough requiring detailed guidance and drafting has not detracted from the Department's ability to respond to innovation required by the demands of Olympic related work. Hackney Legal Services has had critical input in a vast array of work relating to the delivery of the Olympic venues, infrastructure and the hosting of the 2012 Games and the legacy ambitions.

The work involves enormous but exciting challenges for the Legal Team. We have responded to the demands of the role of Hackney Council as the Lead Borough having responsibility to discharge various activities on behalf of the five Olympic Host Boroughs. The need to adapt and innovate partnership working has created many constitutional considerations. Hackney and the Legal Team have taken on a leadership role to ensure vires implications are carefully considered. Legal Services have had significant input to enable the Council to lead the unique Executive Committee of the Five Host Boroughs, which required the assembly of governance arrangements quite different from the local government norm because of the uniqueness of the body in question.

Whilst local government legislation was relied on for executive functions for the basic structure, a unique workable methodology had to be devised relating to overview and scrutiny. This enabled the five Host Boroughs to deal with potential political problems through robust governance arrangement. The legal input provided to support the Lead Authority role is critical to ensure that through a traditional framework, a governance mechanism was devised to meet the political imperative. The relevant bodies and groups consist of:

- Joint Committee of the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympics Host Boroughs;
- Chief Executives' Board;
- Host Boroughs Lawyers' Group;
- 2012 Host Borough Unit.

External partners include:

- The London Organising Committee of the Olympic Games (LOCOG);
- Olympic Delivery Authority (ODA).

The Olympic Team within the Council undertakes work relating to three themes:

- The Games;
- Lasting Legacy;
- Doing the Day Job.

The implementation of the unique joint local authority Regulatory Control Agreement dated 1 June 2009 ("JLAR") pull together the regulatory services of the five Host Boroughs so that services are delivered consistently to achieve a co-ordinated approach which achieve efficient and effective delivery of services e.g. relating to health issues and the management of parks. An officer from one authority can discharge functions on behalf of another Host Borough authority.

The joint local authority Building Agreement dated 7 August 2009 ("JLAB") was critical during the development of the Olympic site to ensure that a uniform building control system was adopted by the Five Host Boroughs. The officers and lawyers within Hackney Legal Services led the negotiation of the terms of the Agreement (on behalf of the five Host Boroughs) and reported to the Host Boroughs Lawyers' Group.

Land compulsorily acquired for the Games will need to be transferred to the Council under various land swap arrangements to meet the Mayor's commitment to return 28 acres as park land after the Games. Legal input and innovative land transactions continue to be progressed to ensure that land adjoining the River Lee is returned to the Council to add value to the Borough post Games.

Appropriate prosecution arrangements relating to the Olympics have been considered to ensure consistency of approach. This involves the control and prohibition of particular activities and trading within exclusion zones adjoining the Olympic site.

Arrangements for joint environmental health procedures and the control of public parks have been implemented to ensure that a common procedure is followed during the Games. These are general local authority functions but to be delivered within the context of the Olympic Games and in a different context within the short period of the Olympic Games.

Further Olympic related work includes, guiding and advising planning officers regarding the Olympic, Paralympics and Legacy Transformation Planning Applications submitted by the ODA. Raising appropriate objections relating to the legacy phase.

Hackney Marshes – a complex Commons Consent application to hold 2012 Olympic related events and cultural activity to include a concert under the Commons Act 2006 Section 38, the National Trust Act 1971 Section 23 and the Ministry of Housing and Local Government Provisional Order Confirmation (Greater London Parks and Open Spaces) Act 1967.

The work of the lawyers within Hackney Legal Services has demonstrated that public sector lawyers can deliver large-scale projects in an innovative, efficient and cost effective manner whilst ensuring that the Olympic programme deadlines are not jeopardised.

Woodberry Down Housing Regeneration

A large-scale housing project to provide a mixed-tenure development to include 1,900 affordable rented and intermediate, well-insulated sustainable homes². The Council will have 100% nomination rights in perpetuity for the social rented element valued at £81.70M with the first lettings to be ring-fenced for existing tenants. Further community facilities include the Skinner's Academy School, children's centre, a training centre, a new community centre, landscape and leisure areas and retail and commercial opportunities. The scheme will consist of nearly 4,600 new homes to include 1,619 private homes.

² Woodberry Down project - photographs

The Council is working in partnership with a private sector developer and a housing association to achieve the entire scheme within 20 years. Works have already started on the Kick-start phases 1 to 4 and planning permission granted for phases 2 to 5. The Skinner's Academy completed in November 2010 and 1,000 homes are already being built.

Complex principal and supplemental development agreements have been negotiated as well as CPO advice; planning; procurement; and housing law work have been undertaken by the legal team in-house and with some external legal advice where appropriate. Residents will benefit from improved housing supply in the area.

Against the background of the additional responsibilities generated by the Olympic Games, Legal Services have demonstrated their versatility to not only provide innovative solutions required by the Games but also continue to successfully progress routine work and other significant projects such as the nationally significant Woodberry Down Regeneration project, primarily through internal resources.

Childcare Cases

Local authorities' childcare services have faced major challenges following recent high profile cases. Hackney, like many authorities, reviewed its practices and quality of staff. Legal Services was no exception and reviewed and restructured its childcare team. Two senior managers took on the challenge of improving the quality of the service and increased client satisfaction. The team is now highly valued and the current Team Leader has achieved a highly acclaimed position of being a member of the Law Society's recognised childcare panel. The courts frequently compliment the team on their work.

The Ministry of Justice identified (during a review of delay in care proceedings) that Hackney Council's legal/client relationship had a successful impact on alleviating delay. The significant improvements and the procedures adopted within the Council are noted to be useful lessons for other London boroughs³.

Impact of the Team's achievements

The most significant achievement has been the reduction in expenditure by £816,960 in staffing costs in the last 2 years since the service was reorganised.

Client satisfaction is 98% in 2010/11. Client feedback is appended to the report.

Significant housing improvement for residents through the Decent Homes Programme and Woodberry Down project.

Limited spend on legal work relating to the Olympics by doing the vast amount of the legal work in-house.

³ Ministry of Justice – Improving Performance case study

By joining the London Boroughs Legal Alliance and the Birmingham City Council's Framework for Solicitors, we have made significant savings on the external lawyers' budget.

We have also generated income through section 106 Agreements and work on commercial properties in the region of £202,000 in 2010/11 to date.

We significantly reduced spend by bringing back in-house debt recovery work that had been externalised. We successfully recovered debt in the region of £1.5 million, significantly exceeding c.£340,000 recovered by the external lawyers in the final year of appointment.

We have two in-house advocates for Litigation cases. This arrangement has proven to be cost effective and value-for-money in presenting some of our cases in court.

Staff morale is very good and we have a dedicated and committed team.

In conclusion, Hackney Legal Services are proud of their achievements to date and continues to improve the service to benefit the community. We are grateful to be able to enter this award to test the service against some of the best legal services in the country.

APPENDICES

Supporting Evidence

THE OLYMPIC STADIUM



WOODBERRY DOWN ESTATE



WOODBERRY DOWN HOUSING REGENERATION

Progress of works – new homes



HOUSING MILLIONS

By James Willsher



THE next step in one of London's biggest regeneration projects looks set to go ahead with another 1,000 homes to be built at Woodberry Down.

A funding package was announced this month for the Council's regeneration programme for the area,

ensuring that it continues through the downturn in the housing market.

The Council is investing over £16million during the next four years, while developer Berkeley Homes has contributed more than £30million. Funding for affordable housing has also been received from the Homes and Communities Agency.

The development programme will deliver a range of new facilities

including a health centre, and retail and commercial opportunities. This follows hot on the heels of the 1,000 homes already being built there, as well as a new community centre and the Skinner's Academy, completed last November.

Planning permission was also granted earlier this month for construction work by Berkeley Homes at the Horston and Sherwood, and Newnton

Close sites, with the next phase of planned work being considered in March, which will together create a total of 226 homes for social renting, 182 for shared ownership, and the remainder for private sale.

Taken together, the funding and planning approval mean that nearly half of the 4,600 homes planned for the 20-year regeneration programme are now either under

construction or due to be built over the next five years.

Cllr Karen Alcock, Deputy Mayor of Hackney, said: "The Council made a pledge to residents that despite the economic climate we would find new and innovative methods with partners to provide housing at Woodberry Down.

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Host borough for
2012 Olympic and
Paralympic Games

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Woodberry Down funding

FROM FRONT PAGE

"The Council's own investment demonstrates our ongoing commitment to one of the largest regeneration programmes in the capital."

She added: "Hackney is also among the top-performing London boroughs for affordable housing provision, and is on course to exceed a three-year total target of

creating 1,961 affordable homes by 2011."

Justin Tibaldi, Managing Director of Berkeley Homes (Capital), said: "We are totally committed to it and will continue to work closely with our partners to ensure that together we deliver the investment necessary to create a real, sustainable community where people will choose to live, and

that provides long-term social and economic benefits for the wider area."

Ruchell Peng, Genesis Regeneration Manager for Woodberry Down, added: "It is a real achievement that the partnership work at this important site is starting to bear fruit and is further proof of Genesis' work to deliver the kind of houses and services

that local communities deserve."

Genesis will acquire and manage around 1,900 of the affordable rented and intermediate homes over a 20 year period. This equates to 41 per cent of the total at Woodberry Down.

The first new homes for social renting are expected to be ready for occupation this spring.

Compliments received by Legal Services

'I feel I need to write to you to praise the outstanding help I've had and it is important to praise professionalism ...'

Resident to the Mayor – Property matter

'the Judge thanked the lawyer in open Court with how the proceedings were efficiently conducted.'

Children Services client

'... called me to tell me how impressed she was with the general litigation team when we met with her and her colleagues recently – and also from casework with the individual fee-earners.'

Property Services client

'I would also like to put on record my thanks to you for the clear advice and support you provided through what was a very complex procurement project.'

Procurement client'

'Thank you for your cogent and meticulous prosecution, which was a great success! Your diligence is much appreciated, as is your continued professional advice. Your approach to the case and support was inspirational.'

Prosecution client

'I am writing to express my appreciation for your speed of response and excellent advice in putting this report together, without which it would not have been possible to get it to Cabinet in time'

Property client

'Excellent work. Well done and my thanks for all the efforts that went into this. It was a challenging project and you managed it skilfully.'

Licensing client'

Children and Community Services Legal Services' Performance

Extract from the Ministry of Justice – Improving Performance case study:

'The London Borough of Hackney has halved the number of cases in which it issues care proceedings and improved its pre-proceedings work and enhanced the reputation of its children's services department, whilst at the same time delivering year-on-year efficiency savings and reducing the council's spending on children's social care.' Hackney Legal Services work closely with the Social Work units'.

Extract from review by London Councils – Hackney approach to Care Proceedings – are there lessons for the rest of London?

'Hackney is doing better than most London boroughs in persuading Courts to agree care plans without unnecessary delays for children and associated costs for the local authority arising from additional assessments'.

'Hackney's performance on timescales has improved markedly and they are currently averaging 51 weeks between application and conclusion of proceedings. (in 2007/08 performance was 74 weeks and in 2008/09 79 weeks). Hackney now undertakes fewer care proceedings than comparable authorities.'

'Hackney Legal Services play a key role in ensuring that Hackney care cases progress well. Their approach is built on strong relationships with the client department and examples of this close working include:

- The principal child-care lawyer meets the head on service on a one to one basis 6 weekly, to address any issue that comes up including performance and attitudinal issues in the respective staff teams.
- Legal services run 3 courses a year on court skills with a barrister conducting mock hearings so social workers get experience of giving evidence and cross examination.'