

SURREY COUNTY COUNCIL**LEADER OF THE COUNCIL****DATE: 16 JULY 2019****LEAD OFFICER: LEIGH WHITEHOUSE, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF RESOURCES****SUBJECT: DISSOLUTION OF THE ORBIS PUBLIC LAW JOINT COMMITTEE****SUMMARY OF ISSUE:**

Surrey County Council has taken the decision to focus on an internal review of its Legal Services function over the next 12 months. As a consequence, it is not currently intended to fully integrate Surrey's legal services within the Orbis Public Law (OPL) partnership with Brighton and Hove City Council, East Sussex County Council and West Sussex County Council. Each authority will retain its own legal service and therefore the OPL Joint Committee will, in reality, serve little purpose and would add an unnecessary administrative layer.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

It is recommended that:

1. The dissolution of the Orbis Public Law Joint Committee is approved.
2. The necessary consequential changes be made to the Constitution.

REASON FOR RECOMMENDATIONS:

There is no current intention to fully integrate the legal services contained within the OPL partnership with Brighton and Hove City Council, East Sussex County Council and West Sussex County Council.

DETAILS:

1. In January 2015, the Leader agreed to the creation of a legal services partnership with East Sussex County Council, Brighton and Hove City Council and West Sussex County Council, to be known as Orbis Public Law (OPL).
2. OPL was established to be a single, resilient, sustainable, cost-effective legal service with the public service ethos and an ability and ambition to grow. OPL was overseen by a Joint Committee, with the partners entering into an inter-authority agreement setting out the basis and terms of the partnership.
3. In January 2018, the OPL Joint Committee endorsed OPL's business plan, which set out its future aims, ambitions and plans. The next intended steps were to implement three key projects:
 - An integrated staffing structure
 - A joint operational budget
 - A single case management platform

4. In the last year, Surrey County Council, the largest OPL partner, has embarked on an ambitious and comprehensive transformation programme. As part of that, Surrey wishes to review its legal services function, and therefore does not consider it right to commit to an integrated staffing structure and pooled budget at this stage. As the three projects are intrinsically linked, this means that Surrey will not take part in any of the key projects.
5. Consequently, the remaining Sussex partners have reviewed their position and have far less confidence in the amount of saving/efficiency that could reality be unlocked, especially when weighed up against the significant disruption that a restructure would entail in a challenging employment market. The outcome is that the Sussex partners have elected not to progress to integration either but instead seek to enhance their collaboration, building on already delivered successes, but without disruption at a time of high demand for services.
6. As there is no longer an intention to fully integrate the legal services contained within the OPL partnership, each authority will retain its own service. All partners consider that the OPL Joint Committee will, in reality, serve little further purpose, would add an unnecessary administrative layer and should therefore be dissolved.

CONSULTATION:

7. Extensive consultation with constituent partners within OPL has taken place. All members are in agreement with the proposed decision and are bringing forward complementary decisions within their own authorities. The decision to not proceed with further integration of legal services has been widely communicated to staff within each constituent authority.

RISK MANAGEMENT AND IMPLICATIONS:

8. There are no risks associated with the decision to dissolve the OPL Joint Committee as the integration is no longer taking place.

Financial and Value for Money Implications

9. It should be noted that of the three key projects only the single case management system had progressed to a point of associated cost to withdraw. The cost to disaggregate the case management system for Surrey County Council is expected to be in the region of £18,000, although this is subject to further discussions with the contractor and agreement with OPL partners.

Section 151 Officer Commentary

10. Surrey County Council is on a major transformation journey and the Section 151 Officer acknowledges that this decision is proposed to enable the Council to review the legal services it needs for the future. The cost can be met from existing budgets.

Legal Implications – Monitoring Officer

11. There are no adverse legal implications associated with dissolving the OPL Joint Committee.

Equalities and Diversity

12. An EIA has not been completed. This is not required as there is no change to a policy, function or service.

Other Implications:

13. The potential implications for the following Council priorities and policy areas have been considered. Where the impact is potentially significant, a summary of the issues is set out in detail below.

<i>Area assessed:</i>	<i>Direct Implications:</i>
Corporate Parenting/Looked After Children	No significant implications arising from this report
Safeguarding responsibilities for vulnerable children and adults	No significant implications arising from this report
Environmental sustainability	No significant implications arising from this report
Public Health	No significant implications arising from this report

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT:

14. Upon approval of the dissolution, the next OPL Joint Committee meeting scheduled for 25 July 2019 will be cancelled, as will all future meetings.

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Consulted:

Orbis Public Law partner authorities

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