



East Cambridgeshire
District Council

Legal Services Delivery Plan 2026 to 2027

Overview of the service

Many of the services provided within the service are statutory (for example, Local Land Charges, FOIA, EIR and GDPR/DPA). The main purpose of Legal Services is to provide a responsive, timely, cost effective and professional legal service, providing quality legal advice to the Council which proactively assists and enables the Council to deliver. The advice given covers a variety of subject areas which include, but are not limited to, the following:

Corporate/corporate governance

Constitutional review, political changes, efficiency, effectiveness and economy, policy reviews/audit.

Corporate Plan 2023 to 2027

Proactively assist and enable other departments to deliver the Corporate Plan 2023 to 2027 by the provision of timely, cost effective, good quality legal advice and assistance.

Planning and development

- planning, committees, Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) developments and appeals.
- negotiation, drafting and completion of planning obligations under s106 Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended) and any related Nomination Agreements
- planning appeals: conducting or supporting external barrister and Planning officers
- Planning Enforcement and Tree Preservation Orders

Property

- acquisition of land and public open spaces
- database support
- enforcement of the s106 Agreement process
- sale of assets at market value
- commercial and residential related conveyancing; leases, easements or licences, release of covenants, redemption of charges and mortgages

Criminal and civil litigation

- bringing or defending proceedings for the Council covering the range of Council functions, for example, food safety, taxi licensing or planning
- car parking enforcement, logging DVLA searches, letters before action, appeals, prosecutions - summonses, witness statements and attendance at court
- sundry debt recovery and any associated litigation for defended matters

Contracts

- preparation and completion of contract documentation in compliance with the Council's Contract Procedure Rules
- review of the Council's Contract Procedure Rules and provision of legal advice on their application

Freedom of Information, Environmental Information Regulations, General Data Protection Regulations/Data Protection

- management and recording of freedom of information requests to ensure compliance with the Freedom of Information Act
- management and recording of data protection requests and reporting to ensure the Council complies with the Data Protection Act/General Data Protection Regulations
- oversee requests and co-ordinate responses
- monitor compliance
- maintenance of central registers
- development of policies and procedures
- training of officers and members and provision of advice and assistance

Quasi-judicial committee support

- reviewing reports, attending and advising at Council and Committee for Licensing, Planning, Finance and Assets Committee and Audit Committee

Local Land Charges searches

- The Infrastructure Act 2015 became law in February 2015 and H M Land Registry ("HMLR") now hold a composite register for England and Wales. They are the sole provider of LLC1 official search results.
- Local authorities now only deal with the more complicated CON29 questions and are responsible for maintaining the composite register.
- The Council is responsible for the registration of items raised by East Cambridgeshire District Council departments, and it remains the Council's statutory function to make sure it is correct as HMLR use the information provided by the Council from the composite register.
- The Council's Local Land Charges team is both an originating authority and a registering authority on behalf of Cambridgeshire County Council, Anglian Water, Historic England and other statutory undertakers. In practice this means the

statutory undertakers makes a request to the Council to register such matters as highways documents, listed buildings/ancient monuments and other legal documents which must be registered as a local land charge against a property.

- As part of the exercise with HMLR, the Council received a new burdens payment which was ring fenced for improvements to the Local Land Charges services. This has been utilised by upgrading systems and software and as a result, the service has been fully digitised since January 2025.

Monitoring Officer

- the Director Legal also acts as the Council's Monitoring Officer, which is a statutory role under the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 and is also a member of the Council's Corporate Management Team
- as Monitoring Officer, the Director Legal provides advice and training to members, parish councils, advice to members on the Member Code of Conduct, Ethical Governance, member interests, investigations into complaints against Members under the Member Code of Conduct and any subsequent determinations and attends committee meetings to provide advice as necessary. The Monitoring Officer also attends board meetings of the local authority trading companies to observe.

The service is operating during a period of significant organisational change driven by the implementation of LGR (local government reorganisation). Officers are supporting governance planning and organisational readiness while continuing to deliver statutory services and provide key legal advice to other Council departments.

This includes participation in an expanding programme of internal and cross-authority meetings, with regular fortnightly coordination sessions reflecting the increasing requirement for legal and constitutional advice, input and support at an early stage of programme development. Balancing business-as-usual responsibilities with transformation activity is increasing workload and complexity. Maintaining the provision of robust and clear legal advice and support throughout this period of change remains a core priority for the service.

How does the service link in with the Corporate Plan?

Legal Services provide ongoing legal support, advice and assistance to all services across the Council and the local authority trading companies (if needed). The team have been involved with key projects in the Corporate Plan, and this will continue into 2026 and 2027 with more projects coming up.

By providing support to all Council services, this provides opportunities to ensure that the Council is making East Cambridgeshire an even better place to live, work and visit.

Legal Services helps to ensure that the Council continues to be customer driven with a pro-business approach and meet its legal requirements.

By providing legal support to the local authority trading companies (as required) and offering a high quality and cost effective land charges service to the general public, the team contribute to the Council being commercially focussed.

Cost of service

The estimated net cost of running the Legal Services department in 2026 to 2027 is £193,292. This includes income received for Local Land Charges searches carried out and income from legal services for fees charged externally, for example, for drafting and negotiating s106 Agreements.

Staffing Information

The Legal Services team currently comprises of 6 staff made up of: 1 Director Legal (and Monitoring Officer), 1 Senior Lawyer (vacant), 1 Lawyer (vacant) 1 Local Land Charges Officer and Paralegal, 1 Land Charges & Legal Support Officer (p/t) and 1 Digital Services & Information Manager (0.66 FTE).

Forward planning for Councillors

Proposed item	Proposed date of decision	Committee
Information Governance annual report	October 2026	Audit Committee
Half year report 2026 to 2027	November 2026	Finance and Assets
End of year report 2026 to 2027	March 2027	Finance and Assets
Service Delivery Plan 2027 to 2028	March 2027	Finance and Assets
Annual Review of RIPA Policies	March 2027	Finance and Assets

Legal Services Delivery Plan 2026 to 2027

This Service Delivery Plan describes what Legal Services will be doing to deliver continuous improvement (service objective). Each performance measure relates to the Council's strategic outcomes and Corporate Plan 2023 to 2027.

Council's Strategic Outcome: Maintain sound finances. Improve systems and practices.

Legal Services' Strategic Objective: Ensure that the Council offers best value for money.

Link to Corporate Plan: Sound financial management.

Performance measure	Target and reporting timescale	Baseline/output from 2025 to 2026	Owner and co-owners
Maximise recovery of legal costs and fees; court costs and fees, contribution to legal costs and disbursements	As identified, annually	Legal Costs recovered £14,183 1 st March 2025 to 28 th February 2026. February 2025.	Director Legal Senior Lawyer Lawyer
Ensure the recovery of court costs and fees attributable to car parking - summons issued and costs recovered in £'s (costs recovered are dependent on the Magistrates' Court choosing to award the full amount of costs requested, fewer costs or no costs at all - ECDC are unable to influence this decision as we can only request full costs are awarded)	100%, annually	90% - £1,366 requested and £1,246 awarded. Costs court recovered £371.50 to 28 th February 2026.	Director Legal Local Land Charges Officer and Paralegal
Ensure the recovery of outstanding debts owed to the Council	100% instructions for recovery: costs recovered in £, annually	59 invoices referred to legal. 29 paid in full, total collected £591,658.22 = 95.87% collected. Further 3 invoices totally £19,000 added; however, as these are civil penalties, should not have been added and have been referred to Environmental Services to chase.	Director Legal Local Land Charges Officer and Paralegal

Council's Strategic Outcome: Customers are at the heart of everything we do.

Legal Services' Strategic Objective: Provide a comprehensive and qualitative legal service.

Link to Corporate Plan: Sustainable Communities.

Performance measure	Target and reporting timescale	Baseline/output from 2025 to 2026	Owner and co owners
Provide legal support for committees when necessary	100% attendance at committees where necessary, annually	100% supported.	Director Legal Senior Lawyer Lawyer

Performance measure	Target and reporting timescale	Baseline/output from 2025 to 2026	Owner and co owners
Ensure car parking appeals and enforcement comply with the following timescales: 80% of appeals responded to within 10 working days 100% within 20 working days	As identified, annually	100% of appeals responded to within 10 working days. 100% within 20 working days to 28 th February 2026.	Director Legal Local Land Charges Officer and Paralegal
Ensure that the timescales set out in the Transparency Code are complied with and manage information data on the Council's website: open data, FOI disclosure log and officer decisions log	100% annually or quarterly for datasets. As soon as received for the FOI disclosure log and officer decisions, annually	100% annually or quarterly for datasets. As soon as received for FOI/EIR disclosure log and officer decisions.	Director Legal Digital Services & Information Manager Local Land Charges Officer and Paralegal
Deliver an effective, accurate and transparent FOI/EIR service	100% of responses within 20 working days (unless the FOI request involves further in-depth research but the service will ensure the customer is kept informed), annually	99% responses in 20 working days* 60% responses in 10 working days Requests: 562 from 1 March 2025 to 28 February 2026 Days to respond: 0 to 5 days = 47% 6 to 10 days = 15% 11 to 15 days = 14% 16 to 20 = 22% 20+ = 1% Clarification = 1% * 100% response rate within 20 working days allows no room for late response. The ICO states that 95% or more requested responded to within 20 working days is considered good.	Director Legal Digital Services & Information Manager Local Land Charges Officer and Paralegal
Deliver a comprehensive Data Protection request service ensuring full legal compliance and accurate responses	100% within one calendar month, annually	131 requests from 1 March 2025 to 28 February 2026. 98.5% responded to within one calendar month * *100% response rate allows no room for late response. 2 late responses due to original request going to Council tax main email rather than ARP data protection.	Director Legal Digital Services & Information Manager

Council's Strategic Outcome: Safe, vibrant and inclusive communities. Community sustainability.

Legal Services' Strategic Objective: Assist and facilitate the Council's corporate priorities to ensure that East Cambridgeshire continues to be a fantastic place to live, work and visit.

Link to Corporate Plan: Sustainable Communities.

Performance measure	Target and reporting timescale	Baseline/output from 2025 to 2026	Owner and co-owners
Proactively assist all services across the Council with issues related to legal requirements	90% within 10 working days, 100% within 20 working days, annually	90% within 10 working days. 10% within 20 working days.	Director Legal Senior Lawyer Lawyer

Council’s Strategic Outcome: Safe, vibrant and inclusive communities. Community sustainability.

Legal Services’ Strategic Objective: Support the local property market.

Link to Corporate Plan: Sustainable Communities.

Performance measure	Target and reporting timescale	Baseline/output from 2025 to 2026	Owner and co-owners
Ensure continuous service delivery for the Local Land Charge service	100% of Local Land Charge searches within 10 working days, 95% within 5 working days, annually	99.49% of searches within 10 working days. 88.5% of searches returned within 5 working days. Between 1 st March 2025 and 28 th February 2026 - average days to respond 4.2 (52.02% of searches returned after 5 days due to other departments answering late or system issues)	Director Legal Local Land Charges Officer and Paralegal

Council’s Strategic Outcome: Be an excellent employer.

Legal Services’ Strategic Objective: Ensure that staff have all the necessary skills to maximise their input to service delivery. Ensure that the Council’s corporate risks are managed effectively and mitigations are put in place to reduce impact.

Link to Corporate Plan: Sound Financial Management.

Performance measure	Target and reporting timescale	Baseline/output from 2025 to 2026	Owner and co-owners
Support the continued professional development of the team to ensure that they are meeting with personal and professional career development opportunities	As identified, annually	The service continues to meet with the professional and statutory requirements for CPD.	Director Legal Senior Lawyer Lawyer Digital Services & Information Manager Local Land Charges Officer and Paralegal

Performance measure	Target and reporting timescale	Baseline/output from 2025 to 2026	Owner and co-owners
Regularly review corporate risks associated with the Council's legal requirements; the current risks to the Authority are as follows: - compliance with the General Data Protection Regulations - Data Protection Act 2018	As identified annually	No data breaches recorded for 2025/26. All legal staff have completed annual compulsory data protection training. In full compliance with GDPR (UK) and Data Protection Act 2018.	Director Legal Digital Services & Information Manager
To actively facilitate and engage with the Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) programme and be operationally ready to transition into the new authority model without service disruption	To provide legal and constitutional advice and 100% attendance at all assigned LGR workstreams by April 2027. Director Legal is Senior Responsible Officer for Key Legal Issues thread of Governance, Democracy, Elections and Civic workstream Ensuring the team are kept up to date with LGR processes and responsibilities including data cleansing, any staff training needed in preparation for LGR, reviewing any contracts, etc.	New Performance Measure	Director Legal Digital Services & Information Manager All staff as required Director Legal

Council's Strategic Outcome: A clean, green and attractive place.

Legal Services' Strategic Objective: Undertake activities which help to mitigate/adapt to climate change.

Link to Corporate Plan: Cleaner Greener East Cambridgeshire.

Performance measure	Target and reporting timescale	Baseline/output from 2025 to 2026	Owner and co-owners
Undertake activities which help to mitigate/ adapt to climate change	As identified, annually	Local Land Charges Officer and Paralegal is part of the Council's Green Team and Courtyard Working Party. 5 of the 6 members of the Legal and Local Land Charges team have undertaken and passed the Carbon Literacy training.	Cross Council activity. All Legal Services team to take part in Carbon Literacy Training.
Legal Services staff to actively seek to reduce paper usage via electronic solutions	10% paper usage reduction	Legal Services achieved 56.44% reduction in paper usage for the period 1 st April 2025 to 31 st January 2026.	Director Legal Legal Services team

