

# Legal firms cast their eye on council teams

**Joe Gregory** shows how the recession has changed private sector perceptions of council lawyers

Councils have always struggled to attract the brightest legal talent turned off by the traditional perception of uninspiring and demoralising working environments and poor pay.

As an experienced legal recruiter, I have heard private practice lawyers sneer at their public sector counterparts and denounce the teams in which they work.

Well they aren't sneering now. The sharp severity of this recession has hit law firms hard. The fact that this recession has been led by the financial services sector, on which most commercial law firms have relied, has led to an unprecedented number of redundancies. This shows no signs of stopping.

Councils are under more financial pressure than ever before. Maintaining front line services in the midst of falling revenue streams and public pressure is becoming increasingly difficult. Could these redundant lawyers help?

Geoff Wild is director of law and governance at Kent CC, and has headed legal services for the last 10 years. He is widely known as an innovator, the man who has led Kent's pioneering,



revenue generating legal services team which is on course to bring in external revenue of around £1.2 million in this financial year.

At this time when revenue-generating parts of local authorities are being affected by the recession and with resources increasingly tight, Mr Wild's model looks attractive – indeed it is being developed in Lincolnshire and Cornwall with other authorities also known to be considering similar

plans. Mr Wild inherited a situation which is broadly similar to local authorities up and down the country today. An under-resourced and poorly motivated workforce, struggling to attract talented lawyers and a high legal spend as a result of outsourced work to law firms.

The key to turning things around was to take away 'the safety blanket' of council funding thus ensuring that the team had to survive in the open market and become much more client orientated.

In a more entrepreneurial environment, Mr Wild was able to attract more talent by a client-driven culture and, as it was self funding, financial packages which could compete with regional law firms.

At Proventure we believe that the private sector's long held perceptions of local authority legal services can be changed. Geoff Wild's model serves as an inspiration and in these gloomy economic times redundant lawyers are more willing to consider careers in the public sector.

A note of caution – with an abundance of talent on the market it is important to make the recruitment process rigorous and robust. Mr Wild

comments that 'we can offer a challenging and rewarding environment but the lawyers have to be guided by some altruism – a belief in doing something for the greater good and an understanding of the public sector.'

Kent has proven that the right legal talent can be attracted and retained. Further with such a team in place the opportunity to sell to other public sector bodies and even the private sector shows that this is something worth investing in.

This money can be pumped back into the front line services we all believe in. As Mr Wild says "these conversations are going on up and down the country, and should not be taken lightly. This has been a very painful process, but the benefits are there for all to see."

With its combination of public sector and legal knowledge Proventure is in an ideal position to help with this "painful process" allowing councils to realise the benefits. ■

*Joe Gregory is an experienced legal recruiter and part of the team at Proventure Consulting, go to [www.proventureconsulting.co.uk](http://www.proventureconsulting.co.uk) or contact Joe on [joe.gregory@proventureconsulting.co.uk](mailto:joe.gregory@proventureconsulting.co.uk).*

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23rd Special focus on Efficiency  
30th Special focus on Adult Care & Health & PPMA issue

### MAY

7th Special focus on Finance  
Whitehall Supplement  
14th Special focus on Children's Services  
Finance Supplement  
21st Special focus on Sustainable Communities  
28th Special focus on Climate Change

### JUNE

4th Special focus on Adult Care & Health  
Whitehall Supplement  
11th Special focus on Children's Services  
Efficiency Supplement  
18th Special focus on Sustainable Communities & CIH issue

25th Special focus on Finance & CIPFA issue

### JULY

2nd Special focus on Sustainable Communities & LGA issue  
Whitehall Supplement  
9th Special focus on Adult Care & Health  
16th Special focus on Climate Change  
23rd Special focus on Efficiency  
30th Special focus on Children's Services

### AUGUST

6th Special focus on Finance  
13th Special focus on Sustainable Communities  
20th Special focus on Adult Care & Health

### SEPTEMBER

3rd Special focus on Finance  
Whitehall Supplement  
10th Special focus on Climate Change

17th Efficiency Supplement  
Special focus on Children's Services  
Finance Supplement  
24th Special focus on Sustainable Communities

### OCTOBER

1st Special focus on Finance & IRRV issue  
Whitehall Supplement  
8th Special focus on Efficiency  
15th Special focus on Adult Care & Health  
22nd Special focus on Children's Services. NC&ASC issue. SOLACE issue.  
29th Special focus on Climate Change

### NOVEMBER

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Whitehall Supplement  
12th Special focus on Adult Care & Health  
Efficiency Supplement