

Good Practice Case Study

EMLawshare's Partnership ethos generates over £3 million savings



East Midlands
Improvement and
Efficiency Partnership



Members of the EM Lawshare Partnership from East Midlands councils and legal partner representatives

EMLawshare: Providing value for money in legal services

East Midlands Lawshare Partnership was brought together in 2006 with the aim of jointly negotiating lower legal costs and advice for member authorities. 13 local authorities initially joined as members.

The Partnership allows strong relationships to be forged with legal firms, significantly reduces legal costs, pools resources to avoid duplication of work and provides accessible legal advice.

Led by a management team, the Partnership now involves an impressive 50 authorities from across the region, an increase of almost 75% over four years, making it the biggest consortium of its type in the UK. Additionally, 72% of all local authorities in the East Midlands eligible to join are now members.

Savings generated to date include a 20% decrease in hourly legal costs and impressive overall savings of over £3 million. The commitment from the local authority members can be shown in the fact that the value of the work being put out to tender has increased from £500,000 to £2.5 million resulting in even more competitive services from law firms.

“Unlike similar initiatives our partnership ethos is the element that underpins the benefits and savings

EMLawshare’s beginnings ▾

The EMLawshare Partnership was initiated in 2005. Nottinghamshire County Council had operated its own partnership arrangement for several years and found that a number of other local authorities across the region were interested in working collaboratively in tendering for legal support and hence set about creating the EMLawshare Partnership.

Clear aspirations

The primary aim of the initial EMLawshare procurement was to ensure that participating authorities would receive a considerable reduction in the hourly rate charged by private sector firms and assist with the legal workload. Other key objectives included:

- Timely support from contracted partners
- Access to legal opinions and professional training

that member authorities in the East Midlands have received through being part of the EMLawshare consortium. This isn’t simply a ‘call-off’ contract, there is a two-way relationship between the consortium and contracted law firms which has resulted in fantastic value-for money.”

Jayne Francis-Ward
Assistant Chief Executive
Nottinghamshire County Council

- Reduced cost of obtaining Counsel opinions via partners sharing data and external research facilities
- Creation of a website for the sharing of legal opinions and other legal information
- Increased productivity through reduced duplication
- Opportunities to establish mini-centres of legal specialisation
- Reduction in training costs, including accommodation and conference facilities for training events

Strong leadership and diverse membership

Since its beginnings, the EMLawshare Partnership has welcomed a variety of members, predominantly district authorities but also counties, unitaries,

fire authorities, Arms Length Management Organisations (ALMOs) and a Transport Secretariat. It would be understandable to expect considerable challenges from such a breadth and diversity of partners. However, it was found that having a management team of four who are mandated to make decisions regarding the consortium works well.

This management team is led by Jayne Francis-Ward, Assistant Chief Executive at Nottinghamshire County Council (and previously the Director of Legal & Democratic Services) and also consists of three representatives from county councils, unitary and district authorities.

Developing the Partnership's success ▾

The first EMLawshare contract in 2005 saw four law firms contracted, and an initial 13 member authorities joined the consortium. It was estimated that £2.5 million in cashable benefits could be made; £3 million worth were made during this four-year period, with a 20% reduction in hourly legal costs.

Following this initial success, the second EMLawshare four-year contract commenced on 1st April 2010; this time the contract encompassed a further 37 members joining, on top of the initial 13. Three of the four initial law firms contracted were retained, alongside two new firms joining the group. The five firms are; DLA Piper based in Birmingham, Weightmans in Leicester, Anthony Collins in Birmingham. Freeth Cartwright LLP, and Browne Jacobson, both Nottingham-based.

Philippa Dempster, partner at Freeth Cartwright LLP says: *“We are delighted to be re-appointed as a partner to this very forward thinking and highly successful consortium.*

“The Consortium has a track record of driving out value for its members and we are looking forward to taking this to the next level.”

Drawing on success

When undertaking the process for devising the second contract, numerous lessons from the first were taken on board to enable an even more beneficial arrangement. These included:

- Being more specific in the brief as to what was required from the law firms
- Gaining further added value activity. For example, the law firms now take the responsibility and the associated cost for running the website
- Partnership statements were outlined to show overarching aims and working ethos

Maintaining costs

Experience from the first contract also allowed the Management Group to gain more value-for-money, assisted by a greater number of members joining and the work being put out to tender increasing from £500,000 to over £2.5 million. Furthermore, undoubtedly, due to the excellent relations built, costs for this contract will remain the same for its duration.

The 'Total Place' Model

EMLawshare wanted to contract firms who could cover all thirteen of the function areas, which form the basis of the contract.

This ethos differs from most other authorities that have a panel and distribute work according to individual function areas. Indeed, one of the principles of EMLawshare is that the 50 members can distribute cases to any one of the five law firms contracted; the firms are secure in the knowledge that with so many members and a significant total spend, they can be assured

of a significant amount of work from being involved. This creates a balanced partnership, which in turn has resulted in additional services provided by the legal firms and thus greater value for money.

As mentioned earlier, Nottinghamshire County Council had been maintaining the EMLawshare website, which provides a forum for the members to share lessons and provide information. The responsibility for this website has now been outsourced to the partnership firms who will now host and fund it, free of charge, saving the Partnership £10,000 per year, a total saving of £40,000 over the next four years.

It is worth noting that most legal work is still maintained in-house with 10% being outsourced. Work is outsourced for two reasons:

- Outsourcing helps to meet these difficult deadlines
- Specialist expertise needed which may not be available in-house

Exemplary value-for-money ▼

The initial primary objective for the EMLawshare was to reduce legal costs and this was clearly achieved. However, the Partnership wanted to offer more than linear savings. This drive has led to additional benefits for both members and the contracted law firms alike:

Training Programme

EMLawshare charges £80 per person, which is a considerable reduction to the fee charged for day courses by external legal training providers. The £80 fee is re-invested into EMLawshare. Thus far 678 members have received training, from lawyers to HR officers on employment related courses to commercial contracts.

Sharing Information

Nottinghamshire County Council record every matter outsourced through the partnership and information on these matters is available to all members through the EMLawshare website. This avoids duplication of work and the cost of new research being carried out, or advice being sought from the law firm when the information is already available. Having a centralised resource also opens communication between members and offers a permanent support tool.

Two-way Partnership

The uniqueness of EMLawshare lies in its emphasis on partnership-working, which has resulted in additional benefits and support. Member authorities instruct law firms individually on individual cases but have the facility of a stable, existing structure and breadth of information to access.

Notably, the partnership law firms have worked extremely well collaboratively, without competitiveness, splitting work and jointly delivering training as well as meeting regularly to update and share lessons.

Added value for members

Being part of an established network like the EMLawshare Partnership

offers bulk discounts, shared information, access to broad legal advice and training. Smaller districts often have considerably smaller legal departments, sometimes with just one person overseeing Legal. Being part of a consortium provides access to advice in the form of 49 other member authorities and five law firms, which offers a huge amount of support and networking opportunities without additional costs.

“EMLawshare is a particularly valuable and practical resource for those working in district or borough councils. I find it very useful to discuss a case with another solicitor from one of the partner firms, to check my approach or thinking without incurring substantial cost. The instruction process is easy to use which is important as often external advice is required when you are facing something for the first time which you are not familiar with and time is against you.”

Anita Bradley
Head of Legal and Member Services
Mansfield District council

Lessons ▾

In its fifth year, the EMLawshare Partnership believes there are key factors that underpin the success of the consortium including;

Partnership Ethos: The Partnership is used so well because it is not simply a call-off contract, there is a genuine partnership ethos underlying the consortium.

Solid working partnerships can undoubtedly be attributed to continuous engagement:

- Activities such as training, pamphlets and newsletters provide added value to being a member of the group and open channels of communication
- The management panel meet at least quarterly allowing for lessons to be shared regularly

- A bi-ennial conference is held for members, practitioners and clients

Member authorities aren't tied in: Obviously it is hoped member authorities will use the consortium's contracted law firms but there is no exclusivity. Authorities are not tied in to use those law firms but they are available if required.

Clarity: From the outset of the initiative, the Partnership made it very clear what they expected from the law firms and they have delivered.

The power of word of mouth: No active recruitment was carried out to disseminate EMLawshare's services, it was through word of mouth from other authorities or law firms themselves suggesting authorities join. This shows that huge marketing budgets aren't necessary as people naturally talk about good service.

Future developments ▾

EMLawshare aims to remain contained in the East Midlands but still has hopes for building on its fantastic achievements thus far. Primarily:

- It aims to expand its reach with other public sector bodies, for example, a number of Primary Care Trusts (PCTs) in the East Midlands are showing interest in being partners

- To appoint a part-time administrator, self-funded by the EMLawshare Partnership



The EMLawshare Management Team

To see a short video case study about EMLawshare visit the EM IEP TV section of our website at: www.eastmidlandsiep.gov.uk

Notes ▾

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East Midlands Improvement and Efficiency Partnership Case Studies

The East Midlands Improvement & Efficiency Partnership (EM IEP) is committed to celebrating the successful, innovative and imaginative project work that exists in the East Midlands region.

The EM IEP Support Team publish case studies showing how East Midlands councils are improving services, and delivering significant improvements and efficiencies.

The case studies are intended to inspire councils in the region, and indeed nationally, to transform services and benefit from the processes developed by those councils that have pioneered the way forward.

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