

## **Joint Commissioning of Legal Advice Services in Gloucestershire**

The five councils in Gloucestershire working together to jointly procure community legal advice services across the county have this week agreed to defer the tendering of these services for the immediate future.

Gloucester City Council, Cotswold District Council, Stroud District Council, Forest of Dean District Council and Gloucestershire County Council have all been involved in a joint initiative with the Legal Services Commission (LSC) to create a new legal advice services network in Gloucestershire which was due to be open to tender this month.

Together, the LSC and the Gloucestershire councils currently fund community legal advice services through local providers such as the Citizens' Advice Bureau, Shelter and the Gloucester Law Centre. These services range from the provision of general advice to more specialist advice on complex matters such as debt, housing, welfare benefits, employment and community care. Through the LSC this also includes advice and litigation services for those who are eligible for legal aid.

Following extensive discussions between the councils and the LSC, it has been agreed that it would be more appropriate to defer the tendering of the service contract until 2012. This will allow time to establish a clearer and more up to date picture of both local need and current service provision.

This will also enable alternative approaches to procurement to be considered. The councils and LSC will be looking at different approaches to ensure that the partnership demonstrates the best value and quality of services for local residents.

In the interim period, councils will seek to extend their current arrangements with service providers for the current year, with a view to moving towards a more joined-up approach from next year on.

The LSC will continue with a separate tendering process for the legal aid services it presently funds over the coming months with the aim of putting new contracts in place for these in each area of the county by April 2010.

Beyond that, councils in Gloucestershire will continue to work both together and with the LSC towards a potential full-scale commissioning exercise in 2012.

24<sup>th</sup> June 2009