



LOCAL
GOVERNMENT:
THE LEGAL
DEPARTMENT
OF THE
FUTURE



Lawyers in local government are pragmatic, solution-focused and adaptable. Fortunate, because they face perhaps the greatest challenges of any group of in-house lawyers. On their side, they have the advantage of scale, are more accustomed to collaborating with peers than their private sector counterparts, and they have a breadth of legal knowledge that should allow them to apply innovations from one practice area in others.

Here we look at their greatest challenges, some solutions to those challenges, and how technology will fit into the changing landscape of local government services. Local government lawyers face a difficult environment, but there are areas where new approaches might relieve the pressure.

THE PRESENT: 7 KEY CHALLENGES

1. INCREASED DEMAND FOR WORK

SOLUTION: Optimise existing resources, including your [technology solutions](#). Are current resources deployed effectively and department-wide? Could your current solutions be rolled out to a wider group?

2. PRESSURE TO DELIVER THE DAY-TO-DAY MAKES IT HARD TO FOCUS ON LONG-TERM, COMPLEX PROJECTS

SOLUTION: Identify strategies to reduce demand by pre-empting client needs. Try to deliver training and materials that are genuinely enabling, such as checklists and step-by-step guides. This [checklist](#) helps local government lawyers through a witness statement made in proceedings for a child arrangements order; [this collection](#) gathers resources relating to the EU referendum and its legal implications.

3. INCREASING COMPLEXITY OF WORK

SOLUTION: Maximise your use of technology. You can leverage online know-how to be better leveraged to create template work-flows. That should save your staff time, and enable clients to self-serve.



4. TRAINING DE-PRIORITISED DUE TO PRESSURE ON STAFF TIME AND BUDGETS

SOLUTION: You can meet some of your training needs from online resources, such as [webinars](#) and [videos](#), as well as regular [updates and digests](#). Online resources can help to fill the gap vacated by a diminished training budget.

5. BUDGETARY PRESSURES IMPACTING PROVISION OF PUBLIC SERVICES

SOLUTION: Maximise your use of collaborative networks. Can you share best practice beyond immediate shared services partners? Use online resources to meet day-to-day needs – both know-how and [Practical Law's Ask](#) service can help support your research.

6. INEXPERIENCED STAFF/RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION PRESSURES

SOLUTION: Invest time in process-mapping to help guide junior staff and clients do the right work, at the right time. Document automation can help with this as it guides the user through questions that highlight risks and potential pitfalls, showing how drafting changes accordingly.

7. FUTURE PLANNING IS CHALLENGING, GIVEN THE CHANGING POLITICAL LANDSCAPE

SOLUTION: Follow developments in other organisations – public and private – to identify creative solutions. For information on the legal market and where it's heading, follow [@TRLegalUKI](#) and [blogs.thomsonreuters.com/legal-uk](#). For ideas on legal practice management, visit the [In-house resource centre](#).

THE CHANGING LANDSCAPE: HOW CAN TECHNOLOGY HELP?

Technology can help make your department more efficient while retaining the quality your stakeholders have come to expect. There are key recent developments that will go a long way towards improving your work.

1. WORKFLOW AND PROCESS-MAPPING

Identifying tasks, who performs them, and expected outputs allows the legal department to identify areas for improvement, embed quality and efficiency, make resourcing decisions, and provide guidance to junior staff. Matter management and e-billing or [tracking software](#) can help keep projects on track.

2. DOCUMENT AUTOMATION

By automating your key documents, you can embed best practice and help clients to help themselves. This frees up lawyers to focus on value-added work. It also helps guide junior lawyers to complete complex document sets, and has [immediate ROI impacts](#).

3. E-FILING

Councils are taking advantage of e-filing to reduce time, paper usage, and transport costs. Court authorities are rolling out [mandatory e-filing](#) in some venues, indicating the direction of travel for the industry.



EMERGING TECHNOLOGY #Cloud computing

Using remote servers hosted online to store, manage and process the firm's data and services, rather than a local server or computer.

4. ONLINE COURT

The *online court* presents threats and opportunities to local government. More litigants in person are likely, but if it works well, a robust triage process and a reduction in the number of hearings could save time and money.

5. CLOUD-BASED SOLUTIONS

Using cloud-based solutions makes it easier and cheaper for local authorities to innovate, by accessing technology that is hosted remotely. Cloud solutions also mitigate the risk posed by data silos – instead of being housed in a council-owned building, vulnerable to floods, fire or any other hazards, the security of data is entrusted to specialists with more robust cyber-security defences.

UK companies using hosted/cloud-based services:

48% 2010 84% 2015

Projected spend in 2019:

\$54.6 bn

Global spend on cloud IT infrastructure, 2015:

\$33.4 bn

77% of businesses cite security as a concern when moving to the cloud

99% ...of business **never** experience a breach there



In 2015 the FBI moved its criminal information to the cloud using **Microsoft Azure**



	+	ADVANTAGES
Access-anywhere data is more suited to modern workflows	↑	
Specialist providers offer better security and back-up in case of data loss	↑	
Connectivity/service outages could cut off access to your data	↓	RISKS
Cloud data stored in US servers can be legally accessed by the US government	↓	
	-	



THE FUTURE: NEW TECH THAT WILL IMPACT LOCAL GOVERNMENT

1. MACHINE LEARNING AND ANALYTICS

Programmes are becoming more readily available to lawyers that *crunch vast amounts of data* to pre-empt risk and identify performance/compliance breaches. Commissioning organisations will increasingly rely on analytics that show what works in practice to inform commissioning decisions. Machine learning technology using natural language processing could also be deployed by public bodies to power chat bots that provide advice to the public on thousands of subjects, from healthcare and planning to enforcement issues.

2. MOBILE TECHNOLOGIES

Many public services can be delivered, ordered and reported on by using mobile technologies. They are already being used in public services – for example, to pay rent, parking fees or track a user's health – and their use will continue, inevitably including the delivery of legal services.

3. AUTOMATION

Cars, buses, and legal documents alike will all face full-scale automation. That presents opportunities and threats to our communities to which local government will need to respond. For example, is your local road and parking infrastructure equipped to cope with driverless cars?

4. ROBOTS!

Beyond the realm of science fiction, robots are already having a positive impact in *nursing homes* and *hospitals*, innovatively meeting needs around social care and mental health. *Schools* have also begun to experiment with robotic technology. Could they also help with the delivery of other public services?

FIRST STEPS: EMBRACING THE FUTURE

All these developments make it inevitable that the local authority legal department of the future will be dramatically different. Local government lawyers can meet that challenge in their day-to-day work by committing to the working practices that will make that change work for your team, and for your clients:

- Systematise know-how by using legal research resources and embedding team members' experience into your drafting.
- Empower clients to self-serve by implementing document automation solutions.
- Go paperless by implementing end-to-end matter management systems, with digital case files from start to finish.
- Drive innovation by exploring new ideas and embracing meaningful change.



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