



Food for Thorpe

✔ **Following the recent launch of the latest LGPS Legal Services Framework, Tom Dunstan talks to National LGPS Frameworks head of operational services and support, Leon Thorpe, about how this new framework is different and how it works in detail**

Can you describe how LGPS Legal Services Framework works?

Every pension scheme, on occasion, needs to source specialist professional advice and services. In doing so, the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS), and other public service schemes, must also ensure that they comply with local and public procurement regulations.

Public sector procurement is subject to a legal framework, which encourages free and open competition and value for money. Whilst public contracts regulation compliance brings benefits and safeguards, procurement exercises can also be time consuming and expensive for all parties.

A procurement framework therefore can help. It is an agreement put in place with a provider or range of providers that enables buyers to place orders for services without running lengthy full tendering exercises. Setting up and using procurement frameworks that are fully compliant with public sector procurement regulations and best practice can be an efficient way of supporting access to already competed specialist services, either by further competition or direct award, saving significant time and money for all parties.

The most recent National LGPS Framework is the new Legal Services Framework. This framework will be available for the LGPS to use for four years until January 2027, and contracts can be let under it for a period of up to seven years (so to January 2030 at the latest).

LGPS funds, pools and employers (as well as other public service pension schemes) can use this framework to procure pensions related legal support and advice, either through further competition or where appropriate via direct award, across a range of service areas and jurisdictions.

Can you detail exactly how the previous Legal Services Framework affected schemes and what effect you believe the new framework will have?

The LGPS operates in an ever-increasingly complex legal environment, and this isn't likely to change any time soon! Funds, pools and employers are accountable to all their stakeholders. The legal framework helps the LGPS to swiftly access the already market-tested specialist legal support and advice that is essential for maintaining the high standards of integrity and compliance, performance and service to scheme members and employers.

How is this new framework different to the previous one?

The starting point for each new framework is to reflect on lessons learnt from the ones that went before. All framework users and service providers are invited to share their experience, particularly of what worked well and what could be improved. This helps make sure we design frameworks – from service specification, pricing models and terms and conditions through to call off and supporting documentation for the user – that are as fit for purpose as they can be.

The National LGPS Frameworks are here to make life easier, to support the LGPS effectively and efficiently access the services it needs. Ultimately, if a framework isn't fit for purpose, it won't get used and we will have wasted fund and pool officers valuable time and money. So we hope all frameworks are an improvement on the ones they replace!

Are there any aspects of the framework in which you think that it falls short?

The Specification of Requirements for each framework is developed by officers, or 'founders' (the LGPS/pools that work with us to set up a framework), at LGPS funds and pools who have the expert understanding of the scope, challenges and complexities of the services they require. We try to make sure that each framework is supported by a range of founders who ensure that the framework is designed to be flexible enough to meet the diversity of funds and pools needs and is also as future proof as possible.

We also undertake extensive engagement with the marketplace before the formal tender process starts, which also helps ensure that each framework not only delivers what users need but also works for providers.

Can you explain the framework's 'lots' and how they work?

'Lots' are used to break down the services into more specialist areas. This helps ensure that we can attract a good mix of specialist providers to the framework ensuring both breadth and depth is available to framework users.



On the legal framework, the founders identified seven service areas, or 'lots'. These were chosen to reflect user requirements. The resulting structure means that users have the choice of procuring a provider who can meet all their service requirements, or have access to providers who may specialise in particular areas. The lots also reflect the differing legal regimes in England and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

There is no limit on the number of providers who can bid to be in each lot, and providers can bid to be on one, some, or all Lots if they think they are qualified. The founders test each bid against the specification of requirement for each 'lot' individually.

I understand that emphasis has been placed on making the framework as accessible as possible. How has this been achieved?

There is a small joining fee to use most

National LGPS Frameworks. The frameworks operate on a not-for-profit basis and this goes towards helping recover the set-up costs and administration of the framework.

The legal framework particularly though is used a lot for relatively small, discrete pieces of work, often needing a quick turnaround time. The founders therefore wanted to make accessing this framework as easy as possible and so decided to not have a joining fee for this framework. This means that all funds and pools can sign up once and then use it as needed over the lifetime of the framework, without any delay.

Are the 12 legal providers enough to support the framework?

All the National LGPS Frameworks, including the latest Legal Services Framework, are multi-provider, allowing several qualified providers to be on the framework.

When designing a framework the founders consider experience from previous frameworks, market research and feedback, and of course use their own experience and understanding of the marketplace.

We always aim to ensure that there is a diverse range of providers, but not so many that the framework becomes inefficient to use.

It is a competitive process to secure a place on a framework. Bids are initially assessed to remove providers who cannot meet the fundamental requirements (for example financial standing and track record requirements). Remaining bids are then taken forward for evaluation by founders. Competition is a combination of quality and price, and only providers who meet the minimum quality standards can be awarded a place on the framework.

Written by Tom Dunstan