

Councillor Couros - QoN - Expenditure on Legal Services

Tuesday, 14 July 2026
Council

Council Member
Councillor Mary Couros

Public

Contact Officer:
Anthony Spartalis, Chief Operating Officer

QUESTION ON NOTICE

Councillor Mary Couros will ask the following Question on Notice:

'Can the Administration provide a report outlining:

1. The total expenditure on legal services for the past 3 years
2. The amount separated and detailed by:-
 - o external legal advisers;
 - o barristers and senior counsel;
 - o litigation and court proceedings;
 - o employment and industrial relations matters;
 - o governance and general legal advice
 - o and any other advice provided with description for advice requested
3. Detail which legal firm provided advice on each item?'

REPLY

1. The total expenditure on legal services for the years 2023/24, 2024/25 and 2025/26 are below. This includes costs of provision of legal services by external providers, and excludes costs which may flow from legal outcomes (for example payments from Council ordered by a court resulting from conclusion of a legal case).
 - 1.1. 2023/24 - \$1.167 million
 - 1.2. 2024/25 – \$0.886 million
 - 1.3. 2025/26 (preliminary) - \$1.020 million
2. A summary of Council's legal expenditure over the requested period has been provided below.

Type	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26
Aquatic Centre advice	61,245	14,191	10,800
Conflict of Interest Advice	5,315	-	-
Court of Disputed returns	26,497	23,698	-

Elected Member Behaviour / Complaint	73,323	64,830	38,072
Elected Member Training	3,890	-	1,030
Employment Relations	160,882	269,838	215,694
Freedom of Information advice	37,162	38,354	33,171
General Advice	637,986	265,851	467,873
Kadaltilla Trademark	800	-	-
Land Management Agreement	14,327	29,358	90,954
Land Management Agreement advice	-	795	-
Lease agreement advice	8,081	13,051	13,945
Legal representation for expiation dispute	11,311	500	6,393
MotoGP	-	-	4,578
North Adelaide Golf Course	-	16,717	39,117
Procurement contract advice	59,857	34,301	7,770
Rating Advice	17,258	5,525	25,750
Section 270 Review	23,903	72,253	25,515
Trademark	2,737	9,735	19,542
Legal Dispute	19,663	22,015	2,397
Voters Roll Advice	2,652	4,957	17,430
Grand Total	1,166,889	885,969	1,020,030

3. The breakdown requested of external legal advisers engaged during the period has not been provided, as these are matters of commercial confidentiality. The providers would each need to be consulted and approve release of details in relation to their engagement.
4. Council approved a panel of legal advisers on 24 June 2025, for a three year period with two possible two year extensions (3 + 2 + 2). Except where further ad hoc specialist legal advice is required beyond that defined in the panel agreement, firms listed in the City of Adelaide's legal services panel are used to provide all external legal advice, in accordance with Council's Procurement Policy.
5. Legal services firms listed on the panel are Cowell Clarke; Minter Ellison; Norman Waterhouse; Mellor Olsson; Wallmans; and Kelliedy Jones.
6. Council's legal expenditure reflects the breadth, complexity and regulatory obligations associated with operating a large and diverse local government organisation.
7. Legal services are engaged across a wide range of functions, including governance, planning and development, property transactions, procurement, employment matters, behavioural matters, regulatory compliance, litigation, risk management and statutory decision-making.
8. Legal advice is obtained through two primary mechanisms:
 - 8.1. **Specialist legal advice** commissioned directly by individual business units where specific expertise is required to support operational or project outcomes; and
 - 8.2. **General legal services** managed through the corporate legal budget to support organisation-wide governance, compliance and advisory requirements.
9. As a result, legal expenditure is distributed across multiple cost centres, projects and operational areas, reflecting the varied nature of Council's activities. Providing a more detailed breakdown of legal costs by matter, subject area, legal practitioner or individual advisor is considerably more complex again.
10. Given the breadth and complexity of Council's operations, the volume and variety of legal invoices received over a three-year period is substantial. Many invoices relate to multiple matters and may include disbursements and third-party costs, such as barristers' fees, expert advice, court filing fees and other associated legal expenses, which are not always separately coded within Council's financial systems.
11. Producing a comprehensive analysis at a more granular level would therefore require a significant manual review of invoices, supporting documentation and financial records to accurately attribute costs to individual matters and service categories. This work would involve reviewing, interpreting and categorising historical records to ensure expenditure is appropriately allocated and reported.
12. It is estimated that this work would require the equivalent of approximately one full-time employee for a minimum period of two months to review, reconcile and categorise the relevant records.

13. Undertaking this work would require the reprioritisation of existing work programs and resources to accommodate the request, and Council should therefore consider the additional value of the information sought relative to the organisational resources required to produce it.

Staff time in receiving and preparing this reply	To prepare this reply in response to the question on notice took approximately 15.5 hours.
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