



DISTRICT COUNCIL

Despatched: 25.03.13

SERVICES SELECT COMMITTEE

04 April 2013 at 7.00 pm

Conference Room, Argyle Road, Sevenoaks

AGENDA

Membership:

Chairman: Cllr. Davison Vice-Chairman: Cllr. Brown

Cllrs. Abraham, Mrs. Ayres, Ayres, Ball, Mrs. Dibsdall, Edwards-Winsler, Fittock, Mrs. George, Horwood, Neal, Mrs. Parkin, Pett, Piper, Raikes, Scholey, Miss. Stack and Towell

	<u>Pages</u>	<u>Contact</u>
Apologies for Absence		
1. Minutes	(Pages 1 - 6)	
Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 14 January 2013.		
2. Declarations of interest.		
Any interests not already registered		
3. Formal Response from the Cabinet following matters referred by the Committee and/or requests from the Performance and Governance Committee (if any)		
4. Actions from the Previous Meeting	(Pages 7 - 8)	
5. Future Business, the Work Plan 2012/13 (attached) and the Forward Plan.	(Pages 9 - 12)	
Members will develop a schedule of work over the year to reflect the terms of reference of the Committee focussing on the Council's priorities for policy development. This includes opportunities to invite other organisations who provide services in the District to provide information to the Committee and discuss issues of importance to the Community.		
6. SDHR amended Allocation Policy and Sevenoaks District Tenancy Strategy - Update		Pat Smith Tel: 01732 227355
Verbal update		

- | | | | |
|-----|--|-----------------|---------------------------------------|
| 7. | Under Occupation of Social Housing Action Plan review
Verbal Update. | | Pat Smith
Tel: 01732 227355 |
| 8. | Scope and terms of reference of the in-depth scrutiny review of Rural Broadband | (Pages 13 - 16) | Lesley Bowles
Tel: 01732 227335 |
| 9. | Localising Support for Council Tax - Update | (Pages 17 - 22) | Adrian Rowbotham
Tel: 01732 227153 |
| 10. | Renewal of Swanley Local Office contract with Swanley Town Council | (Pages 23 - 26) | Amy Wilton
Tel: 01732 227280 |

EXEMPT ITEMS

(At the time of preparing this agenda, there were no exempt items. During any such items which may arise, the meeting is likely NOT to be open to the public.)

To assist in the speedy and efficient despatch of business, Members wishing to obtain factual information on items included on the Agenda are asked to enquire of the appropriate Director or Contact Officer named on a report prior to the day of the meeting.

Should you require a copy of this agenda or any of the reports listed on it in another format please do not hesitate to contact the Democratic Services Team as set out below.

For any other queries concerning this agenda or the meeting please contact:

The Democratic Services Team (01732 227241)

SERVICES SELECT COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting held on 14 January 2013 commencing at 7.00 pm

Present: Cllr. Brown (Vice-Chairman in the Chair)

Cllrs. Brown, Mrs. Ayres, Ayres, Ball, Mrs. Dibsdall, Horwood, Neal, Mrs. Parkin, Pett and Miss. Stack

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs. Davison, Abraham, Edwards-Winser, Fittock, Mrs. George, Piper, Raikes, Scholey and Towell, Mrs. Clark and Fleming

Cllr. Brookbank was also present.

30. Minutes

Resolved: That the minutes of the meeting of the Services Select Committee held on 1 November 2012 be approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

31. Declarations of interest.

Councillor Mrs Parkin declared that she had relatives in social housing.

32. Formal Response from the Cabinet following matters referred by the Committee and/or requests from the Performance and Governance Committee (please refer to the minutes as indicated):

a) Kent Joint Municipal Waste Management (Cabinet 08.11.12 Minute 49)

A Councillor suggested that changes to the operation of the Household Waste Recycling Centres was a significant issue that frequently affected people. The Committee agreed that County Council Members should be invited to a future meeting to provide an update on the issue.

Action 1: That County Council Members be invited to a future meeting to provide an update on changes to the operation of the household waste recycling centres operations

b) 2013/14 Budget and Review of Service Plans (Cabinet 06.12.12 Minute 38)

Noted.

33. Actions from the Previous Meeting

Action 1 – Rural Broadband – The Vice-Chairman reported that the Chairman of the Environment Select Committee had agreed to the Services Select Committee undertaking an in-depth scrutiny review of rural broadband. The Committee

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agreed that the scope of the scrutiny review and potential terms of reference should be considered at the April 2013 meeting.

Action 2: That the scope and terms of reference of the In-depth Scrutiny Review of Rural Broadband be considered at the Services Select Committee in April 2013.

Action 2 – Localisation of Council Tax Support – Members noted that a further update would be provided later in the meeting.

34. Future Business, the Work Plan 2012/13 (attached) and the Forward Plan.

The Vice-Chairman reported that the Business Rates Retention Item would be moved to the June 2013 meeting and the Benefits Performance item would be moved to the November 2013 meeting. This would enable the September 2013 meeting to be cancelled.

The Vice-Chairman also reported that that the Committee would undertake a review of the Tenancy Strategy on June 2013.

A Member requested that the Committee receive an update on Universal Credits in November 2013 and another Member suggested that this be linked to an update on the impact of changes to benefits on the housing service.

(See Minute 35 and Minute 36 for further updates to the work plan)

35. Sevenoaks District Tenancy Strategy and Sevenoaks District Housing Register Allocations Policy

The Head of Housing and Communications presented the report which covered the District Council's proposed Tenants strategy and the approach to the current welfare reform whilst ensuring that the District's limited affordable housing supply would go to those deemed in most need (with more emphasis now through the Allocation policy on local connection and employment) and that future rent revenues were fair but maximised opportunities for Registered Social providers to generate funding for the provision of new social sector housing. The Head of Housing and Communications reported that that Allocation Policy was developed in conjunction with the local community and local providers through consultation. Its main purpose is to identify fairly who should have priority on the Register for rehousing and this is to be undertaken by using 4 bands instead of points, in line with rest of Kent. Members were also provided with an update on the on-going work with West Kent Housing Association surrounding the Housing Register. West Kent HA had agreed to manage the Register for a further 2 years from 1st April 2013. Officers and West Kent HA would be undertaking a review of people currently on the register and hoped to reduce it by half to around 1000. There were many registered who would not be re housed in the near future and they would be given other options to consider.

The proposed Tenancy Strategy would also be trialled on a 10% sample of the Housing Register. An update on this trial would be provided to the June 2013 Committee.

The Head of Housing and Communications reported that the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Balanced Communities had also reviewed the Housing Register Allocations Policy and had suggested that paragraph 1.1 be amended to read:

“Anyone living in the United Kingdom who is at least 18 years old, and who is applying for a social housing property to use as their only or principal residence and who has a local connection to the Sevenoaks District, may apply to the SDHR.”

The Committee endorsed the amended wording.

Public Sector Equality Duty

Members noted the equality impacts arising from the report on the Sevenoaks District Housing Register Allocations Policy and Tenancy Strategy. Members noted that there was no adverse impact with regards to the Tenancy Strategy. With regard to the Sevenoaks District Housing Register Allocations Policy, Members noted that there would be sections of the Community who would be considered to have a greater need than others and therefore would be allocated more priority to assist them to achieve rehousing more quickly.

The Vice-Chairman welcomed the inclusion of the greater emphasis on local connection to Sevenoaks in the new banding systems.

Members considered the Housing Register Allocations Policy and the Priority Banding System and a Member highlighted that there appeared to be very little support for young working people on low wages. Members stressed that they felt that the policy should be clearer in rewarding people in work and should accommodate employment, for example where possible, workers should be found accommodation which enabled them to keep working. The Head of Housing and Communications responded that Officers recognised the issues and continuously sought solutions. The Council offered a Deposit Bond Scheme and encouraged tenants to consider housing which was outside the District. Younger people were also encouraged to consider shared ownership opportunities and the Council was also looking to establish a Single Persons Scheme and Officers were investigating a suitable site for this. Intermediate rental properties were also available.

In response to a question, the Housing Manager, reported that people with no access to the internet would be able to obtain information through the Council's magazine, In Shape; information would also appear in local newspapers; West Kent Housing Association would also be writing to people on the Housing Register and, if required, customers could be sent personalised sheets of suitable properties that were available.

Members also considered the need for suitable temporary accommodation across the District. A Member stressed the importance of consideration being given to where affordable housing was located. The Vice-Chairman suggested that the Group Manager – Planning be invited to attend the June 2013 Committee meeting to provide an update on Section 106 money and comment on social and affordable housing across the District.

Action 3: That the Group Manager – Planning be invited to attend the June 2013 Committee meeting to provide an update on Section 106 money and comment on social and affordable housing across the District.

Resolved: That the adoption of the Sevenoaks District Tenancy Strategy and Sevenoaks District Housing Register Allocations Policy be supported subject to the comments above, and both documents be RECOMMENDED to Cabinet for approval as District Council policy.

36. Localising Support for Council Tax

The Group Manager – Financial Services, provided an update to the Committee on Localising Support for Council Tax explaining that Council Tax Benefit was a national scheme administered by local authorities but funded by central Government. From 1 April 2013 each billing authority would need to have a local scheme for Council Tax Support, and pensioners would be fully protected under the new scheme. Government funding would be 10% less than under Council Tax Benefit.

Billing authorities (SDC) and Major Precepting Authorities (MPAs) – KCC, Fire, Police, would be affected by the new Scheme. The Government had previously stated that Town and Parish Councils would not be affected but this was no longer the case.

The Scheme for Sevenoaks had been approved by Council on 27th November 2012. The scheme consists of the following:

- Agreement to operate for three years.
- Standard reduction to their discount of 18.5% on all non-pensioner claimants – reduced to 8.5% in first year; (i.e. currently receive 100% CT benefit, then receive 91.5% CT support)
- MPAs would pay £125,000 to each billing authority for administration, collection and recovery costs;

Officers would write to all affected residents at the end of January. Two different letters would be sent informing people of the new scheme, giving them a simple example of the scheme and outlining where they could obtain financial and budgetary advice. One letter would be sent to those paying Council Tax for the first time and one letter to those paying increased Council tax. The letters would also ask service users to reply stating which payment option they would like to choose. A further letter will be sent to those who had failed to respond towards the end of February. Information on the new Scheme would be included in Council Tax bills and an article would appear in the Council's magazine, Inshape. Some of the £125,000 from MPAs would be used to pay for additional staff to provide support for part of the year.

A Member requested that information be provide to the Committee regarding the qualifying criteria for full Council Tax Support. The Group Manager – Financial Services agreed to circulate this information following the meeting.

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Action 4: That information regarding the qualifying criteria for full Council Tax Support be provided following the meeting.

Resolved: that a further update be provided to the Committee in April 2013.

THE MEETING WAS CONCLUDED AT 8.24 PM

CHAIRMAN

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ACTIONS FROM THE MEETING HELD ON 14.01..13			
Action	Description	Status and last updated	Contact Officer
ACTION 1	That Kent County Council Members be invited to a future meeting to provide an update on household waste recycling centres operations	Has been added to the work plan.	Richard Wilson
ACTION 2	That the scope and terms of reference of the in-depth scrutiny review of Rural Broadband be considered at the Services Select Committee in April 2013.	Has been added to the work plan.	Joe Middleton
ACTION 3	That the Group Manager – Planning be invited to attend the June 2013 meeting to provide an update on Section 106 money and comment on social and affordable housing across the District.	Had been added to the Work Plan	Alan Dyer
ACTION 4	That information regarding the qualifying criteria for full Council Tax Support be provided following the meeting.	Email sent to Members 12.03.13	Adrian Rowbotham

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SERVICES SELECT COMMITTEE - WORK PLAN 2012/13

Topic	4 April 2013	June 2013	September 2013	November 2013	January 2014
In-Depth Scrutiny	Under Occupation of Social Housing Action Plan review				
	Scope and terms of reference of the in-depth scrutiny review of Rural Broadband	Universal Credits Action Plan Review		Update on Universal Credits.	
Housing (Pat Smith)		Affordable Housing Position Report (Group Manager – Planning be invited to attend to provide an update on Section 106 money and comment on social and affordable housing across the District.) Review of Tenancy Strategy		Impact of changes to Benefits on the Housing Service	
Licensing (Richard Wilson)	Licensing Update Report (information only)				

Topic	4 April 2013	June 2013	September 2013	November 2013	January 2014
Payments & Benefits (Adrian Rowbotham)		Business Rates Retention		Revenues and Benefits Partnership Update Benefits Performance	
Human Resources (Syreeta Gill)					
Information Technology (Jim Carrington-West)	Members IT Working Group – Disaster Recovery Arrangements (information only)	Members IT Working Group – Disaster Recovery Arrangements(information only) Annual IT Update (information only)			
Waste and Recycling (Richard Wilson)		KCC Members invited to provide an update on Kent Joint Municipal Waste Management			
Communications & Customer Service	Customer Services Report (information only)				

Topic	4 April 2013	June 2013	September 2013	November 2013	January 2014
Budget (Adrian Rowbotham)	Localising Support for Council Tax - Update			Review of Service Plans Review of Budget Proposals for 2014/15	
Referral of Performance Issues from P&G Committee		Human Resources Update (information only)			
Other					

Key Stages of In-Depth Scrutiny Review

- Stage 1 – Scoping and identifying key lines of inquiry
- Stage 2 – Familiarisation with subject area
- Stage 3 – Submission of evidence
- Stage 4 – Deliberation/Consideration of Options
- Stage 5(a) – Formulation of recommendations and reporting
- Stage 5(b) – Outcomes
- Stage 6 – Review and Monitoring

Working Group Membership 2012/13

Members IT Working Group

Cllrs. Abraham, Ayres, Mrs. Dibsdall, Pett (Chairman) and Scholey

Members' Under-occupation of Social Housing Working Group

Cllrs. Mrs Ayres, Mrs George, Mrs Parkin, Piper and Miss Stack.

Members' Universal Credits Working Group

Cllrs. Ball, Firth*, Hogarth*, Horwood and Raikes.

*Visiting member- not a member of Services Select Committee

PROPOSED IN-DEPTH SCRUTINY OF BROADBAND PROVISION

Services Select Committee – 4 April 2013

Report of the: Deputy Chief Executive Designate

Status: For Consideration

Key Decision: No

This report supports the Key Aim of A Dynamic Economy

Portfolio Holder: Cllr. Hogarth

Head of Service: Head of Community Development – Lesley Bowles

Recommendation to Services Select Committee: that Members propose and agree the membership of the In Depth Scrutiny Review Group and scope the areas of scrutiny they wish to have undertaken. Possible areas of scrutiny might include:

- a) The work that has been undertaken in order to improve broadband in the District to date
- b) What additional work might usefully be undertaken
- c) Whether the Council has a role in promoting private broadband provision through small providers.

Reason for recommendation: to enable the In-Depth Scrutiny to proceed according to Members' priorities

Background

- 1) The Government has made it one of their top aims to transform the broadband infrastructure in this country by 2015. They are investing £530 million to stimulate commercial investment in broadband infrastructure. The government's ambition is to get superfast access to 90% of residents and businesses, with the remaining 10% to get a minimum 2mpbs service.
- 2) One of the priorities in the new Sevenoaks District Community Plan includes improving broadband connectivity by helping to prove the need and demand for fast broadband, applying for funding to support rural communities in accessing superfast broadband and supporting local communities to find broadband solutions.

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BDUK- Kent County Council

- 3) Local authorities at County and Unitary level (in this case Kent County Council) are responsible for taking forward the local delivery of broadband projects. Each area has set out their proposed delivery in their Local Broadband Plans (LBP).
- 4) KCC is investing £10 million to support this project, which has been matched by £9.87 million from the government. It is expected that the network operator which wins the contract will contribute a significant sum towards the costs of the project. The KCC project has two central aims and these are to:
 - Ensure that every single property in Kent is able to access a broadband connection with a minimum speed of 2 mbps.
 - Try and connect as many properties as possible to a superfast broadband service- i.e. a minimum of 24 mbps.

The current key tasks for the project team are:

- Evaluation and clarification of Tender submissions (January 2013)
 - Submission of local state aid application to DCMS (February 2013)
 - Completion of DCMS Checkpoint C 'readiness to contract' (March 2013)
 - Contract award (April 2013)
- 5) It is expected that we will find out the exact delivery times and intervention area at some point after the awarding of the contract. This may not occur for many months as the private provider has to undergo significant surveying before confirming the project area.
 - 6) The District Council, through its Economic Development Officer, has supported this initiative by promoting the 'Make Kent Quicker' campaign through leaflets and posters aimed at individual communities in an attempt to encourage local people to indicate their support for broadband in their communities, thereby strengthening the case for better broadband in this District.

DEFRA Rural Community Broadband Fund

- 7) The Rural Community Broadband Fund (RCBF) is jointly funded by DEFRA and BDUK. It is specifically designed for the most rural and hard to reach communities. Sevenoaks District Council has made a number of bids for these funds. We currently have a full application submitted which was successful at the first stage and is now being considered at the second stage. If it were successful it would give a number of our rural areas in the District access to superfast broadband (Leigh, Chiddingstone, Penshurst, Hever and Cowden). It is anticipated that there will be a third round and SDC will continue to look at ways of supporting communities to bid for funds.

Internet Service Providers

- 8) In addition to the schemes mentioned above, it is possible for communities to work with smaller services providers. There are a number of such providers, including those that provide a 'soft dig' scheme in rural areas. Members may wish to explore whether these schemes might be an alternative provision in this District.

Key Implications

Financial

There are no financial implications for the scrutiny process

Community Impact and Outcomes

Communities may benefit from the outcome of the scrutiny if it leads to faster, better broadband.

Legal, Human Rights etc.

None associated with this report.

Resource (non-financial)

Member and staff time will need to be allocated to the process.

Equality Impacts

An equality impact assessment will be completed if there is a change in policy resulting from the in-depth review.

Sustainability Checklist

A sustainability checklist will be completed for any policy or actions arising from the in-depth review

Contact Officer(s): Lesley Bowles, ext 7335
Joe Middleton, ext 7128

Dr. Pav Ramewal
Chief Executive Designate

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LOCALISATION OF COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT - UPDATE

Services Select Committee - 4 April 2013

Report of the: Chief Executive Designate

Status: For Information

Key Decision: No

Executive Summary: The Local Government Finance Act has introduced one of the biggest fundamental changes to the administration of Council Tax. The act requires all council tax billing authorities to put in place a local Council Tax Support Scheme to replace the current national Council Tax Benefit Scheme to commence on 1 April 2013.

This report contains an update on the new scheme since it was last reported to this Committee in January.

This report supports the Key Aim of Effective Management of Council Resources.

Portfolio Holder Cllr. Ramsay

Head of Service Group Manager – Financial Services – Adrian Rowbotham

Recommendation to Services Select Committee: that the contents of this report be noted.

Background and Introduction

- 1 Up until 31 March 2013 Council Tax Benefit was a national scheme administered by local authorities but funded by central government. From 1 April 2013 each billing authority is required to have a local scheme for Council Tax Support in place
- 2 Government will pay a grant to contribute towards Council Tax “discounts” given to claimants. This will be paid directly to both district and upper tier authorities. Town and parish council’s have received additional funding passed via this council. The grant is lower than the current amount of Council Tax Benefit paid out by the authority by approximately 10%.
- 3 From 1 April 2013 all of the financial risk of new local Council Tax Support Schemes rests with local authorities. Nationally expenditure on Council Tax Benefit has roughly doubled in the last ten years so this is a significant financial risk. In the case of Sevenoaks there is an increased element of risk in that it has the highest proportion of people of pension age in Kent. The Government has ensured that pensioners are protected from any reform to Council Tax Support through local schemes and as a result any growth in this age group will require increased expenditure from a fixed sum of grant, with the resultant impact of less money available to support working age people with their Council Tax bill.

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Scheme

- 4 The Sevenoaks District Council scheme was approved by Council on 27 November 2012 and consists of the following:
 - Agreement to operate for three years.
 - Standard reduction to their discount of 18.5% on all non-pensioner claimants – reduced to 8.5% in first year (i.e. currently receive 100% CT benefit, then receive 91.5% CT support).
 - Major Precepting Authorities (MPAs) will pay £125,000 to each billing authority to pay for administration, collection and recovery costs.
- 5 As MPAs (Kent CC, Fire, Police) are affected by the change to Council Tax Support as they receive a proportion of the Council Tax collected, they agreed to make a financial contribution to keep the reduction to claimants discounts as low as possible in year 1 and to help with the additional costs expected to be incurred by the billing authorities in Kent (e.g. Sevenoaks DC).
- 6 By setting the standard reduction at 8.5%, the Council will receive a one-off transitional grant from the Government of £27,531. This will be put aside to fund any further additional expenditure resulting from the new scheme.

Communication with affected residents

- 7 A consultation with affected residents took place in August and September 2012 and full details of the results were included in the report to Council on 27 November 2012.
- 8 All affected residents were written to on 4 February 2013 to advise them of the likely impact of the Council's scheme. Approximately 1,000 letters were sent to customers who were already required to pay some Council Tax. This letter advised them of the reduction in their support from April 2013 and signposted them to agencies that could provide budgeting and debt advice. No response was required from these customers.
- 9 A more detailed letter was sent to approximately 2,300 customers who will be required to pay Council Tax after previously having received full Council Tax Benefit. The letter gave examples of the likely levels of payment for an average Band C property and again signposted customers to appropriate agencies for budgeting and debt advice.
- 10 The statutory payment scheme for Council Tax requires payment over 10 months. The Council put arrangements in place for weekly and fortnightly payments as well as monthly payment over 12 months. A reply slip was enclosed which customers were required to send back if they wished to use one of the new payment methods.
- 11 As at 14 March 2013, 131 customers had chosen to pay fortnightly and 94 weekly. 209 customers had signed up for payments over 12 months. Whilst this option is open to customers who are not in receipt of Council Tax Support, the majority set up have been as a result of reply slips. This represents a response

rate of approximately 19% so far, with more customers calling in response to the annual bills which were issued on 11 March 2013.

- 12 Only 2 customers have returned the reply slip stating that they cannot pay anything and others have requested the Council Tax to be deducted from their welfare benefits. Regrettably, deductions cannot be made without the Council having obtained a liability order in the Magistrates' Court and the customer incurring additional costs. We have therefore written back to any customers who have made notes on their reply slips giving appropriate advice.
- 13 Information regarding Council Tax Support is shown on the reverse of all Council Tax Bills and has been included in the March edition of In Shape.
- 14 We have used part of the £125,000 received from MPAs to fund additional staff in Revenues for part of the year to assist with the enquiries arising from Council Tax Support. Whilst we conduct the recruitment process to fill the two fixed term contract posts, we have engaged one agency worker. He is currently engaged on answering calls from customers and providing advice on payment options.
- 15 Most customers will be required to make their first payment on 1 April 2013. We intend to interrogate the Council Tax database shortly after (but importantly before we produce the first reminder notices for the year on 12 April 2013) to identify cases where no payment has been made. Where we have contact telephone numbers for these customers, the additional staff will attempt to contact the customers. We will work with these customers to encourage payment whilst at the same time providing information as to where they can access budgeting and debt advice.
- 16 Our aim is to ensure that we engage with as many customers who are affected by the changes as possible and thereby avoid the need for formal recovery action.

Key Implications

Financial

- 17 By adopting a Kent-wide scheme, a significant proportion of the financial impact for the first three years will be borne by the MPAs instead of this Council.
- 18 The expected impacts of the change to Council Tax Support have been included in the 10-year budget.

Community Impact and Outcomes

- 19 A consultation has been undertaken on the potential effects of the scheme options, with the public and other affected parties.

Legal, Human Rights etc.

- 20 The final scheme approved by the council meets the requirements of the Local Government Finance Act.

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Equality Impacts

21

Consideration of impacts under the Public Sector Equality Duty:		
Question	Answer	Explanation / Evidence
a. Does the decision being made or recommended through this paper have potential to disadvantage or discriminate against different groups in the community?	Yes	The scheme will entail money being collected from some of the more vulnerable residents in the district, although this will be significantly less than if we had not agreed to be part of the Kent-wide scheme.
b. Does the decision being made or recommended through this paper have the potential to promote equality of opportunity?	Yes	The Government has prescribed that pensioners will be protected from any reduction in support as a result of this reform.
c. What steps can be taken to mitigate, reduce, avoid or minimise the impacts identified above?		See Appendix B in the report to Council on 27 November 2012.

Conclusions

- 22 Localisation of Council Tax Benefit is seen by many as one of the biggest changes to local government since the Community Charge. In the current economic climate, the cost of benefits will continue to increase and the impact on district councils both financially and from a social wellbeing perspective is likely to be significant.
- 23 A further report will be presented to this Committee when the actual impact of the change to Council Tax Support is known.

Risk Assessment Statement

- 24 Actual collection of Council Tax from residents who previously received full Council tax Benefit may be different from the assumption included in the 10-year budget.

Appendices

none

Background Papers:

Report to Finance Advisory Group 13 June 2012 – Item 8 – Localisation of Council Tax Support

Report to Services Select Committee 19 June 2012 (also to Cabinet and Council) – Item 9 – Localisation of Support for Council Tax

Update to Finance Advisory Group 25 July 2012

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Update to Finance Advisory Group 24 October 2012

Update to Services Select Committee 1 November 2012

Report to Cabinet 8 November 2012 – Item 7 –
Recommendation to Council on Local Council Tax
Policy

Report to Council 27 November 2012 – Item 5b –
Final Local Council Tax Policy Approval

Update to Services Select Committee 14 January
2013

Contact Officer(s):

Adrian Rowbotham Ext. 7153

Dr. Pav Ramewal
Chief Executive Designate

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LOCAL OFFICE CONTRACT RENEWAL - SWANLEY

Services Select Committee – 4 April 2012

Report of the: Chief Executive Designate

Status: For Consideration

Also considered by: Cabinet – 11 April 2013

Key Decision: Yes

Executive Summary: This report requests that the Council approve the renewal of the Local Office Contract for a further 3 years with Swanley Town Council and sets out the benefits in continuing to provide this service and highlights the risks in not doing so.

This report supports the Key Aim of Effective Management of Council Resources

Portfolio Holder Cllr. Fleming

Head of Service Head of Information and Customer Services – Jim Carrington-West

Recommendation to Service Select Committee:

That the Services Select Committee recommends to Cabinet that the Council renew the provision of a Local Office Contract for a further 3 years with Swanley Town Council based on the current contract terms and value.

Recommendation to Cabinet:

That Cabinet approves that the Council renew the provision of a Local Office Contract for a further 3 years with Swanley Town Council based on the current contract terms and value.

Reason for recommendation: A partnership agreement has existed for ten years between the Council and Swanley Town Council for the operation of services through a Local Office in Swanley. The current agreement expires on 31st March 2013 and Members approval is sought for the Council to seek to continue this arrangement and to renew the current contract to end in 31 March 2016.

Background & Introduction

- 1 The Swanley Contact and Information Centre provides information and services on tourism and Council services. The office is a joint partnership operated by the Town Council under the direction of this Council.

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- 2 Approximately 2,000 customers use the Local Office each month to access services including Benefits, Revenues, Refuse, Planning and Housing.
- 3 In addition the Local Office provides a cash payment facility (handi-till machine) and Local Office staff are trained on the Council Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system in order to directly assist with a variety of service requests.

Service Performance and Operation

- 4 Local residents value this service, as is evident from the consistently high rating and positive comments provided at monthly exit surveys. Regular Benefits surgeries run by the SDC Benefits team (using facilities provided as part of this contract) have proven to be very popular and have become essential in recent years during difficult financial times.
- 5 During 2012/13 key performance information includes:
 - Approximately 27,000 customers seen in the last 12 months
 - 80% of customers rating services as excellent or good
 - Approximately 10,000 payments received through the Handi-till machine totalling £1.1M
- 6 Working together with Swanley Town Council, the Council has developed a high quality solution to providing cost effective local access to Council services. Regular operational meetings are held with the Town Council which continue to ensure that the quality of the service provided meets the expectations of our customers.

Current Position

- 7 Feedback from customers indicates that the provision of a Local Office in Swanley is a valued service and customer satisfaction with the level of service provided remains high. Initial discussions with the Town Council indicate that they wish to continue to provide a Local Office and are willing to negotiate a new contract with the District Council.
- 8 The allocated budget from the District Council to cover the annual contract fee for provision of the service is £50,846 for 2013/14. It is therefore proposed that the Council, with the approval of Members, seek to negotiate a new contract for the estimated contract value of £155k for a period of 3 years from 1 April 2013 to 31 March 2016. During initial discussions with Swanley Town Council, officers have made it clear that in light of the financial challenges the District Council is faced with, it is highly unlikely the current contract price can be increased. The approval of a contract to this value is the responsibility of Cabinet and officers will require Cabinet approval prior to the contract being signed.
- 9 For Members information, the Town Council have indicated they may explore partnership working with the County Council in the future with a view to providing a Gateway service in Swanley. It is therefore proposed that the Council include a clause in any new contract to allow the re-negotiation of the Local Office service in the event that Swanley Town Council takes up the option to operate as a Gateway.

Key Implications

Financial

- 10 It is anticipated that the renewal of the Local Office contract with Swanley Town Council would commit the Council to a contract value estimated at £155k for the next 3 years. This is in line with the current annual spend on the Local Office service of £50,846 per year.

Community Impact and Outcomes

- 11 The provision of a Local Office in Swanley provides valuable local access to Council services for residents in the north of the District. Performance data shows that the service is valued by customers with satisfaction ratings of 80%.

Legal, Human Rights etc.

- 12 An updated Partnership Agreement will need to be executed between the Town Council and the District Council subject to the recommendation of the amount of the annual fee.

Resource (non-financial)

- 13 The Council has no additional human resources available in order to operate a similar service independently to Swanley.

Equality Impacts

Consideration of impacts under the Public Sector Equality Duty:		
Question	Answer	Explanation / Evidence
a. Does the decision being made or recommended through this paper have potential to disadvantage or discriminate against different groups in the community?	Yes	The Swanley office provides access to Council services on a face to face basis for residents in the north of the district. Facilities are available to make secure cash payments for Council Tax & to connect customers to officers at Argyle Road, via telephone or access to Council IT systems through a trained member of staff. In addition a self service PC is available for customers to access the Council website and online applications.
b. Does the decision being made or recommended through this paper have the potential to promote equality of opportunity?	Yes	
c. What steps can be taken to mitigate, reduce, avoid or minimise the impacts identified above?		

Agenda Item 10

Conclusions

- 14 The provision of a Local Office in Swanley to enable residents in the north of the District to access Council services is valued by residents and provides a cost effective service delivery model for the Council.
- 15 It is recommended that Members approve the renewal of its contractual agreement with Swanley Town Council in line with the current agreement and value.

Risk Assessment Statement

- Failure to continue to provide District Council services via a face to face approach at Swanley may result in:
- Poor customer perception of the District Councils service provision
- Negative publicity
- An increase in District Council complaints
- Reduced use and awareness of key District Council services (e.g. Recycling, refuse collection)
- Reduced revenue streams (Handi-till cash payments)

Appendices

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