

SWANLEY LOCAL OFFICE

Cabinet - 3 March 2016

Report of Chief Officer Corporate Support

Status: For Decision

Also considered by: Policy and Performance Advisory Committee - 1 March 2016

Key Decision: Yes

Portfolio Holder Cllr. Fleming

Contact Officer(s) Amy Wilton, Ext.7280 & Jim Carrington-West, Ext.7218

Recommendation to Policy and Performance Advisory Committee:

It is recommended to Cabinet that the renewal of the provision of a Local Office service for a further 2 years with Swanley Town Council based on the current terms and value is approved.

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Renewal of the provision of a Local Office service for a further 2 years with Swanley Town Council based on the current terms and value is approved.

Reason for recommendation: A partnership agreement has existed for fourteen years between Sevenoaks District Council and Swanley Town Council for the operation of services through a local office in Swanley. The current agreement expires on 31 March 2016 and Members approval is sought for the District Council to seek to continue this arrangement and to renew the agreement to end on 31 March 2018.

Introduction and Background

- 1 The Swanley Contact and Information Centre provides information and services on tourism and Council services. The office was a joint partnership operated by Swanley Town Council under the direction of the District Council until August 2015. From August 2015 the office was re-branded as Swanley Link and now operates under the direction of Swanley Town Council, with an agreement between Kent County Council and West Kent Housing Association. District Council services continue to be provided by Swanley Town Council.
- 2 Customers use the local office to access District services such as the regular benefits surgeries, held twice a week, and run by the Sevenoaks District Council Benefits team (using facilities provided as part of this contract), to

purchase refuse sacks and to contact the Customer Services team through a dedicated telephone line.

- 3 For the last full year of the agreement (2014/15) performance information related to District Council services provided at the Swanley Local Office was:
 - 480 customers seen at the Benefits surgery;
 - £854,229 of payments taken through the Handitill; and
 - Customer satisfaction levels at 91%.
- 4 From March 2016 it is planned that the handitill machine which enables customers to make cash payments for Council Tax and Housing Benefit overpayments will be removed from the Swanley Link. From this point the District Council will commence a new contract with Allpay which will enable customers to make payments at Post Office counters and PayPoint outlets throughout the district and wider.

Swanley Local Office agreement

- 5 The District Council allocates a budget of £49,719 per annum for the provision of services at the Swanley Local Office.
- 6 It is therefore proposed that Members approve that the District Council seek to enter in to a new agreement for the provision of District Council services provided by Swanley Town Council at Swanley Link for a period of 2 years from 1 April 2016 to 31 March 2018.
- 7 Subject to Members approval it is proposed that in seeking to reach an agreement with Swanley Town Council for the provision of services the annual cost will remain within agreed budgets.
- 8 Members may wish to note that the District Council will request that clear District Council branding is sited throughout Swanley Link as part of the agreement to provide services.

Other Options Considered and/or Rejected

- 9 None.

Key Implications

Financial

- 10 It is anticipated that the renewal of the Local Office contract with Swanley Town Council would commit the Council to expenditure in the region of £99,000 over the next 2 years. This is in line with the current annual spend on the Local Office service.

- 11 Subject to Member approval to enter in to agreement with Swanley Town Council Officers will ensure that the Council's contract procedure rules are adhered to.

Legal Implications and Risk Assessment Statement.

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

Equality Assessment

- 13 The decisions recommended through this paper have a remote or low relevance to the substance of the Equality Act. There is no perceived impact on end users.

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. It is recommended that Members approve the renewal of its agreement with Swanley Town Council in line with the current terms and value.

Appendices: None

Background Papers: None

Jim Carrington-West
Chief Officer Corporate Support