

## **LOCAL OFFICE CONTRACT RENEWAL - SWANLEY**

### **Cabinet – 11<sup>th</sup> April 2012**

Report of the: Chief Executive Designate

Status: For Decision

Also considered by: Services Select Committee – 4<sup>th</sup> April 2013

Key Decision: Yes

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**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.

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**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

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#### **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.

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**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 31<sup>st</sup> 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.

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#### **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.

- 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?		

## **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)

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