

LICENSING PARTNERSHIP - LONDON BOROUGH OF BEXLEY

Cabinet - 21 April 2016

Report of Chief Officer Environmental and Operational Services

Status: For Decision

Also considered by: Legal and Democratic Services Advisory Committee - 14 April 2016

Key Decision: No

This report supports the Key Aim of sustainable economy.

Portfolio Holder Cllr. Anna Firth (Legal and Democratic Services)

Contact Officer(s) Richard Wilson Et. 7067
Claire Perry Ext. 7325 / 07970 731616

Recommendation to Legal and Democratic Services Committee

That Cabinet be recommended to approve the London Borough of Bexley's Licensing Team functions joining the Licensing Partnership as a fourth and equal partner.

Recommendation to Cabinet

That, subject to the comments of the Legal and Democratic Services Advisory Committee, the London Borough of Bexley's Licensing team functions joining the Licensing Partnership as a fourth and equal partner is approved.

Reason for recommendation: To ensure further savings are realised for the running of Licensing service and additional resilience is achieved.

Introduction and Background

- 1 The Licensing Partnership is now in its seventh year of running a successful partnership carrying out the management of three Licensing Teams and the administration of all processes and issuing of licences, permits and notices for Maidstone Borough Council, Sevenoaks District Council and Tunbridge Wells Borough Council.
- 2 One of the Partnership's service plan objectives has been to expand the Partnership by bringing another partner on board to share costs and reduce our individual contributions to its operation.

- 3 Towards the end of 2015 Officers from the London Borough of Bexley approached the Chief Officer Environmental and Operational Services and Licensing Partnership Manager to hold an exploratory meeting regarding the future of Bexley's Licensing functions.
- 1 The London Borough of Bexley are undertaking a procurement exercise of Regulatory and associated services as part of the Council's Strategic Commissioning agenda. As part of this exercise report, Officers at Bexley were asked to explore the Licensing Partnership as an alternative to outsourcing the Council's Licensing service.
- 2 Following meetings to explore the extent of the services currently undertaken by the London Borough of Bexley and their team structure a proposal was submitted to the London Borough of Bexley, attached as Appendix A.

The Proposal

- 5 The current structure of the Licensing Partnership would continue in that the Licensing Partnership Manager would manage the four teams of Licensing Officers based at the partner authorities and the single Administration Team which is based at the Sevenoaks offices.
- 6 The staff within the Administration Team would process applications, permits and notices on behalf of all the Licensing Authorities. The posts of the Administration Team, the Licensing Partnership Manager and half of the post of the Senior Licensing Officer and Administration Team Leader are directly employed by Sevenoaks District Council but their salaries are paid for by the partners of the Licensing Partnership.
- 7 The Licensing Officers at each authority are responsible for their own policies, interaction regarding compliance with the legislation, compliance and enforcement, validation of new and variation applications for premises licences, hearings and direct reports.
- 8 The Licensing Partnership Manager has responsibility for the direct reports, management of the Licensing Partnership as a whole, budget setting, performance indicator setting and monitoring, co-ordination of Licensing Policies, FOI request responses, reporting to the Licensing Partnership Board and the individual Licensing Committees, service planning, liaison with Finance, HR, IT, Legal, Democratic Services and process engineering.
- 9 Each authority's data is held on a central database which is administered and maintained by the IT staff at Sevenoaks District Council. Officers at the partners' offices access the database via a portal and have access to their records and all the documentation for that application. All documentation is scanned in to a document management system (IDOX) on receipt in the post and is therefore available to all officers.

- 10 The Licensing Partnership has been through a Digital First programme that has seen significant increases in online applications and streamlining of processes. We expect the existing Hub resources to be able to handle the additional workload created by an extra partner, but during the first year an additional 1 fte admin support will be provided to assist the London Borough of Bexley with administrative support and the transfer of documentation onto the Licensing Partnership's central database and document management system it is proposed to ring fence the three administrative officer posts at Bexley and interview them with a view to TUPE transfer the successful applicant.
- 11 The London Borough of Bexley would retain the equivalent of two Licensing Officers to carry out the licensing functions with customers such as complaint investigation, visiting premises, hearing report preparation, mediation with applicants, policy preparation etc.
- 12 The existing performance indicators would remain as they are as it is recognised that the work involved in welcoming a new partner will be substantial. The key focus for the whole team will be to maintain the existing excellent performance, carefully monitor and manage the performance to ensure that it continues to provide first class service to the customer.
- 13 The Licensing Partnership team are an experienced team who have the knowledge and skills to re-engineer London Borough of Bexley procedures in to the Partnership's processes whilst keeping the customer at the focus of what they achieve.
- 14 At the heart of the Partnership is a financial model that is used to calculate individual partner's annual contributions based on the weighted throughput of licence transactions, averaged over a three year period.
- 15 The model used to calculate each existing partner's contribution to the cost of the Licensing Partnership was employed to calculate the cost for the London Borough of Bexley to join.
- 16 Using the data supplied by the London Borough of Bexley it is calculated that Bexley's work will amount to 17.3% of the Licensing Partnership work. This equates to a cost to the London Borough of Bexley of £75,221 per annum.

Key Implications

Financial

- 17 There are some one off costs to cover IT set up and importing the address gazetteer. These are yet to be finalised but are thought to be just under £5,000 and will be borne by the London Borough of Bexley.
- 18 As a result of the London Borough of Bexley joining the Licensing Partnership each of the existing partners are calculated to save at least £15,000 each per annum in their contributions to the Licensing Partnership.

Legal Implications and Risk Assessment Statement.

- 19 There is no requirement for a procurement exercise before entering into such an arrangement. Should such an arrangement proceed, the existing legal agreement will be revised to recognise the addition of a fourth partner to formalise the arrangements.

Equality Assessment

- 20 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.

Appendices

Appendix A - Proposal for the London Borough of Bexley - v3

Background Papers:

None

Mr Richard Wilson
Chief Officer Environmental and Operational Services