

Report to: Lead Cabinet Member for Communities and Safety
Date of meeting: 27 September 2017
By: Director of Communities, Economy and Transport
Title: Business Advice & Support Partnership (BAASP)
Purpose: To outline the proposed partnership with four other local authorities in order to offer a single branded business advice service.

RECOMMENDATIONS: The Lead Member is recommended to:

- (1) Endorse the entering into a partnership with four other local authorities in order to offer a single branded business advice service in collaboration together; and**
 - (2) Delegate authority to the Director of Communities, Economy and Transport to enter into all such agreements necessary to give effect to recommendation (1); and**
 - (3) Agree the reduction of the hourly rate for chargeable business advice from £72 + VAT to £70 + VAT to ensure fees are uniform across the partnership.**
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1 Background Information

1.1. In July 2016 approval was given for Trading Standards to introduce chargeable business advice services as part of an income generation strategy to support the service. This has now been introduced but we have also been engaged in exploring a partnership with four other authorities to produce a proposal for working collaboratively to provide a broader and sustainable advice offering for business. It also achieves benefits of obtaining efficiencies for each service in terms of shared marketing and resourcing.

1.2. The business advice function of Trading Standards supports legitimate businesses in East Sussex and contributes to the Council's priority of driving economic growth. Furthermore, this proposal supports the priority of making the best use of resources.

2 Supporting Information

2.1 A brief outline of the scheme is provided below, with a more detailed appraisal given in the supporting report at Appendix 1. It is proposed that initially the partnership will work under a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) which is currently being considered by Orbis Public Law in West Sussex on behalf of both East and West Sussex County Councils.

Proposal

2.2 **Proposal** - East Sussex Trading Standards is increasingly focussed on more commercial activities, generating income to offset the costs of running the service in line with many other authorities.

2.3 All the proposed partners; Slough Borough Council, West Sussex County Council, Kent County Council and Hampshire County Council Trading Standards Services are considering how best to increase income, and are exploring opportunities of collaboration and best practice. The proposed partnership will help achieve these aims and as the partnership develops the opportunity to generate further income will grow also.

2.4 The five Trading Standards Services are proposing to work together to provide a joint commercial business support service across the five counties and the wider South East of England area. By collaborating on this venture, the five councils can present the largest geographical coverage from one service, and become a considerable force within the paid for consumer protection compliance advice sector. There are benefits for East Sussex to work alongside likeminded authorities who are already selling business advice and providing Primary Authority Partnerships¹ to a variety of businesses.

¹ A government initiative whereby a business partners with a local authority and receives assured advice.

2.5 The proposed model is fundamentally about collaborative working, rather than shared or joint services. Once incoming client requests are received by East Sussex, the existing internal processes will be utilised to provide the business advice and support and process payments. However, there is scope for East Sussex businesses to source other services provided by other partner authorities, and equally for East Sussex to provide advice and support to a business outside of the county (on a chargeable basis).

Vision and Mission Statement

2.6 The Vision of the proposed partnership is to be the leading provider of regulatory advice and support to business.

2.7 The Mission Statement of the partnership is: "Working with businesses to help them flourish through providing high quality products and services affordable and accessible to all from start-ups to global brands."

Benefits

2.8 There are proposed efficiencies in back-office spend e.g. by sharing licences, databases and processes. The partnership model will support the County Council's priority of achieving more for less by making the very best use of resources.

2.9 The partnership model offers a more resilient service, with retained expertise and specialisms shared across the five authorities. Furthermore, there will be capacity to deal with developing regulatory issues for businesses in the future such as the predicted changes and challenges around Brexit.

3 Conclusion and Reasons for Recommendations

3.1 Whilst East Sussex Trading Standards could continue to act independently outside of the partnership, there are clear advantages of working collaboratively, very much focused on shared resources giving rise to shared benefits for the local authority partners and local businesses.

3.2 We are also seeking to reduce our hourly chargeable rate from £72 to £70 per hour plus VAT. The initial rate of £72 was obtained on a cost recovery basis; however, it is essential that the five authorities offer the same rate to enable most effective and clear marketing.

3.3 The Lead Member is therefore recommended to:

- Endorse the entering into a partnership with four other local authorities in order to offer a single branded business advice service in collaboration together;
- Delegate authority to the Director of Communities, Economy and Transport to enter into all such agreements necessary to give effect to recommendation (1) above; and
- Agree the reduction of the hourly rate for chargeable business advice from £72 + VAT to £70 + VAT to ensure fees are uniform across the partnership.

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Director of Communities, Economy and Transport

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LOCAL MEMBERS

All

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

None