

Committee: **Lead Cabinet Member for Communities**

Date: **27 April 2016**

Report By: **Director of Communities, Economy and Transport**

Title of Report: **Joint Citizenship and Passport Checking**

Purpose of Report: **To agree that a fee may be charged for providing this new service**

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**RECOMMENDATIONS: The Lead Member is recommended to:**

- (1) Agree that the Registration Service start to offer the Joint Citizenship and Passport Checking service on a cost recovery basis; and**
  - (2) Approve the fixed fee of £20 for providing this service.**
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## **1. Background Information**

1.1. In November 2015, seven local authorities began a trial of offering a Passport Application Checking Service at the same appointment as the Nationality Checking Service (NCS). These pathfinder authorities worked closely with HM Passport Office to develop a service which would benefit the applicants, as it allows the passport application to be processed alongside the citizenship application, saving considerable waiting time. The Home Office is now rolling this service out nationally to all authorities who currently offer NCS. Consequently, the East Sussex Registration Service has the opportunity to offer Passport Application Checking alongside the existing Nationality Checking Service.

1.2. During the last financial year, the NCS generated £26,275 of revenue income for the County Council. As a non-statutory service, the Joint Citizenship and Passport Checking Service (JCAP) can be charged for on a cost recovery. The pathfinder authorities (Kent and Brent for the South East) ran the JCAP pilot with a centrally fixed fee of £10. However, it is now widely accepted that this figure does not adequately cover the cost of providing this service for those appointments that are not straightforward. As a result HM Passport Office has very recently relaxed this set fee and allowed authorities to determine their own fee based on their own cost recovery calculations.

1.3. As this is such a new service, there is not yet a consistent fee which is being charged by neighbouring authorities for this service. However, the Registration Service has assessed the cost of delivering the service in East Sussex and estimates this to be £20 per application. The proposed fee of £20 has been reached based on the process taking between 10 - 20 minutes to complete for each applicant.

1.4. Based on information provided by the pathfinder authorities and 2015/16 NCS figures, it is expected that around 60% of NCS customers will take up the JCAP service. The take-up of the NCS service is very fluid from one year to the next, predominantly because central government sporadically change the criteria applicants must meet to achieve British Citizenship. Applications for this service are affected by peaks and troughs accordingly, as deadlines of old and new schemes come and go. Furthermore, the Registration Service have proactively pursued NCS customers from out of County by prioritising this service moreso than some neighbouring authorities, leading to easier appointment availability for customers. Over the last year, the peaks and troughs have settled down somewhat and so, unless there are substantial new criteria requirements implemented over the coming year, a take up of 60% of NCS customers would equate to around 225 applicants taking up the new service, which would generate around £4,500 in additional revenue. The Registration Service is comfortable that it can absorb these extra appointments within the current staff headcount.

## **2. Supporting Information**

2.1. The Registration Service provided Citizenship application checking services to 376 potential new citizens in 2015/16. This service is provided across our four offices. The individual's application form and supporting documentation is checked by our highly-skilled staff and sent to the Home Office for processing.

2.2. All of our surrounding Local Authorities are in the process of beginning to offer JCAP; however, the East Sussex Registration Service have a good track record of attracting applicants from outside of the county. This has been achieved as a result of the focus placed on delivery of this service and the efforts made to ensure it is widely available across the county by the Registration Service.

2.3. Our intention is to offer the JCAP service as an added value to our Citizenship applicants who may otherwise be tempted to travel to our bordering authorities where they will be able to take advantage of JCAP.

2.4. As this is funded by a cost recovery fee, there is no cost to the County Council.

2.5. The pathfinder authorities reported a 60% take up of JCAP amongst their NCS applicants. There is a significant risk that should we not offer this service, we could see a similar percentage of our customers travel out of the county to take advantage of JCAP elsewhere.

### **3. Conclusion and Reason for Recommendation**

3.1. Providing the new JCAP service alongside our existing services allows the Registration Service to protect a valuable revenue stream (NCS) as well as protecting the public and assisting in the counter fraud agenda. The cost is recouped at the point of delivery and the risks are minimal. The Lead Member is therefore recommended to agree that the Registration Service start to offer the Joint Citizenship and Passport Checking Service, and that the fee of £20, as outlined in paragraph 1.3 above, is charged for providing the service.

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#### LOCAL MEMBERS

All

#### BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

None