

**MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**COMMUNITIES, HOUSING AND ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE**

**12 APRIL 2016**

**REFERENCE FROM THE LICENSING COMMITTEE**

**LICENSING PARTNERSHIP: LONDON BOROUGH OF BEXLEY**

**Issue for Decision**

At its meeting on 31 March 2016 the Licensing Committee considered the report of the Head of Housing and Community Services which outlined a proposal for the London Borough of Bexley to join the Licensing Partnership as a fourth and equal partner. As the Communities, Housing and Environment Committee have responsibility for Licensing Strategy and Policies, the final decision must be made by this Committee.

**Recommendation Made**

That the Communities, Housing and Environment Committee be recommended to approve the enlargement of the Licensing Partnership to include the London Borough of Bexley's Licensing Team functions as a fourth and equal partner.

**Reason for Recommendation**

Background

The Licensing Partnership is now in its seventh year of running and successfully managing three Licensing Teams, carrying out the administration of all processes and issuing of licences, permits and notices for Maidstone Borough Council, Sevenoaks District Council and Tunbridge Wells Borough Council.

One of the Partnership's service plan objectives since 2013/14 has been to reduce the overall operating costs by expanding the Partnership through introducing another partner onto the group in order to share costs and reduce each local authorities' contributions to the operation.

Towards the end of 2015 Officers from the London Borough of Bexley approached the Chief Officer Environmental & Operational Services for Sevenoaks District Council and the Licensing Partnership Manager to hold an exploratory meeting regarding the future of Bexley's Licensing functions, which exclude taxis and private hire as these are licensed by Transport for London.

The London Borough of Bexley is undertaking a procurement exercise of its regulatory and associated services as part of the Bexley Council's Strategic Commissioning agenda. As part of this exercise, officers at Bexley were asked to explore the Licensing Partnership as an alternative to totally outsourcing the Council's Licensing Service.

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**.

### Proposal

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.

The staff within the Administration Team will 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.

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.

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.

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 applications. All documentation is scanned in to a document management system (IDOX) on receipt in the post and is therefore available to all officers.

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 cope with the additional workload created by an extra partner, but during the first year an additional 1x 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 of the successful applicant.

The London Borough of Bexley will 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.

The existing performance indicators will remain as agreed, as it is recognised that the work involved in welcoming a new partner will be significant. 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.

The Licensing Partnership team is an experienced team that has the capacity, 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.

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.

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.

Using the data supplied by the London Borough of Bexley it is calculated that Bexley's work will amount to 17.3% of the expanded Licensing Partnership work. This equates to a cost to the London Borough of Bexley of £75,221 per annum.

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.

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.

In addition to the savings to the Licensing Partnership it is anticipated that a new partner will increase the resilience of the Licensing Partnership by introducing new skills and areas of expertise. It is still a desire of the Licensing Partnership to authorise officers to work across authority areas and once this is achieved officers will be able to be deployed more effectively.

The option of a transfer of Bexley's Licensing Service to a shared service arrangement with other local authorities is expressly recognised by Regulation 12 of the Public Contracts Regulations 2015. 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.

### **Alternatives Considered**

To recommend no changes to the existing Licensing Partnership. This is not recommended as extending the Partnership to include the London Borough of

Bexley will ensure further savings are realised for the running of Licensing Services and additional resilience is achieved.

**Background Papers**

None.