

Item for Consideration by Cabinet Lead for Planning & Economy

Councillor Guest

Subject (NB. identify Category or Categories of delegated decision)
Scheme of Delegation to Portfolio Holders paragraph 6 – power to authorise officers to enter into agreements and arrangements with other local authorities, other public sector bodies and organisations undertaking activities of a public nature where this is expedient to the effective provision of services by the Council.

Issue

The Council wishes to enter into an agreement with Hampshire County Council as agent for Hampshire Biodiversity Information Centre (copy attached). The agreement is for a period of 3 years

The Hampshire Biodiversity Information Centre is the biological records centre for Hampshire and has been running as a partnership since 2002. It used to be run by HCC but is now independent. HBIC provides the survey information to:

- enable Local Plans and Development Briefs to be drafted in the knowledge of the area's important wildlife sites and species. Data is needed to assist the preparation of plans, assess all proposals, and respond to objections and appeals.
- evaluate planning applications, and assist with public inquiries against a background of increasingly sophisticated ecological consultants employed by applicants.
- guide site/habitat management planning on local authority controlled land, and to support other schemes operating in their local authority area.
- assist with hedgerow removal notices under the Hedgerow Regulations
- to assist in the preparation, implementation and monitoring of Biodiversity Action Plans, Landscape Strategies and State of the Environment Reports involving local authorities or prepared by individual authorities
- to enable local authorities to respond to consultations, policies, strategies and programmes of other agencies operating in their area.

The partnership/collaborative approach has the following advantages :

- The gathering together of many different datasets to provide a 'one-stop shop' for all species and habitats, and thereby providing the 'bigger picture' and context for biodiversity in Hampshire.
- Effectiveness and economy of scale – it is cheaper to share the costs of the service rather than each organisation create its own. There is also less duplication of effort for surveying and data management. It would cost HBC far more than £5000 per year to employ ecological consultants for this work.
- The full costs of data collation, management and interpretation to the local authorities can be offset by income from the private sector derived from providing a chargeable data enquiry service.

- An improved service – by concentrating staff and resources in one centre means a team can provide a better quality service than different personnel deployed across disparate organisations., with greater flexibility.
- The Centre is able to offer partners a wider range of improved ‘products’ such as SINC monitoring, annual monitoring reports etc. based on better quality and more comprehensive data, and increased resources to process the data.
- Working to nationally agreed standards and policies, and being able to access national datasets for data on habitats and species in Hampshire as a local node in the National Biodiversity Network.

Quotations have not been obtained from other bodies for the work. It would be very difficult to tender this work as officers do not know in advance how much work there will be every year. In practice the Council uses more than its allocation some years and less in others so it balances out. However for the reasons stated above it is considered that the agreement represents best value, the activities are of a public nature and entering into the agreement is expedient to the effective provision of services by the Council.

Decision Required

Authority for officers to execute a Service Level Agreement with Hampshire Biodiversity Information Centre for the provision to the Council of biodiversity data and information services for a period of 3 years from 1st April 2015 to 31st March 2018 at a cost of £5,000 per annum.

[NOTE

1. No key/significant decision involved [*Julie Boschi*]
2. Expenditure/Reduced Income Involved – YES. If YES does Head of Resources confirm that financial implications are fully authorised in accordance with Financial Regulations? YES [*HOR or rep to sign off*]
3. Confidential item? If so, specify relevant paragraph(s) from Schedule 12A LGA 1972. No.
4. Case of genuine urgency (i.e. implementation cannot be left for 5 working days) – YES/NO? No. [*Originating Officer/Solicitor to the Council or rep*]

Agreed:...David Guest
(Signed)

[*Councillor*]

Date:14 July 2015