

Committee: Ordinary Council	Date: 16 March 2022
Subject: Revenue and Benefits Partnership	Wards Affected: All
Report of: Jonathan Stephenson, Chief Executive	Public
Report Authors: Name: Steve Summers, Strategic Director (Deputy Chief Executive)/ Jacqueline Van Mellaerts, Corporate Director (Finance & Resources) & Section 151 Officer Telephone: 01277 312500 E-mail: steve.summers@brentwood.gov.uk/jacqueline.vanmellaerts@brentwood.gov.uk	For Decision

Summary

Members will be aware that the Council entered a partnership arrangement with Basildon Borough Council to deliver both councils' Revenue and Benefits Services. The Partnership Board consists of officer representatives from both authorities which oversees performance of the current partnership whilst also exploring future sharing opportunities.

Following discussions between the respective local authorities, an opportunity has now arisen to investigate the possibility of expanding the partnership to include the provision of Revenue and Benefits Services to Castle Point Borough Council.

Subsequently a high-level piece of work was undertaken to benchmark Castle Point Borough Council's Revenues and Benefits Service against the existing Brentwood and Basildon Shared Service. As this piece of work was very high level the data gathered could not be used to establish viability of a shared service without further detailed work being undertaken.

To proceed, an equal level of commitment is required from all interested parties, and this is reflected in the proposed Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Brentwood Borough Council, Basildon Borough Council and Castle Point Borough Council as attached at Appendix A.

Recommendation(s)

Members are asked to:

- R1. Approve Brentwood Borough Council enters into a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Basildon Borough Council and Castle Point Borough Council to enable the commencement of exploratory work in relation to a potential joint working opportunity as attached at Appendix A.**
- R2. Approve that a detailed Business Case is reported to a future Policy, Resources and Economic Development Committee.**

Main Report

Introduction and Background

1. At the 11 February 2015 Finance and Resources Committee, (Min 453 refers) it was resolved that the Council enter a Revenues and Benefits Shared Services Partnership Agreement with Basildon Borough Council.
2. Subsequently at the 15 February 2017 Policy Finance and Resources Committee, (Min 282 refers) it was resolved to recommend the approval of a new Revenues and Benefits Shared Service Agreement with Basildon Borough Council to Ordinary Council. This new agreement included the formal co-location of Brentwood Borough Council's Revenue and Benefits staff within one merged site within Basildon Council offices and included the formation of a Partnership Board.
3. This decision was ratified at the 1 March 2017 Ordinary Council, (Min 294 refers).

Issue, Options and Analysis of Options

4. The Revenues and Benefits Service Partnership provides an extensive range of digital and workforce development solutions to streamline processes and optimise Revenues and Benefits.
5. The Partnership service combines a customer base of 120,000 homes and businesses between Brentwood and Basildon Councils, collecting over £300

million in Council Tax and business rates every year. The Partnership is very well established with the ability now to onboard other authorities.

6. The Partnership was also successful in winning the Institute of Revenues Rating and Valuation (IRRV) Excellence in Partnership Award in 2017 and finalists in the IRRV Innovation Awards 2019.
7. This Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) endorses the vision of the partnership between Brentwood Borough Council, Basildon Borough Council and Castle Point Borough Council - supporting the Councils partnership aspirations to deliver quality front and back-office services in collaboration through partnership working and shared service arrangements.
8. The partnership will operate to provide modern, high quality and affordable services, and will look to deliver this across a range of both support, and customer facing services.
9. The partnership aims to attract additional business from public sector customers, by embracing the following core objectives:
10. The partnership will;
 - a) Improve service experience for our customers
 - b) Improve service resilience and business continuity
 - c) Deliver value for money
 - d) Demonstrate strong leadership and commercial competency
 - e) Maximise opportunities for income generation and cost recovery
 - f) Provide a model of longevity to deliver an ongoing income stream
 - g) Drive continuous improvement in terms of performance, cost, and user experience
 - h) Public sector value and experience 'By public sector for public sector'
 - i) Reinvest all income generated back into services which benefit our residents
 - j) Reduce costs through the adoption of innovative design and technology
 - k) Adopt a true partnership approach, as opposed to an outsourcing approach
 - l) Ensure a mechanism for our Councils to retain their sovereign identity
 - m) The work undertaken to date under this MoU will also set a framework for any future shared service arrangements.

Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) Vision

11. This Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) sets out the following vision:

‘Brentwood Borough Council, Basildon Borough Council and Castle Point Borough Council believe that our collaboration enables resilience and preservation of the services we offer our customers. Brentwood Borough Council, Basildon Borough Council and Castle Point Borough Council are committed to collaborate in areas where service synergy or operational need/resilience present opportunities that meet and fulfil strategic objectives in our respective Corporate Plans. Such arrangements must offer benefits to our customers and work to create future income streams or cost efficiencies whilst retaining the identity of each council’.

12. This approval will make public the partnership aspirations between Brentwood Borough Council, Basildon Borough Council and Castle Point Borough Council – supporting the Councils’ aspirations to work collaboratively and to consider joint working opportunities.

Purpose of this Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)

13. To set out clearly what the partners have agreed to do and ensure all members and employees of the respective organisations are aware and committed to this objective.

14. Each partner organisation by entering the MoU will have the approval to:

- a) Commit time and resources to deliver a Business Case for the Project.
- b) Observe the Project governance arrangements as set out within this agreement.
- c) Make officers and/or resources available to lead, support and facilitate delivery of the Business Case.
- d) The Project to be considered for delivery under the MoU will be the expansion of the Revenues and Benefits Shared Service to include Castlepoint Borough Council.

15. If the approval for the MoU is provided then a detailed business case will be developed and presented to a future Policy, Resources and Economic Development Committee for consideration. The aim of the proposed project is to identify savings of up to £250,000 across the three authorities.

Reasons for Recommendation

16. To enable the council to consider opportunities to meet the Corporate Strategic Plan 2020-2025 key priority of ‘Delivering an efficient and effective council’.

Consultation

17. None.

References to Corporate Plan

18. This objective meets with the Council's 'Delivering an efficient and effective council' key priority as set out in the Corporate Strategic Plan 2020-2025.

Implications

Financial Implications

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19. There are no direct financial implications of entering into the MoU itself however there will then be costs associated with developing the Revenues and Benefits shared service business case and subsequent implementation as appropriate.

20. These will be refined as further scoping work is undertaken and the partners will allocate a contribution to fund any business case development resources as required. These are subject to further agreement but are estimated to likely be between 10k and 20k for Brentwood which will be met from existing resources where possible, or from the service investment reserve for the initial set up period.

21. However, it is expected that further efficiencies will arise from the business case by onboarding Castle Point Borough Council to the partnership, thus ensuring the onboarding will have a cost neutral effect overall. Some examples of these efficiencies will arise from vacancies from the partnership staffing structures as well as supplies and services through procurement of software costs. Through greater collaboration and joint working across the three Councils will drive higher economies of scale, increase knowledge sharing and investing growth and training within the teams.

Legal Implications

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22. An MoU is not a legally binding document unless the parties agree to the inclusion of a clause which provides that it shall be legally binding. It is however a document which demonstrates the parties' intent to move forward with a particular course of action, setting out the parties' commitment to that which is proposed.

23. This MoU does not substitute or override the need to enter formal legal arrangements, upon the approval of viable business cases. The request to enter formal section 101 Delegation Framework Deeds between authorities will need member approval at Full Council.

24. Nothing in the MOU will affect the s113 arrangements BBC have with Rochford District Council.

Economic Implications

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25. There are no direct economic implications arising from the MoU.

Background Papers

- Report to Special Council, 12 February 2013
- Report to Finance & Resources Committee, 11 February 2015
- Report to Policy, Finance & Resources Committee, 15 February 2017
- Report to Ordinary Council, 1 March 2017

Appendices to this report

- Appendix A: Draft Memorandum of Understanding