

Rother District Council

Report to	-	Cabinet
Date	-	13 January 2020
Report of the	-	Executive Director
Subject	-	Voluntary Sector Service Level Agreements

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 25 November 2019, considered a report on Voluntary Sector Service Level Agreements. The recommendations and minute arising is reproduced below.

Recommendation: It be **RESOLVED:** That

- 1) the following four year Voluntary Sector Service Level Agreements be renewed (unless another term stipulated) from 1 April 2020, and subject to a six month termination clause:
 - a) Hastings Advice and Representation Centre – £19,000 per annum;
 - b) Hastings and Rother Mediation Service – £8,400 per annum;
 - c) Rother District Citizens Advice Bureau – £85,000 per annum, to be reviewed after two years and:
 - i. the Council assist the organisation with sourcing and, if required, relocating to suitable premises within Bexhill Town Centre;
 - ii. further funding through Parish Councils be explored; and
 - iii. a robust business plan be provided for the two year review.
 - d) Rother Voluntary Action – £38,000 per annum and grant applications be made to the Council for individual projects;
 - e) Bexhill Museum – £8,500 per annum with a review after two years;
 - 2) the four year unrestricted contribution of £1,000 per annum be renewed from 1 April 2020 to Rye Harbour Nature Reserve and details of how the funding is utilised be provided; and
 - 3) core funding to the Hastings Furniture Service and Action in Rural Sussex cease but that they are encouraged to continue accessing other Council funding streams.
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OSC19/37. **VOLUNTARY SECTOR SERVICE LEVEL AGREEMENTS**

Members received and considered the report of the Executive Director on the Voluntary Sector Service Level Agreements (SLAs). The Housing Development, Programme Office and Policy Manager summarised the report and guided Members through its content. The Task and Finish Group (T&FG) had been established to comprehensively review a number of existing SLAs which were due for renewal. The T&FG consisted of Councillors K.P Dixon (Chairman), Mrs M.L. Barnes and B.J. Drayson. The T&FG met on two occasions

and took evidence from a range of witnesses. The Group was made aware of the contextual issues impacting on their considerations; primary among these were the current financial pressures facing the authority and the impact of funding cuts to its own services. The work of the T&FG was informed by the financial outlook contained within the Medium Term Financial Strategy.

The Chairman of the SLA T&FG paid tribute to his fellow colleagues for their support, the Member Representatives for the five organisations and the Housing Development, Programme Office and Policy Manager for facilitating the meetings.

After deliberation and consultation with the Assistant Director Resources, the T&FG recommended that each agreement would be fixed for a term of four years, April 2020 to March 2024. The funding certainty that this brought the voluntary organisations was known to be very welcome. The controlled termination or variation of any agreements that failed to meet their performance targets or did not achieve the agreed outcomes in any way was built into the detailed terms and conditions governing the agreements. This in effect meant that any service not meeting the Council's requirements could be stopped within six months. It was further recommended that to assist financial planning for the Council, all agreements worked to a fixed fee structure, with no indexing against inflation.

Members considered each recommendation of the SLA T&FG in turn.

Hastings Advice and Representation Centre (HARC)

- HARC had requested an increase of £2,840 on the current annual SLA fee of £16,160, which would equate to the salary and overheads of a part time (0.5 Full Time Equivalent) specialist welfare benefits advisor. The T&FG acknowledged the excellent work HARC did to support Rother residents and agreed to recommend an increase of £2,840.
- It was recommended that the agreement be continued at an annual fee of £19,000 subject to detailed terms and conditions. The Revenues and Benefits Manager would monitor this agreement.

Hastings and Rother Mediation Service

- It was recommended that the agreement be continued for a four year term, at an annual fixed fee of £8,400, subject to detailed terms and conditions. The current annual payment was £8,400. The Environmental Services and Licensing Manager would monitor performance against targets.

Rother District Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB)

- It was recommended that the Council's core support be set for four years, to be reviewed after two years, at an annual fixed fee of £85,000, subject to detailed terms and conditions. The current annual payment was £85,000. Additionally it was agreed that the Council should assist the CAB with sourcing and, if required, relocating to suitable premises within Bexhill town centre, that further funding through Parish and Town Councils should be explored and the CAB to provide a robust business plan for the two

year review. The Housing Needs Manager would monitor performance against targets.

Rother Voluntary Action (RVA)

- It was recommended that the agreement be continued for four years, at an annual fee of £38,000, subject to detailed terms and conditions, and that RVA approach the Council for additional grant funding for specific projects if required. The Housing Development, Programme Office and Policy Manager would monitor performance against targets.

Bexhill Museum

- The T&FG were particularly pleased to note the progress that the Museum had made since the last review and it was recommended that the agreement be continued for four years, at an annual fee of £8,500, subject to detailed terms and conditions. The current annual payment was £8,500. The Neighbourhood Services Manager would monitor performance against targets.

Action on Rural Sussex (AiRS)

- AiRS provided a service across East and West Sussex, representing the needs of rural communities and working to improve the lives of those living in rural areas. The Council's contribution was nominal and unlikely to impact adversely on AiRS' finances and it was agreed to recommend ceasing the funding agreement. Opportunities for further joint project working with AiRS would be explored on a case by case basis.

Hastings Furniture Service (HFS)

- It was recommended that the Council fund HFS for specific works and projects only, rather than on an annual basis and that the funding agreement ceased.

Rye Harbour Nature Reserve

- It was recommended that the funding be continued for four years at an annual unrestricted contribution of £1,000 and the Reserve provide details of how funding was utilised.

Members requested that SLA agreements be open so that recommendations that may come from the Environment Policy could be incorporated. It was confirmed that there would be a clause in the agreement which gave flexibility for the policy to be referred to.

Members acknowledged the important contribution of the voluntary sector in Rother and agreed that each organisation provided an invaluable service to the residents of Rother. The increase in funding for HARC and the ceasing of funding agreements for AiRS and HFS would result in an overall increase of £840 per annum to the SLA budget.

(Councillor J. Barnes declared a personal interest in this matter in so far as he is Vice-Chairman of Friends of Rye Harbour and Rye Harbour Management Committee).

(Councillor S.J. Coleman declared a personal interest in this matter in so far as he was a Member representative on the board of the Hastings Advice and Representation Centre).

(Councillor P.C. Courtel declared a personal interest in this matter in so far as he was a Member representative on the board of the Citizens Advice Bureau and Hastings Furniture Service).

(Councillor R. Thomas declared a personal interest in this matter in so far as he was a Member representative on the board of the Bexhill Museum and Hastings and Rother Mediation Service).

(Overview and Scrutiny Committee Agenda Item 8).

Dr Anthony Leonard
Executive Director