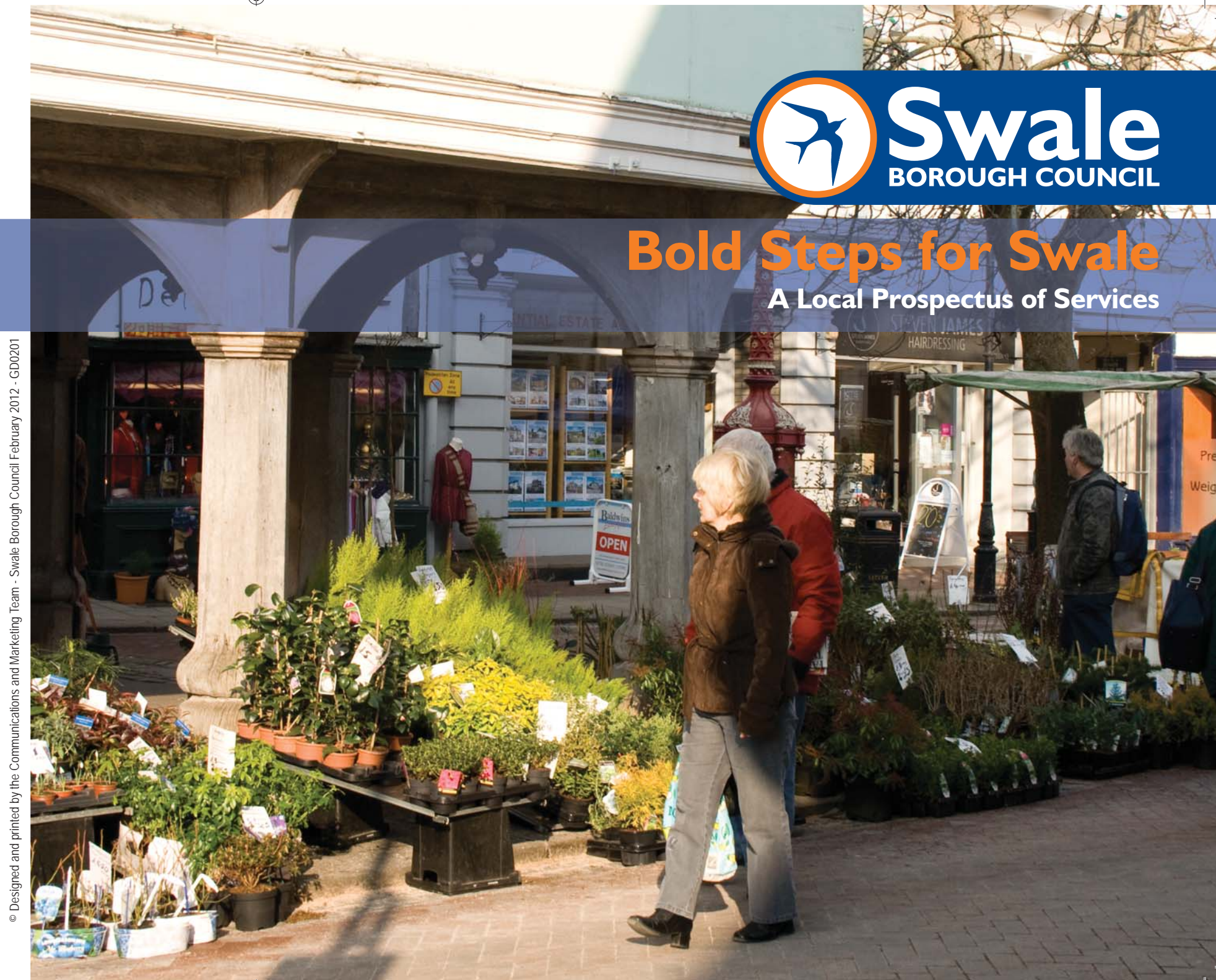




Bold Steps for Swale

A Local Prospectus of Services



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For further information or to make a submission visit our website at www.swale.gov.uk/council-procurement

Expressions of Interest should be sent to:

Head of Commissioning and Customer Contact
Swale Borough Council, Swale House, East Street
Sittingbourne, Kent ME10 3HT

Copies of this Swale Borough Council document are available on the Council website www.swale.gov.uk If you would like further hard copies or alternative versions (i.e. large print, audio, different language) we will do our best to accommodate your request please contact the Council at:

Swale Borough Council
Swale House, East Street
Sittingbourne
Kent, ME10 3HT

Customer Service Centre 01795 417850



Foreword – Our Commitment to Localism

Central government is committed to passing new powers and freedoms to local councils. We believe that power should be exercised at the lowest practical level - close to the people who are affected by decisions, rather than distant from them. Local councils can do their job best when they have genuine freedom to respond to what local people want, not what they are told to do by central government. In challenging financial times, this freedom is more important than ever, enabling local authorities to innovate and deliver better value for taxpayers' money.

For too long, central government has hoarded and concentrated power. Trying to improve people's lives by imposing decisions, setting targets and demanding inspections from Whitehall simply does not work very well: it creates bureaucracy; it leaves little room for adaptation to reflect local circumstances or innovation to deliver services more effectively and at lower cost; and it leaves people feeling 'done to' and imposed upon - the very opposite of the sense of participation and involvement on which a healthy democracy thrives.

We in Swale think that the best means of strengthening society is not for central government to try to seize all the power and responsibility for itself. We want to see a huge shift in power – not just from central Whitehall to local councils, but from local councils to communities and individuals. This will help local people and their locally elected representatives to achieve their own ambitions for their local communities. This is the essence of the Big Society.

We want to help you achieve your own ambitions

This prospectus is one way of making the Big Society happen in Swale. We want to take bold steps towards more localised decision-making, and give local people more say in how services are commissioned. But we also know that our aspirations for the future will not happen overnight – there will be challenges both for the council in managing what will be a significant programme of change, but more so for local communities, through our many town and parish councils, and through our hundreds of community and voluntary sector organisations, to become fully prepared to take on these roles.

For these reasons we do not anticipate a 'big bang' approach, covering all services in all communities on the Borough – rather, we expect to evolve and mature our approach over time, issuing a fresh prospectus each year that learns from and builds upon the successes, and no doubt some failures, of previous years. The mistake would be not to forge ahead because we are wary of such failures and the attention they may bring; but in our view this would be wrong - we want to show leadership on this agenda, building on our already strong foundations, and working hand in hand with our communities to forge a better future for all.

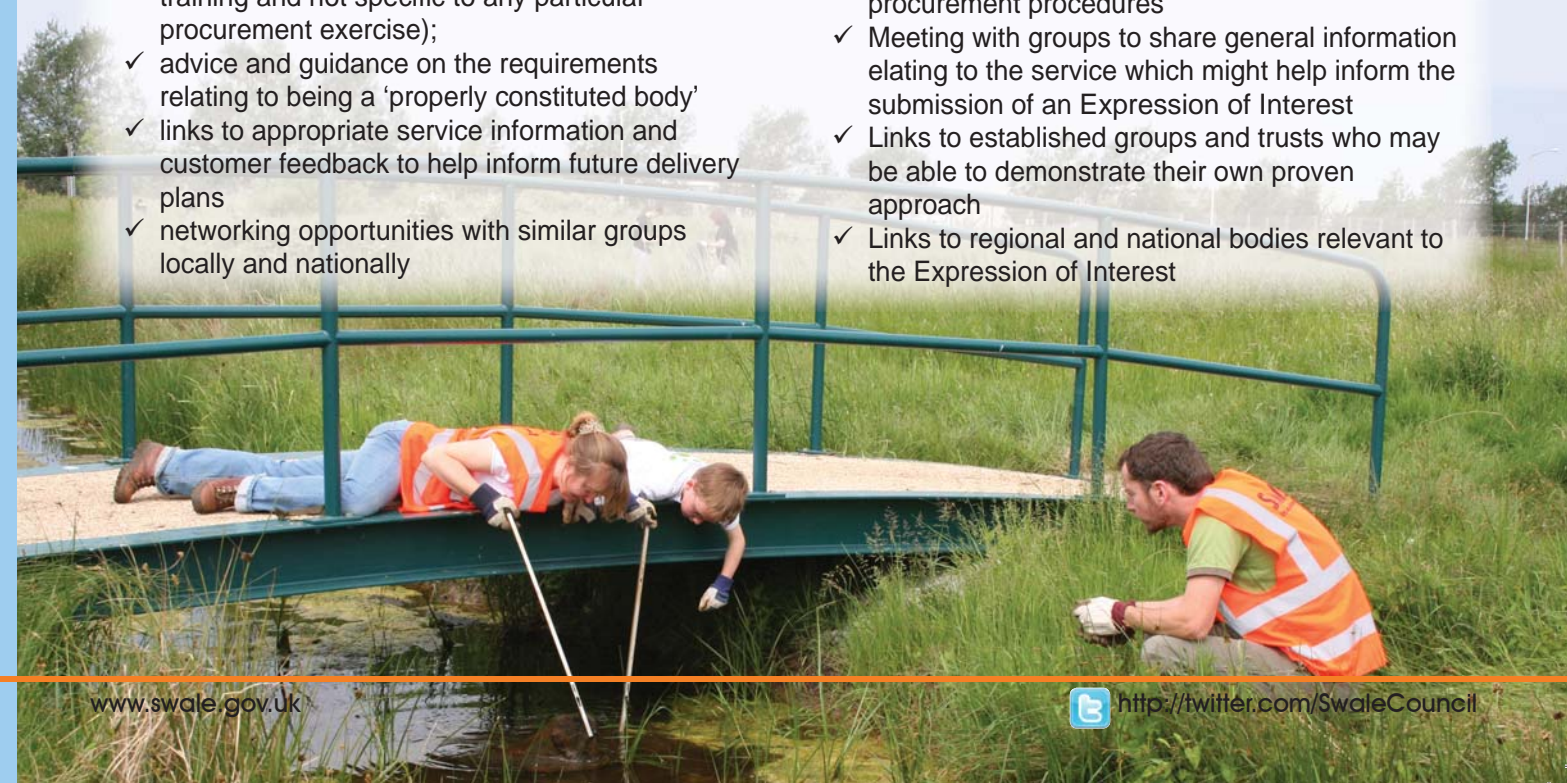
Andrew Bowles
Leader of the Council

In times of austerity this support is unlikely to be in the form of direct financial assistance. Instead we will develop:

- ✓ signposting of specific advice and guidance provided e.g. through national groups and studies on making successful Community Right to Challenge Expressions of Interest ;
- ✓ signposting of potential sources of funding, professional expertise, consultation resources etc;
- ✓ circulation of successful and exemplar Expressions of Interest;
- ✓ creation of templates, checklists and toolkits for potential bidders to use;
- ✓ training for interested groups in what it takes to make a successful Expression of Interest;
- ✓ training for community groups on how to navigate procurement exercises (NB - this will be generic training and not specific to any particular procurement exercise);
- ✓ advice and guidance on the requirements relating to being a 'properly constituted body'
- ✓ links to appropriate service information and customer feedback to help inform future delivery plans
- ✓ networking opportunities with similar groups locally and nationally

In addition, we will fully consider and respond to requests for the likes of:

- ✓ provision of free pre-application advice, guidance and training, for example, on how to develop a sustainable business plan;
- ✓ feedback on 'draft' Expressions of Interest on what further detail may be needed
- ✓ feedback on 'draft' Expressions of Interest on what would be likely to happen were it submitted;
- ✓ allocating some staff time to the relevant body on a 'placement' basis to help develop capacity and capability, for example, one day a week for a limited period; or
- ✓ secondment of staff on a more full time basis, to help develop capacity and capability, for a fixed period of time.
- ✓ Guidance and signposting to relevant procurement procedures
- ✓ Meeting with groups to share general information relating to the service which might help inform the submission of an Expression of Interest
- ✓ Links to established groups and trusts who may be able to demonstrate their own proven approach
- ✓ Links to regional and national bodies relevant to the Expression of Interest



There will be a right of appeal via our normal complaints process in the way that suits you best:

- ✓ online at www.swale.gov.uk/doitonline
- ✓ by email to csc@swale.gov.uk
- ✓ by phone (01795) 417850
- ✓ in person at any of our offices –
- ✓ by letter to **Customer Service Centre**, Swale House, East Street, Sittingbourne, Kent ME10 3HT

In the interests of openness and transparency, and as an opportunity for all groups to learn and mature their approach, we will publish all decisions on our website at www.swale.gov.uk/council-procurement and produce an annual report on all Right to Challenge activity, which will be presented to Cabinet.



Factors for success

It is not in anyone's interest, least of all the Council's, to devolve services to groups that are not fully ready to take them on and deliver them over the longer term, as the likelihood is that that group may fold and the Council

incur costs in running a further procurement exercise, or bringing the service back in house.

Therefore, in order to be successful in making a bid, interested groups will have to demonstrate that they are well placed to deliver the service in question. This will include providing evidence that they have:

- ✓ suitable governance arrangements in place and are a properly constituted body;
- ✓ good consultation mechanisms in place with the communities that the service area provides for;

- ✓ sufficient access to expertise in managing and delivering the service area;
- ✓ sufficient access to finance to cover all risks associated with the service area;
- ✓ the ability to deliver value-for-money and high-quality services;
- ✓ good and sustainable human resources, financial, performance, project and risk management arrangements in place;
- ✓ an understanding of the requirements in place under equalities legislation;
- ✓ support from the local community;
- ✓ the ability to develop a sustainable business plan and financial forecast for the service they are interested in;
- ✓ an ability to provide quality services;
- ✓ a desire to work with a diverse range of partner organisations

This is not an exhaustive list. In particular, there may be specific expectations and requirements for each area of service under challenge.



However, we fully recognise that these are not always easy issues to be able to properly demonstrate and evidence, particularly for groups who are looking to take on a service area for the first time. That is why we are putting support arrangements in place to help any interested groups in preparing to submit an Expression of Interest.

Our policy position

We have a long and successful history of working closely with local town and parish councils and community and voluntary sector groups, including for example:

- ✓ Local Engagement Forums
- ✓ Devolved budgets to members
- ✓ Community asset transfers
- ✓ A Rural Forum
- ✓ Cooperatives for local markets
- ✓ Sports Trusts
- ✓ Trusts to run community halls
- ✓ Local sports clubs
- ✓ Friends of Parks
- ✓ Friends of Beaches
- ✓ Allotment Management Associations
- ✓ Swale In Bloom Groups
- ✓ Tourism Associations

The new Localism Act enables local authorities to devolve powers previously exercised by the various tiers of local government to local communities, making it easier for local people to take over amenities they value and keep them part of local life to achieve their ambitions.

As a result, we want to work with these local town and parish councils, social enterprises, volunteers, and community groups who are full of bright ideas for improving local services.

Specifically, we aim to:

- make it easier for local people to take over the amenities they value, and keep them part of local life;
- ensure that local social enterprises, volunteers, and community groups with a bright idea for improving local services get a chance to change how things are done; and
- give people a new way to voice their opinions on any local issue close to their heart.

We therefore welcome any interest from such groups in the services contained within this prospectus. These are set out below as the Swale Borough Council (SBC) Offer.

Of course, under the legislation, we are open to challenge on the delivery of any SBC services and we will respond appropriately to all expressions of interest that are received. However, we are clear that this initial list of service areas is the one where the most progress can be made quickly.

Over time we plan to do annual updates to this Prospectus, expanding the list of services included in the SBC Offer as both we and community groups and town and Parish councils build their capacity and capabilities to take on greater responsibilities and risks.

It is really important to understand that the Community Right to Challenge in the Localism Act, which this Prospectus is built upon, is specifically only the power to submit an Expression of Interest to trigger a procurement process, relating to the provision of relevant authority services on the authority's behalf, rather than to immediately bid to take over the service.

To be absolutely clear, it is a right for civil society organisations to challenge the provision of services by local authorities, but does not confer on a successful challenger the right to deliver those services.

Where an Expression of Interest is accepted, this will trigger a formal procurement exercise (see www.swale.gov.uk/council-procurement) in line with statutory duties (such as EU requirements) and our own Constitutional Standing Orders.

Queenborough Harbour: the mooring service has just been transferred to the Queenborough Harbour Trust who will run it from the 1st April 2012.

The Swale Borough Council offer – priority services areas

We welcome expressions of interest from not for profit voluntary or community bodies, charitable organisations, parishes and town councils, social enterprises and public sector mutuals (consisting of two or more employees of a local authority) wishing to take on the responsibility for providing local public services which have traditionally been provided by Swale Borough Council.

This is the initial list of the SBC services where we would welcome expressions of interest in taking over the running of the service.

- ✓ Allotments
- ✓ Cemeteries
- ✓ Community Halls
- ✓ Community Woodland
- ✓ Country Sites
- ✓ General Open Space
- ✓ Heritage Buildings
- ✓ Play Areas
- ✓ Sports Pitches
- ✓ Urban Parks

We remain open to all expressions of interest and recognise that such groups have the right to challenge on the delivery of any SBC services.

How to get involved

Any not for profit voluntary or community bodies, charitable organisations, parishes and town councils, social enterprises and public sector mutuals (consisting of two or more employees of a local authority) are welcome to submit an Expression of Interest.

Swale Borough Council will be clear about any restrictions on time periods for bids, for example, where a service is already under contractual or partnership arrangements. In these cases, the time period would be set for when that arrangement was up for review. Details of any restrictions on time periods will be set out clearly on our website at www.swale.gov.uk/council-procurement.

In order to be valid an Expression of Interest needs to include the following information:

- ✓ details of the relevant body submitting it;
- ✓ details of the relevant body's financial situation;
- ✓ details of the relevant service(s) to which it relates (including the geographical area the body wishes to deliver that service);
- ✓ the relevant body's case that they are capable of providing or being involved in providing the



relevant service(s), or are taking steps to ensure they will be in such a position ahead of the procurement exercise.

- ✓ details and benefits of the relevant body's proposal i.e. why it this approach should be considered;
- ✓ details of the outcome to be achieved by the relevant body's provision or involvement in provision of the relevant service(s), including how it promotes or improves the social, economic or environmental well-being of the area, and how it would be able to deliver good value for money;
- ✓ the relevant body's case that they will be able to participate in any procurement exercise relating to the provision of the relevant service(s); and

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The process

Expressions of Interest that are received will be responded to within 30 working days. Where all the data necessary for a decision, we will inform you of our decision. Where data is missing or unclear, we will contact you to request that information.

Acceptance of an Expression of Interest triggers procurement exercise which is appropriate to the value and nature of the contract that may be awarded as a result of the exercise – it does not result in the simple handing over of a service.