

<b>Cabinet Meeting</b>		<b>Agenda Item: 12</b>
<b>Meeting Date</b>	11 March 2015	
<b>Report Title</b>	Supporting Swale's parish and town councils – Statement of Intent	
<b>Cabinet Member</b>	Cllr Mike Whiting, Cabinet Member for Localism, Culture, Heritage and Sport	
<b>SMT Lead</b>	Chief Executive	
<b>Head of Service</b>	David Clifford	
<b>Lead Officer</b>	Bob Pullen	
<b>Key Decision</b>	No	
<b>Classification</b>	Open	
<b>Forward Plan</b>	Yes	
<b>Recommendations</b>	1. To approve the Statement of Intent.	

## **1 Purpose of Report and Executive Summary**

- 1.1 The Statement of Intent (Sol) has been developed to provide clear guidance for the level of support parish and town councils can expect from Swale Borough Council (SBC). Its aim is to provide a clear framework within which SBC and local councils can work together in partnership and cooperation.

## **2 Background**

- 2.1 SBC is committed to supporting and enabling Swale's parish and town councils to embrace the localism agenda and helping to ensure that decision-making is made at the most appropriate level. The Sol is one of a series of commitments SBC has made including:
- The Corporate Plan, which pledged to work better with parish and town councils; and
  - Local First, our prospectus of local services which promoted devolving local assets and services to local communities.
- 2.2 The Sol has been developed to provide clear guidance for the level of support parish and town councils can expect from SBC.
- 2.3 Ideas for what should be included in the Sol were suggested by Heads of Service last year and Informal Cabinet agreed an earlier version of the draft Sol at their meeting on 28 April 2014.

- 2.4 Since then, two separate meetings have been held with representatives from Swale's parish and town councils and the Swale Branch of the Kent Association of Local Councils (KALC) to discuss the draft Sol. The current version of the Sol incorporates responses made at those meetings where we consider we could accommodate them.
- 2.5 The Council formally consulted parish and town councils on the draft Sol on 16 December 2014 and four councils responded with comments. An analysis of the comments received is provided at Appendix I. The post-consultation version of the Sol is at Appendix II.

### **3 Proposals**

- 3.1 The Sol is intended to provide clear guidance for the level of support parish and town councils can expect from SBC. No such guidance currently exists, and parish and town councils tell us it is difficult to gauge what support is available. In addition, the Council has no prior knowledge of the types of demands parish and town councils can make on us. A Statement of Intent such as this clearly sets out our offer.
- 3.2 Most district councils in Kent have published a document to support their local councils. The Sol would demonstrate a clear commitment that we want to support and enable parish and town councils to embrace the localism agenda.
- 3.3 During the course of the discussions with parish and town councils, the idea of a 'Compact' between SBC and local councils arose. Therefore, the draft Sol leaves open the option to develop a document that is closer to a 'Compact' or 'concordat' (para 1.6 of the Sol refers) than the current Statement of Intent.

### **4 Alternative Options**

- 4.1 Not to have a Sol. This is not recommended as it will mean that the Council does not embrace Localism priorities fully. Supporting parish and town councils is an action in the Corporate Plan. Having a Sol will protect the council as it is able to budget for agreed levels of support.

### **5 Consultation Undertaken or Proposed**

- 5.1 Two meetings were held with representatives of parish and town councils and Swale KALC on 2 July and 14 October 2014. In addition, Cllr Whiting attended a meeting of Swale KALC and both he and Cllr Sandle have been attending meetings of parish and town councils to raise awareness of the draft Sol.
- 5.2 The Council formally consulted all parish and town councils and Swale KALC in December 2014 and the response to that consultation is at Appendix II.

## 6 Implications

Issue	Implications
Corporate Plan	The Sol addresses the priority of Embracing Localism, but will also support the Open for Business and Healthy Environment priorities too.
Financial, Resource and Property	<p>Staff resources within SBC have been made available, and SBC has set aside £250k for a Localism Loan Fund and £112,800 for local member community grants, both of which are available to parish and town councils to support their aspirations.</p> <p>SBC has a duty to publish a list of Assets of Community Value and resource is required from the Property Team to maintain that and go through the process of listing.</p> <p>There may be additional assets that SBC may decide to transfer in accordance with our Asset Transfer Policy.</p> <p>While SBC is responsible for the costs involved in setting up the independent examinations and the referendums for Neighbourhood Plans (NPs), these costs are currently covered by a specific grant from central government. Outside of that, parish and town councils would need to provide the resources to undertake and produce their NPs and further grants are available directly to them from central government up to £7,000. Parish and town councils may seek further funding from developers or others involved in their NPs.</p>
Legal and Statutory	The Sol takes account of the Localism Act 2011.
Crime and Disorder	Through localism, communities are more cohesive and resilient and this can help to reduce crime and disorder.
Sustainability	The Sol will help identify what support from SBC and others is required by parish and town councils who want to take on assets and responsibilities.
Health and Wellbeing	None identified at this stage.
Risk Management and Health and Safety	None identified at this stage.
Equality and Diversity	By being Local First, the Council is giving a fair opportunity to parish and town councils.

## 7 Appendices

7.1 The following documents are to be published with this report and form part of the report:

- Appendix I: Responses to consultation
- Appendix II: Statement of Intent: Post-consultation

## **8 Background Papers**

Consultation draft of Statement of Intent - [http://archive.swale.gov.uk/assets/Media/SOI-consultation-draft-final\\_2.pdf](http://archive.swale.gov.uk/assets/Media/SOI-consultation-draft-final_2.pdf)