



## Report of Town Clerk

### Future Local Services Provision in Berwick

#### Access Public

#### Background

1. This council is currently partner, with Northumberland County Council (NCC), in a scheme to provide additional resource within the town for local services, the badge NCC uses for environmental and grounds maintenance services.
2. These arrangements were instituted in 2015-16, and have previously been reviewed. Those reviews have focused on the balance between the Town Councils lack of capacity (and need to create capacity to address the identified needs) and the difficulties in managing work undertaken by a much larger partner and identifying both impacts and value for money. Dissatisfaction with the impact and effect of these arrangements has been expressed previously, and recently.
3. The services offered by NCC are similar to those provided under other, similar agreements elsewhere in Northumberland but those arrangements are unique to each area, and in some cases parish and town councils have moved away from formal partnership structures.
4. The variety of structures and approaches adopted by Parish & Town Council's is not merely a taste, but may reflect real differences between places. For instance, amongst the factors that might make Berwick unique are the high number of public seats within the town, the high number of litter bins, the challenges of delivering services in a coastal environment and the large number of children's play areas the council maintains.
5. Any partnership will give rise to issues around how the staff paid for by Berwick Town Council under the partnership agreement can be directed to address Berwick Town Council's priorities; simply put, do they operate as part of NCC's team, delivering NCC's priorities or do they work to programmes entirely identified by Berwick Town Council with NCC only acting as managing agents?
6. The decision to enter into a partnership agreement by Berwick Town Council was as much a political decision as a managerial decision. As outlined above, other parish and town councils (Alwick and Cramlington, for instance) operate in house handyman services addressing issues like bus stop and seat maintenance, and utilize spare resource to address other public realm issues.
7. It is both appropriate and timely to open this topic to council.

## Options

8. Officers have previously costed a service that would deliver:
  - a. Play park inspection and routine maintenance,
  - b. Bus stop inspection and maintenance,
  - c. Seat inspection, maintenance and painting,
  - d. Splash park pressure washing,
  - e. Spot litter picking,
  - f. Town centre litter picking, and
  - g. Event support (e.g. Riding of the Bounds).
9. The costings prepared in 2017 are out of date, and staff would need to allocate approximately five working days, across three members of staff, to develop up to date costings and research with other parishes how they have addressed these issues.
10. Staff have not seriously explored the possibility of outsourcing work directly to a single contractor, and believe this possibility should be explored.
11. NCC have not yet proposed a revised partnership agreement.
12. At this stage, your officers believe that the choice to be made is as much a matter of principle as it is a matter of cost benefit analysis.

## Recommendation

1. That members indicate to officers how they wish to proceed.

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| Author     | GD | Town Clerk sign off (if required)      | GD  |
| Checked by | SC | Finance Officer sign off (if required) | N/A |