

BUSINESS ADVICE, ENQUIRIES AND CHARGING POLICY REVIEW

To: **Highways and Community Infrastructure Committee**

Meeting Date: **18th November 2014**

From: **Executive Director: Economy, Transport & Environment**

Electoral division(s): **All**

Forward Plan ref: **N/A** *Key decision:* **No**

Purpose: **To consider the proposed amendments to the Supporting Businesses and Communities, Business Advice and Charging Policy.**

Recommendation: **The Committee is asked to approve the amendments to the Business Advice, Enquiries and Charging Policy**

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1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 In March 2009, Cabinet approved a new Business Advice, Enquiries and Charging Policy. The Policy, which related to Trading Standards advice, was developed to offer different levels of services to businesses depending on their circumstances.
- 1.2 In the Report submitted to Cabinet in 2009, the following paragraph was highlighted in relation to 'Significant Implications'.
 - *Officers therefore propose that the Business Advice policy states, "The majority of services provided will be free, however the Trading Standards Service may apply such charges for its services as is reasonable and allowed for by statute. The Trading Standards Service will publicise the basis for its charges on an annual basis."*
- 1.3 At that time, approval was also given to delegate the power to approve amendments to the policy to the Cabinet Member for Economy, Environment and Climate Change in consultation with the Deputy Chief Executive of Environment and Community Services.
- 1.4 In line with this delegation some minor amendments to the Policy have been made, with the most recent amendments being approved in January 2014.

2. MAIN ISSUES

- 2.1 The minor amendments approved in January 2014 gave a better reflection of the service offered to businesses following the Trading Standards restructure in 2013. In particular, the Policy made it clear that businesses with consumer law based enquiries would be referred to our advice partner, the Citizens Advice Consumer Service.
- 2.2 The existing Business Advice, Enquiries and Charging Policy already allows the Supporting Businesses and Communities Service to charge for business advice. It states that the *'The majority of services provided will be free, however charges may be applied to some services as is reasonable and allowed for by statute.'*
- 2.3 Officers consider that the Policy requires amending to make it clearer and more transparent about exactly when a business will be given advice free of charge and when business advice becomes chargeable.
- 2.4 The proposed changes will ensure that an equitable and consistent advice service is provided to all Cambridgeshire businesses. Any income generated from chargeable business advice will be re-invested within the service to help support and manage demand.
- 2.5 **Appendix A** sets out the proposed revised Policy. Section 5 and in particular Sections 5.1, and 5.2 now provide greater clarity for Cambridgeshire businesses on the level of service they can expect from the Supporting Businesses & Communities Service. Examples of

when the service is provided free of charge, and when the advice service is chargeable are given.

- 2.7 Officers undertook a consultation exercise with regard to the proposed amendments. A list of the stakeholders consulted and the results from this consultation are set out in **Appendix B**. Despite the number of stakeholders contacted only 4 responses were received. The low number of responses is likely to be due to the fact only minor amendments have been proposed.

3. ALIGNMENT WITH CORPORATE PRIORITIES

Officers believe the approach outlined in the policy is supportive of the objectives outlined in the Business Plan and Corporate Priorities.

3.1 Developing the local economy for the benefit of all.

By enabling businesses to meet regulatory requirements and enforcing against non-compliance, regulatory services like Trading Standards provide both protection and increased confidence in the market place.

The Service will be better placed to manage demand for its services by being clear about the level of advice available to businesses. Our Officers will ensure that each business contacting the Service for advice and guidance is signposted to the relevant information in order to help create future resilience. By offering a chargeable service, businesses will have the option to access a higher level of support if required.

3.2 Helping people live health and independent lives

There are no significant implications for this priority

3.3 Supporting and protecting vulnerable people

There are no significant implications for this priority

4. SIGNIFICANT IMPLICATIONS

4.1 Resource Implications

Without clarity on the options to charge for services, reducing resources and fiscal pressures could have an impact for some businesses as fewer resources are likely to be allocated to business advice in favour of risk based and statutory service delivery.

The service currently has a significant number of Primary Authority Partnerships in place which provides significant benefit to the business whilst allowing the Service to recover costs.

4.2 Statutory, Risk and Legal Implication

Some areas of Trading Standards are statutory and, therefore, need to be delivered. Business Advice is, however, not a statutory Service and a charge can, therefore, be made for this Service to ensure it can continue to be offered to Cambridgeshire businesses.

4.3 Equality and Diversity Implications

There are no significant implications for this priority

4.4 Engagement and Consultation Implications

A consultation on the Policy was undertaken during September 2014 with a number of local Business groups. Further details of those organisations that were consulted and the results are set out in Appendix B.

Despite the number of stakeholders contacted regarding the proposed amendments to the Business Advice, Enquiries and Charging Policy, only 4 responses were received. There were no negative comments submitted regarding the proposed changes and 100% of respondents agreed that the proposed Policy was both clear and transparent.

4.5 Localism and Local Member Involvement

There are no significant implications for this priority

4.6 Public Health Implications

There are no significant implications for this priority

Source Documents	Location
Existing Business Advice, Enquiries and Charging Policy January 2014	http://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/info/20074/trading_standards/262/advice_for_businesses/4