

Report to: Charity Committee

Date of Meeting: 20th March 2017

Report Title: Proposal to work with the RNLI (Royal National Lifeboat Institution) to provide a beach lifeguard service for Hastings Borough Council and Hastings & St Leonards Charitable Foreshore Trust

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Purpose of Report

To update charity committee on the proposal for the RNLI to run the beach lifeguard service in Hastings for a trial summer season in 2017, and to recommend its acceptance.

Recommendation(s)

It is recommended that HBC and the FT enter into a one season agreement with the RNLI for the RNLI to provide a beach lifeguard service at Hastings for the 2017 season, this operation to be reviewed at the end of the season.

Reasons for Recommendations

Because the RNLI can offer a comparable beach lifeguard service to our in-house provision, directly managed by the RNLI, at a lower price.

Introduction

1. This paper proposes that the RNLI operates our beach lifeguard service for a one year trial for the summer of 2017.
2. Time is critical, and the RNLI have already started recruiting for their operation at Camber and Bexhill this year; they would like to appoint to Hastings using the same pool of potential recruits if possible. A swift decision in principle is needed to allow the RNLI to proceed. We would normally have started the process for recruiting for our own staff now so time really is of the essence.
3. The members of the charity committee, the protector, and the chief legal officer have all agreed that this can be considered as an urgent item at the charity committee meeting on 20th March.

Background

4. Hastings Borough Council/the Foreshore Trust has operated an 'in house' seasonal Lifeguard Service since 2000. This has developed over the years in response to risk assessment, visitor habits and service review.
5. In 2016 HBC/FT employed a total of 18 seasonal lifeguards to provide a service at Pelham and Marina, our main resort beaches, which are also designated bathing waters and award beach areas. The service operated from 16th July until 11th September.
6. A full review of the service was planned for autumn 2017 assisted by the RNLI and in anticipation of this process and in response to other changes; HBC was planning to operate a trial extended service for the 2017 season that included an additional lookout post at White Rock and an earlier start date in late May/early June.

Recent Developments

7. This review would have assessed a partnership approach for the RNLI to provide the service in Hastings. This is an option that been actively considered since the RNLI initiated a Beach Lifeguard Service about 10 years ago.
8. The RNLI currently provides a 24/7 on call lifeboat service to cover search and rescue requirements to 100 nautical miles out from the coast of the UK, and also provides beach lifeguard services on many of beaches in the south, east, and southwest of England and Wales. More recently this has expanded to beaches in other parts of the country.
9. Following the tragic incidents involving multiple drownings at Camber Sands last year Rother District Council have been in discussion with the RNLI for them to provide a Lifeguard Service at Camber Sands and Bexhill. This has now been agreed and will start in early summer 2017.

10. In light of the forthcoming retirement of HBC's beach inspector and the imminent departure of the current resort services manager through voluntary redundancy, there will be a gap in our operational knowledge and experience. We have therefore explored the possibility of the RNLI providing a beach lifeguard service at Hastings for 2017, for a one season trial, to be reviewed at the end of the season.

RNLI Proposal

11. Where the RNLI provide lifeguard services they carry out a full risk assessment and service level audit for each of the patrolled beaches, to identify and assess the risks posed by potential hazards and specify control measures. The RNLI will staff, resource and equip the beach appropriately based on the risk assessment, service level audits and subsequent discussions with the beach operator.
12. The RNLI operate a joint funding arrangement to cover the costs associated with running the lifeguard service. The RNLI ask for a contribution from the beach operator equivalent to the seasonal wage bill for the time the operational lifeguards spend patrolling, with the RNLI funding the remainder of the service. They also ask for permission from the beach operator to fundraise and promote the Institution on the beach during the lifeguarded season.
13. The RNLI and the beach operator - HBC/FT - enter into a contractual agreement for the provision of lifeguard services, usually for a minimum five year term, although in this instance the RNLI are happy to offer an initial one year trial contract.
14. The RNLI and the beach operator agree a season plan. The RNLI will then commit to provide the lifeguard patrols in accordance with its Standard Operating Procedures and site specific Local Operating Procedures. Both of these will be made available for inspection to the beach operator.
15. In providing the lifeguard patrols the RNLI will endeavour to provide the lifeguard service in accordance with the criteria for beach lifeguard services required for compliance with the European Blue Flag and/or Seaside Award.
16. RNLI lifeguards act with high standards of courtesy and consideration towards members of the public at all times and will notify members of the public using the patrolled beaches of the relevant local byelaws which directly relate to beach safety. They will inform the appropriate officer responsible for environmental services regarding any beach cleaning requirements or pollution incidents noted by the lifeguards.

Financial Implications

17. The RNLI have indicated a charge of £27 183 for an equivalent service to last year. If they are able to recruit early enough then they would provide an earlier service from 27th May, just at Pelham, for a cost of £40 085. This would be HBC's only financial contribution to providing the service. All other costs for equipment, training, supervision and buildings would be met by the RNLI.

18. At present the cost of the lifeguard service is split between Hastings Borough Council and the Foreshore Trust according to agreed ratios of 65% FT, 35% HBC.
19. For comparison the service cost HBC/FT approximately £54 000 for staff in 2016, this figure did not cover any internal supervision costs, and there were additional costs of £7500 for training, induction and supervision from our lifeguard consultant.
20. The RNLI proposal will therefore be cheaper than in-house provision, even though the RNLI pay their lifeguards a higher hourly rate than HBC/FT would, because the RNLI pick up training, overhead and management costs, and the cost of providing the equipment
21. The RNLI have previously undertaken an audit of our existing signage and PRE (Public Rescue Equipment) which they have offered to update and have also made a commitment to cover 50% of the cost of replacement signage to RNLI standard. This was already in the Foreshore Business Plan for 2017/18 and could potentially save up to another £10 000.

Summary

22. Although we have to move very quickly to get the RNLI to operate our service this year it will mitigate some of the risks HBC/FT might be exposed to through the loss of specialist knowledge and experience with both the beach inspector and resort services manager leaving HBC within the next few weeks. It will also provide public reassurance, as the RNLI is a recognised household name for saving lives at sea. A full review of the service will still be undertaken at the end of the 2017 season with support from the RNLI.
23. HBC has maintained an active dialogue with the RNLI and an open approach to the potential for them to run the service on our behalf. Previous concerns around an initial 5 year contract, lack of cost benefit and loss of other lifeguard roles (eg litter picking/painting etc. in wet weather) appear to be negated given the benefits and cost savings.
24. The RNLI are keen to extend their coverage of this part of the UK and have made substantial concessions in their proposal to HBC.

Next Steps

25. Initial visits have been made to existing buildings and facilities (lifeguard station and beach office), the RNLI will want to agree leases for these as soon as possible so that they can be enhanced where necessary, at their cost.
26. The RNLI also require an operational base - usually a 5000sqm industrial unit - and may consider renting one from HBC if we have something suitable available.
27. A meeting with the RNLI has been set up to agree Service Level and Local Operating Procedures.

28. Our legal team are currently reviewing a draft contract which will need to be signed by both parties but in the short term we have a draft letter of intent if we wish to proceed.

29. The coastal users' group was briefed on the proposal at its meeting on 7th March and enthusiastically, and unanimously, supported the principle of the RNLI providing the beach lifeguard service at Hastings.

Wards Affected

Old Town
Castle
Central St Leonards

Policy Implications

Please identify if this report contains any implications for the following:

Equalities and Community Cohesiveness	
Crime and Fear of Crime (Section 17)	
Risk Management	X
Environmental Issues	X
Economic/Financial Implications	X
Human Rights Act	
Organisational Consequences	X
Local People's Views	X
Anti-Poverty	

Additional Information

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