

**REPORT TO:** Executive Board Sub-Committee

**DATE:** 1 April 2010

**REPORTING OFFICER:** Strategic Director - Environment & Economy

**SUBJECT:** New Service Level Agreement with Cheshire Wildlife Trust.

**WARDS:** Boroughwide

## **1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

1.1 To seek Members approval to enter into a three year Service Level Agreement with the Cheshire Wildlife Trust ,which will enable the Council to deliver its biodiversity commitments.

## **2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That**

**The Council enter into a Service Level Agreement with the Cheshire Wildlife Trust for the provision of Ecological Advice, Biological Recording and advice on Planning matters.**

## **3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

3.1 The Cheshire Wildlife Trust is the region's leading environmental conservation organisation, working on all aspects of nature and wildlife protection. Over a number of years, the Trust has worked in partnership with local authorities and other conservation bodies. The Trust has developed a Service Level Agreement that will provide ecological advice, biological recording, development of site management plans and Local Wildlife Sites (see 4.2) for Cheshire West & Chester Council, Halton Borough Council and Warrington Borough Council. These services will be delivered to Halton for a fixed cost of £17,000.00 per year for three years.

3.2 The Council currently has a very basic Service Level Agreement with the Cheshire Wildlife Trust through which they give advice on nature reserve management and prior to December 2008 they provided assistance to the Nature Conservation Officer. The current agreement costs £2,400 per year.

3.3 The Council currently has a Service Level Agreement with 'Record' for the provision of biological recording and GIS analysis. The current agreement costs £2,170 per year.

- 3.4 The Council's Open Space Services has responsibility for nature conservation and biodiversity. The Division does not have a designated Nature Conservation Officer and therefore needs to deliver this element of its responsibility through partnership working.

#### **4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

- 4.1 There is a general biodiversity duty in the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act (Section 40) which requires every public body in the exercising of its function to 'have regard, so far as is consistent with the proper exercise of those functions, to the purpose of conserving biodiversity'. This SLA will help with this duty through the delivery of the current Natural Assets Strategy and the Halton Biodiversity Action Plan's and their successor strategy 'The Halton Green Infrastructure Strategy'.
- 4.2 Local Authorities are also required to report against National Indicator 197 (NI 197) – Local Wildlife Sites in active conservation management. The Agreement will help in the information gathering and survey work required for this part of the statutory duty.
- 4.2 The Service Level Agreement will help to achieve several of the objectives in the Corporate Plan, particularly those connected with 'A Healthy Halton' and 'Urban Renewal'.

#### **5.0 OTHER IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 Financial: An annual sum of £17,000 has been allocated from within the Revenue budgets of the Open Space Services and the Regulatory Services Divisions to cover the cost of the Service Level Agreement. The proposed agreement would commit the Council to this annual cost until 2013.
- 5.2 Sustainability: The Service Level Agreement will help to achieve several objectives of the Local Agenda 21 Strategy and A Local Compact for Halton.

#### **6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES**

##### **6.1 Children and Young People in Halton**

The above proposals will deliver improvements that will directly impact on the lives of local children and young people who will have access to local nature reserves and wildlife sites for study and recreational purposes.

## **6.2 Employment, Learning and Skills in Halton**

The Cheshire Wildlife Trust will recruit and train local volunteers to carry out biological recording at wildlife sites boroughwide and in so doing will develop valuable transferable skills amongst local residents.

## **6.3 A Healthy Halton**

Improvement of the Borough's biodiversity will have an impact on human health through the creation of interesting sites that will encourage visitors.

## **6.4 A Safer Halton**

There are no implications regarding A Safer Halton.

## **6.5 Halton's Urban Renewal**

Improvements to the Borough's Green Infrastructure will further improve the image of the Borough and contribute directly to its Urban Renewal.

## **7.0 RISK ANALYSIS**

6.1 No significant risks have been identified.

## **8.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES**

7.1 No significant Equality and Diversity Issue have been identified.

***(NB ONLY INCLUDE 8.0, 9.0 AND 10.0 BELOW IF THE REPORT RELATES TO A KEY DECISION INCLUDED ON THE FORWARD PLAN)***

## **9.0 REASON(S) FOR DECISION**

## **10.0 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED**

## **11.0 IMPLEMENTATION DATE**

## **12.0 LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972**

<b>Document</b>	<b>Place of Inspection</b>	<b>Contact Officer</b>
Natural Assets Strategy	Picow Farm Depot	Paul Wright
Halton's Biodiversity Action Plan	Picow Farm Depot	Paul Wright