

## **NORTH LINCOLNSHIRE COUNCIL**

### **CORPORATE SERVICES CABINET MEMBER**

#### **ESTABLISHING A NATIONALITY CHECKING SERVICE IN NORTH LINCOLNSHIRE**

##### **1. OBJECT AND KEY POINTS IN THIS REPORT**

- 1.1 To seek approval for start-up and delivery of a Nationality Checking Service (NCS).
- 1.2 This report provides information to the relevant Cabinet Member to allow a decision to be made on the start-up of a NCS. The purpose and objectives of the service are presented alongside the risks and potential benefits.

##### **2. BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

- 2.1 The NCS initiative is a partnership between the Border and Immigration Agency (BIA), Local Authorities Coordinators of Regulatory Services (LACORS) and local authorities across the United Kingdom. It is aimed at people wishing to apply for British citizenship.
- 2.2 The service now accounts for over 30% of citizenship applications. It is proven to speed up the processing time for new applications and cut the refusal rate.
- 2.3 The NCS is also associated with promoting active citizenship and building cohesive communities.
- 2.4 For an administration fee customers have their applications checked for accuracy by the local authority. Documents are checked, photocopied and forwarded to the BIA. Customers keep their original documents while their application is processed.
- 2.5 An immigration advice service is currently run from Crosby Local Link. It should be noted that although this service provides advice to customers on applying for British citizenship it does not provide a document checking service. Customers receiving this advice make their own applications and do not keep their original documents while they are being processed.

### **3. OPTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION**

- 3.1 The NCS has been assessed as deliverable in North Lincolnshire and is a good fit with the shared ambitions for the area.
- 3.2 The facility could be operated by the Registration Service as follows -
  - 3.2.1 Through a Local Link office. Both Barton and Brigg offices have been assessed as suitable and are used by the Registration Service already for its core work.
  - 3.3.2 Deliver the service at Scunthorpe Register Office.

### **4. ANALYSIS OF OPTIONS**

- 4.1 Delivery of the NCS in other areas has been successful. It allows local authorities to provide a valuable service to customers and increased choice. In addition the cost of providing the service is recoverable through the administration fee.
- 4.2 The NCS initiative is a good example of joined-up government. The BIA has stated that the service has increased the number and accuracy of new citizenship applications.
- 4.3 An immigration advice service is provided through Crosby Local Link although this is not a document checking service. The NCS would be targeted at customers who are aware of their eligibility for citizenship and wish to have a shorter processing time and the reassurance of being able to keep their documents during their application. This is in line with delivery of the service nationally.
- 4.4 If the council approves start-up for the NCS the Registration Service will need to work closely with Crosby Local Link immigration advisors to ensure that staff and customers are aware of the different functions of each service.
- 4.5 Delivery options:
  - 4.5.1 Both Barton and Brigg local link offices are physically suitable for delivery of the NCS. Staff mobility may cause a problem as the majority of staff are based at Scunthorpe.
  - 4.5.2 Delivering the NCS at Scunthorpe Register Office would mean less disruption to the Registration Services other business.

## **5. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS (FINANCIAL, STAFFING, PROPERTY, IT)**

### **5.1 Financial**

5.1.1 The council would need to be licensed to deliver the NCS at a cost of £550 annually. Other start-up costs are negligible.

5.1.2 The initial charges will be £40 per adult application and £30 per child.

### **5.2 Staffing**

5.2.1 The NCS will be delivered using existing staffing resources. Other local authorities are successfully delivering the service alongside other functions.

5.2.2 Staff must be trained and licensed to deliver the service. Training can be provided locally and the cost will be negligible.

### **5.3 Property**

5.3.1 The preferred option is to deliver the NCS at Scunthorpe Register Office. The impact on other services delivered at this location will be minimal.

### **5.4 IT**

5.4.1 Then NCS would require systems for bookings, payments and record keeping. Existing resources would be used.

## **6. OTHER IMPLICATIONS (STATUTORY, ENVIRONMENTAL DIVERSITY, SECTION 17 – CRIME AND DISORDER, RISK AND OTHER)**

6.1 The NCS is in line with the council's Diversity Outcomes Framework and the shared ambitions for North Lincolnshire.

6.2 An initial diversity impact assessment has been completed and no significant negative impacts have been identified.

6.3 The most significant risk is that the service will be unsustainable if demand is low. Given that immigration advice is currently delivered in North Lincolnshire work will need to be undertaken to promote the NCS as a separate service. Other actions to mitigate this risk will be included in the planning for the service.

6.4 Given the relatively low cost of setting up and delivering the service the potential benefits outweigh the risks.

## **7. OUTCOMES OF CONSULTATION**

### **7.1 Consultation with the Home Office**

7.1.1 NCS staff at the Home Office provided information that makes a strong business case for start-up of the service.

7.1.2 It was recognised that any risks would be locally specific.

### **7.2 Consultation with other local authorities**

7.2.1 Good practice in delivering the NCS was identified through conversations with and visits to other local authorities. It was regarded as a valuable, cost-effective service by those involved in its delivery.

## **8. RECOMMENDATIONS**

8.1 It is recommended that approval is given for the start-up of the NCS service in North Lincolnshire and that Scunthorpe Register Office be the site for delivery.

### **SERVICE DIRECTOR LEGAL AND DEMOCRATIC**

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### **Background Papers used in the preparation of this report:**

*Nationality Checking Service: Local Authority Guidance Document* Home Office

*Benefits of Using Nationality Checking Service: Stakeholder Information Pack* Home Office