

<b>Economy &amp; Property Committee</b>	
<b>Meeting Date</b>	9 April 2025
<b>Report Title</b>	Procurement of Provision of RNLI Lifeguard Service
<b>EMT Lead</b>	Emma Wiggins, Director of Regeneration and Neighbourhoods
<b>Head of Service</b>	Martyn Cassell, Head of Environment and Leisure
<b>Lead Officer</b>	Mike Knowles, Seafront and Engineering Manager
<b>Classification</b>	<b>Open</b>
<b>Recommendations</b>	1. That the Committee approves the awarding of the Beach Lifeguarding Contract to the Royal National Lifeboat Institution from 1 <sup>st</sup> April 2025 for a period of 5 Years at a predicted total value of £295,733

## **1 Purpose of Report and Executive Summary**

- 1.1 The previous contract for the Provision of Lifeguard Services by Royal National Lifeboat Institution (RNLI) ran from 1 April 2017 to 31 December 2024, and included a 2-year extension to the contract term from 31 December 2022.
- 1.2 This report seeks Committee approval for the new five-year contract to be awarded to the RNLI through the publishing of a Voluntary Ex-Ante Transparency (VEAT) Notice .

## **2 Background**

- 2.1. The RNLI is the market leader on providing beach lifeguards in the UK. RNLI lifeguards are qualified in lifesaving and casualty care, highly trained, strong, and fit. They must be able to swim 200m in under 3 ½ minutes and run 200m on sand in under 40 seconds. It is worth noting that the qualification for beach lifeguarding is significantly enhanced on the National Pool Lifeguard Qualification (NPLQ).
- 2.2 RNLI lifeguards monitor sea conditions and set up the appropriate flags, watch visitors to the beach and offer safety advice to beach users. All RNLI lifeguards are equipped not only with the best training but the best equipment enabling them to deal with any situation.
- 2.3 The contract has previously covered the provision of lifeguard services on our three bathing beaches at Leysdown, Minster and Sheerness, but in recent years a lack of suitable recruits has meant we have had to reduce cover to two beaches. Minster beach was selected based on having a lower risk rating than the other beaches, backed up by data in the annual reports from RNLI. In the absence of local recruitment, the RNLI have had to cover Swale’s lifeguarding service by bringing in resources from other areas, which has had significant travel implications in moving staff from Thanet to Swale on a daily basis.

- 2.4 Due to the requirement for specialist training and observation of best practice in lifeguarding principles and all applicable law and regulations, it is deemed most appropriate to issue a VEAT Notice to award the contract to the RNLI. This will set out an intention to award the contract direct to the RNLI and will be published on Find a Tender.
- 2.5 Despite numerous attempts, Swale have been unable to source suitable alternative organisations or contractors to deliver this specialist service, and as such this was agreed as the most appropriate route. When undertaken for the previous contract, no appeals or challenges were lodged against the VEAT Notice.
- 2.6 The tender award criteria for the contract would have been based on a 60% price and 40% quality weighting, but with no other organisations submitting a tender it is proposed to issue a direct contract award. Another important consideration of using the RNLI is the fact that as a charity they provide a substantial amount of financial assistance to the provision of the lifeguarding service equipment, and local authorities pay a contribution towards the staff costs only through the contract. This is how you see the considerable lifeguard huts, powered watercraft, and lifesaving equipment for a low cost.
- 2.7 Performance of the previous contract has been strong. Their provision of staffing and equipment is unrivalled, they regularly report to SBC officers through contract meetings and there have been no major accidents under their stewardship.
- 2.8 Having a lifeguarding service is a key part of the Blue Flag criteria.

### **3 Proposals**

- 3.1 The Committee is requested to approve the awarding of the Beach Lifeguarding Contract to the Royal National Lifeboat Institution for a period of five years.

### **4 Alternative Options**

- 4.1 As detailed above, due to the specialist nature of the lifeguarding service, alternative service providers have not been identified through our market research. The majority of neighbouring local authorities use the services of the RNLI, except for a neighbouring authority who run an in-house service covering two beaches. This is possible due to the significant size of their Coastal Team. Whilst no detailed analysis of costs has been undertaken at this time, the budget shortfall to run a like for like in-house service would be considerably more than the budget shortfall for the RNLI contract option. Full details of the cost calculations can be found in Appendix I, but in summary the shortfall for an in-house service over 5 years is estimated as £402,211. There is currently no

resource or funding identified for the option of an in-house service, so if members were to choose this option, this would need to be identified through the budget setting process. There is also the risk that an in-house service would be likely to worsen recruitment rates, which would ultimately put the service in danger.

- 4.2 It should also be noted that the costs to the neighbouring authority are revenue costs, and for a similar in-house service to be provided in Swale we would also require an upfront capital programme to provide the lifeguarding huts and lifesaving equipment.
- 4.3 The previous pandemic, and the substantial challenges it presented which led to no lifeguard service for a season, highlighted that there are no suitable alternative service providers who can deliver this specialist provision, and whilst a security company was able to provide staff presence on our beaches during this time, they were clearly not trained or equipped to the high standard of the RNLI and would not have been in a position to provide a reactive service to emergency water or coast-based situations.
- 4.4 Using alternative service providers would result in a substantial increase in costs to the local authority, as all costs would need to be met.
- 4.5 We could cease to operate a lifeguarding service completely. Whilst not a statutory service, the lack of beach lifeguards would bring an increased risk to the authority as was seen recently with other Councils that did not provide the service. It would almost inevitably stop the Council from applying for Blue Flags at the beaches.

## **5 Consultation Undertaken or Proposed**

- 5.1 A meeting has taken place with Officers of Swale Borough Council, including the appropriate Head of Service, and a range of representatives at the RNLI to discuss current and future lifeguarding arrangements for our bathing beaches in Swale. Whilst current staff resources within the RNLI can only cover two of our bathing beaches, the contract does cover lifeguarding of the third beach in Minster if suitable recruitment is achieved.

## 6 Implications

Issue	Implications																
Corporate Plan	<p>Appointing a trusted and nationally recognised charity such as the RNLI who meets a good quality standard and provides good value for money contributes towards all the corporate priorities as it ensures that the lifeguarding provision is undertaken in a professional and effective way. Corporate Plan objective to implement the visitor economy framework to increase investment, address new visitor demands and grow the value of the sector to the Swale economy.</p>																
Financial, Resource and Property	<p>The anticipated spend on the five-year contract is as follows, and further information can be found in Appendix I.</p> <table border="1" data-bbox="495 745 1315 1123"> <thead> <tr> <th data-bbox="495 745 917 808">Financial Yr</th> <th data-bbox="917 745 1315 808">RNLI Contract Costs</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td data-bbox="495 808 917 850">2025/26</td> <td data-bbox="917 808 1315 850">£55,703</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="495 850 917 892">2026/27</td> <td data-bbox="917 850 1315 892">£57,374</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="495 892 917 934">2027/28</td> <td data-bbox="917 892 1315 934">£59,095</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="495 934 917 976">2028/29</td> <td data-bbox="917 934 1315 976">£60,868</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="495 976 917 1018">2029/30</td> <td data-bbox="917 976 1315 1018">£62,694</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="495 1018 917 1071"></td> <td data-bbox="917 1018 1315 1071"></td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="495 1071 917 1123"><b>TOTAL VALUE</b></td> <td data-bbox="917 1071 1315 1123"><b>£295,733</b></td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <p>It should be noted that these calculations are based on the annual RPI and have used predicted figures for future years. These figures give a total anticipated spend on the five-year contract of £295,733.</p> <p>The annual shortfall against budget will be covered by savings in other areas of the service.</p> <p>As stated above, the figures are contributions to the RNLI towards the total cost of providing this service.</p> <p>The Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 2006 as amended (“TUPE”) do not apply to this contract.</p>	Financial Yr	RNLI Contract Costs	2025/26	£55,703	2026/27	£57,374	2027/28	£59,095	2028/29	£60,868	2029/30	£62,694			<b>TOTAL VALUE</b>	<b>£295,733</b>
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Legal, Statutory and Procurement	<p>The provision of lifeguarding on our bathing beaches is a non-statutory service</p> <p>The contract has been drawn up by the RNLI to ensure consistency nationally and has been checked and approved by Mid Kent Legal Services and Finance.</p>																

	The contract is within the scope of Swale's Contract Standing Orders and the Public Contracts Regulations 2015.
Crime and Disorder	Lifeguards play a role in reducing anti-social behaviour management at our beaches.
Environment and Climate/Ecological Emergency	None identified
Health and Wellbeing	The lifeguarding service provides a safer environment for both visitors and residents using the beach facilities at our bathing beaches, by providing fully trained and well-equipped staff on patrol on our beaches during the summer season.
Safeguarding of Children, Young People and Vulnerable Adults	All lifeguards are DBS checked by the RNLI as part of their recruitment and training procedures. The RNLI have provided an updated Safeguarding Policy within their contract, which is currently being reviewed by Swale's Safeguarding Officer. Any required amendments to the policy will be discussed and agreed through the continued communications with RNLI prior to signing the contract.
Risk Management and Health and Safety	As part of the contract, the RNLI undertake a detailed Risk Assessment of every patrolled beach at the beginning of each season to identify and assess the risks posed by potential hazards and specify a series of control measures to mitigate against the identified risks. This helps the Council to measure and understand the risks on our beaches.
Equality and Diversity	None identified
Privacy and Data Protection	None identified

## 7 Appendices

7.1 Appendix I – Cost calculations for in-house service and RNLI contract costs

## 8 Background Documents

8.1 None.