

Report to Council

Subject: Support Services Portfolio

Date: 20 February 2014

Portfolio Holder: Councillor H Ulkun

Recommending:

That the report of the Support Services Portfolio Holder be noted.

1. Individual Electoral Registration (IER)

Since the last meeting of Council, there has been one significant development in relation to the process to be followed in relation to the next electoral canvass beginning in July 2014 under the new individual registration regime.

The Cabinet Office has accepted a recommendation of the Electoral Commission that the electoral registration canvass form should be reproduced on A3 paper rather than the present A4. This decision has resulted from customer surveys conducted with voters as to the most user friendly way of publishing the form.

This has had an immediate impact on planning for the next canvass in that the scanning or printing facilities available in the Council cannot deal with A3 printing, folding and mailing. As a result of this, new scanners and printers will be required in the Electoral Section and external printers will need to be found to print the 130,000 plus forms required.

In all, the cost of the additional scanners/printers is estimated at between £15,000 - 20,000 and other equipment may also be necessary. An application is in preparation for additional transitional funding from the Government in addition to the £33,000 already approved.

In addition to this the cost of external printing will also have to be met and I will shortly be considering a Portfolio Holder decision as to the best method of procuring this.

2. Electoral Canvass 2013

I have reported at previous Council meetings on progress with the current electoral register canvass which is the last one to be conducted on the household system. I have commented before about the importance of ensuring that this particular canvass is as accurate as possible so as to prepare the way for the new individual canvass which will start in July 2014.

The automated response method (telephone, text or internet) for notifying 'no change' to the registration of households has been well received by voters. I have reported previously that in 2012, 15,000 electors responded by these methods over the whole canvass period. For the 2013 canvass which is now completed, a total of

23,000 have responded in this way. This has produced a net postal saving to the Council of approximately £4,600.

In terms of the overall percentage for registering all voters, in 2013 percentage is 96% compared with 90% in my last report.

3. Review of Polling Stations

The review of polling stations will commence in early February and discussions are continuing on providing better access at Hastingwood Village Hall for the next round of elections.

I have mentioned before that Faversham Hall, Chigwell Row will not be available for use after the elections this year and therefore the search is continuing for a suitable alternative venue in that area.

4. Directorate Re-Structuring

Staff in Human Resources are actively involved in the transition programme towards implementing the new Directorate structure approved by the Council at the December 2013 meeting. This includes preparation of new job descriptions, job evaluations, and interviews for vacant posts.

5. Apprenticeship Programme

The Corporate Apprenticeship Programme has now been running for three months and the Business Administrators are half way through their first placements. HR are receiving very good feedback from both the apprentices themselves about the work they been involved with and from the teams they are working with. They have regular reviews with both the NVQ Assessor and the Councils Learning & Development Manager.

The apprentices were recently set a corporate task to organise a Council stand for the Careersfest held at Epping College at the end of January 2014. They worked together to produce a leaflet and attended the event to spread the word.

The Council does not intend to recruit a further cohort of apprentices this year, this will take place in 2015.

6. Employment Law Conference

The Council hosted an Employment Law Conference at the Civic Offices at the end of January. The event was attended by our own legal and HR staff along with employees from the public sector across the county. The event was organised by VineHR which is a not-for-profit company set up by the Heads of HR from Essex authorities.