

Report to Council

Subject: Support Services Portfolio

Date: 22 April 2014

Portfolio Holder: Councillor H Ulkun

Recommending:

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

1. COUNCIL APPRENTICESHIP SCHEME

I am pleased to report to members that the Council's eight apprentices continue to do well. The six business administration apprentices are coming to the end of their first placements and will start their new placements at the beginning of May. All have passed their BTEC tests and are well on their way to completing their NVQ Level 2 in Business Administration.

The two construction multi trade apprentices are undertaking a different NVQ course. They are both doing very well and are passing their practical assessments.

The apprentices have participated in a range of corporate training courses including minute taking, telephone training, business letter writing and diversity awareness. The Chief Executive has also run a session with them on the Council's Values and Behaviours.

All the apprentices were involved in organising and running the recent Careers Fair at Epping Forest College. They spoke to parents and students about the benefits of being part of an apprenticeship scheme at the Council.

They will also be taking part in the Council's Crucial Crew programme which starts in June.

The feedback from the Apprentices has been very positive; they are gaining confidence, learning new skills and meeting a range of different people.

2. REVIEW OF POLLING PLACES AND PLANNING STATIONS

I would draw the Council's attention to the statutory consultation on polling places and polling stations which is currently underway and closes on 30 May 2014.

The review covers polling districts and polling places. A polling district is a geographical area created by the sub-division of a UK Parliamentary constituency for the purposes of a UK Parliamentary election. Each parish is a separate polling district unless there are special circumstances (eg. a small number of electors). A polling place is an area or building in which polling stations will be selected by the (Acting)

Returning Officer. Polling stations should be within easy reach of all electors from across the polling district.

The review is designed to assess questions about the accessibility of polling stations to voters. A number of comments have been received.

Copies of the consultation material are available in hard copy from Democratic Services and at Council Information desks. Details are also available through the website. All members should bring forward any concerns as part of this review.

3. INDIVIDUAL ELECTOR REGISTRATION (IER)

Since my last report, officers have put together a funding bid to the Cabinet Office in support of the increased costs of producing IER registration forms in A3 format. These funding bids are due to be paid to the Council in April. This bid includes additional equipment for scanning in forms, printers and form folding equipment.

Alongside this bid, the Council will receive grant sums this month to support the increased workload in the transition to IER over the summer period and funding for specific public engagement activity. This will be coordinated with other councils across Essex to coincide with national awareness campaigns in July and August. Additional temporary staffing has been secured through the use of grant money and it is the intention to review staffing in the section as part of phase 2 of the Council Restructuring to ensure it is at an appropriate level going forward.

I am pleased to say that we have completed the process to secure the printing of the new style forms which, for this year, will be printed by the same company group that supplies the electoral registration IT system. With so many changes to the process this year I have taken the decision that printing new forms otherwise would pose too great a risk to the success of the transitional process. This will be reviewed again next year.

IER will see a significant shift in the way people register and it is a major undertaking to ensure that registration rates do not decline after the General Election.

4. HASTINGWOOD VILLAGE HALL – POLLING STATION

I have referred previously to concerns about access to this polling station and am pleased to say that the Council has arranged for a ramp to be available there for wheelchair user and others when necessary. This solution was relatively cheap and the ramp will be kept permanently at the Hall.

5. ELECTION TIMETABLE

I would draw the Council's attention to the timetable leading to the European Parliament and District Council elections which has been published on the website. This sets out the various important deadlines which must be met during the process.