

# ***Report to the Council***

**Committee:** Cabinet **Date:** 30 September 2014  
**Subject:** Technology and Support Services  
**Portfolio Holder:** Councillor A Lion

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**Recommending:**

**That the report of the Technology and Support Services Portfolio Holder  
be noted**

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## **Support Services**

### **Local Government Pension Scheme**

The Local Government Pension Scheme was amended with effect from 1 April 2014 so that benefits accrued after 31 March 2014 will be on a career average rather than on a final salary basis.

As a result of the changes, the Council is required to formulate, publish and keep under review a Statement of Policy on certain discretions which it has the power to exercise. The purpose of the Statement of Policy is to ensure that there is clarity on the Council's approach to the Scheme for current and ex-employees, the Council and the Essex Pension Fund.

In formulating the Statement of Policy, officers had regard to the current financial position of the Council and the extent to which the policy is workable, affordable and reasonable. Because of the potential costs involved, many of the discretions offered at the present time were not recommended to Members.

The Statement of Policy was agreed at the September Cabinet meeting.

### **Integrated HR/Payroll IT System**

The reference above to the Local Government Pension Scheme leads me nicely to our current Payroll/Human Resources IT system, purchased in 2004 and which officers now consider not fit for purpose. There are a number of requirements which cannot be met, specifically, it is unable to automate the new pension auto enrolment processes or the regular reports and information required by the Pension Fund Administrators. The deficiencies of the system require manual interventions and processes which have a significant impact on staff time, efficiency and effectiveness.

As well as wishing to eliminate the problems with the current IT system, it is recognised that technology has progressed since the Council first updated the HR/Payroll IT system. Many systems now have self-service functionality which enables employees and managers to access certain functions of the system, for example e-payslips, completing on line forms for mileage and other payments. Managers would have access to leave records for individuals and their teams and to

real time information on sickness absence. Self-service would assist in reducing potential human error (due to transposing figures) as input would be carried out once directly by the employee or manager with checks taking place in Payroll/HR.

A report requesting a capital bid of £80,000 for 2015/16 to purchase an Integrated Payroll/Human Resources IT System will be submitted to October's Cabinet.

### **Envelop Machine**

The current enveloping machine is managed by the Council's Reprographics section. Primarily it provides an envelope 'stuffing' service for Revenues, Benefits and Elections. The machine is used extensively between February and April each year, enveloping benefit claims, Council Tax and non-domestic rate bills and postal vote inserts.

Unfortunately, the current machine is obsolete with parts increasingly difficult to source and is expensive to maintain. As with the HR/Payroll System, the current machine cannot meet all of the Council's requirements.

The technology for these machines has moved on considerably and the standard specification for the new machine will extend the range of envelope size it can work with meaning that other work will be able to be handled in-house, e.g. the Housing Tenant Survey and work for the Housing Income and House Sales teams.

Officers proposed that £15,000 of unallocated new burdens funding is utilised for this purpose along with £25,000 from the Reprographics photocopier budget which is not required for this financial year. Therefore the purchase of the machine will be contained within existing resources. I am pleased to report that Cabinet agreed the reallocation of budgets to facilitate the purchase of this critical piece of equipment.

### **Technology**

#### **Telephone System**

The telephone system is now live and an auto attendant greeting has been introduced to direct calls to specific departments and, to reduce the number of calls to the switchboard. ICT are now assisting Directorates to compile their own auto attendant messages and call handling processes. There has been a report to the September meeting of the Finance & Performance Management Scrutiny Panel detailing the previously identified issues of delays in answering calls to the switchboard. Examples of the monitoring reports available from the system will be presented at the Finance & Performance Management Scrutiny Panel in November.

#### **Leisure booking system**

ICT Staff have developed an in-house solution for bookings for summer play-schemes and other community development activities using existing software. This was used successfully over the summer, and the Community Development Team are now requesting additional functionality be added. This has been developed as an alternative to a commercial off the shelf solution, as it has become apparent our requirements do not fit well with the functionality offered by commercial products. These enhancements will include the implementation of integrated payment processing.

## **GOOD licence model**

ICT have negotiated an improved licencing model for the GOOD, mobile working system. The new model is based on the user rather than the device, meaning that staff and Members can now install GOOD on numerous devices at no extra cost. The GOOD system is commercially available software which provides secure access to potentially replace the cumbersome Intranet system, allowing Council email addresses and officers contact details. This is being trialled at present but any Member who would like to know more about the system should contact myself.

## **Server hosts**

Servers are the hardware on which all of the Council's computerised systems run. In 2010, ICT undertook a server virtualisation program, which effectively reduced 140 physical servers to 6 powerful host servers. These host servers run all the core systems for the authority and now require replacement. Funding was agreed at Cabinet last year. A tender using a procurement framework was issued in August with a required return date of 30 September. The purchase and installation will take place during October.

## **Core network switches**

The new network core switches, an essential element of the new telephone system, have now been installed and are fully operational. They are faster and more resilient than the previous switches.