

Report to the Council

Committee: Cabinet
Date: 23 July 2024
Subject: Transformation Portfolio
Portfolio Holder: Cllr Smruti Patel

Recommending:

That the report of the Transformation Portfolio Holder be noted.

1. ICT & Transformation

ICT

- Shared Services - Matthew White has taken up workstream lead for ICT Shared Services for Epping Forest District Council and Colchester City Council under the sponsorship of Melissa Kemp-Salt. The Directorate meet for their second in person workshop on 9th July.
- A joint SLT is taking place later in July to discuss the proposed approach to shared ICT services, following which it is expected that a smaller senior strategy group will be formed. Its purpose will be to set the direction for digital services for Colchester and Epping Forest and enable debates and decisions to take place across both Councils. Its first order of business will be to consider a new platform for our websites.
- Following the departure of Martin Moore, an internal candidate, Robert Wright was appointed in April 2024 to the position of Business Applications Team Manager on secondment until September 2024.

ICT Projects

Priorities for ICT to deliver continue:

- Migration from Microsoft E3 to E5 level licencing: Work continues on the consolidation and removal of third-party products to standardise support on Microsoft tools, maximising the value from the E5 licencing suite.
- Preparation continues to support the general election.
- Waste Project:
 - New ICT equipment ordered and being prepared
 - New e-mail addresses in place.
 - Infrastructure and networking being prepared for the new “Hub” at North Weald Airfield.
 - Granicus forms being rebuilt and connected to the new WhiteSpace system.
 - WhiteSpace system development on-going, including data transfer from legacy application.
- Supporting Phase 2 delivery of the Civica CX Implementation.

- Big Switch-off – although the deadlines have been extended until 2027, Colchester and Epping Forest continue to migrate legacy analogue lines to digital lines.
- Information@Work cloud upgrade continues, where we are migrating the document management system to a cloud-based system.

DIZ

- Work to support the Herts & Essex Digital Innovation Zone (DIZ) continues, with the Acting Director reporting into the ICT&T Director, with some excellent feedback on recent sessions held. The DIZ Annual report is due soon.

Programme Management Office (PMO) Corporate Update

- The PMO provides governance, assurance, project management resources and support to colleagues in the council. It continues to work with service areas and the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) to review, assure, align, and agree key projects for EFDC's corporate objectives so that time, effort, and money can be directed and supported to the appropriate projects.
- The following are noted as EFDC's agreed corporate priorities aligned to EFDC's Corporate Objectives. Not all projects are governed through the PMO and may have governance arrangements agreed elsewhere within the business. The project list is subject to further refinement in line with the emerging Fit for the Future Portfolio.
 1. Fit for the Future Portfolio:
 - Shared Services & Partnership Working
 - Future Workforce
 - Digital Customer
 - Waste & Recycling Service Development
 - Council Asset Plan
 - Economic Growth
 2. Waste Services Programme (TVS)
 - Workstream 1: Future Waste Services Delivery
 - Workstream 2: Environment Operations Hub
 - Workstream 3: Procurement of Waste Fleet Vehicles
 3. Housing and Asset Management System Project (HAM's)
 4. Public Protection System Project (Formally known as M3PP)
 5. Epping Leisure Centre Project
 6. Finance Systems Replacement Project
 7. Pay 360 System
 8. The Big Switch Off
 9. Work Management Solution Proof of Concept
 - Moving forward, as agreed with SLT, a revised set of Corporate Priority Projects will be reported on a quarterly basis through Overview and Scrutiny which support member engagement and alignment. These are:

1. Fit for the Future Portfolio
 2. Waste Programme
 3. Epping Leisure Centre
- The PMO continues to work to align resources with all projects to ensure correct prioritisation and the appropriate allocation of resources. This work helps inform the critical path.
 - Alongside colleagues from Colchester, the PMO is developing new tools to boost delivery alignment, efficiency, and productivity.

2. Customer

Customer Service Contact Centre

- Officers continue to meet regularly with the system provider Cirrus/Gamma, continually exploring ways to improve the service experience. Officers are collaborating with colleagues at Colchester Borough Council to understand their experience and learnings with the system as Colchester adopted systems ahead of Epping Forest.
- Customer Service Officers are supporting key elements of the Waste Project at this critical stage by way of testing the new processes that will be handled by the Contact Centre from November.
- Continuous improvement initiatives across the Team, including identifying and proactively adopting new ways of working, and other integral next steps and actions, continue to take place. For example, Officers have begun to scrutinise data in respect of calls being transferred to other internal teams, and the root cause to those calls coming to the Contact Centre in the first instance.

Civic Offices Community Hub

- New Quarterly Partner Operations meetings to discuss the Community Hub have provided Officers with a more consistent and comprehensive view of the provision. Officers can track community usage, discuss ongoing issues and make strategic decisions in a more organised and structured manner. These regular meetings allow Officers to maintain better communication with the partner agencies who deliver their services from the Community Hub, align the Council's goals and priorities appropriately, and ensure that all stakeholders are joined up in their approach, resulting in an improvement in collaboration and an enhanced experience for residents.
- Barclays Bank has recently renewed its partnership with EFDC by signing a new one-year contract using the Community Hub to continue providing a wide range of non-cash services and advice to residents.
- Previous partner agencies including Essex Cares Limited, Phoenix Futures and Open Road have returned to use the Community Hub. New Partners; EPUT Employ-Ability and Vita Health have joined. EPUT Employ-Ability specialises in providing employment and training opportunities for individuals with mental health conditions, while Vita Health offers holistic wellness programs and services to promote overall health and well-being.

Complaints Team

- The Council is now in full compliance with the Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code 2024. Officers have recently updated the Council's Complaint Response Templates, Complaints Policy and Online Complaints Form. By making these

updates, the Council is demonstrating its commitment to transparency, accountability and continuous improvement in its complaint handling processes.

- The Self-Assessment and Complaints Annual Report has been presented to the relevant committee for review and has subsequently been published. This report provides a comprehensive overview of the Council's performance, highlighting learning from complaints and improvements needed. By conducting a thorough self-assessment the Council ensures it's fully in line with The Code.
- Complaints Officers facilitated six Complaints Handling Workshops Council-wide for staff between April and May 2024. These were well received by attendees, and the inclusion of the Data Protection Officer as a guest presenter made the sessions even more valuable. The Council has seen a significant increase in its complaints response service level from 77% in Q4 to 89% in Q1. Investigators are now asking the right questions and are putting into practice the knowledge gained from the training sessions. Officers are looking to host further workshops this year to ensure all investigating officers have attended. Officers are also working to create interactive online Complaints Handling Training for all other employees via Litmos to complete, either as part of Onboarding if they are a new starter, or periodically for existing staff.
- Complaints Officers continue to conduct Quarterly Service Areas Complaints Reviews (QSACR) with service areas with a high volume of complaints in order to understand root causes and trends. From these discussions and agreed actions, more Investigating Officers come to The Complaints Team for support with Extension of Time requests and letters, to help manage the customers' expectations.

Digital Inclusion

- The Council is proud to announce its membership in the Good Things Foundation National Digital Inclusion Network, providing access to valuable training, funding and resources to advance digital inclusion efforts within the community.
- In line with this initiative, the Civic Offices now serves as a designated site where residents facing financial barriers can request free mobile data to ensure they can stay connected in an increasingly digital world. Currently, over 40 residents have benefitted from this programme, with an internal campaign underway to increase awareness and promote referrals throughout the Council's various services.

Waste Project

- The Customer Service Team is actively supporting the new waste service project by reviewing existing procedures to find opportunities for efficiency and simplification of online services alongside Corporate Support colleagues.
- Recent meetings have taken place with both Whitespace (waste system provider) and Granicus (online forms supplier) to discuss and approve the redesign or creation of online forms for the project. All processes requiring online forms have been approved and are now in the process of being developed by ICT or external consultants for testing by the business.
- Additionally, work has commenced on building the Whitespace system in a testing environment, with plans to transition it to the live system once testing is successfully completed.

3. Corporate Services

People

- **I Belong Survey** – An all-employee survey about Equality, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) was launched at beginning of July. The survey will help us develop our understanding and required actions in this area. The results will be available for all to see in September. The Council is arranging an EDI Leaders Conference for all managers in November.
- **2024/25 National Joint Council Pay Award** – The NJC pay negotiations are currently under way. The unions have submitted a pay claim for £3000 or a 10% uplift (whichever is greater) and the employer side have responded with a “full and final” pay offer of £1290 on scale points up to and including SCP43 and a 2.5% increase above this. Two of the recognised unions, Unite and Unison have opened ballots for their members with a recommendation that the offer is rejected. The third union, GMB, are remaining neutral on the offer and are leaving their members to decide whether to accept or reject. The outcome of the ballots is not yet known.

It is likely, that any next steps will await the outcome of the General Election as a possible change in Government may influence Local Government pay policy. It may therefore be some time before the NJC pay award is agreed.

Fortunately, due to our Local Pay arrangements we were able to increase employee salaries by 2% at the 1st April 2024. We will match the NJC pay award and backdate any payments due to the 1st April 2024.

- **Wagestream** – is, our financial wellbeing app launched to the organisation in October 2023. Our current engagement has increased slightly to 15% of the workforce, Wagestream reported that we have one of the highest engagement rates of all their local government clients. Last month the most used features of the app was the ‘Track’ facility which enables employees to compare current expenditure to last month’s expenditure, thereby enabling better control over spending and the ‘Stream’ facility allowing employees to stream any earned wage to their bank account before payday. The percentage of enrolled employees with a build (savings) pot is at 37%.
- **Apprenticeships** – we welcomed another Apprentice into our workforce in May, a Paralegal Apprentice has joined the Legal team, thus supporting internal career development. All Apprentices are enjoying engaging in a cross-authority networking group, which is run once a month by Braintree Council. Our Resourcing Apprentice (People Team) attended the LGA ‘Apprentice of the Year’ event and was given excellent feedback on her performance. A working group for ‘Apprentice Strategy’ has started for Epping, Braintree and Colchester Councils to share best practice and resources.
- **Terra Verde Services Ltd** – the Corporate Business Partner for Employment Practice and Reward is currently supporting the project team for TVS. Wider support from the team will be necessary when the TUPE process begins.
- **Shared service arrangements** – the People Team have been involved in design workshops regarding the proposed HR shared service arrangements with Colchester and Braintree councils. During this unsettling period, the team

continue to support managers and employees with general queries and in some cases, difficult employee relations case work, in a professional, responsive way.

- **Departure of Joanne Budden** – the Service Manager responsible for the People Team has left the organisation for a senior role at the London Borough of Havering. Jessica Douglas, the Head of People at Colchester City Council, has taken on the day-to-day management of the team, pending the proposed move to a shared service arrangement.
- **Essex County Council** – We are now working with Essex County Council to help bring new agency staff to EFDC when needed. We have done this as Essex have preferential rates working with a wide range of agencies which will help us reduce our costs.

Business Support

Local Land Charges (LLC).

- Turnaround time is approximately 14 working days for searches. (Target is 10 days) as volumes have increased due to the summer months. The team are also taking annual leave and helping the Arcus system roll out. Turnaround is continuing to be monitored and interventions put in place where necessary.
- Moving onto the Arcus system to be on the same platform as Planning and Building Control. Project on target for completion in Q3.

Internal Customer Service Meetings.

- Supporting the Waste Project with information about the back-office processes.

Conference Suite

- Hosted the Romanian EU Election on the 9th June 2024 and a training event held by a training company on 25th June 2024 – this may be a regular booking in the future.

Democratic Services

- The Team supported the Joint Committee of the Harlow & Gilston Garden Town at its first meeting on 11 June 2024.
- The implementation of Report Management within the Committee Management System continues, and several training sessions have been scheduled for Officers to learn how to use the system over the Summer.
- The Annual Council meeting took place on 23 May 2024, and all the decisions taken at that meeting in terms of Committee places and Chairmanships have been updated on the Committee Management /system.

Elections

- The Team successfully delivered the all-out District Council elections and the Essex Police, Fire & Crime Commissioner election on 4 May 2024.
- We used Chigwell Marquees for the first time as the Count venue. It was the biggest venue available to us, with ample parking.
- We had just started to review the Local Elections for any lessons to be learnt when the Prime Minister announced that the General Election would be held on 4 July 2024. At the time of writing, the Team is busy getting everything organised and the Count will again be held at Chigwell Marquees.

Member Services

- Following the all-out Local Elections in May, the Member Induction Day was successfully held on 8 May 2024, which enabled all Councillors to sign their Declaration of Acceptance of Office as well as receive training on the various systems that they will be using during their term of office.
- The Member Training Day was held on 10 May 2024, in the Council Chamber, with 5 District Council courses and 1 Qualis course successfully delivered.
- The new bespoke e-learning training programme launched during the Members induction event in May has seen high engagement from Members, with the majority choosing to complete their training digitally. Over 150 e-learning courses have been successfully completed so far, resulting in significant time savings and efficiencies. The project has now been transitioned back to Democratic/Member Services from Customer for ongoing management as business as usual.

4. Performance, Strategy & Delivery

Performance

- Currently working across the organisation compiling a KPI suite which will enhance our performance as a Council and provide a set of quantifiable metrics that officers and members can use to track and measure progress towards specific goals and objectives. This will help identify areas of success, as well as areas that require improvement.
- Reviewing the way performance is presented to O&S committee members, looking at format and style potentially splitting projects and organisational performance and supporting Members to make informed decision around the data presented.
- Reviewing the current Service Planning Process and making improvements to encompass the 'Golden Thread' approach for the organisation ensuring that the Corporate Plan is reflected in the aims and objectives of each service.

Strategy

- Officers are reviewing the Corporate Plan to ensure it covers the aims and objective of our Fit for the Future Programme and embodies the ambitions of the Council for 24/2025 and beyond.

Delivery - Continuous Improvement

- Payroll Review - Working with Braintree District Council Payroll Services to identify improvements to processes and identify efficiencies. The review will help our understanding of processes currently used across the 3 shared payroll partners (Braintree, Colchester and Epping), system opportunities, pain points and risk, quick wins/opportunities, resource, current functions and performance. The outcome of this review will support the future procurement of the service and focus on improvements to our customers, increase resilience, service efficiency, support staff retention and development and improve capacity and agility.