

# ***Report to the Council***

**Committee: Cabinet**

**Date: 28 April 2009**

**Subject: Corporate Support and ICT Services Portfolio**

**Portfolio Holder: Councillor Mitchell Cohen**

**Item: 7(e)**

---

## **Recommending:**

**That the report of the Corporate Support and ICT Services Portfolio Holder be noted.**

---

1. The theme for this report is the contribution of various support services within my portfolio 'behind the scenes' and to demonstrate this I have referred to the last two Cabinet agendas
2. The agenda, which is the framework for our discussions, is printed in-house and dispatched by the Administration Office/Messenger Service. At the Cabinet meeting a Superintendent is present, sets out the room etc.
3. Turning to the paperwork, an item related to the Gypsy & Traveller Consultation /Local Development Framework Process which was quite properly the report of the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Economic Development, requires specialist input from our in-house legal team who continue to contribute greatly in terms of advice both to officers and Members in dealing with this high profile issue.
4. Another planning item dealt with the costs associated with a planning injunction– but it also involved legal staff and external counsel instructed by them responding swiftly to local/Member concerns, as well as High Court deadlines.
5. However, it is not just the litigation specialists who were required to react with speed. On a Monday lunchtime the market operators at North Weald Airfield informed the Council that they had entered into administration. If a temporary licence agreement could not be negotiated, evidenced and completed by the Thursday – the Saturday market would, for safety, insurance and logistical reasons, have been cancelled. As we know, the director of the company was called to a meeting at these offices on the Tuesday; bank, insurance and legal checks were made and an agreement signed, with the consent of the Administrator, in time to ensure the market went ahead. I can report all payments due under that agreement have been received.
6. A progress report on a Housing contract (Springfields) is a reminder of the body of contract work dealt with, largely in- house, by legal staff.
7. Even where external expertise is used- eg Essex County Council are paying for legal advice to the Districts for the Inter Authority Agreement on Waste Management – the legal service still has a role to ensure that appropriate questions are raised and safeguards put in place to reflect this Council's position.

8. The creation of a part time Home Ownership Officer will involve Human Resources in advisory and recruitment work. The new member of staff will require access and identity cards from Corporate Support Services and will of course wish to be entered on the payroll!

9. Turning to the gas metering report concerning Waltham Abbey, I am sure the Housing Portfolio Holder was assisted in his decision making by the involvement of the legal team and specialist counsel instructed by them.

10. Sickness absence levels are unsatisfactory and my report reflected this but I was also in a position to report that the trend had been reported to the Corporate Executive Forum(CEF) at an early stage, which in turn had authorised action to begin to address the issue. The combination of a temporary resource within Human Resources to provide regular information to managers and focus their attention on early action, together with the requirement for regular attendance of the Assistant Directors at CEF to account for their respective performance demonstrates the constructive approach to this issue which I require.

11. All of these reports will have been through the Cabinet Agenda Planning Group or the Corporate Executive Forum. The Director of Corporate Support Services is a member of the former and regularly attends the latter in an advisory capacity.

12. So whether the report is in the name of my Portfolio or not it is clear that staff within my area of responsibility will have had some involvement.