Report to the Council

Committee:	**Cabinet**	**Date: 31 July 2012**

Subject: **Support Services Portfolio**

Portfolio Holder: **Councillor Hal Ulkun**

Recommending:

That the report of the Support Services Portfolio Holder be noted

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1.   **Police and Crime Commissioner Election for Essex**

1.1   The election of a Police and Crime Commissioner for Essex will take place on 15 November 2012. The election in Essex is directed by the Chief Executive for Chelmsford Borough Council in his capacity as the PARO (Police Area Returning Officer) appointed by the Government.

1.2   Planning for these elections is underway. The Government has given a commitment to support the costs incurred for this election but as yet the details of the funding regime have not been received. A sum of £148,000 has been provided by the Council in this year's budget to meet necessary expenses in connection with this election. This was an estimate of the maximum cost on a "worst case" scenario but Returning Officers will be working hard to ensure that economies are achieved wherever possible. The actual funding formula to be adopted by the Government will, when announced, influence the extent to which this Council's costs will be met.

1.3   79 polling stations will be needed for this election. The PARO has determined that verification of ballots is likely be take place after the close of polling on 15 November with the counting of candidates' votes according to the "single transferable vote" system taking place locally on 16 November. The local result will then be fed back to the PARO for the final declaration of the result in Chelmsford.

1.4   The closing date for nominations is 19 October 2011.

1.5   There is some very useful information on this election on the websites of the Electoral Commission and the Home Office which I would commend to members, particularly on the intricacies of the "single transferable vote" system.

1.6   I will keep members up to date on developments over the coming weeks.

2.   **Individual Elector Registration (IER)**

2.1   A seminar on IER was held on 28 June 2012 at which Colin Dingwall, the Programme Director for the Electoral Registration Transformation Programme at the Cabinet Office gave a presentation on the current state of play regarding this new method of compiling the electoral register. Central to this change is the move towards

electoral registration by individuals instead of registration by households. This change is to be completed by the General Election in 2015.

2.2   All electors must register individually from 2014 and have their application verified before their names can be added to the register. Existing electors have until December 2015 to register under the new system. This is to meet a prime objective of the government to remove the vulnerability of the present system to electoral fraud, not that this has ever been an issue in this District.

2.3   This verification process involves the elector in supplying their national insurance number and their date of birth. Improved and more secure information technology is being developed to reflect the fact that this will no longer be a "signature based" process. This opens the way for online registration in the future. This kind of development is part of a broader Government agenda for electronic service delivery.

2.4   The ability to "opt out" of registration which was previously mooted has been withdrawn and civil penalties can now be applied to those who refuse to register.

2.5   The Government will be announcing its funding proposals to assist Registration Officers to meet the cost of the 3 year transition from the present household register to the new individual register. Mr Dingwall was very clear that Government funding will be to assist with the transitional phase and it will be for the Council to determine the level of resources required to maintain the IER system locally after the 3 year transition period has come to an end.

2.6   I am sure that those members who attended the seminar found Mr Dingwall's comments illuminating and the Registration Officer has told me that he will be taking up Mr Dingwall's offer for him to return to the Council to update members on the project.

2.7   Once again, there is a great deal of material on the Electoral Commission website which I commend to members, not least because I think we can all expect queries from our ward electors once the new system comes into operation.

3.   Electoral Registration 2012

3.1   Members will be aware that the canvass has been brought forward this year to provide an up to date register for the Police Commissioner Elections and begin the process of transferring to IER.

3.2   The canvass began in June and the new register (which will be based on households) will be published in October 2012.

3.3   This year new ways of confirming registration where there are no changes have been introduced. These include confirmation by telephone, by internet and by SMS. The traditional method of returning a paper form has continued.

3.4   As at 3 July 2012, postal re-registrations without changes totalled 26,144households, of which the new methods have produced the following results:

Telephone: 5053 households

Internet: 4,930 households

SMS: 1,795 households.

3.5   The total number of households is 54,536.

3.6   Hopefully, this process can be developed in future years and make the registration process less resource intensive and speedier.

3.7   Registrations where there are household changes will continue to be dealt with by the paper form, returned by post.

4.   Electronic Services for Members

4.1   As part of an ongoing review of services for members, a report is to be made to the Constitution and Member Services Standing Scrutiny Panel in September 2012. This report will review our current practices of paper agenda distribution in light of advice received. The meeting will also be an opportunity for updating members on the introduction of tablet technology for agenda distribution.

5.   Public Law Partnership

5.1   The Public Law Partnership, which includes our Legal Service , has been Commended in the Legal Services category of the Municipal Journal Awards at a ceremony in London last month.

5.2   This legal partnership of 27 public bodies who all share the aim of providing high quality, low cost legal support, was shortlisted as a finalist in two further categories- Shared Services, and Transformation through IT.

5.3   The Shared Services recognition was based around the savings the PLP had made in areas as diverse as joint training, provision of child care legal advice and work on the new Standards regime.

5.4   The success in the IT category was based on the shared case management system and the new website which will make sharing of resources and knowledge more easily accessible.

5.5   The new PLP website in particular will mean our legal officers will be able to access a database of the fees Counsel charge for categories of work. This will assist us in negotiating value for money.

5.6   Furthermore, a court diary which will indicate when and where each authority has court cases scheduled will allow us to reduce travel and waiting time for routine matters. It may also produce an income stream if we conduct matters for other Councils when we need to attend Court.

5.7   We have hosted low cost events for legal training on topics as diverse as Licensing, Freedom of Information and Data Protection, Election Purdah and the Community Infrastructure Levy. We continue to develop our officers by sending them to PLP courses at other authorities. We have also opened these events up to other Council officers and Members.

5.8   We will be hosting a Bribery Act course here in September and the PLP is intending to run a course on the legal aspects of affordable housing – date and venue to be confirmed.

6.   New Council Website

6.1   The new website went live on Saturday 7 July. The switchover went seamlessly with minimum disruption to availability. The new website has a very modern look and avoids the historic directorate menu structure, making it easier for visitors to find the information they require with the minimum amount of mouse clicks. The new site is more interactive, embracing social media sites such as Twitter and Facebook. The site includes a link to enable visitors to provide feedback. This feedback will be closely monitored and discussed during the internal Website Development Board and user group meetings. The website is now entirely managed internally and offers greater functionality, such as automated integration into back office systems. Yearly maintenance costs have also been greatly reduced.