

## ***Report to the Council***

**Committee:** Cabinet

**Date:** 27 September 2012

**Subject:** Support Services Portfolio

**Portfolio Holder:** Councillor Hal Ulkun

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### **Recommending:**

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

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### **Police and Crime Commissioner Election – 15 November 2012**

The Returning Officer has attended a further briefing with the PARO held on 1 August 2012 where a number of key issues relating to this election were discussed.

The closing date for nominations is 19 October 2012 and it is known that, within Essex, four candidates have publicly declared themselves.

At the meeting the PARO organised a simulation for the counting of votes under the alternative vote system. A number of learning points arose from this trial and training for this Council's own counting staff both for senior supervisors and counting teams will be given. This system is based on the principle that if there are more than two candidates, voters can express a first and second preference on the ballot paper and if the total number of first choices for a candidate does not reach 50% of the votes cast, second preferences are then be counted to achieve a result.

Arrangements for conveying results in Districts to the central count centre are being developed with the PARO as the result is for Essex as a whole rather than any District.

Members are referred to the website of the Electoral Commission for more details of this system.

The Government has issued a consultation document on the funding regime for these elections and is seeking comments from Returning Officers regarding the proposed arrangements. A number of reservations have been expressed about the cost assumptions for some expenditure heads and the final proposals of the Government are now awaited.

### **Individual Electoral Registration**

The Government has recently opened consultations regarding the funding arrangements for the new individual elector registration system. These proposals are currently being assessed and any comments will be made in accordance with the deadlines set.

### **Electoral Register Canvass – June/September 2012**

As at 3 September 2012, 32,000 household forms had been received in the traditional way. A total of 14,300 properties had re-registered by the new "remote" methods, namely by text, e-mail or dedicated phone line. The current percentage return rate is 94.3% and last

reminders were despatched on 15 September 2012 to the 3,000 properties which have not yet responded.

### **New Standards Regime**

Work is being undertaken to obtain registration of interest forms from those councillors who have not so far returned them. Similarly, with Parish and Town Councils, the returns for parish members not so far returned are also being sought.

The Parish and Town Councils are forming a new Joint Parish Standards Committee to which a majority have affiliated. Some Councils have opted for the District Council's Standards Committee whilst others have yet to respond with their preferences. A training course was held on 17 September 2012 on declarations of interest and will be repeated if necessary to assist members in getting to grips with the new system.

In terms of the Code of Conduct and the complaints procedure, those devised by the Public Law Partnership have been accepted with one or two exceptions.

### **Upgrade to Payroll/HR System**

The Council has been required to implement an upgrade to the Payroll/HR IT System as SAGE (the System provider) will no longer provide the necessary support for the end-of-year processes for 2012/2013 and beyond.

A substantial amount of work is being undertaken by Payroll and HR staff to implement the new version of the System. The amount of work required is because it is not just a regular upgrade to the System, extensive changes have been made specifically to the HR module.

### **Legal Services retained LEXCEL**

Lexcel is an accreditation scheme which is regulated by the Law Society and is a scheme which is relevant to both Private Practice and In House legal provision. The objective of Lexcel is to enhance the service given by a practice to its clients, to improve the management of the practice and the morale and motivation of staff. Lexcel encourages practices to consult with clients to ensure that the views of users of legal services have an impact on the way the service is delivered. There is an emphasis within the standard on continuous improvement.

Legal Services first achieved Lexcel accreditation in August 2006. The accreditation lasts for 3 years with yearly maintenance reviews by an Independent Assessor to ensure continued compliance. The Law Society constantly reviews the standard and it has been revised to enhance its relevance to the profession, to reflect changes in the law and has increased the risk management requirements. Legal Services was assessed on 14 August 2012 against the new Lexcel V5 standard and was successful in retaining the accreditation.

The Independent Assessor report highlighted 4 minor non compliances (procedural issues not adequately reflected in the Quality Manual as a result of the changes to the standard but which were dealt with on the day and signed off), 5 suggestions for improvement, which will be considered and implemented as necessary, and 17 areas of good practice.