

Report to the Council

Committee: Cabinet

Date: 6 November 2012

Subject: Support Services Portfolio

Portfolio Holder: Councillor H Ulkun

Recommending:

That the report of the Support Services Portfolio Holder be noted

Police and Crime Commissioner Election – 15 November 2012

The Statement of Persons Nominated for the Police and Crime Commissioner Election for the Essex Police area to be held on 15 November 2012 has now been published and contains six names which can be found on the Council's website.

Since the last Council meeting the Government has advised the Local Counting Officer that the total cost allocation for this district for these elections is £203,000. The election therefore has to be delivered within that amount to be refunded by the Government. However, even expenditure within that target figure will be subject to Government scrutiny to establish that it is being correctly claimed. If expenditure exceeds the target figure, a special case will need to be made by the Local Counting Officer to justify the expenditure and if this is not accepted the additional cost will fall on the Council. I can assure the Council that the Local Counting Officer will work very hard to ensure that total expenditure on this election is in accordance with Government guidance and within the target figure.

The 2012/13 budget shows a figure of £148,000 for this election and this will be revised to £203,000 in line with the Government target. By the same token, income from the Government by way of reimbursement of costs will also be increased to the same figure so that the two figures should balance.

I asked for a comparison to be prepared on how the Government target figure compares with similar elections in the past. I have been advised that the best recent comparison was the referendum held in May 2011 on the voting system. The cost of that referendum (which was reimbursed by the Government) was £160,000. The lower cost for that referendum is attributable to the fact that it took place at the same time as District and Parish Council elections which meant that elements of the cost were shared between different election budgets and the referendum. The difference for November 2012 is that there is no other election being held at the same time as the Police election.

Individual Electoral Registration (IER)

Further information is still awaited from the Government on the funding arrangements for the new IER System. It is clear that there is going to be funding from the Government to assist with the transition from the present householder system to IER, a process that will be costly and complicated. It is also clear that the transitional funding will cover the need for additional staffing. The Registration Officer is already considering where those resources will be identified.

In the longer term however, once the IER system is in place, it will be necessary to review whether there will be increased costs to the Council in comparison with householder registration.

Electoral Registration Canvass (June – September 2012)

The 2012 canvass has now been completed. 33,500 household forms were received in the traditional (i.e. paper) manner whilst a total of 14,500 properties re-registered by the new “remote” methods including text, email or a dedicated phone line. The final percentage return rate for the canvass was 97% following final reminders which were dispatched on 15 September 2012 to the 3000 properties which at that stage had not responded.

Print Operations

I have discussed with officers the implications of the decision of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee at its recent meeting to ask me to review the accounting arrangements for print operations in the Corporate Support Services Directorate. I hope to be able to report back to a future Cabinet meeting and to the Council on my findings.

Website

The new website continues to perform well and has been extremely reliable. In response to user feedback the design has been slightly modified to make key information more prominent. In addition, the menu structure will also be simplified to consolidate the options available, making it easier to navigate. It is anticipated that all of these amendments will be completed by the end of October.

A recent external assessment of Waltham Abbey Museum carried out by VAQAS (Visitor Assessment Quality Assurance Scheme) on behalf of Visit England, praised the content and layout of the new website, commenting on the vast improvement from the previous website.

Car Leasing Review

Members and Officers have jointly been carrying out a review of the present staff car leasing scheme. They are currently finalising proposals on which the trade unions and eligible staff will be consulted. The aim is to submit a report to the Joint Consultative Committee on 26 November and to Cabinet on 3 December for a decision.