

Report to the Council

Committee: Cabinet

Date: 18 December 2012

Subject: Support Services Portfolio

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Hal Ulkun

Recommending:

That the report of the Support Services Portfolio Holder be noted

1. Police and Crime Commissioner Election – 15 November 2012

A full review of the election will be reported to Overview and Scrutiny's Constitution and Member Services Panel in January next.

However, the Council may be interested to hear that the likely cost of the election in this District is provisionally £170,000 compared to the overall expenditure limit set by the Home Office of £203,000. These costings are to be regarded as provisional as they are to be reviewed by the Home Office before they are accepted. One or two bills are still to be paid. The Local Returning Officer received an advance from the Government approximately £148,000 so the balancing amount will be sought from the Government.

The cost profile for the election in this District has been assisted by joint procurement of election supplies and use of the internal Print Unit.

The general feedback from the Essex PARO is that the election was completed successfully without major problems. There was some delay in sending the result electronically to the PARO but these did not prove insurmountable.

2. County Council Elections – 2 May 2013

It is understood that the Returning Officer for this election has directed that the verification and counting of votes will take place after the close of polling on 2 May 2013.

3. Print Operations

The review of accounting arrangements in respect of the in-house reprographic section is continuing. A report will be brought forward in the New Year and I will then be in a position to comment further.

4. Individual Elector Registration (IER)

There have been no new developments regarding the transition to individual from elector registration, details of transitional funding from the Government being awaited.

5. Paper Agenda and Minutes

I would draw members' attention to the letter from the Minister at DCLG regarding the electronic despatch of agenda which was recently published in the Council Bulletin.

Although the Council has received legal advice indicating that, under the present law, paper circulation must be continue it is apparent from the Minister's letter that DCLG is willing to review rules and has given the Council an undertaking to keep us informed of their progress in this matter.

6. Committee Management and Webcasting

A major software upgrade was completed in November to the Council's Committee Management System. This has enabled the Council to respond to new legislation relating to Access to Information; to enable greater integration of content onto the Council's other web pages and introduce new APP based software for residents and members bringing agenda and other documents to tablet technology. I understand it is officers intention to hold a session for members on new IT services in the new year.

Officers are also proposing to trial a new process of webcasting that will enable those using tablet technologies to access webcasts. This is in the early stages of development and I will keep members informed of progress.

7. Website Developments

Work is in progress to move the hosting of the website to an external provider to further improve performance and access speeds and also increase resilience. Development work is in progress to launch a mobile device version of the site shortly.

The Website Main Advertising Banner (top right corner) is now in use as an unpaid trial for FibreWifi, following its earlier successful use to promote the Local Plan Consultation. This trial will help confirm the viability of advertsing as an income generator. .Additional promotional space has been added to the right of the homepage page to allow for permanent promotion of internal or partner initiatives such as One Shops Local and Visit Epping Forest.

The homepage layout and menu structure has been modified based on user feedback to make access to online services easier

The Council's Online forms have been migrated to a new cloud based version, and work is in progress to radically reduce the number of forms that customers must choose between, and to improve the functionality (and office processes) of these forms

Officers are currently developing an online mapping solution to, initially, replace the former pinpoint planning system by showing on a map planning applications being made or previously made near to your own house and also to offer greater capabilities in the future. This is undergoing final testing. This solution, as with the main website, has also been developed in house using open source technologies.

The change to an Open Source website system maintained by Council staff will save us around £20,000 in ongoing costs (this has been reinvested in improving the

functionality of other systems) and an estimated £75,000 in procurement and implementation costs compared to purchasing a traditional vendor supplied system in a similar authority.

A number of Council services have extended their Social Media presence (for example Facebook or Twitter) offering new channels for engagement at no material cost. Work is in progress to improve the integration of these pages with the main website.

Internal training of further Directorate staff in news and event creation for the website is largely complete, with final session before Christmas. This will allow more user to post information giving greater depth to coverage. The Website team is also in discussion with Key services about contingency plans for adverse weather over the Christmas period.