

Report to Council

Subject: Support Services Portfolio

Date: 19 February 2013

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Hal Ulkun

Recommending:

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

Police and Crime Commissioner Election – 15 November 2012

I reported to the last Council meeting concerning the likely costings for the Police and Crime Commissioner Election locally. Discussions with the Government's Claims Unit are continuing regarding a range of detailed items in the Council's claim for costs but at the present time there is a reason to anticipate that there will be any difficulty in the balance of Government funding being received.

As I stated in my last report to the Council the total cost allocation from the Government for that election was £203,000. A sum of £148,000 was provided by Government in advance and the current discussions concern the payment of the balance. The estimate of the Council's actual spending is approximately £160,000.

Individual Electoral Registration (IER)

I have reported previously concerning the commencement in the next financial year of the transition from householder to individual registration on the Electoral Roll.

It is the intention of the Government to fund additional expenditure directly attributable to the transfer to the new system over a period of three years.

In December the Council received a letter from the newly appointed Minister for Political and Constitution Reform, Chloe Smith MP regarding the first stage of this transition from 2013/14 to 2014/15. Aside from giving a general update on the progress of the relevant legislation through Parliament and a promise that the Government would be writing to councils in the New Year to update on the action necessary to implement this change, the Minister made a number of comments regarding the funding position. In particular the Minister commented:

"I also wanted to take this opportunity to reassure you that the Government is committed to funding all the additional costs arising from IER. New transitional activities such as testing the confirmation of existing electors will be fully funded through a timely and direct grant. Activities which will create additional cost such as the write-out to electors in the autumn of 2014 will result in top up funding to ensure that there are no net additional costs. Only registration activities that are unaffected by IER will be met from the formula grant in the normal manner."

The Minister goes on to say that the Council will be notified in March 2013 about the actual value of the grant that will be paid to all local authorities in 2013/14. At that stage the Minister will also give her best estimate of what the funding is likely to be in 2014/15.

Electoral Register – Pre-ticking

I have been advised by the Registration Officer that the Council received challenge from a private company about the practice adopted by this Council and many other local authorities of "pre-ticking" the electoral registration form.

Members will be aware that there is a box on the registration form which, if an elector does not wish their details to appear in the edited copy of the register, they can tick in order to withhold the information.

The practice in many local authorities for many years has been to "pre-tick" the registration forms at each annual canvass if an elector has previously opted to withhold their details. A legal challenge was threatened because this practice was thought not to accord with legal requirements for electoral registration.

Advice was sought from Leading Counsel as to this practice and advice was received that it could not be justified in terms of the current law. The Council was therefore advised to cease the practice for the next canvass later in 2013. However Leading Counsel also advised that a separate procedure could be adopted in order to continue with "pre-ticking" by asking electors to sign a Data Protection Act Certificate if they did not wish their electoral registration details to be used for any other purpose than those permitted under the electoral provisions. With this in mind all households on the electoral register in which an elector has previously opted out of the edited register will be receiving a letter and certificate to complete in order to indicate their wishes.

The Council's legal advice is that once these certificates have been received under the Data Protection Act, the process of "pre-ticking" on future occasions will have appropriate legal authority.

Essex County Council Elections 2013

As the Council is considering the budget at this meeting and because I am aware that there has been some discussion about the election budgets for next year, I asked the Returning Officer for some information on this.

In May next the County Council elections would normally be only ones scheduled. Therefore the only provision in the budget would be an expenditure item and a balancing income heading to reflect the reimbursement of the costs by the County Council. However, provision has been included for possible EFDC and Parish Council bye elections. EFDC will need a budget for the cost of the District Council elections whilst the cost of any Parish Councils elections will be claimed back from the Parish Council(s) concerned.

I understand that Essex County Council also makes a separate payment to this Council to reflect staff costs in running the election.

Website

The EFDC mobile website has been launched. **Mobile EFDC** is simpler, clearer, faster - designed to access information when you are out and about, focusing on our most popular online services.

A third of our users' access information using a mobile device, **Mobile EFDC** makes it easier to navigate on small screens. By adding the URL (<http://www.eppingforestdc.gov.uk/mobile>) to your browser bookmark, or adding a shortcut on your phone homepage you can easily interact or contact us at the press of a button.

By using open source software and internal resources, improvements and cost savings continue to be achieved.

Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act (RIPA)

On 15.1.13 Andrew Mackian, an inspector from the Office of Surveillance Commissioners, met with the two officers designated by this Council under RIPA (as amended), Colleen O'Boyle and Ian Willett. RIPA is legislation which is designed to carefully control covert surveillance procedures so as to ensure that these are properly authorised.

The purpose was to review the Council's management of covert activities. I have discussed the report with the officers and it will now go to the officers' Corporate Governance Group to consider a response to the recommendations made. I am, however, pleased to inform Members that the report concluded this Council uses these legislative powers only as a last resort. From 2010 to January 2013 only one authorisation was sought, granted and subsequently cancelled.

Service Reviews

Two reviews have commenced which affect the Support Services Portfolio. The shared objective of the reviews is to make savings and increase efficiency;

(a) Reprographics

A report to Management Board in early March will outline a dual approach of a staffing review in conjunction with full use of the in-house resource across all Directorates of the Council.

(b) Out of Hours Service

This review is in conjunction with Housing Services as the majority of calls out of hours relate to housing matters. Legal advice is being considered as to the best way to procure an enhanced, cost effective solution. Where appropriate, staff have been spoken to informally. As the reviews progress, consultation, including Unions, will be undertaken