

Report to the Council

Subject Support Services Portfolio

Date: 23 April 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 cost for the Police and Crime Commissioner Election. I am pleased to say that the Government's Claims Unit has now cleared this Council's spending profile for the election at a figure of approximately £148,000, disallowing only approximately £700 concerning (a) refreshments at postal vote openings (where the Council was advised only after the openings had taken place) and (b) the Unit's decision to allocate only a portion of the expense on certain items of equipment to the PCC Election because it was argued that those items could be used at other elections.

The balance of the advance provided by the Council for the election has now been refunded to the authority to the tune of just over £20,000.

Individual Electoral Registration (IER)

The process of obtaining from electors Data Protection Act certificates in regard to "pre-ticking" of the register is now in process and a good response is being received from the public.

The Registration Officer has now received from the Minister details of the transitional funding which will be made available to the Council in 2013/14 to assist the change from the household system to IER. The sum is £7,130 incorporating to cover "change implementation" (which covers items such as IT, training for staff), additional staffing requirements and working with support staff from the Cabinet Office together with funding for a "dry run" on the new register. The Government says that this sum will be paid to Councils in April 2013.

The Minister also states that ongoing expenditure on IER in 2015/16 and thereafter when the transitional phase has been completed is still under review for the next budget round. However, the Minister's comments offer some comfort about ongoing financial support.

The "dry run" process this summer will hopefully give this Council and the Government clearer information about the likely cost of the new system.

Electoral Register – Performance Standards

Under Section 9B (1) of the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000 the Electoral Commission has to issue a direction on the performance of Registration Officers against set performance standards in the preparation and publication of the Electoral Register.

The results of the assessment for 2012 have just been received and out of the 10 performance standards, the Council has met eight of the standards and exceeded the standard in two cases, namely cross matching of electoral register data against other records and maintaining the integrity of registration and absent voter applications.

European Parliament Election 2014

Information has been received by the Returning Officer which indicates that the date of the European Parliamentary election in 2014 may be 22 May. It is expected that the District Council elections will be deferred to that date although the Government has not made the formal regulations as yet.

Once the situation has been confirmed, the Council may need to review dates for the Annual Council Meeting next year.

Business Plans

I have read and agreed Business Plans from the Office of the Chief Executive and the Corporate Support Services Directorate.

Car Leasing

At December's Cabinet members agreed to amend the Council's Car Leasing Scheme which was closed to new members and will eventually phase out during 2016. Employees on the current scheme will be allowed to extend for a further three years and the Council will make its contribution based on a maximum lease cost of £4,000 per annum. The Council's contributions are also capped.

Thirteen employees have already returned their cars and there are a further have employees returning their cars during the first quarter of the new financial year. As a result additional savings will be made in this financial year and in the next financial year. We anticipate the additional savings to be £12,600 in this financial year and £7,000 for next financial year.

The Cabinet also agreed to implement a Green Car Salary Sacrifice Scheme open to all eligible staff with no Council contribution towards the cost of the car. The Scheme was launched at the beginning of March with some interest from staff but as yet no-one has placed an order for a car under these arrangements.

Reprographics

Work has been undertaken to review staffing and financial arrangements for the in house Reprographics Service. The recovery of costs in respect of this service was raised with me previously. As a result of the review staffing changes will be made which should result in a reduction in running costs with re-charging of costs continuing to be in accordance with CIPFA guidelines.

I am advised that the service operations will be continue to be monitored to assess the effectiveness of the new arrangements.

Website

Following a request from some members of the Finance and Performance Management Scrutiny Panel, a website workshop has been organised for 21 May, prior to the Annual Council meeting. The time and venue will be advised in the Council Bulletin. This is a valuable opportunity to contribute to and comment on the new website, so I would encourage as many members as possible to attend.

An accessibility audit has recently been carried out on the Epping Forest website. A number of recommendations were made and are currently being addressed. These should be finalised on or before August 2013 at no extra cost and within existing resources.

The conclusion of this independent report stated;

“It is considered that this website will meet (the top rated) Double-A conformance once the issues indicated in this report have been addressed.”