

# Report to the Council

**Subject:** Support Services Portfolio

**Date:** 30 July 2013

**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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**1. County Council Elections – May 2013**

The Electoral Commission has now completed its review of performance standards in respect of the Epping Forest District in connection with the County Council Elections held in May 2013.

These performance standards cover planning and organisation, administering the poll, absent voting, verifying and counting the votes and action after the declaration of result. The Commission has found that in relation to the Epping Forest District, arrangements met all of these standards.

**2. Individual Electoral Registration (IER)**

I reported to the Council meeting in April 2013 stating that government transitional funding had been received by Council for 2013/14 to assist with the transfer from household to individual electoral registration. The sum of £7,300 was earmarked to assist in transitional arrangements.

I can report that this sum has been used to purchase new scanners for the purposes of voter registration security, a new storage system, two new workstations and upgrading of other IT equipment.

A data matching exercise with the Department of Work and Pensions database has taken place shortly before this Council meeting. The results are still being assessed and the percentage of matches between the two databases will determine the level of further government funding to assist in achieving the highest possible accuracy level in the register. The Registration Officer is hoping that a 70% match with DWP data will be achieved. Any percentage below that level will obviously increase the amount of work to be undertaken in following up on mismatches with a view to ensuring that the current high registration rates in the District can be maintained.

I will report to a future Council meeting on the outcome of the data matching exercise.

**3. Review of Polling Districts and Places**

The Returning Officer is required to carry out a review of polling districts and places on a five year cycle. The next review is due in the autumn this year and means that

every polling district and place in the District must be viewed from the point of view of convenience to voters, disabled access, facilities for staff, car parking etc.

There will be full consultation with members of the District Council and external partners and the outcome of the review will be reported back to the Council.

#### **4. European Parliament Elections – May 2014**

The date for the Euro Elections has now been fixed and the Returning Officer is awaiting notification from the UK Government that the District and Parish Council Elections due in May 2014 will be deferred so as all elections are held at the same time.

It is understood that the Chief Executive of Chelmsford Borough Council is Regional Returning Officer designate for the East of England for the EU Elections. Mr Packham was the County Returning Officer for the purposes of the Police and Crime Commissioner Election held in November 2012.

Arrangements for the EU Elections are at a very early stage with verification to take place at a time to be confirmed by the RRO and the actual counting of votes on the following Sunday.

#### **5. Moreton, Bobbingworth and The Lavers Parish Council – Designation of Neighbourhood Area**

The Cabinet recently considered a report on the designation of a neighbourhood area comprising the Parish of Moreton, Bobbingworth and The Lavers for the purpose of developing a neighbourhood plan for the area. The final step in that process is the holding of a local referendum. This is subject to a process of scrutiny of the plan over the proceeding period.

It is hoped that this referendum could be held alongside the EU and District/Parish Elections due in May 2014 but at the present time it is very difficult to predict the actual timetable for the referendum but the Returning Officer continues to monitor the situation.

#### **6. Website**

The website workshop took place on 21 May, prior to the Council meeting. Overall 15 members attended presentations by ICT staff in the ICT Training room and staff recreation area. It was a very informative event for both Members and ICT. A feedback document covering all of the issues raised has been produced and will be published in the Council Bulletin. It will also be discussed at the Finance and Performance Management Scrutiny Panel meeting in September.

The new responsive website is currently being tested. This will enable the Council website to be viewed more easily using smartphones, and tablets etc. The structure of the page changes to accommodate different style menus and makes the viewing experience much clearer on smaller screens. This version will go live during the summer.

## **7. Contract Work**

In addition to the more routine contract work which occurs throughout the year in legal there has been a marked increase in high profile, complex contracts requiring staff commitment for long periods. These matters have been and will continue to be active for a substantial period. Most notably they include the Waste Management etc contract. Various reports from other portfolios quite rightly reflect the content and purpose of these contracts, so I would record here the input from Support Services in helping to deliver these important projects.

## **8. HR Policies and Procedures**

I recently agreed a number of updated HR policies following a review of the Council's Disciplinary/Capability Procedure. This Procedure has now been divided into three separate procedures;

- Medical/Health Incapacity
- Improving Performance
- Disciplinary Procedure

These three procedures now sit under an overarching framework called the Employee Management Framework, along with the Managing Absence Procedure.

Dividing the current Procedure in this way ensures that employees are treated in a fair and appropriate way depending on the circumstances. Also this approach is intended to assist managers by locating these management processes in one place which provide clarity on the use of each Procedure.

In addition to the Employee Management Framework I agreed amendments to the Council's Grievance Procedure and the introduction of a new procedure for dealing with Appeals – Short of Dismissal.

Guidance for Managers will be provided for the new policies and procedures along with face-to-face training and e-learning.