

Report to the Council

Report of: Support Services Portfolio

Date: 17 December 2013

Portfolio Holder: Councillor H Ulkun

Recommending:

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

Individual Elector Registration (IER)

1. Since I reported to the Council meeting on 5 November 2013, I am pleased to say the Council has been successful in a grant application made to the Cabinet Office for additional IT software. This will help to facilitate better data checking in connection with elector registration. The grant approved totals £1,500.
2. Work is continuing on schemes to make use of the separate transitional funding provided for the next financial year by the Cabinet Office in respect IER. Currently, discussions are centring on the need to provide additional staffing in the Electoral Services Section in order to cope with additional work generated during the transitional phase leading to full individual elector registration next year. Currently it is estimated that the £33,000 grant from the Government will be utilised for administrative support (£22,000) and the balance being reserved for temporary staffing over the canvass period.

Electoral Canvass 2013

3. As I reported to the last meeting, the Electoral Register canvass is currently underway and the final reminder notice were sent to households during the weekend 30 November/1 December 2013.
4. At the November Council meeting, I reported that 15,000 electors had responded by telephone, text or internet where they had no changes to their details. This good performance has continued. The total number of households using this method is now over 22,000. However, this good news is tempered by the rate of return overall. At third reminder stage last year, 92% of households had completed their registration. This year the figure is 90% so it is important that there is a good response third reminder letters. Approximately 5,300 voters have yet to be registered and further publicity will be sought bearing in mind the importance of achieving a registration level which matches past performance.

Review of Polling Stations

5. The review of polling stations will now take place early in 2014. In addition in relation to the two polling stations I mentioned previously where special works were to be undertaken, I am pleased to say that the Allnutts Institute, Epping has now been completed. At Hastingwood Village Hall, steps are in process to provide a ramp for wheelchair users who come to vote when it is in use as a polling station.

6. I also mentioned in my last report the position concerning Faversham Hall, Chigwell Row which will not be available for polling purposes after May 2014. I am pleased to say that a possible alternative venue has now been identified and this will be reviewed in time for the General Election in May 2015.

Website – Disaster Recovery/Business Continuity

7. Members will be aware that the Epping Forest website is currently hosted on the Council's own internal infrastructure. This creates a certain risk in the event of a loss of premises or of a connection as the website would then become unavailable. To deal with this threat, it is proposed to move the website to an external host and with this in mind a number of providers are currently being evaluated by David Newton, Assistant Director (ICT) and the Website Development Board.
8. As the website is held in a virtual environment, the process of transferring the site to the new location can be achieved quickly once a provider has been selected.