

Report to the Council

Committee: Cabinet

Date: 29 July 2014

Subject: Technology and Support Services

Portfolio Holder: Councillor A Lion

Recommending:

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

Technology

Councillor Connectivity

It is a very exciting time to take on this Portfolio and I am keen that we seek to improve operational efficiency amongst both officers and Members through the best use of modern technology.

As part of this process and as previously reviewed by the Finance and Performance Scrutiny Committee, a pilot trial has been organised to evaluate a number of applications or 'apps' for potential use by Members. If this pilot is successful these 'apps' should make the accessing of information far easier and quicker. However there are cost implications and any additional expenditure will need to be justified by benefits. The benefits are still to be assessed but it is considered that these new facilities might replace some more cumbersome existing systems. Examples of the applications under consideration are:-

- The Mod.Gov app will allow access for minutes and agendas to be viewed electronically (including restricted documents), using a tablet device and may reduce the need for printing.
- The GOOD app will allow access to email and intranet functionality. Whilst the download of the app is free, there are licensing implications with regard to email and if this project were to progress, additional funding would need to be agreed.
- The engageEFDC app enables clear and readable access to EFDC news and services from a mobile device. For example, you can read the Chairman's blog, or make payments for Council Tax, Housing, Parking etc. all by using a smartphone. The application is available for download now.

Telephony system

The new telephony system rollout is virtually complete, with only a few external phones requiring installation. Now that the technology element is nearing completion, the focus of the project is changing toward the system configuration and operation. This will result in changes to user practises and procedures to get the best from new facilities. To some extent this is about user education, identifying the capability of the system and how best to configure the system to meet user needs

and improve the customer experience. The options for configuration were discussed at the Leadership Team and their recommendations have now been approved by Management Board to be rolled out throughout the Council. Full details can be viewed on the Management Board agenda for 9 July.

Setting up a corporate configuration is a complex procedure and will take time to settle in. There have been some teething problems but I can assure Members that they are being addressed. If you encounter an issue, please do not hesitate to contact myself or the Assistant Director of ICT and Facilities Management, David Newton.

A number of members have identified calls to the main telephone number, when not immediately being answered by the operator, were going directly to music. This has now been rectified with calls not being answered immediately receiving an Epping Forest District Council announcement whilst waiting to be put through.

Network Failure

There was a network failure at the Civic Offices which affected both data and telephone service for most of the morning of 1st July. District ICT staff were called out on Sunday evening when the failure was discovered and worked through the night to restore service. Service was fully restored early Monday afternoon. This failure was due to a hardware fault on some aging critical equipment which has now been replaced.

Wireless Superfast Broadband

Discussions are in progress with Fibre WiFi (Buzcom) to provide higher speed wireless broadband coverage to parish councils, initially to the Loughton, Epping and Chigwell areas to support the rollout of electronic access to and presentation of planning information. This should help enable parishes to work more efficiently and result in cost savings for both them and this Council in handling planning applications.

Civic Offices Security

Following a previous decision of Cabinet and a competitive tendering process, new security arrangements came into place on 1 July. Out of Hours cover for the Civic Offices is now provided by TSS (Total Security Services) between 22:00 and 07:00 Mon-Fri, with 24 hour cover over the weekend until 7am on Monday morning. Members will only be allowed access with the correct ID and access credentials during these times.

Support Services

Sickness Absence

This report is being written before the Finance and Performance Management Scrutiny Panel meeting on 16 July. The agenda for that meeting includes the annual report on sickness absence and there are a couple of points from that report that I thought were worth sharing with you. The sickness absence outturn figure for 2013/2014 was below the Council target of 7.25 days, at 7.01 days. This is the fourth consecutive year that performance has been better than the target and in each consecutive year the target has been made more challenging. The target for sickness absence for 2014/2015 has once again been reduced and is an average of 7 days per employee. Well done to Paula Maginnis and her team and all members of staff for this achievement.

National Graduate Development Programme

The Corporate Apprenticeship Programme has been a great success but it is quite intensive in terms of the support required. To complement the eight apprentices an additional resource at a more senior level in the organisation was considered to be the better option to build further capacity into the authority. It has been decided to use the National Graduate Development Programme (NGPD) to meet this requirement.

The National Graduate Development Programme (NGPD) is a 2 year national management trainee programme for high calibre graduates with the potential to become senior leaders in local government within the next 10 years. Overall management of the programme is handled by the Local Government Association.

The main objective within the Council of the NGPD will be for the successful candidate to progress a number of appropriate projects specifically in areas where the Leadership Team has identified a need for a review to be carried out.

The Council has recently interviewed and appointed to a graduate position which will be for a fixed term of two years. The successful Graduate will join the Council in September before they undertake a national induction day. During their time with us they will receive four projects/placements in various parts of the Council covering front line, operational and strategic roles/reviews.

Strike Action

A number of public sector Trade Unions balloted their members in May/June of this year to carry out a national day of action on 10 July 2014. Nationally there was a low number of votes cast with just over half of those voting in favour of strike action (based on Unison figures). I am pleased to report that there was only limited disruption to Council services with most areas operating as normal.

This is a national dispute not a local one and as a Council we are represented by the national employers body. There is a possibility of further strikes later in the year but I hope the dispute can be resolved amicably before these occur.

Terms of Reference for the Joint Consultative Committee

The reference above to the national negotiating machinery leads me nicely on to our own local arrangements. In common with most Councils, we have a Joint Consultative Committee. This Committee is currently reviewing its Terms of Reference and a report will be submitted to its next meeting at the end of July for discussion and agreement.