

Report to the Council

Committee: Cabinet

Date: 1 November 2017

Subject: Technology and Support Services

Portfolio Holder: Councillor A Lion

Recommending:

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

Support Services

Health and Safety

Members will be aware that the Council will be contracting out its Careline monitoring function switching to Tunstalls starting in November. In addition to providing an emergency service to our residents, the Careline control was also used by the Council's lone workers to report their locations to ensure their safety whilst working in the district. This service will not be transferring to Tunstalls and officers have been trialing an alternative system with Skyguard. The feedback has been very positive and so we will implement the system in the next couple of weeks so there is no break in cover for the lone workers.

A review has been carried out of the current fire safety procedures at the Civic Offices and this identified a need to improve the evacuation management procedures for the safety of staff and visitors. Consequently, the Council will be purchasing a new simplified system from TagEvac. It is simple to use and deliberately low tech with tags in each zones brought in person to a central point and added to the main panel. This enables staff and emergency services to know instantly which areas have been cleared and what areas need to be checked. TagEvac is an adaptable system that can be tailored to the Civic Office building as changes to the building and working practices are introduced.

Facilities

Some Health and Safety works are now underway at Townmead Depot in Waltham Abbey. A new steel fence is being installed around the perimeter of the site and some old concrete storage bays are being grubbed up and removed shortly.

Specialist stone restoration and external rendering works have been now been completed at the Civic Offices. These remedial repairs were identified following the cleaning of building elevations last year.

Boiler house refurbishment works at Frank Bretton House, Jessop Court and Leonard Davis House are now complete and commissioned on site.

Tender documents have now been issued for the refurbishment of nine passenger lifts on the Limes Farm Housing Estate in Chigwell. Submissions are due back in November.

External redecoration of the control tower at North Weald Airfield and the annexe building to Hangar one is underway. External redecoration of the shop at 48-50 The Street, High Ongar will begin once the sites at the North Weald Airfield are complete.

Wall mounted instant boiling water appliances have just been installed next to the ground and first floor conference rooms in the control tower. These will enable conference delegates to have quick and easy access to tea and coffee making facilities.

Legal

On 19 October 2017, the Council acquired the land at the rear of Buckingham Road in Epping for use as public open space. This area is approximately four acres and is now maintained by the Council's Grounds Maintenance Team. The open space was provided by the Developers as part of the planning agreement for the development of the St. John's Road School site.

Corporate Fraud Team

In mid-September the Corporate Fraud Team have commenced a joint working arrangement with Brentwood Borough Council to provide them with an anti-fraud service on a paid for basis. The arrangement is that the Corporate Fraud Manager will spend 2 days a week over at Brentwood Borough Council assisting with the running of their Corporate Fraud section as well as undertaking investigations into suspected cases of fraud on their behalf. The arrangement has already had its first success with a Right to Buy application being stopped with the property in the process of being recovered.

Following an investigation by the Corporate Fraud Team, a council property has been recovered that was subject to an attempted case of housing fraud relating to succession. When the tenant dies, the tenant's son applied to succeed the tenancy from his late father claiming that he had lived at the property for at least the last 12 months prior to his father's death. Enquiries were subsequently made by the Corporate Fraud Team which established that the son's assertions were in fact untrue as he had taken on a private tenancy of his own within the period and was liable for Council Tax etc. at the privately rented address. The property was visited and the late tenant's son was called in for a formal interview, which he never attended however, pending the commencement of legal action, the keys were subsequently returned to Housing enabling the property to be re-let to someone on the housing waiting list.

Technology

All ICT vacant posts are now filled, they are just waiting on the completion of their notice period before they can start. The current new staff have fitted in well and are starting to deliver on improving the quality of service their section provides, especially in key areas such as the service desk and assisting with implementing mobile working.

The GIS and Gazetteer team have been working on the implementation of our new Gazetteer, which is progressing well alongside work to incorporate the Street Naming and Numbering function into the team.

The development of the replacement ICT Strategy is now complete and a briefing on the strategy was provided for the Resources Select Committee on 17 October. The upcoming Cabinet decision on the Strategy and its funding will be key in ensuring that ICT can deliver the projects that will be required to enable Transformation and accommodation changes.

It is likely that as part of the ICT Strategy will be the adoption of Office 365 and the out hosting of the Council's email and much of the storage. Work and research has been conducted around email resilience, after a move to Office 365 and to ensure the security set-up is both secure and proportionate. Further discussions have also been held with telecoms

providers around the provision of a back-up internet connection and the upgrade of wide area network (WAN) infrastructure.

Work continues on the upgrade of the online forms to meet the deadline in January 2018 when the old system is no longer supported. ICT have been supporting PR in restructuring of the website and have implemented a replacement search tool in test mode.

Upgrading of the Council's Citrix infrastructure is well under way. On completion of the Desktop Terminal project the transfer can begin and then plans to upgrade the Microsoft operating system to Server 2016, which looks and feels equivalent to Windows 10, can commence.

The Council's Internet connection has been upgraded from 100MB to 1GB in preparation for a larger expected connectivity demand due to home working. New more powerful and capable firewalls have been installed at the Civic Offices giving improved capacity and protection for the Council's data and infrastructure.

Superfast Broadband High Speed Internet

The Rural Challenge Project continues to deliver ultrafast fibre broadband capability to rural houses and business premises throughout the north-east of the district. The focus in the summer months has been on carrying out remedial works on areas previously served to address some key issues.

As at September 2017, the network build had reached just over 3,600 premises passed with more than 2,900 active. Building work to install the final two cabinet areas of the network in Hastingwood and Ongar has now commenced with the anticipated completion date remaining at December 2017. A number of site visits and discussions have taken place to identify how best a route across part of North Weald Airfield might facilitate a shorter build timescale.