

Report to the Council

Committee: Cabinet

Date: 20 December 2018

Subject: Business Support Services

Portfolio Holder: Councillor G. Mohindra

Recommending:

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

Accountancy

The Local Government settlement was original expected on 6th December however this has now been delayed until after the Brexit vote on the 11th. It is hoped that the Governments proposal to remove negative Revenue Support Grant will be honoured and assurances have been given that the usual consultation period will not be truncated as a result of this delay, having said that it will give less time to analyse the outcome which isn't particularly helpful.

We are still awaiting information on the Fair Funding Review (FFR) and what the arrangements will be for the consultation. It is intended that responses to the consultations will be considered by the Resources Select Committee as and when a response is required. The settlement should hopefully give some more clarity around the timetable for this and also whether the 75% Essex Business Rates Pilot bid has been successful or not.

The budget process is continuing with the detailed General Fund and HRA budgets as well as the overall budget commentary due at Finance and Performance Management Cabinet Committee on 24th January 2019. The process will continue onto Cabinet on 7th February culminating in the budget setting report due at Council on 21st February. The process this year has been a little more involved mainly because of the continuing change as a result of the People Strategy implementation.

Going forward, Accountancy will be providing support to the St Johns Road and Accommodation Review projects as ensuring the financial aspects of both these schemes are fully evaluated will be an important part of the project teams work.

Support Services

The apprentices are organising a charitable event, for all staff to donate to Save the Children's 'Christmas Jumper Day' on 14 December. The apprentices are appearing on the front page of District Lines edition 96, wearing their Christmas Jumpers to promote the event.

Apprentices will be hands-on at the 'Careers-fest stand' at Epping Forest College on 31 January, to promote the advantages to students in joining the Council's successful apprenticeship programme, by gaining qualifications and experience at the same time.

We are very pleased to report that 8 of the Council's business administration apprentices have passed their Level 2 apprenticeships, which is equivalent to a GCSE level. This includes several of them improving their Maths and English GCSE results to a Grade C. Another apprentice will have passed their Level 3 apprenticeship in January, which is equivalent to an A Level.

The latest national achievement rates for apprenticeships is currently at 67% out of 100 apprentices who complete the programme. The Council currently has a 100% completion rate for this cohort.

The apprentices have now started their Level 3 qualifications and have moved across to other service areas within the Council, to gain valuable experience. Brandon Alford, who started as one of this cohort's Business Administration apprentices, has now been offered an AAT Accountancy apprenticeship with Accountancy in a career graded role.

Work is progressing on implementing the People Strategy. The new structure (i.e. Common Operating Model), continues to be developed and implemented. Officers are working with the trade unions on a new pay and grading structure, the initial meetings have just taken place and work is on-going. The Council's HR/Payroll IT system continues to be rolled out.

The Council has launched a Winter Wellness Programme where anti-bacterial hand wash has been introduced along with regular washing of door handles with the intention of trying to reduce the number and spread of infections during the winter months. Also publicising a flu jab scheme, the Council operates through a local pharmacy for staff.

Legal

At Chelmsford Magistrates Court on 15 November 2018 a prosecution was brought by the Council against Mr. Halil Kanteper of Stoke Newington Road, London N1, for carrying out unauthorised work to the listed building at 309 High Street, Epping known as Poppy's Café and the first floor of that building. Mr. Kanteper pleaded guilty to the offence and was fined £1,200 and ordered to pay costs of £500 and a victim surcharge of £120.

Consents had been granted in 2016 and 2017 for an extension and conversion of the first floor into 2 flats and for a replacement shop front at the property, but on 15 August 2017 the Council was alerted to the possibility of work being carried out to the listed building which was more extensive than contained in the permissions granted. Council Officers visited the property the same day and it was immediately clear, that substantial unauthorised work had been carried out, including walls being stripped of their historic lath and plaster, ceilings floors and joists removed in their entirety and stud walls being removed. Work is being carried out now in conjunction with new planning approvals.

On the 29 May 2019 the Council was alerted by a member of the public, to the fact that work was being carried out at 19 Hartland Road, Epping adjacent to a cedar tree that was protected by a Tree Preservation Order made in 2001.

The work being carried out was the construction of a new driveway at the property. An inspection revealed that several significant roots of the tree had been cut and that no consent had been sought or obtained from the Council as required in the Tree Preservation Order.

Both Mr. Kingsley and Mr. Delaney were prosecuted by Epping Forest District Council and at the hearing in Chelmsford Magistrates Court on 15 November 2018. Mr. Kingsley pleaded guilty to the offence of causing or permitting the cutting of the tree roots without consent. He was given an absolute discharge and ordered to pay a contribution towards the Council's costs of £200.

Mr. Delaney failed to attend and was convicted in his absence of cutting the roots. He was fined £660 and ordered to pay the balance of the Council's costs of £945.32 and a Victim Surcharge of £66.

Technology

The rollout of approximately 500 laptops is now largely complete, on time and within budget, enabling agile and home working. All old stock of equipment is now being reallocated and dispatched to other sites and will be used by staff who are unable to adopt flexible working.

Testing is now complete for enhancing to Blackberry Good to enable a secure printing solution.

The Council's remote working solution, Virtual Private Network (VPN) is being replaced by a more flexible online solution. The system is now capable to have a pc based soft phone.

Background work is now in progress for the technology support to the Planning system, which is due to begin formal testing in the final quarter of 2018/19. Similar preparatory work is in progress for the transfer of email system to the cloud using Office365, which will greatly increase resilience of our email and reduce our future requirements for on premises data storage.

The new SharePoint based intranet facility is planned to live in January 2019, Members access is being planned and introduced once the main system has embedded down.

Gazetteer & Street Naming and Numbering (Spatial Information Team)

Enhancements to property classifications a new statutory requirement from central government - have now been completed, with 5000 records updated since the last report and 9000 in total since September. These classifications identify specific types and uses of every residential property within the district.

The project to link to Capita Academy is now awaiting resource from the business area, but we now have an implementation plan available when ready.

Our gazetteer is now rated Silver in the current Geoplace improvement schedule and is just a few points away from an overall Gold rating. The Council's replacement Street Naming and Numbering solution is now live and is offering improvements to our Planning colleagues. Collaborative working with the parish councils we have been able to encourage developers to use names preferred by the parish.

Geographical Information System - GIS (Spatial Information Team)

Grounds Maintenance is now piloting a mobile survey solution for their Basic Tree Maintenance (BTM) process, and we are already in the process of designing a similar solution for their playgrounds maintenance.

A new mobile app for the waste development team is now complete and fully tested with January 1 the go live date.

Central reporting tool for Street Cleaning and Waste Collection to be able to check which streets have been cleaned and which bins have been collected. Both randomly select from the waste contractors daily work for inspection and reporting.

We have also been working on several nearly new web pages for the new website this supports the following pages:

- Who is my Councillor, and which is my Town/Parish council?
- What is my Council Tax band and cost?
- Where is my Polling Station?
- When is my Waste Collection?

We have created a web mapping application for Essex Police, giving them full access to our CCTV mapping which shows the location and direction of all the Council's CCTV. This enables better partnership working and reduces requests from the police where we don't have coverage as they can now accurately see the locations.

Digital Forms Team

Works is underway to move data from the old No lone working visit to the new accompanied attendance is being completed, to be self-managed and saving officer time.

Our new complaints and escalation process is now live and working well and automatically saving officer time and ensure statutory deadlines are met.

Several new forms and processes for the public and internally for the Customer Relationship Management system are now live, including reporting dead animal, noise and graffiti. We now have a new missed bin reporting system which enables information from Biffa and our systems.

A UAV flight was carried out on Remembrance Sunday commemorations at Bobbingworth Park. Despite the weather, they were able to collect some good

video and images that were used by Corporate Communications. Chairman starts Remembrance Sunday march:

<http://www.eppingforestdc.gov.uk/news/?p=37205>