

Report to the Council

Committee: Cabinet

Subject: Customer Portfolio

Portfolio Holder: Councillor S Kane

Recommending:

That the report of the Customer Portfolio Holder be noted

1 Preparations for annual billing and year-end processes for Council Tax, Business Rates and Benefits have been in full flow. Following the closure of the Council's internal reprographics function the Council's bills and benefit letters for March this year will be produced by Uttlesford DC following successful negotiations. There is a disaster recovery solution in place within the contract which is an additional benefit. The other good news is that the process will provide a saving of

2 At the time of writing the Council was due to hold a new Multi-Agency Centre (MAC) for Waltham Abbey to support residents, particularly those in need and in receipt of Benefits. It mirrors and expands upon the MAC that exists in at the Job Centre in Loughton. Organisations involved range from EFDC Housing, Benefits, Revenues, Community and Digital teams to the DWP, MIND, Peabody, Epping Forest Foodbank. Overall it is anticipated that around a dozen services will be available for residents to access in one place. This is seen as a potential new model of service delivery where the Council joins up with partners across our district to engage with our residents in the most need supported by data insight around the particular locality.. The Waltham Abbey centre will operate on alternative Thursdays between 1-3pm.

3 The roll-out of the Council's Digital Inclusion Network is continuing. It is another example where the Council is acting a community leader in supporting our residents. Over 60 Digital Buddies have been recruited internally and this network is now expanding across the district with other organisations from the public and third sector and now involves around 20 other organisations and is growing. The Council is providing an on-line hub which will help signpost support and training for those involved in the network. The Council's Customer team is also providing specific skills training to third sector organisations to help them with their digital skills work. Citizens Online, the national charity working across the country to address digital exclusion is using Epping Forest District Council as an exemplar with other Councils and organisations in how the Council and its partners have engaged with the process and the progress that has been made.

4 Customer satisfaction in the third quarter reached a high of 83% which was very good to see and is a reflection of the good work undertaken. However, there have been staffing issues recently with the Customer Services Team which managers are addressing for now and looking at future resilience arrangements. There have also been some issues with upgrades to the Council's telephone systems that affected call handling and which the ICT team have been resolving. I apologise if

Members or their constituents have not received usual high standards of service in recent weeks. This ultimately may unfortunately lead to a temporary reduction in the satisfaction rate for this month and the overall quarter figure for the fourth quarter.

5 As stated in my last report In December Member's ability to access Council e-mails from their personal phones and devices is now available. Many Members have taken advantage of this area and booked time with officers to enable their devices and other issues with the digital solution. For those that haven't yet done so I would urge them to do so quickly to allow easy access to e-mails using their corporate e-mail addresses. We shall cease the use of private emails at the end of March, this will afford our IT team sufficient time to resolve any outstanding issues with iPads and Bring Your Own devices.

.6 The ICT Restructure Consultation triggered on 7th February and will last for 30 calendar days. The changes proposed are to reorganise the ICT Team at the Team Manager and Employee level. Most of the Council has been through this process, however, some Teams in Business Services were put on hold for various operational reasons and ICT was one of those teams. We are now in a position to start a consultation process to bring stability to the Team. The Council's new structure is based on a Common Operating Model (COM), which separates out customer, business support and technical functions; locating them together in the new structure. The proposed restructure is closely linked to the three distinct areas in the Corporate Plan.

7 An updated version of the ICT Strategy is currently being developed, and the draft document for Stakeholder use is intended to be presented at March Cabinet.

8 The ICT Team are currently working to support the Accommodation Programme and are currently on schedule with their key milestones. The roll out of O365 Teams has been completed, and so far we have seen a positive take up for use; this tool supports remote and flexible working.