

Report to the Council

Committee: Cabinet

Date: 26 September 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

Apprentice Recruitment

I am pleased to update colleagues that the Council has recruited ten new apprentices (aged 16 -18); Nine Business Administration apprentices and one Construction apprentice. We worked with Essex County Council's Skills and Intervention Team, to identify young people who would be interested in an apprentice opportunity within the district. There was also a social media and newspaper recruitment campaign put together by an existing apprentice, Becky Linford.

The ten apprentices started work at the Council on the Monday 4 September. The Business Administration apprentices will move around to different services areas every six months, to gain a broad range of experience and skills, whilst the Construction apprentice will work in the Housing Repairs Team.

Our apprentices will be completing either a Business Administration Level two qualification or a Multi-Trade Construction Level two qualification. They will also attend corporate training and receive monthly mentoring from one of our internal coaches.

Graduate Recruitment

Unfortunately we were unsuccessful in recruiting a graduate from the National Graduate Development Programme run by the Local Government Association (LGA). This was mainly due to candidates being focused on working in London or not having the required skill sets. Officers will be looking to work with our local Jobcentre Plus and embarking on a local advertising campaign to recruit graduate level applicants for this higher apprenticeship role. The recruitment campaign will start in the new calendar year.

HR/Payroll IT System Update – iTrent

Members may be aware that we agreed to update the Council's HR/Payroll ICT system and jointly procured the iTrent system with Braintree and Colchester Councils. Officers have been implementing various parts of the system over the past 12 months, starting with the payroll module and core HR functions. Working collaboratively with Braintree and Colchester the employee self-serve functionality was launched in July and all staff are able to access their personal records, amend their address, bank details and sensitive information (equality information) and can access their payslip.

Various working groups involving all three authorities are building and working towards implementing the remaining modules, annual leave, recruitment, expenses and training to name just a few.

Members will also be able to access their details in the same way as staff and we will be switching to electronic payslips for the payment of Member allowances from January. A drop-in session has been arranged for the evening of Tuesday 31 October and you will see further information in a future Council Bulletin. This has been an excellent example of partnership working across the three authorities with benefits to all authorities.

Facilities

Works are now beginning to come to an end at the Sheltered Housing units at Frank Bretton House, Jessop Court and Leonard Davis House. Over the last few months the boiler houses at these sites have been fully refurbished with the installation of new boilers, pumps, pipework, hot water cylinders and control systems. In conjunction with colleagues in ICT, these new installations are almost ready to be linked into our Trend Building Management System so they will be ready for operation in time for when outside temperatures begin to drop later in the year.

The Building Engineers are project managing the proposed refurbishment of nine passenger lifts on the Limes Farm Housing Estate in Chigwell. Together with the input of a specialist lift consultant, tender documents are now in the later stages of preparation. The target start date for refurbishment works to begin is January 2018.

Facilities Surveyors are having an input into the investigations into relocating the Pylres Lane Nursery team to Townmead depot in Waltham Abbey. In preparation for an expansion in use of this site, a contractor has now been appointed to install new security fencing around the perimeter of the complex. The fencing is currently being fabricated and works should begin next month.

Technology

All four vacant posts were filled last month with staff now in their new roles, the remaining two posts have been offered internally and they will start with ICT after their notice periods. Again the quality of internal applicants has been excellent and some of these posts were filled internally against external competition.

Our new staff are focusing on improving the quality of service that the mobile working and service desk teams give, we have also been using our new resource to begin work on developing information@work in Housing and beginning the process of implementation in Neighbourhoods and People Team.

Successful testing has been carried out on assessing the viability of switching our laptop security model, which easily accommodates the needs of mobile workers. A larger scale pilot is to be held in the autumn to enable further testing and future selection of laptops for flexible workers and to test new remote connectivity solution more widely ahead of a full rollout in April 2018.

Work is progressing in the corporate forms solution upgrade, which feeds into the corporate Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system and will change the way our website is structured. We have tested a replacement search tools on the website, which will be the key in the future redesign of the website and this will be implemented against the current website shortly.

The development of the replacement ICT strategy continues apace, ICT System and Business Analysts have completed the second round of meetings with Assistant Directors and have fed back the outcomes into the draft strategy. The draft has been approved by Director of Resources, Head of Transformation and has been presented to the Leadership Team. The strategy will be taken to Resources Select Committee before going to Cabinet in November. A considerable amount of work has gone into the development of this strategy to ensure that it meets the needs of the Council now and over the next five years.

Telephony is now stable after an initial problem with the changing of the Council's external trunk supplier (external calls to/from the Council), this was due to a misconfiguration of termination equipment during the transfer by external Consultants. On-going issues in Council Tax and Neighbourhoods are currently with Developers at ShoreTel to create a fix for their concerns.

Testing and monitoring equipment has been purchased to allow for in-depth analysis of wireless coverage and quality within Council properties. This device will enable us to improve the coverage and speed of connectivity currently available.

The security and protection of data section of ICT continue to have a good record with no breach or loss of data integrity to external forces. An external review is currently being undertaken and we are expecting another good report. On-going improvements are being made to emails and website scanning systems have been implemented to further protect the Council from an ever evolving Internet threat and new more powerful replacement Firewalls are to be installed in the next few weeks.

New Gazetteer staff are now in place and in the process of learning new systems with a view to taking on the additional responsibility of Street Naming and Numbering over the next couple of weeks. The quality of our Gazetteer remains rated Gold, the highest rating available and this accurate addressing data will underpin the CRM system and other software linked to it.

UAV flights continue on a regular basis and once work begins, we will be using the drone to capture time-lapse aerial photography showing the erection of the new Leisure Centre in Waltham Abbey. Development of our GIS solution is ongoing, with website pages for residents showing 'near me' services currently in development and various mobile working solutions either ready for use or undergoing testing. We have also been updating our existing website maps for residents to view the latest technology, such as our Waste Collection Dates map, which since its launch in March 2015 has been viewed over 85,000 times.

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. In August 2017 the network build remained at just over 3200 premises passed with more than 2200 active and able to access the world-class speeds provided by the broadband infrastructure. Planning work has begun in detail for the two final areas in Hastingwood/North Weald and Ongar.

Digital Innovation Programme

The second One Epping Forest Smart Places seminar was held on Friday 8 September at Harlow Council Chamber. The seminar brought together representatives from Businesses, Education, Health, Local Authorities, Partnership bodies and the Voluntary Sector to hear

about and discuss the latest digital innovations and their application to the provision of Health and Social Care.

This seminar followed the second meeting of the Digital Innovation Zone (DIZ) Board, a cross-border grouping of Epping Forest District Council (EFDC), Uttlesford, Harlow, East Herts and Broxbourne Councils, Essex County Council, the London Stansted Cambridge Consortium, Princess Alexandra Hospital, West Essex CCG and KAO Data that has agreed to co-fund and co-commission a digital infrastructure strategy for a proposed DIZ covering the geographies of the five district local authority partners.

An expression of interest has been submitted on behalf of the DIZ Board to the Department for Digital Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) to be involved in the DCMS Local Full Fibre Networks (LFFN) Programme. This programme will explore opportunities to expand full fibre networks through a range of mechanisms to support residents and businesses in accessing superfast broadband speeds and invitations to submit full bids are expected after Autumn workshops with interested parties.

Legal - Corporate Fraud Team

Prosecution

After a five day trial at Chelmsford Crown Court, a former EFDC Council Tenant was found guilty of two charges of fraud (under The Fraud Act 2006) relating to a social housing fraud. The first charge related to her failure to relinquish a Housing Association Tenancy following her purchase of a three bedroom detached house in Dunmow, which she moved into during 2009.

The second charge related to making false representations to EFDC to obtain a Council property under the mutual exchange scheme. Despite moving out of her Housing Association property in 2009, she continued to sublet it until she then obtained a mutual exchange into an EFDC property in November 2011. The defendant never actually moved into an EFDC property, but illegally sublet it from the initial outset.

Prior to the trial, she had already entered a guilty plea to a charge brought under the Prevention of Social Housing Fraud Act 2013 for illegally subletting the EFDC tenancy. The property was recovered during the investigation and has since been re-let to someone from our waiting list.

The judge adjourned sentencing until Friday 15 September at Chelmsford Crown Court in order for a pre-sentence report to be obtained. Following the convictions for both crimes, proceedings are now being instigated against the defendant under The Proceeds of Crime Act.