

# ***Report to the Council***

**Committee: Cabinet**

**Date: 25 April 2019**

**Subject: Business Support Services**

**Portfolio Holder: Councillor G Mohindra**

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## **Recommending:**

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

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## **Accountancy**

The Final Accounts process for 2018/19 is now underway with a deadline of 31<sup>st</sup> May for presentation of the statements for audit and 31<sup>st</sup> July for approval which is the same as last year. This is a challenging timetable for both the Council and the External Auditors. Closure is heavily dependent on receiving information in a timely fashion from a number of sources either internal or external such as the County Council in relation to pension fund information, and the Council's valuers. The auditors this time round are Deloitte LLP who took over from BDO our previous auditors. Deloitte have already carried out some of their preliminary work during February and March in an effort to reduce the amount of work required in June and July.

A response to the two consultation papers, one relating to the Fair Funding Review (FFR) and the other to Business Rates retention was made by the due deadline of 21<sup>st</sup> February. The issue was considered by the Resources Select Committee at its meeting on 12<sup>th</sup> February and a number of comments made were included in the final response. Further consultations are due over the next six months or so as the funding picture for 2020/21 and beyond starts to take shape. The intention is to respond to these consultations as required and involve the new select committees in that process. The settlement for 2020/21 will be based on the outcome of the consultation and should be issued during December 2019.

## **ICT Strategy**

### **Desktop & Mobile Support**

Work is nearing completion to replace secure email to other Government bodies using GCSX mailboxes with the ability to send securely from Officers' standard mailboxes. This work should be finished by the end of April.

Now that all members of staff have been allocated corporate laptops to allow for flexible working the configuring of the laptops for remote working and the training of Officers to understand the process is well under way. There are currently less than one hundred users who need setting up and it is envisaged to complete this process within the next month based on Officers being available for the training.

The transfer of corporate mailboxes to Microsoft Azure is currently under way and the next stage for mailbox transfer will be for The Leadership Team.

Upgrades to the Citrix environment are currently being implemented to allow for a more modern desktop experience and the availability of Microsoft Office 365 to replace Office 2010.

Consideration is being given to the process and costs required to transfer the corporate phone system (ShoreTel/Mitel) to a web-based environment hosted in The Cloud. The current hardware in place at The Civic Offices becomes end-of-life in December 2019.

The corporate wireless environment is currently under performance review. Tests are being carried out and changes are being made to ensure the availability of a solid and reliable connection at all Epping Forest DC sites.

### **People Strategy**

The Council has started to consult with staff in the Planning - Development Management Support Team to separate functions aligning them with the Common Operating Model (COM) i.e. Business Support or Customer. Once completed this will be the twelfth team to join Corporate Business Support.

Process mapping is continuing across Housing & Property and Community and Partnerships, once complete work will start to split functions and resources into the COM again to align them with either Business Support or Customer.

The Council just has finalised the consultation process with the Trade Unions regarding the Pay and Benefit review, resulting in an agreement in principle. The next steps are for the Trade Unions and Council to issue a joint statement to all staff and for both to consult with their members or staff. The aim of the negotiations has been to reach an agreement with the Trade Unions which has been achieved.

The Council has appointed to the two Corporate Management Apprenticeship roles. One of the appointees is Louis Walton who joined the Council on our original cohort of business administration apprentices five years ago. The other successful applicant is Theresa Larsen who currently works in Benefits who will now be working on a project to support bringing Council Tax and Benefits processes together in order to make improvements to how our customers experience these services.

This is a great success story as it demonstrates the progression/development opportunities available for our apprentices and indeed for staff.