

# ***Report to the Council***

**Committee:** Cabinet  
**Date:** 5 October 2023  
**Subject:** Customer and Corporate Support Services  
**Portfolio Holder:** Councillor Sam Kane

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## **Recommending:**

**That the report of the Customer and Corporate Support Services Portfolio Holder be noted.**

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## **Customer Service**

### **Data Capture Process – Trial with Tenancy & Estate Management Team**

Regardless of the way customers contact us we need a greater understanding of the reasons they contact us, how they contact us to determine blockers to using digital as well as insight on their customer experience, positive or negative. As a reminder we are introducing a 'data capture process' to enable us to capture this insight.

We have been trialling the process with the Tenancy & Estates management team. Customer feedback is positive. We are waiting on ICT resource and prioritisation to extend the trial to all of Housing, followed by other service areas.

### **Contact Centre**

Call volumes continue to be sporadic dependant on level of service provided by our Waste Contractor. Full KPI information will be reported to Stronger Council.

As of 1 October, we will have a new provider for our out of hours call centre. Following a tender process, I am pleased to confirm that SPS Doorguard Ltd will be our new provider. We have already met with SPS to discuss the mobilisation plan and have been very impressed.

### **Improving the Member induction and training programme**

At the last coffee morning Members provided feedback on the current induction and training programme which is being incorporated into development of a refreshed programme for next year. To assist Members in completing training at their convenience we are developing interactive online training giving 24/7 access at your convenience without the need to attend in person.

We are also continuing to work in collaboration with Democratic Services to digitalise all induction forms Members are required to complete into a 'tell us once' digital form. The timescales for completion of both strands of work is March 2024 in readiness for the May 2024 Election.

We encourage Members to let us know of any particular subjects they would like to hear about at Members coffee mornings, please email Kim Partridge at [memberservices@eppingforestdc.gov.uk](mailto:memberservices@eppingforestdc.gov.uk)

## **Payment Solutions**

The project to update our payment solutions to support the new Housing Civica Cx system is on schedule and expected to be completed by the beginning of September with Civica Cx expected to go live at the end of October. The high priority of the Housing Civica Cx project along with contractual delays means the project to migrate our payment solutions to the cloud has been delayed, new timescales will be agreed, resource permitting this should be November.

## **Corporate Communications**

A new three-year contract for the provision of webcasting has been agreed between Epping Forest District Council and Public-i. New arrangements came into place from 1 July, creating an annual saving of £8,000 over the previous contract.

The following meetings will continue to be streamed live and available to view via the Public-i 6-month archive:

- Council
- Cabinet
- District Development Management Committee
- Area Planning Sub-Committee East
- Area Planning Sub-Committee South
- Area Planning Sub-Committee West
- Overview & Scrutiny Committee

The following meetings will be recorded:

- Audit & Governance Committee
- Communities Scrutiny Committee
- Place Scrutiny Committee
- Licensing Committee
- Licensing Sub Committee
- Local Councils' Liaison Committee

All live streamed and recorded meetings will be uploaded to You Tube where they will be available for 6 years.

- [YouTube – Meetings from 1 January 2022](#)
- [YouTube – Meetings from 2018 to 2021](#)

As well as the reduction in the number of live-stream hours, the switch to You Tube, and a reduced Public-i archive (from 2 years to six months), savings were also achieved by returning mobile webcasting equipment.

## **Webcasting of meetings for the 5 months from April 2023 to August 2023**

- 32 meetings totalling 38 hours 14 minutes
- 26 meetings were live totalling 31 hours 19 minutes

- 6 meetings were recorded and published on YouTube totalling 6 hours 55 minutes
- Plus 6 member training sessions totalling 6 hours 37 minutes

## **Website**

Improvements to the current Wordpress website have now bedded in.

- Improved Navigation – following customer research last year, work was conducted to improve website navigation. Visitors to the website are now able to find desired content more quickly and easily via the navigation menus.
- Improved Search – extensive development of the search function is also redirecting customers to Essex County Council and other statutory providers more effectively. Further work has been done to aid customers searches with misspelt and alternative terms. Improved metadata is also improving Google and other search engine optimisation (SEO). This allows more customers to go straight from their main search engine to EFDC content without the need to visit the homepage or navigate the menus.
- Reduction in Refuse and Recycling enquiries – the number of searches for missed collections information and report forms has reduced as the service has improved.

Most popular pages include:

- Planning search
- Homepage
- Check bin collection
- Recycling and rubbish

## **Local Gov Drupal**

The current Wordpress website is approaching retirement. Proposals have been made for replacement by Local Gov Drupal, a content management system supported by a cooperative of local authorities. Among the advantages of LG Drupal are the sharing of research and development, the availability of previously developed and user tested content, and the evolution of new forms. LG Drupal also offers potentially better long-term levels of security and accessibility at a potentially much lower cost than an independently produced system.

## **Social Media**

Epping Forest District Council continues to communicate with residents and stakeholders through a range of social media channels. Just over 1,500 people and organisations also subscribe to the Council's Mailchimp media release distribution service.

Day time customer enquiries are now managed via the Customer Contact Centre. Social Media monitoring and customer responses continue out of hours (evenings, weekends and bank holidays) through Corporate Communications.

- Facebook subscribers increased by approximately 11 percent to 4,745 between April and August 2023.

- Instagram increased by just over 3 percent to 2,524 between April and August 2023.
- LinkedIn increased by just under 4 percent to 3,241.
- X (Twitter) fell very slightly to 9,966.

## **X Twitter**

Changes to X (formerly Twitter) have been well documented elsewhere. Since the purchase of Twitter by Elon Musk in 2022, global usage has reduced considerably. The North Essex Parking Partnership recently announced the closure of its X (Twitter) platform due to a declining number of engagements compared with its other channels.

Epping Forest District Council continues to keep the channel under review. We have seen a modest decline in followers. However, interactions with the EFDC account remain high. Impressions and Likes were up from the last 2 months and second highest for this period, after May, when both were high due to the elections.

We still receive a lot of customer enquiries and questions via X, through private and public messages. On average, we have received 128 messages per month on X from April to August.

## **Corporate Services**

### **People Strategy**

The new people strategy for 2023-2027 was signed off by Cabinet in May 23 and launched to the organisation June 23. However, there has been a review and reprioritisation of the projects identified for 2023-2027, this is due to the focus and work taking place in the HR shared service programme.

Our focus, in addition to BAU now being the following:

**Legislative Changes/Updates** - A quarterly update report is now submitted to the ELT/SLT and Wider leadership team outlining updates and changes to wider legislation reviews/changes and internal policy development.

**Disability Confident** – A draft self-assessment has been submitted to the DWP who we are working with to achieve our Level 2 status. We are waiting to hear back from the DWP to see if we need to change or amend anything before, we submit the self-assessment for our level 2 status.

**Implement Wagestream** – Wagestream, our new financial wellbeing app, was launched to employees on 2 October. There will be further employee/manager comms along with ‘drop in’s’ for further information.

**iTrent – Recruitment Portal & Application Form development** - The People team have upgraded iTrent to the ‘fresh’ look web recruitment portal, the fresh look allows applicants a cleaner and more accessible view of the vacancies we have to offer. Alongside this we took the opportunity to refresh and update the job application form, allowing us to embed some additional information requirements as well as reformatting and removing fields that are no longer required or applicable. The changes will make applying for a job easier for candidates with less pages and fields to complete and help

managers ensure that we obtain the information needed to make good / better shortlisting and hiring decisions. Any further work evolving our recruitment process has been temporarily paused, albeit the work that was envisaged as 'simple projects' has now been completed.

## **Complex Projects**

### **iTrent Multifactor Authentication -**

The work involved in allowing iTrent to use Multifactor Authentication has been completed, we are now in the process of moving teams over to the new method of signing in. (Approx 20% of the organisation completed so far).

**Employee Insight** – Adopting a High-Performance Culture Survey June-July 23 has now concluded. An executive summary has been launched throughout the organisation and insight formed part of the September Leadership Summit event.

### **Service Led Workforce Planning Part 1 Succession Planning -**

The Succession Planning tool developed by People Team was completed by majority of service areas. The outcomes of this have been.

- Conversations re impact of potential retirements, career planning and shared services roles are clearly taking place.
- Management & Leadership development needs are being balanced with technical development.
- Apprenticeship Levy funding is being maximised for leadership development and a number of technical qualifications, thus making the greatest use of corporate training budget.

### **Local Pay – NJC -**

Under our Local Pay arrangements, all Epping Forest District Council employees received a flat rate annual pay increase of £1200 from 1 April 2023, equating to an average 3% award across the organisation.

However, as part of our local pay arrangements, the Council is also committed to matching the National Joint Council collective agreement. The NJC offer, made in February 2023, was a £1925 consolidated increase to scale points up to and including SCP43. Scale points 44 and above were offered a 3.88% increase.

The Employer side reaffirmed that their offer was full and final. The offer has not been accepted by the trade unions. However, following a meeting of the NJC Trade Union Side on 19 September, UNISON indicated that it would not be taking strike action and wished to "...resolve this year's pay dispute and get that pay increase in [its members] pockets as soon as possible."

Some industrial action is being taken by Unite against a small number of councils. A GMB ballot of its members on industrial action targeted at some schools and councils closes on 24 October. Although no decision was reached at the meeting of the unions in September, they have arranged to meet again following the result of the GMB ballot.

The Chief Officer NJC pay award has been agreed at 3.50% and this has been applied.

Chief Executives are awaiting the outcome of the NJC negotiations, as they are requesting that their pay award is no less than that given to employees.

Should the NJC offer be accepted, EFDC salaries would increase by a further £725 for salaries up to Grade H. Salaries from Grade I and above (excluding Chief Officers and Chief Executive) would have the £1200 uplift reversed and 3.88% applied instead. The award would be backdated to April.

### **Terms & Conditions - Contract Review**

The EFDC contract templates for Service Managers and above have been legally reviewed and updated to ensure compliance with current employment legislation.

The Team Manager and standard employment contract review is currently on hold.

### **Standby/Call out payments.**

A project group has been looking at how Standby and Call Out is managed throughout the Council and benchmarking this to other authorities and particularly Colchester and Braintree councils.

A new proposal has been prepared and recommendations have been given to the Executive Leadership team to review.

Once reviewed, formal consultation will commence with Unions and effected employees on any changes.

### **Apprenticeships**

Five new Corporate Apprentices are currently being recruited across the Council - Democratic Services/ Elections, Tree Team, Highway Rangers/ Countrycare, Health & Safety and Internal Communications. The Apprenticeship Levy will be used to train the new Apprentices in specific skills for these areas, thus supporting succession planning.

The Apprenticeship Levy is also being used to fund 15 aspiring Team Managers to start an ILM 3 (Institute of Leadership & Management) programme in early October 2023. The Levy will also fund 8 managers to complete ILM 5 (Solace Emerging Leaders programme).

The Levy now supports upskilling employees in areas such as; IRRV, Planning, Legal, Accountancy, ICT, HR, Project Management, Business Analyst and Coaching/Mentoring.

The use of the Council's Levy (which we are obliged to contribute to) means maximising Corporate Training Budgets.

### **Business Support**

#### **Local Land Charges (LLC), His Majesties Land Registry Project**

- Con29 searches at have reduced from 30 to approximately 17 working days. 15 - 20% of current searches are for 'complex land'. These searches have increased since the Local Plan has been adopted and are more time consuming then residential searches.

- Processes and systems continue to be reviewed, benchmarked and improvements identified and implemented.
- HMLR continue to give glowing feedback.

#### **Finance Team**

- Awaiting the testing of Advance Financials from October 2023.
- Purchase card project is nearing completion.

#### **System upgrades affecting Business Support**

- Information at Work.
- M3.
- Advanced financials.
- Civica.

#### **Insurance and Risk**

- Following a difficult negotiated renewal process where UK insurance rates have increased 20 – 60% the Council managed to secure renewal on expiring rates for this policy year, fighting off a potential £200k increase. This year's renewal costs have been kept within existing budgets.
- A Council-wide Risk Management Framework, Policy & Strategy was approved at Audit and Governance Committee on the 17 July and Cabinet on 18 September.
- Risk Management training is continued to be rolled out across the Council to individual Service Areas. Member training will be rolled out in November 2023 in conjunction with the Chief Internal Auditor.
- The Insurance & Risk Specialist has commenced and will continue to deliver guidance and support with individual service areas and Directors where appropriate throughout the year.
- The Insurance & Risk Specialist is continuing to work with the Fleet Management team, Health & Safety and HR on revising our Driving at Work policy, Drink & Drugs policy and producing a Drivers Handbook to ensure the Council is compliant with its obligations under the Health & Safety at Work Act and Road Traffic Acts amongst other obligations and is expected to be finalised by Q4 of 2023/2024.

#### **Elections**

- The Annual Canvass continues and the Team is still on track for completion in early December.
- The Team is currently compiling a list of streets within each of the new wards, following the Boundary review. This will be released when complete.
- Planning continues for the all-out elections in May 2024. The Project Plan has been revised and the Elections Planning Group is in the process of reviewing it.

#### **Democratic Services**

- The vacancy within the Team has been recruited to, and the new employee will start on Monday 2 October 2023. This process has taken some time and involved three separate rounds of advertising since the previous staff member retired in May.
- Interviews have been held to recruit our first Democracy & Elections Apprentice to the Team. This is a positive step and will assist in our succession planning.

## ICT

Following the departure of John Houston, Melissa Kemp-Salt, Joint Director of ICT, PMO & Transformation for Colchester and Epping Forest District Council will become EFDCs Digital Innovation Zone Board representative.

Work is about to commence on an audit to assess Microsoft systems used by the Council.

### Service Management, Security & Networks

A cyber security incident was prevented thanks to the good procedures and vigilance of council staff. Following protocols, staff were able to identify a fraudulent attempt to transfer a legitimate payment into a separate bank account. Significant sums involved were subsequently transferred correctly with no harm to the council, residents, or other stakeholders.

Investigations have been carried out to understand the source of the incident and any further measures the council might take to protect itself in the future.

The staff who thwarted the incident have been commended.

A free cyber mandatory training course has been organised for all colleagues in October with Essex Police. This awareness training will explain how phishing emails work and online safety.

National Cyber Security Awareness month takes place in October 2023. Internal Communications and ICT will be looking at promoting customer engagement and awareness during that period.

ICT continues to improve the customer experience, with the teams jointly working on BAU and projects to drive performance and improvements. Customer feedback was overall positive with 100% satisfaction. Tickets are being managed extremely well, with 'on hold' tickets being at a low of 4 and tickets are 95% within SLA's.

### KPI's – SLA Metrics & Analysis for w/c 4 September 2023

Tickets Raised	Outstanding	On Hold	Resolved	Within SLA	% Within SLA	Outside SLA	% Outside SLA
110	5	0	105	109	99%	1	1%

### Customer Feedback August / September 2023

Satisfaction Level	Ticket Handling	Customer service	Technical skill	Time taken
Very satisfied	90%	90%	85%	90%
Satisfied	10%	10%	15%	10%
Dissatisfied	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%



Very Dissatisfied	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
(blank) No response	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%

### **Customer comments on service provided:**

- Thanks for your help Joe.
- Awesome handling of my ticket – Thanks.
- Joe. Completed a great service, very quick and efficient, resolved issue brilliantly.
- Thank you, Jay, for your help.
- Very helpful as always thank you.
- Very quick response thank you.
- Thank you very much for retrieving the file I accidentally deleted. it was handled impeccably.
- Quick work

### **Strategy**

ICT continue to explore efficiency savings within projects and BAU (business as usual). Due to having a successful relationship with the business, enables ICT to explore detailed requirements and add value with best practice, cost savings and aligning resources in the areas most needed. This enables ICT to deliver the strategy efficiently and focus on key projects that will assist colleagues and residents across the district.

### **Projects – Business Applications and Infrastructure**

The following projects have been delivered by ICT:

- iTrent Multi Factor Authentication has started to rollout to service areas, great early feedback on making it easier for colleagues to sign-in.
- Licence issues on servers has been resolved and a risk closed on the corporate risk register.
- Microsoft Office 365 Multi Factor Authentication rollout to all EFDC colleagues for password reset.
- Encrypted mail to our mail server.
- Data cleanse on the F: Drive, reorganised 1.4 TB of data this could be equivalent to 25 million pieces of paper!

Priorities for ICT to deliver in the next few months continues:

- Omnichannel Customer Contact Capability project go live (Gamma).
- Moving to a Software As A Solution, for our payments application (Pay360).
- Replacement Housing Asset Management cloud solution going live (Civica CX).
- Our Corporate Document Management Solution being significantly upgraded.

### **Corporate Projects**

The Project Management Office (PMO) provides governance and project management resources. The PMO has worked with service areas and the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) to review, align and agree key projects to EFDC's corporate objectives so that time, effort, and money can be directed and supported on the right

projects. Steering Groups continue to develop and evolve to support the roles of the key stakeholders involved.

Through the collaborative work that has been completed, 12 projects are agreed as EFDC's 'Corporate Priority Projects' which are strategically aligned to EFDC's Corporate Objectives. Corporate Priority Projects will be reported on a quarterly basis through Overview and Scrutiny as well as being governed through our internal project framework.

The Corporate Priority Projects are:

- Shared Services Programme
- Housing and Asset Management Project (HAM's)
- M3 Replacement Project
- Omnichannel Customer Contact Experience (Previously Telephony)
- Epping Leisure Centre Project
- Future Waste Services Programme
  - Workstream 1: Future Waste Services Delivery
  - Workstream 2: Environment Operations Hub
  - Workstream 3: Procurement of Waste Fleet Vehicles
- Information @ Work Upgrade
- File Server Data Cleanse
- Financial Systems Replacement Project
- Microsoft Sentinel
- Infrastructure Architecture
- Increase Back Office Automation

In addition to the above noted Corporate Priority Projects, several smaller 'projects' have been identified and work is underway to understand the scope and requirements of these so that the right governance can be applied where appropriate. The PMO is currently working through a check/deep dive on all Corporate Priority Projects to identify any gaps, but importantly to identify any opportunities.

The PMO is also considering new tools, that would provide EFDC with a platform where all our processes, tools, and teams work together which would boost team's alignment, efficiency, and productivity. Any proposal will follow the project governance framework for consideration and will be aligned with the Shared Services Programme.