

Report to the Council

Committee: Cabinet
Date: 20 February 2024
Subject: Portfolio – Leader of the Council
Portfolio Holder: Councillor C Whitbread

Recommending:

That the report of the Leader of Council be noted.

Corporate Services

People Team

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, the last report being January 2024.

Wagestream

Wagestream, our new financial wellbeing app launched to the organisation on 2 October. Our current engagement rate is 14% of the workforce, Wagestream report that we have one of the highest engagement rates of all their local government clients.

Of the enrolled employees, 62% use the “track” facility on average 6 times a month to support with budgeting and money management. 27% have started a “build” pot with over £1,500 being put aside as an emergency fund. Over £11,800 has been advanced and 25% of enrolled employees have used the flexible pay feature. 50% of advances have been used for groceries and shopping. 40% of advances have been used for bills, expenses and travel.

We will continue to monitor the uptake of Wagestream and provide regular reports on usage.

Standby/Call out payments

Formal consultation will commence with Unions and effected employees on any changes in late January.

Apprenticeships

Our Health and Safety Apprentice now in post as of 8 January 2024.

Service Led Workforce Planning

Leadership/Management workforce planning upskilling sessions booked to commence with the LGA, June 2024.

Gender Pay Gap 2024

The Gender Pay Gap (GPG) calculations have been completed and submitted to the government portal for the snapshot date of 31 March 2023. We are pleased to report that the gap between male and female pay has reduced, and the mean gap is now 7.15% compared to 9.47% in 2022. The median pay gap has reduced to 0%.

Business Support

Local Land Charges (LLC), HMLR Project

- Turnaround time approximately 4 working days (target is 10 working days).
- Steering group has agreed the roll out of Arcus Land Charges to put it on the same platform as Planning and Building Control. Project Plan being developed.
- HMLR continue to provide glowing feedback on our performance.

Finance Team

- Testing of Advance Financials commenced.
- Customer monthly service reviews being set up for Finance customers.

Waste Team

- The back-office waste team are providing support and knowledge to the Corporate Waste project.

ECC Library

- Site visits at the Civic in Epping and Harlow Library have been undertaken.
- Draft stage one paper has been drafted for agreement with ECC.

Planning Admin Team

- Formal Consultation to bring more resilience into the team has been successful and new arrangements are in place.

Chamber chairs

- Quotes are being obtained to sensitivity repair and upholster the top table chairs in the Chamber.

Democratic Services

- At the time of writing, the Elections Team has been busy organising the Roydon Parish Council by-election on 1 February 2024 and the result will be known by the date of the Council meeting.
- We must undertake a review of Polling Districts this year and the plan is to start this before the all-out elections in March. We are planning to hold the public consultation in September / October with a report to Council in December.
- An all-Member Briefing on the implications of the Elections Act 2022 has been scheduled for Monday 12 February 2024. This will be held on Teams and the invite has already been sent out.
- Two multi-team Officer workshops have been scheduled for February to understand the process following the declaration of a result at an election. This will encompass Member Training and Induction, as well as the administrative duties that we have to undertake for all newly elected Councillors.
- We are looking to implement DocuSign with the aim that Councillors will be using this for the signing of minutes and Portfolio Holder decisions in the first instance. The Team has had a training session on its use and we will support any Councillors who have not used DocuSign before.

- Work is continuing to digitalise Members induction forms so that Members only have one form to complete, saving Member and Officer time. This form, along with the new interactive online training courses being set up on Litmos, will be available for Member testing in March.

Corporate Communications

The Corporate Communications team continued to provide a full programme of media liaison, social media, website, webcasting and marketing services on behalf of the Council.

The team helped organise, set up and support the 2023 Youth Conference in November, which saw 125 delegates and teachers from the district's secondary schools hear from guest speakers and take part in a lively debate. The theme of the Conference was 'Let's Talk About Money'.

Corporate Communications is working on moving the Countrycare, Epping Forest District Museum and North Weald Airfield microsites plus relevant files on the Local Plan Examination website, into the main EFDC website. Closing these 4 microsites will save just over £19,000 in support and hosting costs.

The team continues to provide specific support for the 2024 May elections, the new waste and recycling contract, shared services, and the Latton Priory Design Code consultation in association with Harlow and Gilston Garden Town.

Corporate Communications continued to support a range of external partners on joint communications projects including Essex County Council to NHS initiatives. Communications is in development with London Marathon Events, Essex County Council and EFDC colleagues for the Ford Ride London-Essex 2024.

The team has been working with Places Leisure, Pellikaan and Qualis to distribute key messages for the new Epping Leisure Centre in Bakers Lane. A dedicated webpage has been set up as a central place for news and updates on the centre.

Corporate Communications continues to receive a variety of local, social and national (often tabloid) media enquiries.

Earlier this month, the team launched an updated version of our Communications Guidelines, 'Communicating with our Community'. This contains a wealth of information to help colleagues across the organisation plan any communications they may need for their project. The team is working closely with the internal communications team to promote the document, highlighting different sections including the importance of planning, accessibility and other directives also the use of social media.

Members of the Corporate Communications team have been supporting Operation Dial. This campaign tackles anti-social behaviour in Debden and received funding from the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner. Team members have been working closely with colleagues from the Community Resilience team to promote 2 Public Spaces Protection Orders: 1 for dog control, 1 for anti-social behaviour.

The team organised the Christmas Carol service at St. Mary's Church in Chigwell. Councillors, employees and local residents braved the cold weather for a delightful service and mince pie.

Plans are underway for this year's Civic Awards. There was a lot of worthy nominations this year for both Team and Citizen of the Year. Finalists have been invited to the ceremony, which will take place at the Marriot Hotel in Waltham Abbey in March.

Webcasts November and December 2023

- 9 live meetings totalling 10 hours 53 minutes
- 1 recorded meeting totalling 40 minutes

Top 3 viewed:

1. Council 19 December 302 views (287 Public-i + 15 YouTube)
2. Cabinet 18 December 247 views (216 Public-i + 31 YouTube)
3. Cabinet 13 November 217 views (203 Public-i + 14 YouTube)

Social Media

Social media engagement remained steady, with number of followers increasing slightly since the last portfolio report.

Social Media Engagement Table

Platform subscribers	October 2023	December 2023
Facebook	4,793	4,816
Instagram	2,559	2,593
LinkedIn	3,235	3,317
X (Twitter)	9,968	9,992
Mailchimp	1,542	1,557

Social media channels are monitored out of hours on a rota by members of the Corporate Communications team, up to 10pm weekdays and 9pm at weekends. The team also provided monitoring and customer response services over the Christmas/New Year period.