

Report to the Council

Committee: Cabinet

Subject: Business Services Support

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Stavrou

Recommending:

That the report of the Business Services Portfolio Holder be noted

Accountancy

The Final Accounts process continues, with the External Auditors, Deloitte, currently on site and carrying out their testing and sampling work. The accountancy team are working constructively with the External Auditor and are not only providing the detail and explanation required, but are also identifying jointly areas of further improvement in terms of practice and presentation. Originally, it was intended to take the External Auditor's reports with the accounts themselves, to the Audit Committee on the 25th July. Scheduling means these reports will not be considered by the Audit Committee until 12th September, though the External Audit review of the accounts is likely to complete in early August. It should be noted that the formal timetable for the submission of External Auditor verified Final Accounts is the end of July.

Following the audit of the 2018/19 accounts more of the team's effort will be redirected to the financial performance in 2019/20 and specifically to the issue of the financial performance statements as at the end of June, together with an analysis of the progress with; invest to transform, savings and other District Development Fund (DDF) projects.

Attention will also switch to the financial planning to support the delivery of the Councils' objectives for next year and beyond. It is intended to issue a paper in early August outlining the key financial opportunities and challenges and the assumptions made by the Council in the existing plans. This will then move on to a second quarter financial review, carried out in October, outline revenue and capital budgets being formed in November and December and formal consideration by Council of the Budget and associated papers in February. The timings are consistent with previous years but the process will need to take account of not only local issues and priorities but also the national impact of the Spending Review and economic conditions.

People Strategy

Apprentices

In July we are interviewing the current business admin apprentices for Higher Level roles in the following areas; Digital Marketing, Human Resources, Project Management, and Economic Development (Digital). These are 2-year roles with qualifications at level 3 or 4 (A Level or Degree Level); a brilliant opportunity for further career development for the young people of the district.

The recruitment campaign for new our new Cohort of Business Administration/ Customer Service (16-18 year olds) has gone live in the Epping Guardian and on social media which is generating lots of interest. The new cohort will start in September 2019. Several staff have volunteered to become new coaches/ mentors to support the new apprentices

Common Operating Model - Business Support Review

The Business Support Review project closure document is being written; this will include accurate cost saving information from posts deleted from the establishment and other savings found. Other benefits include implementation of efficient processes leading to improved performance, increased resilience (for example 70% of staff within Business Support have been crossed trained, the aim is to have 100% of staff crossed trained) and improved customer service.

iTrent – Time & Expenses Claims

Time and expenses claims are automated and processed through iTrent for all employees and has worked well. It does give employees extra time to put their claims on-line for authorisation and payment, this means less time to wait for payment.

Pay & Benefits Review

This significant project is coming to a successful close as agreement has been reached with the Trade Unions. A Collective Agreement has been signed by the Trade Union representatives and Georgina Blakemore as Head of Paid Service.

The Agreement includes an increase in some terms and conditions such as annual leave and has moved the Council onto local pay arrangements. Staff have received variation letters and the new Agreement will be implemented on 1 October 2019.

Shared Payroll Service

We have moved over to the shared payroll service with Colchester and Braintree and the first pay run went well. The processes are being worked through and all are working well as a group.

Local Land Charges

The current turnaround time for a LLC search is now 5 days, down from 19 days; which was above the acceptable average set by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government.

We are working with HM Land Registry to prepare for the data migration project, we have not been advised by HMLR that we will be included in the 20/21 roll out; we are waiting to hear from them.

ICT Strategy

Leadership Team are trialling elements of O365 before we roll out wider. Council mailboxes for staff and members are gradually being migrated to the cloud.

The ICT Strategy will be reviewed this year using the Corporate Plan and its 11 major workstreams as a framework, identifying our priorities under Stronger Communities; Place and Council.