

Report to the Council

Committee: Cabinet

Date: 19 September 2019

Subject: Business Services Portfolio

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Stavrou

Recommending:

That the report of the Business Services Portfolio Holder be noted

Accountancy

Our final accounts were submitted to the September meeting of the Audit and Governance Committee for approval and have published them on the Council's website in line with our statutory duties for public scrutiny. Members have already been sent a link to the relevant page of the website where the documents can be found.

We are expecting useful guidance from the External Auditor following the budget process for 2018/19. Some of which is already in hand and officers plan to process map our procedures to make the necessary improvements for the 2019/20 budget process. In 2020/21 there will be a focus on automating our approach with better use of IT systems.

The broad budget timetable, as in previous years, is to put a robust draft budget together for consideration at the end of October. HR and Accountancy are working together to finalise staffing structures and costs. For November, our priority will be developments and investments. It is the intention that the completion of strategic and service reviews will occur before the final draft budget comes together for early December. Officers plan to assemble the 2019/20 budget process by 31 December to allow a quarterly dry run for both finance and the key contributors of essential information.

Loans and day to day Treasury Management will be also reviewed, working with our financial advisors, Arling-Close, with the aim to increase yields. In addition work continues on bringing together the financial costs of setting up the Council's Development Company.

People Strategy

Pay and Benefits Review

Following agreement with the recognised Trade Unions regarding changes to terms and conditions for current staff the formal Collective Agreement has been signed by the GMB, Unison and the Council. Consultation is now underway regarding the next phase of the People Strategy which is the proposed implementation of Job Families.

iTrent Development

iTrent is the Council's HR/Payroll system which over the past 12 months, officers have been implementing a range of modules for staff to be able to book leave, claim expenses etc on-line. They are working with Braintree and Colchester to agree common recruitment processes for implementing the recruitment module, automating processes as far as possible.

In the next phase officers will be exploring how the expenses module could be implemented for members.

Apprentices

The Council arranged a pre-selection training week at the beginning of August for this year's apprenticeship cohort. During the training week the apprentices learn about interview skills, communication and team building. Interviews took place following the training week and 7 young people were appointed to Customer Service/Business Admin apprentice roles. They will be on a two-year apprenticeship moving around different departments and studying a Customer Service Qualification. In addition, 3 young people were appointed to Construction apprentice roles and will study a construction related qualification.

Common Operating Model - Business Support Review

The Business Support Review project has now closed and reported to the officer Stronger Council group, recommending the common operating model structure work to continue within the forthcoming service reviews.

Local Land Charges (LLC)

The average turnaround time for a LLC search since April 2019 is 7.73 days, which is within the 10-day threshold set by government. An extract of our LLC data was recently sent to HMLR for accuracy analysis, once feedback is received officers can progress with preparation work for the data migration project to the HM Land Registry.

A review of LLC fees is underway which will be subject to a future member report. The aim is to ensure fees for developers reflect the amount of officer time spent processing, usually, multiple searches.

ICT

Officers are working with an external company to carry out a comprehensive review of the ICT Strategy and capability of the team, as well as provide some interim leadership for ICT staff.

They have spent time getting to know the ICT Team to understand their projects and challenges and what value those projects add to the Corporate Plan. Meetings have taken place with Service Directors and their Service Managers to get a view of what the business ICT requirements are. A skills gap analysis will take place to ensure that officers can deliver the desired requirements.