

Report to the Council

Committee: Cabinet

Date: 5 November 2019

Subject: Business Services Portfolio

Portfolio Holder: Councillor S Stavrou

Recommending:

That the report of the Business Services Portfolio Holder be noted

Accountancy

At this stage the main activity for Accountancy is putting together a draft 2020/21 Budget and Medium Term Financial Strategy along with the plans and priorities of the Council. To date accountants have met with all the services, have agreed a formulaic approach to building budgets and reviewed staffing costs in detail so that staff establishments can remain consistent for the next seventeen months at least. In addition, a formulated list of developments and funding sources have been pulled together for consideration by Cabinet, in the first instance. In November these plans and proposals will be further developed and a review of the capital programme and use of the District Development Fund will take place.

Accountancy have reviewed our reporting practices and have drafted a new monthly summary financial report that will be made available shortly and be an agenda item at meetings in the future.

The work on our Final Accounts is almost completed with five follow up questions posed by the External Auditors all of which have now been answered. We have not been notified of any adjustments over and above those reflected in September. The Auditors are due to formally report back at the Audit Committee meeting in November with Council approval as soon as practical after that. An improvement plan is in progress so working papers and process will be as expected in future years.

Various business entities have been set-up reflecting the Cabinet's new approach to asset ownership and development and basic accounting support is being given to this initiative.

Financial input apart from day to day support to the authority's services, has also been input into key projects such as; Accommodation Strategy, HMRC Custom Clearance Facility (North Weald), Development Company financial and tax modelling issues and a revision to our cash flow planning and treasury management arrangements.

People Strategy

Apprentices

Stronger Council Select Committee heard from 5 of our previous Cohort of Apprentices, who are in Higher Apprenticeship roles. The Apprentices provided members with insight into their learning, placements and progress into the roles they are currently in. Members also heard from our Management Trainee, previously a Business Administration/Customer Service Apprentice, who is now undertaking a Management Degree at Anglia Ruskin University. Our new Cohort of apprentices, who joined the Council in September, introduced themselves to the Committee. They are working in different teams across the Council including three Construction Apprentices.

The Council is expected to meet a government set target of 2.3% of the workforce being apprentices, which equates to 15 posts. We currently have 24 apprentices.

Common Operating Model - Council Restructure

The Council has formally consulted with staff over the proposals for the current restructure which ended on 23 October 2019. Recruitment has continued into the Team Manger roles and currently there are 4 vacant roles which need to be filled.

Policy Development

HR are currently reviewing current Flexible Working policies to assist the Accommodation and ICT Strategies to enable an agile workforce

ICT

The overall ICT Strategy remains under review, however, an interim Transformation Plan is in place with Itica, which includes finding solutions to high priority challenges, such as improving the experience that employees have whilst working flexibly. Whilst the review is ongoing, ICT are focusing on supporting the Accommodation Review and the role out of Office 365. The team are continuing to migrate mailboxes to the cloud and are putting a training package together for O365 teams, for further roll out across the organisation. Itica are also due to start an options appraisal for our server provision/cloud based options.

LLC/HM Land Registry (HMLR) Data Migration Project

There has been no movement on the HMLR Data Migration Project since the previous update, as HMLR are yet to advise us which migration cohort we will be included in. We are continuing to maintain a positive relationship with HMLR and we are preparing for the project where possible.