

# ***Report to the Council***

**Committee:** Cabinet

**Date:** 25 September 2018

**Subject:** Technology and Support Services

**Portfolio Holder:** Councillor A. Lion

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**Recommending:**

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

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## **Support Services**

### **People Team**

The Council has completed the recruitment process for the Service Director positions, all are internal appointments. The new roles commenced on 10 September, starting with an Induction Day.

Shortlisting for the vacant Strategic Director role by Members of the Senior Management Appointment Panel took place on 6 September. Assessment centre interviews have been arranged for 25 and 26 September. Recruitment to the Chief Executive role will start at the beginning of October.

Unfortunately, the date of the Members training for i-Trent scheduled for 31 July did not go ahead as the launch of the Community Safety Hub took place. A new, provisional date has been arranged for 25 September, before the full Council meeting.

Three of our apprentices recently achieved good grades in GCSE maths qualifications. They all passed their exams first time.

The new Corporate Training Programme has been launched with a focus on leading, managing and coping with change. Sessions are available to all staff and managers to attend.

i-Trent continues to be rolled out across the Council and average figures for the number of log-ins (not users) obtained from June until 22 August are reported as follows:

Members	11
Managers	647
Staff	1605

i-Trent will continue to change the way we all claim expenses, mileage etc., and for managers to record, monitor and authorise leave, sickness absence and training.

### **Facilities**

Roofing works are now well underway at the museum in Waltham Abbey. The building is fully scaffolded and the existing roof tiles have been stripped off. A breathable membrane has been fixed into place over the roof timbers and tiles will be reused or replaced, leaving the structure fully watertight. The existing chimney stacks will soon be overhauled, and all

external areas will be redecorated. This will ensure that this fantastic listed building remains in fine order for many years to come.

The installation of new thermally efficient double-glazed aluminium windows and doors at North Weald Airfield Gatehouse has been completed. This will improve energy savings over the coming months and will make a big difference to staff located there.

Preparations are being made at the Civic Offices and the Control Tower to replace the life expired fire alarm installations. The Control Tower, which is a listed building, will benefit from internal redecoration throughout and some minor internal refurbishment to the popular ground floor conference room.

The ongoing project to refurbish the nine passenger lifts at the Limes Farm estate continues to progress well. Two lifts have now been completed and a third is anticipated to be finished by the middle of September.

The refurbishment of Homefield House in the grounds of the Civic Offices is nearly completed and will soon be ready for occupation. Two new meeting rooms, a training room and 'hot desking' office accommodation will be available.

Although the Accommodation Review has meant that a lot of planned maintenance works are on hold at the Civic Offices, some essential health and safety works are currently underway. The fire alarm loop on the first floor of the Civic Offices is being upgraded and an order has been placed to renew some smoke detectors and alarm speakers that have exceeded their recommended lifespan.

The existing Civic Offices entry card reader system is to be replaced with a new design called "Sateon". The new system will allow access with a combined ID badge given to Members and staff allocated at the Civic Offices. Additional information on how to apply for an ID badge will follow in the Members Bulletin.

Site investigation works are underway at Townmead depot to convert Building 21, the old canteen and shower block, into accommodation for the Nursery Service who will shortly be vacating their current site in Pyrles Lane Loughton. Assistance from Planning and Building Control colleagues is currently being sought and it is anticipated that refurbishment works will be able to commence soon. Facilities Management (FM) plan to utilise some of the Works Unit's own trades team to assist with the project.

St Peters Avenue in Ongar is being prepared for the external redecoration of the shops and flats above, including reroofing a single storey extension to the rear of the block. Estates and FM are to take on the role of discharging the landlords repairing obligations under tenants' leases.

Additional landlord works will begin at Oakwood Hill Industrial Estate, where the Council leases a number of commercial units. This includes external redecoration of common areas and some repairs to boundary walls and car parking areas.

## **Legal**

The Legal Service was first awarded Lexcel Accreditation, by the Law Society in 2006. A full assessment is carried out every three years and John Cross, an independent assessor has confirmed that he will be recommending that the Law Society renews our Lexcel Accreditation.

The challenge for next year will be to update our practices and the Quality Manual so that we comply with the standards in the new Lexcel 6.1. This will ensure that our procedures take

account of General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), Money Laundering updates and Data Security.

## **Internal Audit**

### **Corporate Fraud Team**

During July and August, the Corporate Fraud Team, (CFT) has been pursuing the withdrawal of five 'Right to Buy' (RTB) applications, which have saved the Council approximately £393,000 in potential discount (based on the maximum RTB discount of £78,600). Furthermore, the five properties in question remain as Council housing stock and will continue to generate an ongoing revenue in the form of rent receipts.

The team is actively engaged in several significant investigations, including a suspected subletting enquiry, where it is suggested that the tenant has not occupied a Council property in the last 12 years. The CFT is attempting to arrange a joint working arrangement with Northamptonshire Police in order to move this enquiry along as quickly as possible.

## **Technology**

Over the recent period ICT has configured and rolled out around a quarter of the 400 new laptops. They have been prioritising staff who have urgent business needs to receive a new laptop. The rollout is now continuing progressively through the Civic Offices building. These new laptops all include Office 2016 and the capability to use Office 365 in the future. All staff receiving the laptops, are given the opportunity to be trained on how to use these devices from home, if previously agreed by their manager for flexible working.

The initial training for ICT staff and Directorate Champions on Office 365 has been completed. The training has provided the skills required to get Office 365 into wider usage and highlighted several key areas that will need to be addressed during the rollout process. The Council will be moving across to Office 365, to improve technology and to assist with the delivery of the People and ICT Strategy under Transformation. Office 365 will enhance skills sets for the future of the Council's flexible and agile working projects.

Work is in progress on the replacement of the internal website 'Intranet', which will make use of Office 365 capabilities and it is planned for this to 'go-live' in December. The Communication Plan for Office 365 has now commenced following earlier presentations to the Leadership Team and at Staff Briefings.

The Office 365 programme team is issuing a weekly 'online' newsletter via the Intranet, to promote key functions and training opportunities in Office 365. A staff induction into Office 365 was held on the 30 August and just over 200 staff attended the four briefing sessions held throughout the day. This was to demonstrate what Office 365 has to offer staff in their working environment. A video version of the training will be made available to staff and Members shortly. However, it is already clear that the capabilities Office 365 provides will improve the way we work and communicate amongst our teams and partners. A training programme on Office 365 will be put together for Members and it will be essential for everyone to attend. Information on the training schedule will follow in the Members Bulletin in due course.

Progress on the Technology Strategy continues on track, although several projects have been reprioritised to take account of delays around the Accommodation Review. A review for 'quick wins' has taken place, one example being the purchase and implementation of the Empty Homes module for the Private Sector Housing team. This went from specification, to user testing in less than a month. The approach is that ICT are providing equipment for staff

to embrace flexible working, giving Managers an opportunity to encourage their teams to adopt new ways of working ahead of the changes to accommodation.

The Networking Team is assisting with configuration of the corporate telephone system to allow for more secure connectivity for residents during a credit/debit card transaction.

### **Geographic Information System (GIS)**

The GIS team has developed and is currently testing a replacement mapping system for the Council's Grounds Maintenance section. The existing mapping product has proven to be unfit for purpose and this replacement brings mapping in-line with the Council's corporate ESRI solution. This will add a significant amount of additional functionality and flexibility, as well as saving licensing costs for the old product.

GIS is currently providing services to Economic Development to aid in the Digital Innovation Strategy for the West Essex and Eastern Hertfordshire, Digital Innovation Zone (DIZ), a project lead by the Council. The Council's GIS supplier, ESRI is supplying support to this project and presented at the first workshop on 6 September. ESRI is also helping us in a review of our platform infrastructure to ensure the GIS systems continue to meet the growing needs of the Council.

### **Spatial Information Team (Gazetteer and Street Naming and Numbering)**

Following the successful system and database migration, the team has completed a full re-sync process with Geoplace, ensuring the local database now fully matches the National database. With this complete, the team can now begin to work on new National statutory requirements, such as Tertiary Property Classifications, which is used to describe the quality and location of a property. We are currently in the final testing phase of the new Street Naming and Numbering solution and will begin a pilot shortly.

### **Digital Forms Team**

The Digital Forms team is currently finalising a project with Firmstep to enable a single sign on, which will allow customers to check and pay Council Tax bills from within the Firmstep Portal. Further system integrations will follow once this is successfully implemented.

The Digital Forms teams has been working with the new Corporate Safety Officer, to develop a replacement system to manage Cautionary Contact (formally no lone visits and accompanied attendance). This is now in the final testing phase and will be piloted shortly.

The team is also reviewing the website content with Public Relations and are looking at replacing all PDF forms with digital forms.

### **Superfast Broadband High-Speed Internet**

The new Phase 4a Superfast Essex Broadband project in the District, has been secured under a new contract between Essex County Council and Gigaclear, commencing in September 2018. This follows agreement by Cabinet to contribute a further £350,000 of Council funding towards further broadband infrastructure. This £3.1million contract with Gigaclear will bring full fibre ultrafast speeds to a further 2,100 homes and businesses in the District by December 2019. Concurrent to the existing Phase 2a and 3 rollouts being deployed by both Gigaclear and Openreach. This will enable the District to achieve approximately 99.2% superfast broadband coverage by December 2019.

The launch of this next phase was announced at an event at Epping Ongar Railway in conjunction with a celebration of the completion of the Phase 2b Rural Challenge Project. This earlier project delivered ultrafast broadband to more than 4,000 rural business and residential premises in the District. This was successfully piloted for an alternative method of delivering superfast broadband speeds in previously hard to reach areas.