
Council Responsiveness (Recommendations of Overview and Scrutiny Enquiry)

Report of Cllr Paul Duckett, Chairman of the Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee (paul.duckett@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk)

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This report relates to a Key Issue

Purpose of this report

1. To provide Members with the outcomes of the scrutiny enquiry into Council Responsiveness as reported to the Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Executive

1. **consider the report and recommendations of the enquiry at Appendix 1; and**
2. **respond to the report within two months indicating what action, if any, it proposes to take and if it decides to take no action, the reasons for that decision.**

Overview and Scrutiny Comments/Recommendations

2. This report and its recommendation were ratified by the Corporate Resources OSC on 24 January 2017 at which the Committee also sought a further report setting out proposals for additional joint committees at a future meeting.

Background

3. In February 2016 the Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee (CROSC) agreed to undertake an enquiry to support the Council to deliver one element of the Five Year Plan relating to being a “responsive Council”.

4. The enquiry involved Cllrs Duckett (Chairman), Chatterley and Kane and throughout the course of the review met with officers from a range of services including Communications, Knowledge & Insight, Customer Services and Partnerships & Community Engagement.
5. The review focused on two specific aspects of council responsiveness as detailed in the attached report. Firstly a review of customer experience when contacting the Council and secondly a review of the extent to which residents could influence council decision-making for which the enquiry commissioned some independent research to be undertaken by Public Perspectives, the outcomes of which have informed this report.
6. The detailed report attached contains a summary of the findings of the enquiry and recommendations that are proposed to be provided to the Executive to enhance performance with regard to council responsiveness.

Council Priorities

7. The recommendations of the enquiry aimed to support the Council's approach to be a more efficient and responsive Council.

Corporate Implications

Legal Implications

8. The report contains recommendations to the Executive and as such on one level it might be concluded that no legal implications are necessary within this report on the basis that this could be included at a later stage should the list of proposals receive the backing of Executive. However, there is an alternative view which suggests that an early engagement with and awareness of legal issues or their absence is a good thing in helping to direct the project.
9. In the list of recommendations there is reference to expanding the significance of the Joint Committees (JCs). JCs are governed by a complex set of regulations and clarity around the proposed structure will be necessary in any future paper.
10. Constitutional changes such as those to the JC's is a Council function and as such the Executive will need to make recommendations via General Purposes Committee to amend the Constitution if these recommendations are supported.

Financial and Risk Implications

11. Many of the recommendations of the enquiry, if implemented, can be delivered within existing budgets.

12. There are however some recommendations that propose additional resources to support Members' engagement with the local community and giving further consideration for match funding Joint Committees to stimulate local participation.
13. The exact financial implication of the recommendations would depend upon the extent of their implementation but match funding the Joint Committees would result in an additional cost to be determined.

Equalities Implications

14. Central Bedfordshire Council has a statutory duty to promote equality of opportunity, eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and foster good relations in respect of nine protected characteristics; age disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation. This includes identifying opportunities to encourage people with protected characteristics to participate in public life or in other activities where their participation is low.
15. The recommendations of the enquiry aim to enhance the accessibility of the Councils' decision making process. If implemented it is envisaged that the proposals would provide additional channels through which residents of Central Bedfordshire could communicate with the Council in both a formal and informal manner.

Conclusion and next Steps

16. The Executive are asked to consider these recommendations and determine what action, if any, is necessary.
17. If the recommendations are agreed it is suggested that an update is provided to the Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee within 2 months of their implementation.

Appendices

Appendix 1 Detailed report of the enquiry

Background Papers

None