

Central
Bedfordshire
Council
Priory House
Monks Walk
Chicksands,
Shefford SG17 5TQ



**TO EACH MEMBER OF THE
CORPORATE RESOURCES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

09 December 2014

Dear Councillor

**CORPORATE RESOURCES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - Tuesday 16
December 2014**

Further to the Agenda and papers for the above meeting, previously circulated, please find attached the following additional Item:-

2. Minutes

To approve as a correct record the Minutes of the meeting of the Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 21 October 2014 and to note actions since that meeting.

Should you have any queries regarding the above please contact Policy and Scrutiny on Tel: 0300 300 4193.

Yours sincerely

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Scrutiny Policy Advisor
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CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE COUNCIL

At a meeting of the **CORPORATE RESOURCES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE** held in Room 14 - Priory House, Monks Walk, Shefford, SG17 5TQ on Tuesday, 21 October 2014.

PRESENT

Cllr P A Duckett (Chairman)
Cllr Miss A Sparrow (Vice-Chairman)

Cllrs	Mrs C F Chapman MBE M R Jones J Murray	Cllrs	Mrs M Mustoe N Warren
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Apologies for Absence: Cllrs Dr R Egan
R W Johnstone
T Woodward

Members in Attendance:	Cllrs	D Jones M A G Versallion R D Wenham	Executive Member for Children's Services Deputy Executive Member for Corporate Resources
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Officers in Attendance:	Mrs D Broadbent- Clarke Mr P Meigh Mr G Muskett Mrs R Preen Mr C Warboys	– Director of Improvement and Corporate Services – Chief Procurement Officer – Head of Revenues & Benefits – Scrutiny Policy Advisor – Chief Finance Officer
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CR/14/36. **Minutes**

RESOLVED

that the minutes of the meeting of the Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 23 September 2014 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

CR/14/37. **Members' Interests**

None.

CR/14/38. Chairman's Announcements and Communications

None.

CR/14/39. Petitions

None.

CR/14/40. Questions, Statements or Deputations

None.

CR/14/41. Call-In

None.

CR/14/42. Requested Items

None.

CR/14/43. Executive Member Update

The Executive Member for Corporate Resources advised the Committee that Central Government had made recent changes to the roll out of Universal Credit, namely that the scheme would now be launched in all areas in 2015 instead of 2017 following pilot studies in the North of the country initially.

With regards to concerns raised at the last Corporate Resources OSC regarding the cost of Town and Parish Council complaints to the Authority, the Scrutiny Policy Adviser had been liaising with the relevant officers to gain an understanding as to current action being taken to tackle the problem and what was planned going forward. The Executive Member for Corporate Resources explained that he would be meeting with the Chief Legal and Democratic Officer, after which he would report back to the Committee with an update.

CR/14/44. Council Tax support Scheme 2015/16

The Head of Revenues and Benefits delivered a report and presentation to the Committee explaining that each year Members were asked to sign off the Council Tax Support Scheme and advised that as the changes proposed were minimal, the Council did not need to go to a full public consultation.

The report detailed the number of claimants currently in receipt of Council Tax Support within Central Bedfordshire. Proposed changes in the scheme favoured the claimant as there would be an inflationary element which had not previously been factored into the figures.

In light of the report the Committee discussed the following issues in detail:-

- The positive impact of several hundred empty homes being back on the market since the introduction of the scheme, largely as a result of the withdrawal of the empty homes discount.

- The removal of the Second Adult Rebate, which had previously provided a discount for young adults living at home.
- The impact of court costs imposed upon those who were already struggling to pay. The Head of Revenues and Benefits explained the Council would rarely take the route of issuing a Court Summons against those who were in genuine need of support, preferring to make arrangements which would lessen the burden of debt and accumulated late payments. Court Summons' were predominantly used as a deterrent and against persistent non-payers. The Chief Finance Officer explained that there was also a Discretionary Hardship Scheme which offered those in desperate need up to 100% discount based upon their liability.

The Executive Member felt that it was important to note that this scheme reflected Central Bedfordshire Council was a responsible Authority which would not take punitive measures without just cause.

RECOMMENDED that the Council Tax Support Scheme be approved.

(Councillor Murray requested that his vote against the recommendation be recorded.)

CR/14/45. **Energy Procurement Report**

The Executive Member for Corporate Resources introduced the item and requested that the recommendation(s) be amended from 'Endorse the proposal...' to:- 'Review and comment on the proposal that Central Bedfordshire Council continues to use the Central Buying consortium's flexible energy contracts for electricity and gas supplies to Council buildings and street lighting for the period 2016-20 and continues to make these contracts available for schools to use should they wish.'

The Chief Procurement Officer delivered the report which provided the Committee with the following information:-

- The Council had been using LASER 2009 and savings of £290k had been delivered since the commencement of the contract.
- All Council buildings used LASER except a handful of schools that chose to procure their own energy.
- As part of the Buying Consortium LASER were able to forward purchase energy thus securing the best price, avoiding spikes in energy demand and prices. The Council could look to procure their own energy but there were untested risks as the expertise was not in house. Further savings would be identified if the Authority did stay with LASER and there was room for improvement with regards to any ongoing agreement with them.

In light of the report the Committee queried whether other avenues had been identified, not just with regards to who supplied the Council's energy but also in relation to green initiatives. The Director for Improvement and Corporate Services explained that the Council was doing as much as it could to produce

its own energy and reduce its carbon footprint and that several schools and Council buildings had installed solar panels. The Chairman requested details regarding the cost savings made to the Council through green initiatives and the Director for Improvement and Corporate Services said that she would arrange this for the Committee.

RECOMMENDED that the report be supported and endorsed.

CR/14/46. **Work Programme 2014/15 & Executive Forward Plan**

The Committee considered its current Work Programme and the latest Executive Forward Plan and agreed that a report be submitted to the Corporate Resources OSC regarding Energy cost savings and Green initiatives. The Director for Improvement and Corporate Services explained that two items on the Executive Forward Plan may not be submitted on the dates indicated (West of A1Stotfold and Stratton Business Park Phases 4 & 5) but if they were the Committee would be informed.

RECOMMENDED that the Corporate Resource OSC Work Programme be amended as outlined above.

(Note: The meeting commenced at 10.00 a.m. and concluded at 10.45 a.m.)

Chairman.....

Date.....