

CREATING CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE

At a meeting of the **CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE SHADOW SCRUTINY COMMITTEE** held at Committee Room 2, South Bedfordshire District Council Offices, Dunstable on Thursday, 4 September 2008.

PRESENT

Cllr Mrs P Staples (Chairman)
Cllr A R Bastable (Vice-Chairman)

Cllrs P N Aldis
R G Baker BEM
A Fahn
R Goodwin

Cllrs D Hogan
J Kane
H J Lockey

Apologies for Absence: Cllrs R A Baker
L Birt
N B Costin
K C Matthews
G Summerfield

Members in Attendance: Cllrs M R Jones
P Rawcliffe
A J Rayment
P Snelling

Officers in Attendance: Mr G Alderson – Director of Environmental & Planning Services
Mr B Carter – Overview & Scrutiny Manager
Mr J Didrichsen – Interim Director of Children, Families & Learning, BCC
Ms M Headicar – Consultant
Mr G Jeffrey – Committee Advisor (BCC)
Mr C Jones – Director of Customer Services
Mr T Keaveney – Director of Landlord Services, SBDC
Mr R Mills – Scrutiny and Committees Manager, SBDC
Mr P Stabb – Interim Strategic Director

S/08/1

CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman welcomed everyone to this first meeting of the Central Bedfordshire Shadow Scrutiny Committee. Members and officers introduced themselves.

The Chairman reminded the Committee that there was a lot of work to be done and urged Members to concentrate on making the unitary proposals work in Central Bedfordshire. She also stressed that the Committee should not over-scrutinise as there was not sufficient time for that.

Members were informed that work on the new Authority's Constitution was well under way.

S/08/2 **MEMBERS' INTERESTS**

(a) **Personal Interests:-**

None.

(b) **Personal and Prejudicial Interests:-**

None.

S/08/3 **DECLARATION IN RELATION TO THE EXISTENCE OF A WHIP**

No declarations were made.

S/08/4 **REQUESTS FOR AGENDA ITEMS**

The Committee noted that no requests for agenda items had been received under the terms of Scrutiny Procedure Rule No. 8.

S/08/5 **CALL-IN ITEM**

Members noted that no decision of the Shadow Executive, an individual Member of the Shadow Executive or one made on a key issue by an officer with delegated authority of the Shadow Executive had been referred to the Committee.

S/08/6 **CREATING CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE - PROGRESS REPORT**

The Committee considered a report of the Officer Programme Board on overall progress towards the creation of the new Council for Central Bedfordshire.

The report aimed to assist the Committee in identifying the key issues associated with the administrative changes necessary during the current re-organisation of local government in Bedfordshire.

The Chairman invited Marion Headicar (consultant) and Peter Stabb, Interim Strategic Director, South Bedfordshire District Council, to introduce the report on behalf of the Programme Board. She explained that the Portfolio Holders, present, would be given opportunities to comment during the course of the meeting.

Marion Headicar briefly made some key points. First, she referred to the letter within the Committee papers from John Healey MP, Minister for Local Government and stressed the need for the new Authority to bear in mind that it would need to have a strongly improving Direction of Travel and be a flagship authority within a couple of years and that there was a huge amount of work to be focused on from day one.

She also highlighted the importance of the Implementation Plan with its set of strategic milestones and warned of the pressures on time which meant that things often had to be done in parallel rather than sequentially. Marion's final comment was to reassure the Committee that impressive progress was being made, even though some matters such as shared services were beyond the shadow authority's control.

Peter Stabb confirmed that the Implementation Plan was monitored at every Officer Programme Board meeting and he referred, in particular, to the three delayed milestones identified in the Plan.

He explained that the first drafts of the services' business plans had now been completed. In relation to service level agreements and contracts for shared services, it was reported that, as at 1 September 2008, of the seventy in total, thirty-three were to be shared from April 2009 and that, of those, fifteen would be hosted by Central Bedfordshire Council, thirteen by Bedford Borough Council and five by Bedfordshire Primary Care Trust. It was noted that of the remaining thirty-seven, thirty were not being shared and seven were yet to be determined. Members were pleased to note that very good progress was being made overall.

In respect of the third, delayed milestone, Members were informed that Bedford Borough Council and Central Bedfordshire Council still had differing views concerning customer engagement.

The Chairman then invited Members' questions.

In terms of accommodation requirements for the new Central Bedfordshire Council, it was reported that, from 1 April 2009, the new Authority would need at least as much of the County Hall in Bedford as it currently occupied but that there would be a two to five years programme to move from the County Hall into three or four sets of offices within the Central Bedfordshire area with additional points of presence being provided in the larger towns.

It was emphasised that there would be a significant Central Bedfordshire presence in the County Hall from 1 April 2009 and that the intention would be to move staff only once to minimise disruption.

Reference was made to cross-area issues and ICT matters and the associated risks. It was noted that consultants had been appointed to look in depth at ICT issues in order to avoid problems.

In terms of expenditure on the transition, it was noted that, of the £18.2m provided, £16.3m remained at the time of the report's production.

Concerns were expressed that, where services were being disaggregated, the Shadow Authority was perhaps not being robust enough. Marion Headicar reassured Members that people had been employed to address those concerns. She reminded Members that, of the seventy services considered, only six were felt to be of concern and had yet to be determined.

In terms of the budget for the new Authority, the Chairman suggested that the Committee might wish to have an additional meeting early in the new year to consider the key issues arising from and impacting upon the Authority's budget for 2009/2010.

The Chairman, at this point, invited the Portfolio Holders present to provide updates on the work of their respective Transitional Task Forces (TTFs).

Councillor Rawcliffe, Portfolio Holder for Social Care, Health and Housing, referred to the number of meetings of the TTF so far and its future work programme. He confirmed that of the five visions/priorities recently agreed by the Shadow Executive, two were within his portfolio. He assured the Committee that he was focused on the services within his portfolio firstly running smoothly on 1 April 2009 and then improving further over the next two to three years.

The Chairman then invited Councillor Jones, Portfolio Holder for Corporate Resources, to comment. Councillor Jones referred to the process for assimilating staff into the new Authority in accordance with TUPE and the transitional regulations, with twelve individual projects currently under way. He expected the new Directors to be appointed very shortly and added that Heads of Service posts should all be appointed by 10 October 2008.

In relation to the budget, for the new Authority, Councillor Jones expressed disappointment that the Department for Communities and Local Government had recalculated its formula and Central Bedfordshire would be receiving less money than originally expected. This was due to deprivation factors within Bedford Borough Council.

Councillor Jones referred to the work of a TTF Sub-Group (the Constitution and Governance Member Working Group) which was working on the new Constitution. Members were invited to feed any views on the Constitution to the Working Group.

He reported that branding for the new Authority was mostly being undertaken by the County Council's Creative Services Unit.

The Chairman then invited Councillor Rayment, Lead Member, Children, Young People and Families, to update the Committee on the work of the TTF. Councillor Rayment explained that the membership of the TTF had been extended to include three headteachers (one from each of the lower, middle and upper school phases) and that the County Council's Cabinet Member for Education, Councillor Drinkwater, had also been involved. He placed on record the value of Councillor Drinkwater's contributions. Councillor Rayment also recorded his appreciation of the immense help provided by John Dean, Strategic Director, South Bedfordshire District Council, especially given the lack of any prior involvement by that Authority in the area of Children's Services.

Councillor Rayment referred to the huge amount of time spent considering shared services and explained the criteria used for the disaggregation process. He added that the two main areas of work for the TTF were the development of special educational needs provision and the interface with the Primary Care Trust on health and care service commissioning. In relation to the special needs provision, Councillor Rayment expressed his thanks to officers of the County Council for their assistance to be recorded.

The Committee discussed the future strategy of education for Central Bedfordshire and noted that government funding is potentially available. Councillor Rayment explained that all issues impacting on the education service over the next ten years would have to be carefully considered. The state of the school building stock and levels of educational attainment would be key issues that would affect the decision as to the choice of strategy in the new Authority.

Members agreed that everything possible must be done to maximise the benefits of all children in Central Bedfordshire.

Finally, the Chairman invited Councillor Snelling to update the Committee on issues within the Safer, Stronger Communities Portfolio.

Councillor Snelling was pleased to report that most issues had been dealt with smoothly and that as soon as the Head of Service was appointed, there would be further good progress.

He confirmed that, as far as disaggregation of services was concerned, the Archives and Countryside Access Services would be shared services but that the Library Service would be split.

Councillor Snelling referred to contractual issues in relation to the Highways Contract with Amey and to the possibility of a joint management committee being needed to oversee this contract.

He also expressed concerns about future arrangements for waste which was currently collected under separate contracts in Mid and South Bedfordshire but with the same contractor and referred to important decisions still to be made about the proposed 'energy from waste' project.

Councillor Snelling reported that two major decisions that the TTF would need to make related to the completion of the existing independent local delivery frameworks and the proposal for one Development Control committee for the entire Central Bedfordshire area, with a high level of delegation.

Gary Alderson, Director of Sustainable Communities, explained that the Sustainability TTF was all about the growth agenda. He added that the fact of Central Bedfordshire being a growth area was a challenge in itself, but being bounded by other growth areas (Luton and Milton Keynes) made the situation an even bigger one and meant Central Bedfordshire would need to punch above its weight. All concerned were very aware of the area's infrastructure deficit and the need to ensure that growth infrastructure was delivered alongside new housing. Members' concerns around, in particular, developing good quality jobs which would allow working couples to buy locally, addressing traffic congestion and promoting public transport were being taken into account.

He stated that, to date, all milestones had been met and added his wish for the new Authority's building control service to be a flagship model.

In terms of the future arrangements for Development Control in the area, the majority of Members present, including Executive Members, were concerned at whether and how the proposal to have a single Committee for the new Authority would contribute to the Council's ambition to get closer to its communities. Views were expressed that either two or possibly four committees should be considered as options. Members noted that decisions would ultimately be made as part of the adoption of the constitutional framework and that no detailed consideration had yet been given to the frequency or location of Development Control Committee meetings.

The Committee, therefore, recorded its concern that the proposal for a single Development Control Committee covering the whole area of Central Bedfordshire may reduce the opportunities for involvement by residents and be impractical in terms of the length and/or frequency of meetings needed to conduct the business. The Committee accordingly asked that other options be considered and a report be made to the Committee at its next meeting.

The Chairman concluded the meeting by thanking Members of the Committee, Portfolio Holders and Officers for their work so far in creating the new Authority and for their valuable contributions during the meeting.

RESOLVED

- 1. that the progress made to date in creating the new unitary council for Central Bedfordshire be noted.***
- 2. that a further progress report be made to the Committee's next meeting on 11 December 2008.***

3. ***that the committee refer to the relevant executive body its concerns regarding the proposal for a single Development Control Committee covering the whole area of Central Bedfordshire and seek a report back to its next meeting on the issues raised.***

(Note: The meeting commenced at 6.30 p.m. and concluded at 8.30 p.m.)