

CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE COUNCIL

At a meeting of the **BUSINESS TRANSFORMATION OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE** held at Room 15, Priory House, Monks Walk, Shefford on Monday, 22 February 2010

PRESENT

Cllr M Gibson (Chairman)

Cllr R A Baker
Mrs A Barker
J A E Clarke

Cllr D J Hopkin
J G Jamieson
J Murray

Apologies for Absence: Cllr R W Johnstone
Ms J Nunn

Substitutes: Cllr P N Aldis (In place of Ms J Nunn)

Members in Attendance: Cllr Mrs J G Lawrence

Officers in Attendance: Mr B Carter Overview & Scrutiny Manager
Mr R Ellis Director of Business Transformation,
CBC
Mr P Frazer Head of Partnerships & Community
Engagement
Mrs E Heaney Temporary Democratic Services
Officer
Mr C Jones Assistant Director Business
Transformation & Customer
Services
Mr I Porter Assistant Director Policy,
Partnerships & Performance
Mrs G Stanton Assistant Director Communications

BT/09/74 **Chairman's Announcements and Communications**

A ten minute adjournment was announced due to the inclement weather. The meeting resumed at 10:10am.

BT/09/75 **Minutes**

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting of the Business Transformation Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 25 January 2010 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

BT/09/76 Members' Interests

No interests were declared.

BT/09/77 Petitions

The Chairman announced that no petitions had been received.

BT/09/78 Questions, Statements or Deputations

The Chairman announced that no questions, statements or deputations had been received.

BT/09/79 Call-In

The Chairman announced that no call-ins had been referred to this committee.

BT/09/80 Requested Items

The Chairman announced that no requested items had been received.

BT/09/81 Remodelling of Customer Services

Members considered the report of the Portfolio Holder for Business Transformation and Director of Business Transformation. The report focussed on six key programmes of activity where the Council could work closely with partners in the public sector to deliver joined-up services.

The Portfolio Holder for Business Transformation emphasised that each of these programmes sought either to reduce costs or provide improved services at the same cost and would ensure that the Council offered customers a variety of ways to access services.

While acknowledging that the report had come to the Committee at an early stage Members raised some concerns at the lack of financial detail and requested that a business case for each of the 6 key programmes of activity would come back to them to give them an overview of the costs and benefits of the programmes.

In response to a question the Committee was advised that each of the six programmes could stand alone and that a delay or problem in one programme would not impact on the others, and each programme would allow savings or improvements to be realised, with the greatest impact being if all six programmes were operating.

Members were concerned that so many telephone numbers were published for Council services and asked whether it would be possible to reduce this number. It was noted that the intention was to reduce over 50 public telephone numbers to 7 phone numbers, each one going through to staff trained to handle calls in that area. It would not be possible for all customer services officers to be trained to handle enquiries in all of the areas of the Council's

business at a high level. If staff were to add value rather than simply transferring calls then enquiries needed to be directed to those best equipped to help them.

Whilst it was noted that an automated system where members of the public selected the services they needed would be the cheapest way to manage this but Members nonetheless were opposed to delivering the service in this way.

RESOLVED:

- 1. That the 6 key programmes of activity outlined in the report be endorsed in principle subject to the Executive ensuring that each programme of activity delivers either the same service at reduced cost or a better service at the same cost.**
- 2. That a business case for each key programme of activity be brought back to the Committee at the earliest opportunity.**
- 3. That, should the remodelling of customer services result in vacant posts, recruitment should be delayed until such time as the migration of further services occurs.**

BT/09/82

Communications Strategy

Members considered the report of the Assistant Director of Communications, setting out the Council's Communication Strategy. It was noted that communications would take an increasingly important role in influencing how people perceive the authority. The strategy set out six key objectives to reach the Local Government Association's "Gold Standard" for corporate communications and set out ways for the department to train and support officers across the authority to send out cohesive and effective messages.

Members noted that there was no core funding available for the Council's publication, News Central, next financial year and expressed their support for the publication as a key communication tool. The Committee therefore recommends that the Executive identify a funding source for this so that it would not be entirely dependant on advertising revenue.

Members were concerned that point 2 (Strategic Aim) focused on enhancing and safeguarding the Council's reputation and believed this sent the wrong message to the Council's customers. It was Members' opinion that the strategy's overriding aim should be about improving customer satisfaction and therefore requested the strategy's aim be redrafted accordingly. Members were also concerned that on some occasions partner organisations, when undertaking work on the Council's behalf, had sent letters using their own headed paper rather than Central Bedfordshire branded paper.

Members discussed whether it was appropriate for the Corporate Communication team to assist on internal communication projects or whether it should be the sole responsibility of managers to cascade key messages.

RESOLVED:

- 1. That the Committee endorses the draft strategy subject to amendment to its strategic aim to better reflect the need to improve customer satisfaction (as outlined in the preamble above).**
- 2. That the Committee supports the use of News Central as a key communications tool and requests the Executive to consider the provision of core funding for its publication in the new financial year and beyond.**

BT/09/83 **Quarter 3 Performance Report**

The Chairman announced that Agenda Items 11 and 12 would be taken together after a ten minute comfort break. The committee adjourned at 11:50 and reconvened at 12 noon.

The Chairman asked for an update on the Information Technology problems last week and how this could impact Quarter 4 performance data.

The Director of Business Transformation briefed members on the causes of the IT system failure and the recovery work which had been undertaken. Details were given about specific service areas and when their systems would be fully functional.

Members then considered together the reports on Quarter 3 Performance and Quarter 3 Budget Management.

A Member asked a question relating to Appendix A (overall position by Directorate) of the budget management report regarding the purpose of the budget line headed "Schools only". Members agreed to receive an explanation by email following the meeting.

Members asked for more details relating to the level of Bad debt. The Director of Business Transformation explained that the Bad Debt provision had been reduced a few months ago; this had recently been reviewed and restored to its previous level. Bad Debts had increased in a number of local authorities during the current economic recession.

RESOLVED:

- 1. That the Committee notes the Quarter 3 Performance Report.**
- 2. That the Committee notes the Quarter 3 Budget Management Report**

BT/09/84 Quarter 3 Budget Management Report

The Committee considered this report at the previous item, minute BT/09/84 refers.

BT/09/85 Task Force Report on enabling Councillors to be leaders in and for their communities

Members considered the report of the Director of Business Transformation. The report set out the five key principles of the Local Strategic Partnership, the second of which "Enabling Councillors to be leaders in and for their communities" had been considered by a Task Force. The Task Force had recommended eight key activities around this principle and produced a Delivery Plan to address each.

- Provide councillors with relevant ward-based intelligence, information and customer insight
- Provide individual Councillor budgets
- Offer support for scrutiny, Councillor Call for Action and response to petitions
- Establish greater role and involvement in partnerships
- Establish links with Third Sector organisations
- Procure a Case Management system for Councillors
- Provide Member Development of community engagement skills
- Provide dedicated officer support.

The Committee welcomed the Delivery Plan and noted that due to budget constraints it would not be possible to implement all of the recommendation immediately, but they were a valuable set of desirable outcomes. In the discussion Members expressed some concerns that they were not always advised when officers would be visiting or working in their wards. The Assistant Director of Communications agreed to remind managers of their duty to liaise with Members.

RESOLVED:

That the Delivery Plan be approved for submission to the Executive at its meeting on 4 May 2010.

BT/09/86 Work Programme 2009 - 2010**RESOLVED:**

That the work programme be noted.

(Note: The meeting commenced at 10.10 a.m. and concluded at 12.45 p.m.)