

## CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE COUNCIL

At a meeting of the **CORPORATE RESOURCES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE** held at on Monday, 10 August 2009

### PRESENT

Cllr J G Jamieson (Chairman)  
Cllr J A E Clarke (Vice-Chairman)

Cllrs Mrs A Barker  
P A Duckett  
D J Hopkin

Cllrs R W Johnstone  
D Jones  
Mrs C Turner

Apology for Absence: Cllr Mrs J G Lawrence

Substitutes: Cllr M Gibson

Members in Attendance: Cllrs P A Blaine  
A Fahn  
M R Jones,

#### CR/09/013 **Apologies for absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Jane Lawrence. Councillor Mike Gibson was present as her substitute.

#### CR/09/014 **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 13 July 2009 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

#### CR/09/015 **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest at the beginning of the meeting.

Later in the meeting, under item 8 Procurement Strategy, Councillor Adam Fahn, Assistant to the Corporate Resources Portfolio Holder, indicated that he had a personal interest in relation to the Council's payment of invoices in that his business had a contract with Central Bedfordshire Council.

**CR/09/016 Chairman's Announcements and Communications**

The Chairman indicated that the Budget information would be considered at the Committee's September meeting as figures for Quarter 1 were being submitted to the Executive's August meeting.

The Chairman also indicated that he expected that item 9, ICT and Accommodation Strategy, would be considered in private session as commercially sensitive information would be discussed.

**CR/09/017 Petitions**

There were no petitions.

**CR/09/018 Public Questions, Statements or Deputations**

There were no public questions, statements or deputations.

**CR/09/019 Call-in**

There had been no matters of call-in.

**CR/09/020 Procurement Strategy**

The Committee received a detailed presentation from the Head of Procurement regarding the Procurement Strategy. Members were advised that the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) had published a national procurement strategy, and a cornerstone of this was that every local authority must endorse and adopt a corporate procurement strategy.

Members' attention was drawn to the key objectives of Central Bedfordshire Council's proposed procurement strategy. Notably, the six categories accounting for 80% of the Council's spend were:

- Construction
- Social Community Care
- Environmental Services
- Consultancy
- Human Resources
- Transport.

The Head of Procurement advised the Committee that the Procurement Strategy would provide guidance about the various procurement rules to officers responsible for spending public money on a range of sometimes complex and specialist services. This was especially important to those officers working within the areas of the six largest spending categories.

A number of questions were asked in relation to fraud prevention, the percentage of procurement covered by contracts and the proportion of procurement where there was opportunity to improve performance. This accounted for approximately two-thirds of the Council's current contract arrangements.

A question was asked in relation to the speed with which the Council paid invoices and Members were advised of timescales. Members were also informed of the systems in place to ensure that payments were not overlooked. It was noted that the IT package alerted users to non-payment of a particular invoice. There was also mention of an escalation feature which highlighted and escalated any invoices that had not been paid, to upper tier officers.

The Head of Procurement informed the Committee of the national indicators monitoring the timeliness of payment. It was noted that the Procurement Team encouraged the use of "P Cards" for incidental spends. This enabled payment to be made within five working days. Compliance to the indicators was voluntary but it promoted best practice and benchmarking among other councils within Central Bedfordshire Council's comparator group.

Councillor Fahn declared a personal interest in this matter by reason of his company having a contract with the Council.

The Head of Procurement informed the Committee that by the very nature of some Directorates, it was difficult to apportion the amount of contracts within a service area. The Committee was advised that all contracts were the responsibility of the Director. With this in mind the Procurement Team was working closely with the Directorates to develop the current intelligence in lieu of a fully populated contracts database.

Members were advised that an element of the procurement team's work would be to incorporate the detailed review of directorate-led contracts. Contract Managers would be assigned to Directorates and would be expected to understand the key drivers within the Directorates as well as the relevant legislation and statutory requirements. Once this has been considered a category-specific Procurement Strategy could be applied to a service area.

The Committee was informed that the Procurement Team was also working with external partners. This had enabled the Team to benchmark performance within the guidance of a range of regional and national procurement bodies namely the Central Purchasing Consortium, Society of Procurement Officers (SOPO) and a wide group of stakeholders in local government procurement.

It was noted that the Executive was expected to formally adopt the Strategy in September 2009. A suggestion was made that this Committee could usefully perform the role of championing the adoption and use of the Strategy.

A suggestion was made that the Committee could set up a Procurement Task Force. The Task Force would meet during August to clarify its objectives and terms of reference and would report back to the Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee at its September meeting on its findings.

**RESOLVED:-**

1. to note the presentation on the Procurement Strategy;
2. to set up a Procurement Task Force with the following membership: Councillors Angela Barker, Paul Duckett, James Jamieson and Roy Johnstone;
3. that the Procurement Task Force would meet during August to draw up its objectives and terms of reference and report to the Corporate Resources Committee at its September meeting on its findings.

**CR/09/021 Exclusion of the Press and Public**

The Committee **RESOLVED** under section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972 that the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the next item on the grounds that the consideration of the item was likely to involve the disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act.

**CR/09/022 ICT Strategy/Accommodation Strategy**

The Committee received an oral report from the Assistant Director responsible for ICT, Property and Assets on the Council's current position regarding the accommodation strategy. This included the plan for rationalisation and migration with ICT.

It was noted that currently Central Bedfordshire employees were working from 46 different offices in a variety of locations within the region. Members noted that the aims of the accommodation strategy included rationalising the number of offices and enabling teams to be located eventually in one central location, which would support the development of a Central Bedfordshire Council culture and brand. This would also support the progress of the ICT strategy which would move from the four legacy platforms to one. It was also anticipated that there would be a reduction in the use and purchase of 700 applications to approximately 400. This would result in a cashable saving due to the reduction of licenses needing to be purchased.

The Committee was advised that a short term accommodation solution had been identified and was close to completion. This would influence the longer term solution due to commence in January 2010 and would incorporate lessons learned from the options appraisal and analysis of the short term solution as well as the consultation of employees and Councillors.

It was noted that the target date for implementation of the long-term solution was 31 March 2013. The Assistant Director for ICT, Property and Assets pointed out the importance of decisions being taken within the next 12 months.

A suggestion was made that the Committee should set up a Task Force to review the objectives of the long-term accommodation strategy, including looking at associated broad and fundamental political matters.

The point was made that it would be appropriate for this matter to be considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Management Panel (OSMP) at its meeting scheduled for the 2<sup>nd</sup> October 2009.

Members felt that an issue of this nature would require representation from all Overview and Scrutiny Committees and decided to include the OSMP discussions and deliberations at their 5<sup>th</sup> October meeting. From this discussion the Committee would consider establishing a cross cutting Task Force, to include Council Officers in an advisory capacity.

**RESOLVED:-**

1. that consideration of establishing a Task Force be referred to the OSMP's meeting on 2<sup>nd</sup> October 2009;
2. that the membership of the Task Force should include one member from each Overview & Scrutiny Committee;
3. that the Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee would receive a summary outcome from the OSMP deliberations at its 5<sup>th</sup> October meeting.

**CR/09/023 Review of the Committee's Work Programme**

The Committee received a report regarding its work programme for 2009/2010 and also discussed proposals for considering specific items detailed in an appendix to the submitted report.

It was noted that the Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee's September meeting would cover:

- An overview of the Financial Services Department covering key drivers and pressures
- An overview of the Budget Setting Process
- Quarter1 Budget and Performance Information
- Feedback from the meeting of the Procurement Task Force
- Review of the revised Work Programme.

It was noted that the Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee's October meeting would cover:

- An overview of the Human Resources Department (provided that the issues in the Forward Plan for September were not time critical)
- Preliminary discussion / scoping exercise of the Task Force considering the Long Term Accommodation / ICT Strategy
- Review of the revised Work Programme.

**RESOLVED:-**

1. that the contents of the report be noted for information;
2. that the Committee adopts a policy of meeting with Heads of Service at least once per quarter.

**CR/09/024 Forward Plan**

The Committee noted the Executive's Forward Plan of Key Decisions for the period 1 August 2009 to 31 July 2010.

**RESOLVED:-**

1. that the contents of the report be noted for information;
2. that the Forward Plan for the period starting 1<sup>st</sup> September 2009 be included for discussion at the Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee's September meeting.

**CR/09/025 Date of next meeting**

The Committee noted that the next meeting would be held on Monday 7 September 2009 starting at 10.00am.

Date .....

Chairman .....

(Note: The meeting commenced at 10.00 a.m. and concluded at 12.15 p.m.)

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