

CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE COUNCIL

At a meeting of the **CUSTOMER AND CENTRAL SERVICES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE** held in Room 15, Priory House, Monks Walk, Shefford on Tuesday, 14 June 2011.

PRESENT

Cllr P A Duckett (Chairman)
Cllr I Dalgarno (Vice-Chairman)

Cllrs J A E Clarke
Mrs R J Drinkwater
R W Johnstone

Cllrs J Murray
Miss A Sparrow

Apologies for Absence: Cllrs A D Brown
Dr R Egan

Substitutes: Cllrs L Birt
D Jones

Members in Attendance: Cllrs P N Aldis
D J Hopkin

M R Jones

Deputy Executive
Member for Corporate
Resources
Deputy Leader and
Executive Member for
Corporate Resources

Officers in Attendance: Mr J Atkinson – Head of Legal and Democratic
Services
Mr B Carter – Corporate Scrutiny & Research
Manager
Mr R Ellis – Director of Customer and Shared
Services
Mr P Fraser – Head of Partnerships &
Performance.
Mr A King – Head of Financial Strategy
Mr J Unsworth – Interim Assistant Director of
Finance

CCS/11/1 **Minutes**

RESOLVED

that the Minutes of the meeting of the Customer and Central Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 21 March 2011 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

CCS/11/2 Members' Interests

(a) Personal Interests:-

None.

(b) Personal and Prejudicial Interests:-

None.

(c) Any political whip in relation to any agenda item:-

None.

CCS/11/3 Chairman's Announcements and Communications

The Chairman provided the Committee with an update on the work of the Shared Services Task Force, which last met on 20 April, when it considered the report of Internal Audit regarding the governance arrangements of the Council's shared services with Bedford Borough Council.

The Chairman confirmed that the Task Force would meet again in early August 2011 to receive and consider a progress report from management regarding implementation of Internal Audit's recommendations, and would report back the outcome to the September meeting of this Committee.

The Chairman also confirmed that due to Council elections and the subsequent Annual General Meeting, the Task Force now consisted of only 4 Members (from 9 originally), as follows:-

Cllr Jane Lawrence (Vice Chairman)
Cllr Nigel Aldis
Cllr Fiona Chapman
Cllr Roy Johnstone

The Committee agreed that the remaining Task Force Members should continue their work as outlined above and report back their findings to this Committee at its 5 September 2011 meeting.

CCS/11/4 Petitions

No petitions were received from members of the public in accordance with the Public Participation Procedure as set out in Part D2 of the Constitution.

CCS/11/5 Questions, Statements or Deputations

No questions, statements or deputations were received from members of the public in accordance with the Public Participation Procedure as set out in Annex 1 of Part A4 of the Constitution.

CCS/11/6 Call-In

The Panel was advised that no decisions of the Executive had been referred to the Panel under the Call-in Procedures set out in Appendix "A" to Rule No. S18 of the Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rules.

CCS/11/7 Requested Items

In accordance with Procedure Rule 3.1 of Part D2 of the Constitution, the Committee considered a request from Councillor N Aldis regarding the following issue:-

I would like to request that there be a review of the arrangements for this year's election from when the election was first announced to post results stage. I think there are a number of issues that need scrutiny:

- informing Agents about meetings
- ensuring nomination papers were properly completed
- the Count at Dunstable (including the payment of expenses/parking facilities for counting staff)
- Time taken for results to be announced
- the lack of a results information service
- notification of results to Towns & Parishes

Members debated the issue at length and agreed that the election process, and in particular the count, could have been managed more effectively. The Committee was therefore supportive of the request that a review be undertaken and were informed by the Director of Customer & Shared Services that such a review had already been commissioned by the Chief Executive, in his role as Returning Officer. The Director further confirmed that this review would incorporate the concerns raised by Cllr Aldis and would report its findings to the 4 August meeting of the General Purposes Committee (as the Committee with responsibility for all election matters).

Members were invited to submit any further concerns regarding the election process directly to John Atkinson, Head of Legal & Democratic Services and/or attend the General Purposes Committee to take part in consideration of the review report.

CCS/11/8 Executive Member Update

The Executive Member for Corporate Resources provided the Committee with an update on current activities pertaining to his portfolio, which covered the following issues:-

- Employees Terms & Conditions;

- The closure of year end accounts for 2010/11, which currently indicated a small surplus of circa £348k;
- The sale of surplus assets, including the achievement of targets for 2010/11;
- The Medium Term Accommodation Strategy;
- ICT and the move to a single network by June 2011;
- Legal Department Lexcel accreditation; and
- The integration of Customer Services into Jobcentre Plus offices in Biggleswade (the first Council in the country to deliver such innovative joint working), with firm plans to do the same in Dunstable and Leighton Buzzard.

CCS/11/9 **Community Engagement Strategy Update**

The Deputy Executive Member for Corporate Resources introduced his Community Engagement Strategy report, which set out the rationale, key drivers and timeline for a refresh of said strategy. This introduction was supplemented by a presentation on the matter from the Head of Partnership & Performance.

There followed debate amongst Members regarding the general principles driving the current strategy and progress made to date regarding its delivery. More specifically, Members raised the following key issues:-

- The need for further information regarding the achievement of key milestones in 2010/11;
- The need for any refreshed strategy to incorporate government drivers such as the localism agenda;
- Full support for the continuation of the Let's Talk Together initiative, albeit recognising the need to improve attendance by individual members of the public;
- The difficulty in empowering communities to do more for themselves;
- Individual Councillor budgets;
- A sense that Councillors still experienced a lack of a coordinated approach to the dissemination of information from each directorate; and
- A sense that Directorates still operated in silos with regard to community engagement and the need therefore to transform the current strategy into Council policy embraced by the whole organisation;

Following the debate, Members agreed that the current strategy did require review, which should be transforming in nature to ensure the refreshed document was forward looking, focussed on delivery and became Council policy across all directorates.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 1. That the Deputy Executive Member for Corporate Resources proceeds to draft a refreshed Community Engagement Strategy, ensuring that it was forward looking, focussed on delivery and capable of becoming Council policy across all directorates; and**

- 2. Submits this refreshed strategy to the 25 July 2011 Customer & Central Services Overview & Scrutiny Committee for comment prior to Executive consideration in August.**

CCS/11/10 **Treasury Management Annual Report**

The Executive Member for Corporate Resources introduced his report, which provided Members with an update on treasury management activity for the financial year 2010/11.

The Executive Member informed the Committee that in future, treasury management reports would be incorporated into the budget monitoring reports presented to the Committee on a quarterly basis. These combined reports would be much more succinct but supplemented by a presentation highlighting key facts and issues. The Committee was content with this approach.

Members were also content to endorse the contents of the report, which seemed to reflect a sensible approach to treasury management whilst at the same time delivering good performance in terms of the level of debt interest paid and investment interest realised, when benchmarked against other local authorities.

RECOMMENDATION:

That the report be noted.

CCS/11/11 **Work Programme 2011 - 2012 & Executive Forward Plan**

The Committee considered its current work programme and the latest Executive Forward Plan.

RESOLVED

That the Committee's Work Programme be noted.

(Note: The meeting commenced at 10.00 a.m. and concluded at 12.00 p.m.)

Chairman.....

Date.....