

## CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE COUNCIL

At a meeting of the **CORPORATE RESOURCES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE** held in Room 14, Priory House, Monks Walk, Shefford on Tuesday, 18 December 2012.

### PRESENT

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

Cllrs L Birt  
Mrs R J Drinkwater  
Dr R Egan  
C C Gomm

Cllrs R W Johnstone  
Mrs M Mustoe  
I Shingler

Apologies for Absence: Cllrs

Substitutes: Cllrs

Members in Attendance: Cllrs P N Aldis  
R D Berry  
Mrs C F Chapman MBE  
D J Hopkin  
M R Jones  
B Saunders  
Deputy Executive  
Member for Corporate  
Resources  
Deputy Leader and  
Executive Member for  
Corporate Resources

Officers in Attendance: Mrs K Aspinall – Consultation Manager  
Mr B Carter – Corporate Policy & Scrutiny  
Manager  
Ms D Clarke – Assistant Chief Executive (People  
& Organisation)  
Mr P Fraser – Head of Partnerships & Community  
Engagement  
Mr R Gould – Head of Financial Control  
Mr G Muskett – Head of Revenues & Benefits  
Mr C Warboys – Chief Finance Officer

Others in  
Attendance

**CR/12/60 Minutes****RESOLVED**

**That the minutes of the meeting of the Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 23 October 2012 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.**

**CR/12/61 Members' Interests**

There were no declarations of interest or political whip in relation to any agenda items.

**CR/12/62 Chairman's Announcements and Communications**

The Chairman had no announcements.

**CR/12/63 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.

**CR/12/64 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.

**CR/12/65 Call-In**

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

**CR/12/66 Requested Items**

No items were referred to the Committee for consideration at the request of a Member under Procedure Rule 3.1 of Part D2 of the Constitution.

**CR/12/67 Executive Member Update**

The Deputy Leader and Executive Member for Corporate Resources provided the Committee with an update on current activities pertaining to his portfolio, which were not already included on today's agenda and which covered the following issues:-

- The successful completion of the Council's move to a new data centre;
- The imminent upgrade of the Council's Citrix environment, to version 6.5, which would provide a more reliable and faster user desktop experience.

During the update Members of the Committee raised two further issues, namely:-

- The status of the post of Director of Children's Services and whether the holder of such a post could legally hold other positions at the same time. The Deputy Leader agreed to provide a response at the next meeting;
- The use and availability of paper copies of consultations undertaken on the Council's website. The Communications Manager confirmed that paper copies were always available upon request and agreed to ensure the Communications Team actively promoted this medium as an alternative to electronic consultation.

## CR/12/68 **Council Tax Support**

The Deputy Leader and Executive Member for Corporate Resources delivered a presentation, which provided the Committee with the outcomes flowing from the public consultation on the draft policy on localised Council Tax support. Specifically, the presentation covered:-

- Reasons for the change from the current system;
- A summary of the Council's initial proposals, covering key principles and features;
- Details of the consultation process;
- A summary of the public response to the consultation;
- Proposed changes to the Council's initial proposals;
- Details of the government's £100M transitional support available to local authorities nationally for "doing the right thing";
- The financial model, outlining best and worst case scenarios; and
- A summary of conclusions reached regarding finances.

A further presentation was delivered by the Consultation Manager, which provided more detail regarding the consultation results by question asked.

Members of the Committee raised a number of queries during each presentation regarding the following issues, which were addressed by the Deputy Leader and officers in attendance:-

- The risks inherent in the financial model, particularly with regard to uncollected Council Tax. The Chief Finance Officer acknowledged the risk, and the uncertainties the new scheme would bring but confirmed that the financial model did include an allowance for uncollected Council Tax in both best and worse case scenarios;
- The ability of the Council to collect Council Tax due from uninhabited properties. The Head of Revenues and Benefits confirmed that whilst it would be a challenge, he was confident that such sums could be pursued and recovered; and
- The importance of ensuring the Council was seen to be taking effective action to recover Council Tax discounts, which were proposed to be removed.

Finally, the Deputy Leader paid tribute to the hard work of the Chief Finance Officer, Head of Revenues & Benefits and the Consultation Manager in preparing the draft policy and managing the consultation to a successful conclusion, a sentiment which Members of the Committee were happy to support.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

- 1. That the Committee endorses the draft policy on localised Council Tax Support for approval and adoption by Executive and full Council respectively.**

CR/12/69 **Community Engagement Strategy**

The Deputy Executive Member for Corporate Resources introduced this report, which outlined the process and timetable for the preparation of the Community Engagement Strategy 2013-2016. He specifically referred to the five key principles of the existing Strategy, the options for the new Strategy and next steps. This introduction was supplemented by further detail regarding the process used to develop the new Strategy from the Head of Partnerships & Community Engagement.

Members of the Committee raised a number of queries during discussion of the report regarding the following issues, which were addressed by the Deputy Executive Member and Officer in attendance:-

- The continuing lack of sufficient and timely engagement with Ward Members regarding events happening within their communities. The Deputy Executive Member acknowledged the issue and confirmed that work was progressing with Directorates to improve communication with Ward Members in future;
- The need to consider the format of Town & Parish Council forums, possibly providing separate forums for the larger Town Councils;
- The need to manage expectations regarding the Localism Act and to sell its benefits more intelligently; and
- The need to support the new Police & Crime Commissioner in his role delivering policing strategy across the whole of Bedfordshire. Mention was also made of the role of the Police & Crime Panel, whose meetings were open to the public and in this respect, the Head of Partnerships & Community Engagement agreed to provide Committee Members with the dates of forthcoming meetings.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

**That the Committee endorses the continuing principles and new options contained within the Community Engagement Strategy 2013-2016 and supports the next steps outlined within the report.**

CR/12/70 **Face to Face Service Review**

The Deputy Leader and Executive Member for Corporate Resources introduced this report, which detailed the outcome of further consultation with relevant Ward Members regarding the reduction in opening days of Leighton Buzzard Customer Services Centre and confirmed that the Centre would close for two days a week.

Members commented that the further consultation had been constructive and had provided Ward Members with the necessary information upon which to endorse the proposal to close the Centre for two days a week.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

**That the Committee endorses the closure of Leighton Buzzard Customer Services Centre for two days a week.**

CR/12/71 **Customer Perception**

The Interim Assistant Chief Executive delivered a presentation, which provided the Committee with an update on the latest residents tracker survey results. Specifically, the presentation covered:-

- The rationale for the research;
- The programme of research up to 2014;
- Details of the questions asked;
- A summary of the results covering issues such as satisfaction, value for money, drivers of satisfaction and universal services;
- Target rates; and
- A summary action plan to maintain customer satisfaction.

Members of the Committee raised a number of queries during the presentation regarding the following issues:-

- The need to be assured that the sample was representative of all residents and that the methodology used was appropriate. In this respect, the Interim Assistant Chief Executive agreed to arrange a meeting between Cllr R Egan and an officer within the Communications Team to explain further the methodology used;
- The difficulty of improving residents perception of value for money in the current difficult economic climate, with cuts to public services; and
- The value of comparing the Council's performance in this area with peer authorities. In this respect, the Interim Assistant Chief Executive agreed to provide comparative data the next time survey results were presented to the Committee.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

**That the presentation be noted.**

**CR/12/72 Treasury Management**

The Deputy Leader and Executive Member for Corporate Resources introduced this report, which provided a brief summary of the changes to the Council's Treasury Management Strategy, a Strategy which underpinned the Medium Term Financial Plan.

Members of the Committee raised a number of queries during discussion of the report regarding the following issues, which were addressed by the Deputy Executive Member and Officers in attendance:-

- The need to provide appropriate training in treasury management (and financial management generally) to Members. In this respect, the Chief Finance Officer agreed to consider the addition of such training as part of the Member development programme; and
- The Council's ability to earn market leading rates of interest on its investments and the rationale behind the inclusion of those financial institutions placed on the Counterparty List at Annex D of the Strategy. In this respect, the Deputy Leader confirmed that it was the Council's objective to place security before high returns when taking investment decisions. Notwithstanding this point, the Chief Finance Officer was pleased to report that the Council's performance in this area continued to be better than its peers, with investment interest rates higher than average and loan rates lower than average. He also confirmed that the Counterparty List was reviewed monthly in collaboration with the Council's external advisors, Arlingclose.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

**That the Committee endorses the Treasury Management Strategy and Treasury Policy for approval and adoption by the Executive and full Council respectively.**

**CR/12/73 Quarter 2 Performance Monitoring**

The Deputy Leader and Executive Member for Corporate Resources presented the second quarterly performance report for Corporate Services, which provided an overview of performance in 2012/13 for the period to 30 September 2012 for those corporate health indicators presented to this Committee. He further stated that, despite the ongoing efficiency savings and continued pressure on budgets, Council performance generally was good and improving.

Members of the Committee were content with the performance reported.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

**That the report be noted.**

**CR/12/74 Q2 Revenue Report 2012/13**

The Deputy Leader and Executive Member for Corporate Resources presented this report, which set out the Council's revenue position for 2012/13 as at the end of September (Quarter 2) and detailed spend to date against profiled budget and the forecast revenue outturn. He further explained that the forecast revenue outturn for 2012/13 was a £1.4M over spend against budget.

Members of the Committee discussed the contents of the report in detail and raised the following issues, which were addressed by the Executive Member and officers in attendance:-

- The Council's strategy with regard to short term investments over 3 months. The Chief Finance Officer confirmed that the Council held a mix of investments over differing periods as part of its overall strategy of seeking the best available rates of interest within a robust, secure and flexible framework;
- The current position with regard to unfilled social worker posts within Children's Services. It was confirmed that the recruitment of qualified social workers to fill vacancies was an ongoing activity;
- The ability of Albion Archaeology to realise a surplus on each project in an increasingly competitive market. The Chief Finance Officer explained that the intention is for the service to recover its full costs;
- The reason for the under spend in ICT. The Chief Finance Officer confirmed that this under spend represented savings against superannuation costs as a result of some ICT staff choosing not to join the local government pension scheme;
- The under spend in Leisure Services relating to additional income from the physical activity programme. The Chief Finance Officer agreed to provide further detail regarding this issue to the Member concerned;
- The unachievable income target within HR as a result of the Council ceasing its trading activities with schools;

In conclusion, the Committee paid tribute to the hard work of officers in maintaining sound financial management and noted the report.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

**That the report be noted.**

**CR/12/75 Q2 Capital Report 2012/13**

The Deputy Leader and Executive Member for Corporate Resources presented this report, which set out the Council's capital position for 2012/13 as at the end of September (Quarter 2) and detailed spend to date against profiled budget and the forecast outturn position. He further explained however that the report had been superseded by the recent report to full Council on the 29 November 2012 regarding the Capital Programme Review.

Members of the Committee were content to acknowledge this point and noted the report.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

**That the report be noted.**

**CR/12/76 Q2 Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Revenue & Capital Report 2012/13**

The Deputy Leader and Executive Member for Corporate Resources presented this report, which set out the revenue and capital position for the Council's Housing Revenue Account (HRA) for 2012/13 as at the end of September (Quarter 2), and detailed spend to date against profiled budget and the forecast revenue outturn. He further explained that this was the first time such a report had been presented to this Committee due to the fact that funding of the HRA had changed recently from a model of subsidy to one of self finance. This meant that in return for the Council retaining its housing rents, it had been required to take on a debt of £165M.

Members of the Committee were happy to note the contents of the report with the exception of one specific issue regarding tenant rent arrears and the possibility that the situation might deteriorate due to the current economic climate. Cllr R Drinkwater (in her capacity as Chairman of the Social Care, Health & Housing Overview & Scrutiny Committee) agreed to provide further detail regarding this issue to the Member concerned.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

**That the report be noted.**

**CR/12/77 Q2 Revenue Report 2012/13 - Corporate Services**

The Deputy Leader and Executive Member for Corporate Resources presented this report, which set out the revenue position for Corporate Services as at the end of September (Quarter 2) and detailed spend to date against profiled budget and the forecast revenue outturn. He further explained that the forecast revenue outturn for 2012/13 was a £0.126M under spend against budget.

Members of the Committee discussed the contents of the report in detail and raised a number of minor issues, all of which were addressed by the Executive Member and officers in attendance:-

**RECOMMENDATION:**

**That the report be noted.**

**CR/12/78 Q2 Capital Report 2012/13 - Corporate Services**



The Deputy Leader and Executive Member for Corporate Resources presented this report, which set out the capital position for Corporate Services as at the end of September (Quarter 2) and detailed spend to date against profiled budget and the forecast outturn position. He further explained that the forecast spend for 2012/13 was £11.738M, against an approved budget of £14.055M, with slippage expected to be £2.006M.

Members of the Committee discussed the contents of the report in detail and raised a specific issue regarding transparency of the reasons behind forecast slippage. The Chief Finance Officer agreed to provide a note explaining such slippage in future reports.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

**That the report be noted.**

CR/12/79

**Work Programme 2012 - 2013 & Executive Forward Plan**

The Committee considered its current work programme and the latest Executive Forward Plan and agreed to the following amendments:-

- The expansion of the 2013/14 Draft Budget item due for consideration at the 22 January meeting to include both revenue and capital, together with an update on the local government financial settlement; and
- The postponement of consideration of the ICT Framework to the 30 April meeting.

**RESOLVED**

**That the Committee's Work Programme be updated to include the above mentioned amendments.**

(Note: The meeting commenced at 10.00 a.m. and concluded at 12.50 p.m.)

Chairman.....

Date.....