

CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE COUNCIL

At a meeting of the **CORPORATE RESOURCES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE** held in Room 14, Priory House, Monks Walk, Shefford on Tuesday, 30 April 2013.

PRESENT

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

Cllrs	Mrs A Barker	Cllrs	Dr R Egan
	L Birt		J Murray
	Mrs C F Chapman MBE		B Saunders

Apologies for Absence: Cllrs T Woodward

Substitutes: Cllrs

Members in Attendance:	Cllrs	R D Berry	
		D Bowater	Vice-Chairman of the Council
		C C Gomm	
		D J Hopkin	Deputy Executive Member for Corporate Resources
		M R Jones	Deputy Leader and Executive Member for Corporate Resources
		M A G Versallion	Executive Member for Children's Services
		R D Wenham	Deputy Executive Member for Corporate Resources

Officers in Attendance:	Mr B Carter	– Corporate Policy & Scrutiny Manager
	Ms D Clarke	– Assistant Chief Executive (People & Organisation)
	Mr A Fleming	– Service Director - Business Services
	Mr P Fraser	– Head of Partnerships & Community Engagement
	Mr M Scott	– Head of Information Assets
	Mr C Warboys	– Chief Finance Officer

Others in Attendance	Mr J Gledhill	Toddington Parish Council Councillor and Chairman of the Stronger Communities thematic partnership of Central Bedfordshire Together
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CR/13/1 Minutes

Members discussed Minute CR/12/88 regarding the Draft Budget 2013/14 and specifically agreed to consider the proposed reduction in partnership funding in 2014/15, particularly with regard to the Citizen's Advice Bureau, during the forthcoming budget setting process.

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the meeting of the Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 22 January 2013 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

CR/13/2 Members' Interests

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

CR/13/3 Chairman's Announcements and Communications

The Chairman had no announcements.

CR/13/4 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.

CR/13/5 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.

CR/13/6 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/13/7 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/13/8 Executive Member Update

The Deputy Leader and Executive Member for Corporate Resources delivered a presentation to the Committee regarding the impact of welfare reforms on Central Bedfordshire's residents. The presentation covered the following issues:-

- The terms of reference of the recently established Welfare Reform Working Group;
- The governance arrangements for this group;
- Cross Council representation on this group;
- Statistical information regarding the number of residents affected;
- Work done to date to support these residents including dedicated communications, alternative payment options for Council Tax and rents; CAB representation, additional resources offering help and advice, mutual exchanges and Local Welfare Provision;
- The impact on customers;
- Statistical information regarding the impact on customer facing teams; and
- Actions taken to manage demand.

Members of the Committee raised the following issues during the presentation, which were addressed by the Executive Member and officers present:-

- The need for further information regarding the impact of these reforms on residents. In this respect, the Executive Member agreed to bring forward a more detailed report in July following completion of the first quarterly analysis;
- Concern over the additional costs to the Authority in managing the process and responding to the significantly increased demand on the organisation's customer facing services. The Chief Finance Officer assured Members that these additional costs were being tracked and also confirmed that the Council had received £108k of New Burdens funding from the government to partly offset these costs;
- The need to ensure the Welfare Reform Working Group received adequate representation from front line services to ensue useful input from a customer perspective;
- The ability of the Council to meet demand in terms of discretionary housing payments made in emergencies. The Executive Member confirmed that although the Council assessed applications according to a consistent policy managed by experienced officers, the total sum available was finite. Members of the Committee therefore requested sight of the discretionary housing payments policy, which would be circulated by the Chief Finance Officer following the meeting;
- The impact on staff regarding the significantly increased workload. The Interim Assistant Chief Executive confirmed that Contact Centre staff were all fully committed and enthusiastic about providing an excellent service, and although the number of customer contacts made during March and April had been unprecedented, morale was high and staff were helping each other through this demanding period. Managers had also introduced a number of initiatives such as leave buy back, overtime, staggered lunch breaks, part time to full time working, etc to manage demand during this period. Members of the Committee wished to formally record their thanks to the staff involved for all their hard work during this exceptionally busy period;
- The impact on the Citizen's Advice Bureau in Dunstable, who were also receiving unprecedented enquiries regarding welfare reform and who had

recently submitted a request for additional funding to manage this additional workload. Members of the Committee were supportive of this request and urged the Executive Member to consider it favourably.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1. That, following completion of the first quarterly analysis, the Executive Member bring forward a more detailed report to the July meeting of this Committee regarding the impact of welfare reform on residents;**
- 2. That the Chief Finance Officer provide Members of the Committee with a copy of the discretionary housing payments policy; and**
- 3. That the Executive Member considers favourably the request from the Citizen's Advice Bureau in Dunstable for additional funding to manage the increase in workload generated by the welfare reforms.**

CR/13/9

Information Assets Service

The Head of Information Assets delivered a presentation, which provided the Committee with details of the newly named Information Assets service and its progress and achievements to date. Specifically, the presentation covered:-

- The Vision Statement for the service, which would enable the Council to be an information and knowledge led organisation;
- The transformation of ICT to Information Assets and the accompanying management structure;
- Teams and responsibilities;
- Recent progress and achievements;
- The service recovery and improvement programme; and
- The timeline and key themes of the newly emerging Information Assets Strategy.

The presentation and its content was supported by the Deputy Executive Member for Corporate Resources.

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

- The appropriateness of the new management structure, particularly with regard to the separation of the Service Demand and Programme Delivery teams. The Head of Information Assets acknowledged this point and confirmed that the issue would be reviewed once the service had matured sufficiently;
- The advantages and disadvantages of Cloud technology and its use by the Council in the future; and
- The significant capital expenditure which the Council had incurred on Information Technology since its inception and the need for a strategic approach to any future spending in line with the emerging Information Assets Strategy.

RECOMMENDATION:

- 1. That the Committee receives a copy of the draft Information Assets Strategy for consideration prior to submission to the Executive.**

CR/13/10 Community Engagement Strategy

The Head of Partnerships & Community Engagement delivered a presentation, which provided the Committee with an overview of the final draft Community Engagement Strategy 2013 – 2016 contained within the agenda papers. Specifically, the presentation covered:-

- Details of the Strategy's development and timeline for approval;
- The rationale for the Strategy and outcomes expected;
- Details of the 5 principles supporting the Strategy;
- An explanation of how the Strategy would be web enabled; and
- A brief summary of the 30 policy statement contained within the Strategy, which would drive implementation.

The presentation, its content and the Strategy were supported by the Deputy Executive Member for Corporate Resources.

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

- The need to reinforce the importance of sufficient and timely officer engagement with ward Members regarding events and issues occurring within their communities;
- The most appropriate means of ward Member engagement with residents including surgeries, websites and social media, and the use of local notice boards;
- The need to ensure the Council is clear about the potential bias contained within any consultation undertaken;
- The capacity of Town and Parish Councils to deliver services locally; and
- The use of the word "leader" in principle 2 (Enabling Ward Councillors to be leaders in and for their communities), with a number of other suggestions being made. On balance however the Committee agreed to retain the word "leader" in this principle.

RECOMMENDATION:

- 2. That the Committee endorses the final draft of the Community Engagement Strategy 2013 – 2016 and supports the next steps of approval through Executive and adoption by full Council.**

CR/13/11 Q3 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 December (Quarter 3) 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 £0.3M under spend against budget.

The Chairman initiated a general debate regarding the suitability of the current quarterly reporting methodology i.e. this report and the following four agenda items, and questioned whether it was meeting the needs of the Committee in terms of its role in scrutinising the financial management and strategy of the organisation. Whilst the detail currently provided was comprehensive, it was Members opinion that this very detail made it difficult for the Committee to identify and review the key issues, variances and risks. Members favoured reporting by exception albeit recognising the need to access further detail if required, and therefore requested the Executive Member and Chief Finance Officer to consider the matter further and bring forward suggested improvements when reporting Quarter 4 performance.

RECOMMENDATION:

That the Executive Member and Chief Finance Officer consider the format and content of quarterly reports and bring forward suggested improvements when reporting Quarter 4 performance.

CR/13/12 **Q3 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 December (Quarter 3) and detailed spend to date against profiled budget and the forecast outturn position. He further explained that the forecast was to spend £70.3M against a capital budget of £80.4M, with a proposed deferral of £7.0M into 2013/14.

The Executive Member also explained that new procedures were currently being drafted, which would allow capital projects to start earlier thereby alleviating the need to carry forward under spends in the future.

RECOMMENDATION:

That the report be noted.

CR/13/13 **Q3 Housing Revenue Account 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 December (Quarter 3), and detailed spend to date against profiled budget and the forecast revenue outturn.

RECOMMENDATION:

That the report be noted.

CR/13/14 Q3 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 December (Quarter 3) 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 £53K under spend against budget after the use of earmarked reserves.

RECOMMENDATION:

That the report be noted.

CR/13/15 Q3 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 December (Quarter 3) and detailed spend to date against profiled budget and the forecast outturn position. He further explained that the forecast under spend for 2012/13 was £2K, against an approved revised capital programme of £9.208K.

RECOMMENDATION:

That the report be noted.

CR/13/16 Work Programme 2013 - 2014 & Executive Forward Plan

The Committee considered its current Work Programme and the latest Executive Forward Plan and agreed to the following amendments/additions:-

1. Joint Venture Proposal – delayed until 10 September meeting;
2. Equality & Diversity Strategy – added to 11 June meeting;
3. Impact of Welfare Reforms – added to 30 July meeting;
4. Customer First Update – added to 30 July meeting;
5. 2014/15 Budget Framework and Process – added to 10 September meeting;
6. Draft Information Assets Strategy – added to 10 September meeting (tentative date to be advised);
7. Q1 Budget & Performance Monitoring reports – delayed until 22 October meeting.

RECOMMENDATION:

That the Corporate Resources OSC Work Programme be noted as amended.

(Note: The meeting commenced at 10.00 a.m. and concluded at 12.45 p.m.)

Chairman.....

Date.....