

CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE COUNCIL

At a meeting of the **CORPORATE RESOURCES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE** held in Council Chamber, Priory House, Monks Walk, Shefford on Tuesday, 28 January 2014.

PRESENT

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

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

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

Officers in Attendance:	Ms D Clarke	–	Director of Improvement and Corporate Services
	Mrs P Everitt	–	Scrutiny Policy Adviser
	Mr R Norris	–	Team Leader Housing Finance
	Mr P Taylor	–	Finance Manager
	Mr C Warboys	–	Chief Finance Officer

Others in Attendance	Mrs P Katrak	Client Director, Arlingclose Limited
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CR/13/88 Minutes

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting of the Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 17 December 2013 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record subject to the addition of Cllrs P N Aldis and M J Jones to the attendance list.

CR/13/89 Members' Interests

Cllr Dr Egan declared a disclosable pecuniary interest in Item 13 due to the nature of a corporate tenancy.

CR/13/90 Chairman's Announcements and Communications

None

CR/13/91 Petitions

None

CR/13/92 Questions, Statements or Deputations

Cllr Dr Egan requested to speak on item 13 as a member of the public due to the nature of the interest that she had previously declared. The Chairman agreed to invite Cllr Egan to speak in advance of the relevant item.

CR/13/93 Call-In

None

CR/13/94 Requested Items

None

CR/13/95 Executive Member Update

The Deputy Leader and Executive Member for Corporate Resources provided the Committee with an update regarding the following:-

- The annual canvass showed that 96.9% of electors were registered correctly. From June 2014 an individual elector form system would be introduced.
- A reception for Tenant Farmers to meet the Assets Team that would take place on 6 February 2014 at Priory House, Chicksands.
- A loop hole that had been discovered in the Spare Room Subsidy and legislation that would be brought in to remedy this whilst work to identify those affected was undertaken.

In light of the update, Members commented as follows:-

- The Committee extended their congratulations and thanks to the Electoral Registration Team and canvassers for their excellent achievement. The Committee requested that the Electoral Registration Manager write a letter of thanks to all canvassers.
- That tenant farmer's agents and local authorities adjacent to Central Bedfordshire be welcomed to the Farmers Reception and that feedback on the event be reported to the Committee.

CR/13/96 Draft Treasury Management Strategy Statement 2014-2018

The Deputy Leader and Executive Member for Corporate Resources introduced this report, which provided a summary of the changes to the Treasury Management Strategy as a result of continuous review with the Council's external advisers, Arlingclose Ltd.

Members of the Committee considered the content of the report and, confirming that they did not have any concerns, thanked officers present.

NOTED the report

CR/13/97 Draft Budget 2014/15, Medium Term Financial Plan 2014 - 2018 and Capital Programme 2014/15 to 2017/18

The Executive Member introduced this report, which provided the Committee with an opportunity to comment upon the draft budget 2014/15, Medium Term Financial Plan 2014 – 2018 and Capital Programme 2014/15 to 2017/18. This report had been presented and approved for consultation at a meeting of the Executive on 14 January 2014.

The Chief Finance Officer drew the Committee's attention to the final Capital budget proposal. A few changes had been made following the phasing of some projects and copies of the changes were circulated to Members at the meeting. Members asked questions on the adjusted figures relating to the Flitwick Leisure Centre project and speed safety cameras. The Chief Finance Officer advised that the changes were in line with project adjustments and re-phasing of the work for the leisure centre and there was only a very minor change to the value of the scheme in total.. Members were also informed that costs for speed safety cameras were paid by the Council as part of their community safety role, however, it was the Police who collected and kept the money retrieved as a result of any fines issued. Members requested that the Communications Team publicise the Council's role in relation to these speed safety cameras.

RECOMMENDED that the draft budget 2014/15, Medium Term Financial Plan 2014/15 to 2017/18 and the Capital Programme 2014/15 to 2017/18 be endorsed as set out.

CR/13/98 Fees and Charges 2014/15

The Executive Member introduced the report which proposed the revised fees and charges rates to be effective from 1 April 2014 and identified those charges where increases were different from the 2% advisory increase as per the Fees and Charges Policy.

Members of the Committee discussed the content of the report and supported the proposal that the Fees and Charges Policy be revisited by the Committee. The Chief Finance Officer agreed to present a report to the April meeting for consideration.

NOTED the report

CR/13/99 **Draft Budget for the Housing Revenue Account (Housing Service)
Business Plan**

Cllr Dr Egan had declared a disclosable pecuniary interest in relation to the Housing Revenue Account due to the nature of a corporate tenancy. Dr Egan was invited by the Chairman to address the Committee as a member of the public before leaving the room for the remainder of the discussion. Dr Egan raised concerns regarding the amount paid by tenants in 1 bedroom sheltered accommodation compared to the lower percentage paid by tenants in 3 bedroom accommodation. Dr Egan suggested that the Council should not implement the proposed rise in rents for tenants in sheltered housing accommodation for at least a period of two years.

(Cllr Dr Egan left the Chamber during the debate)

Members of the Committee were informed that the sheltered accommodation rate was, on average, 71% of the market rate. Of the tenants in this type of accommodation a total of 80% received full or partial benefits from the Council, and were therefore at least partially exempt from the increase in charges. It was pointed out that a similar situation affected tenants in 1 bedroom accommodation in the south of Central Bedfordshire. In light of this information Cllr Chapman proposed a motion (seconded by Cllr Murray) that the Committee recommend to Executive a 1 year freeze in rent increases for sheltered accommodation.

(Cllr Dr Egan rejoined the meeting)

The Housing Finance Officer advised that a briefing note could be provided to give Members a detailed account of the manner in which rents for Council properties were calculated and a comparison of the level of proposed rents to comparable market rents in the private sector. Members raised specific questions relating to average market rents and officers would provide a written response to these and a comparison between the rents at the Council's Sheltered properties with the rents at our General Needs properties.

(The Chairman adjourned the discussion to permit receipt of additional information and the Committee went on to consider other items on the agenda before returning to consider the HRA later in the meeting. On receipt of the additional information the Chairman adjourned the meeting for 15 minutes to permit time for Members to read the additional information. When the meeting reconvened Cllr Dr Egan left the Chamber during the debate).

The Chief Finance Officer advised Members that a more detailed piece of work to assess the impact of the rent increases on different sectors of the market could be undertaken if Members requested it. In light of this advice the Chairman suggested that the Committee request a report for a future meeting that set out the outcomes of this assessment. Cllr Chapman subsequently withdrew the previous motion.

RECOMMENDED

1. That the draft HRA budget proposals for 2014/15 be endorsed as set out.
2. That officers be requested to carry out an in-depth study to address the concerns of inequity in rents, during the course of the year.

(Cllr Murray requested that his vote against recommendation 2 be recorded)

CR/13/100 **Your Space 2 Project Update**

The Director of Improvement and Corporate Resources gave a presentation on the Your Space 2 Project as requested by the Committee at their meeting in December 2013.

Members attention was drawn to the key reasons for change that included a drive to reduce accommodation costs as outlined in the Medium Term Financial Plan and to exit the Bedford Borough area. The engagement that had been undertaken during the process and the feedback of staff was also highlighted.

In light of the presentation Members raised a number of concerns:-

- That need to address parking pressures at Priory House and Watling House. Of major concern were the dangerous parking practices and the difficulty of emergency vehicles gaining access to buildings. The Director of Improvement and Corporate Services advised that plans to increase the number of car parking spaces were in hand and further short terms measures to create spaces would be implemented, including the provision of car parking spaces near Creasey Park Football Club for staff.
- Expectations that staff should work in overcrowded conditions and whether the Council was in compliance with Health and Safety requirements. The Director of Improvement and Corporate Services assured Members that there was no breach in Health and Safety law. The Director agreed to arrange for a Health and Safety Officer to discuss this issue with Cllr Dr Egan. In light of these concerns a Member offered some suggestions to help alleviate some of the parking and accommodation pressures including meeting room availability that the Director of Improvement and Community Services agreed to investigate further.

NOTED the update

CR/13/101 **Work Programme 2013 - 2014 & Executive Forward Plan**

The Committee considered its current Work Programme and the latest Executive Forward Plan and added items relating to the Fees and Charges Policy and an overview of service level agreements.

RECOMMENDED that the Corporate Resources OSC work programme be amended subject to the addition of the items detailed above.

(Note: The meeting commenced at 10.00 a.m. and concluded at 12.25 p.m.)

Chairman.....

Date.....