

## CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE COUNCIL

At a meeting of the **CORPORATE RESOURCES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE** held in Room 14, Priory House, Monks Walk, Shefford on Tuesday, 22 March 2016.

### PRESENT

Cllr P A Duckett (Chairman)  
Cllr J Chatterley (Vice-Chairman)

Cllrs	Mrs A Barker	Cllrs	J Kane
	Mrs C F Chapman MBE		T Swain
	K Ferguson		N Warren

Apologies for Absence: Cllrs R W Johnstone  
D McVicar

Substitutes: Cllrs Mrs A Barker

Members in Attendance:	Cllrs	S Dixon	Deputy Executive Member for Corporate Resources
		J G Jamieson	Leader of the Council and Chairman of the Executive
		M A G Versallion	Executive Member for Education and Skills
		R D Wenham	Executive Member for Corporate Resources

Officers in Attendance:	Mrs D Broadbent- Clarke	– Director of Improvement and Corporate Services
	Mr S Girling	– Assistant Director Assets
	Mr T Keaveney	– Assistant Director Housing Services
	Mrs R Preen	– Scrutiny Policy Adviser
	Mr C Warboys	– Chief Finance Officer

Public 0

#### CR/15/67. Minutes

**RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting of the Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 02 February 2016 be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

#### CR/15/68. Members' Interests

None.

CR/15/69. **Chairman's Announcements and Communications**

The Committee were informed that at a recent meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Coordination Panel (OSCP) a new approach had been agreed in relation to OSC procedures, that a more concise, cross functional and targeted approach would be adopted to include more overview items as well as scrutiny and that Executive Member updates would be tailored to brief updates centred around policy and strategy.

CR/15/70. **Petitions**

None.

CR/15/71. **Questions, Statements or Deputations**

None.

CR/15/72. **Call-In**

None.

CR/15/73. **Requested Items**

None.

CR/15/74. **Executive Member Update**

The Executive Member for Corporate Resources provided the Committee with an update on the Working Smarter project which included planned works to Ground West at Priory House in May 2016. The Executive Member highlighted efficiency savings made through recent IT tenders and that new software and telephony systems within the Customer Contact Centre would soon be live and capture performance in order to monitor efficiencies. The new website was live and had recorded increased traffic, in particular from mobile devices and tablets. Members were reminded that there were several elections taking place later in the year and that they were being encouraged to participate in the paperless trial.

In response to a Member query the Chief Finance Officer and Executive Member confirmed that there had been higher call volumes than usual due to the recent Council Tax billing although quieter than anticipated which was attributed to the detailed information sent to residents prior to the distribution of bills.

A Member queried the back up procedure in the event the Council adopted the Cloud system for IT storage and the Executive Member stated that no final decision had been made but the system would need to meet the Council's disaster recovery strategy and provide a robust service.

CR/15/75. **Acquisitions Policy update**

The Assistant Director (AD) for Assets delivered a presentation outlining farmland acquisition proposals, highlighting the shrinking agricultural asset base due to the sale of Council land. The presentation proposed that a policy of land acquisition be put in place to allow the Council to replenish its agricultural estate through judicious purchases of farmland where they fit strategically within the current estate. That the current 8 week Committee cycle for decision making was not conducive to timely purchases, hence the need for a more agile and rapid response in relation to farmland acquisition. It was acknowledged that there was no current provision within the Capital Programme for land acquisitions and any proposals would need to be added to the Capital Budget with each purchase requiring an approved business case.

In light of the presentation the Committee agreed that the long term proposals would need to be carefully considered by the Corporate Management Team first before progressing onto the General Purposes Committee and full Council for a final decision. The Chief Finance Officer expressed the view that it may be possible to consider interim Urgency powers as detailed within the Constitution but it would not be appropriate as a long term solution. The Leader of the Council suggested that a sum could be included within the Capital Budget at full Council in April or May 2016 and delivered as policy by the summer of 2016 but stressed the importance of considering any legal implications.

Members expressed the need for caution with regards to sums paid for land, the tax implications for certain types of land and clarity around the reasons for replacing farmland. Members queried the different types of bidding available on land purchases and it was confirmed that the Council could enter into the process provided there was a valid business case.

**RECOMMENDED:-**

- 1. that General Purposes consider and propose to Council an amendment to the Constitution such that if a specific budget for the purpose of strategic land acquisition had been approved by full Council, a decision to purchase land could be delegated to a specified group of Members and Officers. This would satisfy the exemption detailed below that negates the requirement for such a decision to be taken by Executive. A detailed business case for each purchase would still be required.**

**“1.3.4 implementation of an explicit policy within the approved Budget and Policy Framework or fulfilment of the policy intention of a key decision previously approved by the Executive”**

- 2. that pending amending the Constitution as recommended above, the Executive Member for Corporate Resources consider using the protocols of the Constitution for a decision to be taken on the grounds of urgency in order to expedite a decision where supported by a valid business case, should the need arise.**

CR/15/76. **December 2015 Q3 Revenue and Capital Budget Monitoring**

The Chief Finance Officer delivered a presentation detailing the financial position of the Council at the end of Quarter 3, highlighting areas of underspend, overspend, Capital budget monitoring and low Capital Receipt figures due to fewer sales than previously planned. Details regarding the delayed opening of Priory View and the impact on revenue as a result were discussed.

**RECOMMENDED**

- 1. That a record of the lessons learned throughout the development of Priory View be retained in order to minimise the likelihood of similar difficulties in the future, particularly relating to agreeing the detailed scope of the project.**
- 2. That a briefing session be organised for Members relating to Priory View and other similar future projects, including a wider focus than just the financial aspects.**

CR/15/77. **Work Programme 2016/17 and Executive Forward Plan**

**AGREED the Work Programme subject to the combination of the IT Strategy and Digital Transformation in June 2016.**

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

Chairman.....

Date.....