

CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE COUNCIL

At a meeting of the **CORPORATE RESOURCES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE** held in Council Chamber, Priory House, Monks Walk, Shefford on Thursday, 30 November 2017.

PRESENT

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

Cllrs Mrs A Barker
N B Costin
J Kane

Cllrs D McVicar
T Swain

Apologies for Absence: Cllrs Mrs C F Chapman MBE
T Woodward

R D Wenham – Deputy Leader and Executive
Member for Corporate Resources

Substitutes: Cllrs M A G Versallion

Members in Attendance: Cllrs K M Collins Deputy Executive Member for
Corporate Resources and
Vice-Chairman of Licensing
Committee
Cllr S Dixon Executive Member for
Education and Skills
K Ferguson Chairman of Children's
Services Overview and
Scrutiny Committee
E Ghent Deputy Executive Member for
Social Care and Housing
C C Gomm
Mrs S A Goodchild
Mrs C Hegley Executive Member for Social
Care and Housing and Lead
Member for Children's Services
P Hollick Chairman of Social Care,
Health & Housing Overview &
Scrutiny Committee
B Saunders Vice-Chairman of the Council &
Vice-Chairman of Sustainable
Communities Overview &
Scrutiny Committee
B J Spurr Executive Member for Health
and Chairman of the Health
and Wellbeing Board
Mrs T Stock Deputy Executive Member for
Health

Officers in Attendance:	Mr Q Baker	Executive Director LGSS Law
	Mr I Berry	Assistant Director of Assets
	Mr M Coiffait	Director of Community Services
	Mrs P Everitt	Scrutiny Policy Adviser
	A Gordon	Head of Estate Management
	Mr P Meigh	Chief Procurement Officer
	Mr N Murley	Assistant Director Resources
	Mr G Muskett	Head of Revenues & Benefits
	Mrs L Owen	Practice Manager, LGSS Law
	Mr C Rushworth	Legal Services Business Relationship Manager
	Mr C Warboys	Director of Resources

Public - None

CROSC/17/42 Minutes

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting of the Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 21 September 2017 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

CROSC/17/43 Members' Interests

None.

CROSC/17/44 Chairman's Announcements and Communications

It was confirmed that the final financial training session would take place at the conclusion of the meeting.

Following a question from a Member of the public, the Chairman had requested a briefing on the ethical investments made by the Pension Service at Bedford Borough on behalf of Central Bedfordshire. A Member of the Pensions Team would be invited to a future meeting of the Committee in order to provide advice to Members.

CROSC/17/45 Petitions

None.

CROSC/17/46 Questions, Statements or Deputations

None.

CROSC/17/47 Call-In

None.

CROSC/17/48 Requested Items

None.

CROSC/17/49 **Executive Members' Update**

The Deputy Executive Member for Corporate Resources advised the Committee of the latest news and events that included: -

- The annual budget cycle and Medium Term Financial Plan was well advanced.
- Digitisation of services continued and will in future include electronic expenses claims by Members. These initiatives would drive efficiencies and save money.
- An upgrade to the accounting system had been scoped and the project had moved onto the next planning stage.
- A drive to make better use of the Apprenticeship Levy would include the introduction of 'corporate' apprenticeships. It was also proposed to increase the number of apprentices from 30 to the target of 53 across the organisation.
- A performance portal had been created on the Council's website and a set of common indicators showing past and current performance would be available.

CROSC/17/50 **Local Council Tax Support Scheme for 2018/19**

The Head of Revenues and Benefits introduced the Local Council Tax Support Scheme for 2018/19 annual report. There were no proposed changes to the scheme and therefore it was not necessary to consult the public. Central Bedfordshire Council collection performance for 2016/17 was highest ever performance achieved by the Council and above the national average at 98%.

In response to a question about the exemption of care leavers from Council Tax, the Director of Resources advised there was no proposal to include care leavers in the scheme, however, a package of support for care leavers was under review. The Committee requested that officers review arrangements to include care leavers in the Council Tax Support Scheme in 2019/20.

RECOMMENDED

- 1. That the Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee endorse the Local Council Tax Support Scheme for 2018/19 to Executive.**
- 2. That the Executive review arrangements for the financial support provided to care leavers through the Local Council Tax Support Scheme for the following year (2019/20).**

CROSC/17/51 **Q1 2017/18 Budget Monitoring Reports**

The Director of Resources introduced the Q1 revenue budget monitoring report that forecast the Council would achieve its budget by March 2018. There was a slight overspend within the Corporate Resources Directorate, which based on expected savings on salaries throughout the Council but the £1m efficiencies were now on course to be delivered.

With regards to the Capital Budget the Executive had approved a virement to progress the Thorn Turn and the Depot schemes. The Director advised the variances in the Capital programme could be pinpointed to individual schemes and provided a better understanding than in previous years. Within Community Services an £8m budget for strategic acquisitions had been introduced in order that officers utilised funds speedily when viable schemes presented themselves.

Concern regarding the pressures on homelessness in the HRA Budget was raised and it was proposed that the SCHH OSC consider widening its impending Homelessness Review to include shared ownership and affordable rental housing schemes.

In response to a question regarding the Houghton Central scheme delays, the Director of Community Services advised that, subject to agreement, a tender for the project would be ready in January 2018.

RECOMMENDED

- 1. The Social Care Health and Housing OSC widens the Homelessness Review to include shared ownership and affordable rental housing schemes.**
- 2. Noted and endorsed the Revenue, Capital budget and HRA budgets.**

CROSC/17/52 Farming Strategy Update

The Head of Estate Management recapped on the purpose of the Strategy, which was to provide a robust, defensible planning document for adoption under the Asset Strategy. This Strategy would direct the work of Estate Services to support the delivery of viable farm holdings, the preservation of landscape and access to the countryside. The Strategy would also make land available for housing and employment.

Bidwells had begun working with officers to scope, resource and create a time frame to develop a draft Strategy that would incorporate current good practice, governance arrangements and emerging themes by end of March 2018. The draft strategy would be submitted to the Committee in the Spring for consideration and comment and before Executive on 12 June 2018. The public would then be consulted.

In response to a question regarding the role of Bidwells, the Head of Service advised there was no capacity in-house and Bidwells were best placed to develop the Strategy under the management contract.

In response to a question about legal requirement of councils to hold farm land stock and the amount Central Bedfordshire Council might hold, the Director of Community Services advised the new strategy would provide direction on this matter.

NOTED the update.

CROSC/17/53 Procurement Service

The Head of Procurement Services delivered a presentation that outlined the agreed procurement service framework used by officers, created in line with legislation. Procedures ensured a transparent and compliant process for the award of Council contracts.

In response to a question regarding future procurement after Brexit, the Head of Service advised that not much would change as much of the EU procurement law was embedded in UK legislation.

NOTED the update.

CROSC/17/54 LGSS Law Legal Service Update

The Executive Director LGSS Law Ltd, Legal Services Business Manager and Practice Manager LGSS Law delivered an overview of the Shared Legal Services in its first year. The Legal Service had achieved its efficiency targets and improved customer and staff satisfaction as outlined in an additional survey distributed in hard copy by the Executive Director at the meeting. Members were also informed that a lead LGSS Business Partner would be based at Priory House twice a week amongst other planned initiatives.

In response to a question regarding the challenges faced by the Service with reduced capabilities, the Executive Director advised that social work posed the biggest challenge, however, with the benefit of providing legal services to three councils, a large team supported this area of work, including Children's cases.

The Executive Director informed the Committee that LGSS Law continued to work alongside Town and Parish Councils (T&PC) and regularly attended the conferences. The T&PCs now had a better understanding of the LGSS Law service and the extent of specialism that could be offered.

A Member requested a LGSS Law briefing session so Members could better understand the service now provided.

RECOMMENDED that a Member briefing on Legal Services be provided at a future date.

CROSC/17/55 Work Programme 2014/15 & Executive Forward Plan

The Committee considered the work programme and Executive Forward Plan and agreed to include a Bedford Pension's representative be requested to attend a future meeting of the Committee to advise on ethical investments.

RECOMMENDED that the work programme as set out in appendix A be agreed subject to the addition of the Pensions update outlined above.

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

Chairman.....

Date.....