

CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE COUNCIL

At a meeting of the **CORPORATE RESOURCES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE** held in Council Chamber, Priory House, Monks Walk, Shefford on Thursday, 29 November 2018.

PRESENT

Cllr J Chatterley (Vice-Chairman)

Cllrs	Mrs C F Chapman MBE	Cllrs	D McVicar
	C C Gomm		T Swain
	J Kane		

Apologies for Absence: Cllrs Mrs A Barker
P A Duckett
T Woodward

Substitutes: Cllrs B Saunders (In place of P A Duckett)
M A G Versallion (In place of Mrs A Barker)

Members in Attendance:	Cllrs	M C Blair	Chairman of Audit
		E Ghent	Executive Member for Assets and Housing Delivery
		Mrs S A Goodchild	
		Ms C Hegley	Executive Member for Adults, Social Care and Housing Operations (HRA)
		Ms C Maudlin	Deputy Executive Member for Adults, Social Care, Housing Operations (HRA) and Volunteering
		Mrs T Stock	Deputy Executive Member for Health

Officers in Attendance:	Mr M Coiffait	Director of Community Services
	Mrs P Everitt	Scrutiny Policy Adviser
	Ms S Fecondi	HR Business Partner
	Ms C Harding	Community Intelligence Manager
	Mr G Muskett	Head of Revenues & Benefits
	Mrs G Stanton	Chief Communications Officer
	Mr C Warboys	Director of Resources

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CROSC/18/42Minutes

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting of the Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 20 September 2018 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

CROSC/18/43 Members' Interests

Cllr Mrs Chapman declared an interest at item 15 as a Patron of Bedfordshire Rural Communities Charities.

CROSC/18/44 Chairman's Announcements and Communications

None.

CROSC/18/45 Petitions

None.

CROSC/18/46 Questions, Statements or Deputations

None.

CROSC/18/47 Call-In

None.

CROSC/18/48 Requested Items

None.

CROSC/18/49 Executive Members' Update

The Deputy Executive Member for Resources updated the Committee on the following:-

- Progress regards the S4Hana Project that would replace the current Finance system and had implications for the whole Council.
- A new approach to officer appraisals, an evaluation of which would be undertaken.
- A review of parishes in the area had been undertaken and resulted in the reduction in parish councillors from 719 to 711.

In response to a question about the extent of Executive Member involvement in officer 360 appraisals this year, the Director of Resources commented that Member involvement in the process had been valued in the past. The Director undertook to review the process.

The Executive Member for Assets and Housing Delivery updated the Committee on the following:-

- An increase of capital receipts to £13.2m.
- The development of a commercial estate plan.
- The new catering service provision at Houghton Regis Visitor Centre.
- Proposed development of Bedford Square, Houghton Regis.

In response to a Member's concern regarding the development of the Brook transitional homes project in Houghton Regis, the Executive Member assured the Committee that ward Members would be consulted on the design.

The Director of Community Services advised that officers were engaged in discussions on two capital bids to develop integrated health and care hubs in Dunstable and Biggleswade. Additional monies for design work had been provided by the CCG to develop the schemes on their behalf. This money had been added to the £1.2m allocated by the Council. Joint commissioning for integrated health and care hubs in Leighton Buzzard, Houghton Regis and West Mid Beds was in hand.

CROSC/18/50 Project Simplify Presentation

The Head of HR Development gave a presentation that explained the new simplified process to manage recruitment, development and performance of staff. The new system provides clear career pathways, making it easier to identify development needs and build the relevant skills and know-how. It will also create greater flexibility to deliver the Council's plans and services and respond to change by focusing on the commonalities rather than the differences between roles.

Members raised a number of comments and were reassured that the new approach would help managers deliver on workforce issues and offers staff greater visibility of opportunities.

NOTED the update.

CROSC/18/51 Residents' Survey- Listening to our Customers

The Assistant Director Service Development introduced a presentation that outlined the results of the bi-annual residents survey. Generally, the data compared favourably with national statistics and previous surveys. The top issues that residents perceived were important in their area included roads, pavements, the level of crime and anti-social behaviour along with lack of police visibility.

In light of the report, a Members queried:-

- What steps would be taken to tackle and monitor the survey results. In response, the Assistant Director advised the results would feed into the performance framework and officers would renew efforts to improve services.
- Concern that the Council's responsiveness to residents who contact us by telephone was not achieved. The Executive Member for Adult Social Care advised much had been done to ensure a full complement of contact centre staff was available. However, there was a drive towards on-line communications wherever possible and appealed to Members to recommend this method of communication to residents.
- How the Council would help to dispel residents' fear of crime and disorder when this is the role of the Police Force? In response, the Director of Community Services advised much was being done in partnership to build community resilience in these matters. The Executive Member for Assets

also advised that Police representatives had attended Councillor Surgeries in the Dunstable area and this had proved successful and helped those residents with concerns.

The Chairman asked that all Members of the Council receive the residents survey and sought assurances that residents can expect the Council to act positively to improve community cohesion in Central Bedfordshire.

RECOMMENDED

- 1. That the residents survey be circulated to all Members of the Council.**
- 2. That the Committee's concerns on the Council's responsiveness to residents be referred to the Director of Social Care Health and Housing.**
- 3. That a report detailing the Council's response to the residents' survey be included on the work programme and considered in 6 months.**
- 4. That following consideration of this report, individual aspects of the survey be submitted to the appropriate Overview and Scrutiny Committee.**

CROSC/18/52 Local Council Tax Support Scheme 2019/20

The Head of Revenues and Benefits introduced the Local Council Tax Support Scheme report for 2019/20. Central Bedfordshire Council collection performance for 2017/18 reached £179.3m and compares well with national figures and indicated the increase of households in the area.

The number of Council Tax support scheme claimants had reduced and was an indication of an improved economic climate. There were no proposed changes to the schemes and the figures had been adjusted to meet with inflation increases.

The Director of Resources advised that an **amendment** to the Rating (Property in Common Occupation) and Council Tax (Empty Dwellings) Bill had received Royal Assent and gave councils the power to increase the empty homes premium thresholds on council tax bills for homes left empty. The support of Members was sought to enforce the maximum charge on empty properties that increased according to the length of time the property was left vacant.

RECOMMENDED

- 1. That, as permitted by the new Government Legislation:-**
 - from 1 April 2019 100% premium, be applied to homes that have been empty and substantially unfurnished for 2 years and**
 - from April 2020 a 200% premium, be applied for homes that have been empty for between 5 and 10 years, and**
 - from April 2021 300% premium, be applied for homes empty for 10 years or more.**

2. That the Head of Revenues and Benefits reports on the outcome of this new legislation annually in the Local Council Tax Support Scheme report.
3. That subject to the above, the Local Tax Support Scheme for 2019/20 be endorsed.

CROSC/18/53 **Equality Strategy and Action Plan 2018-2021**

The Community Intelligence Manager introduced the Equality Strategy and Action Plan 2018-2021. The report summarised progress made in the development of the Strategy and a refresh of the Action Plan, which had been published to demonstrate the Council's compliance with its Equality Duty.

In light of the report, a Member queried how monitoring of the four objectives was carried out. In response the Community Intelligence Manager advised that lead officers allocated with actions from the plan were contacted regularly to check on progress and were assisted if needed.

The Community Intelligence Manager would investigate and provide a response to Members on the project to profile Houghton Regis and develop and understand the needs of this area.

RECOMMENDED that the Equality Strategy and Action Plan 2018-2021 be fully endorsed.

CROSC/18/54 **Q1 2018/19 Performance Monitoring Report**

The Head of Knowledge and Insight delivered the 2018/19 Q1 Performance Monitoring report (April-June). Measures that had new data attached to them were identified. Those items with a negative or downward turn in performance were also highlighted.

In response to the report, Members proposed a number of changes to future performance reporting that included:

- a higher number of performance indicators that relate to education and skills matters be included in future performance reports.
- under the creating stronger communities element of the MTFP, officers consider resilience and succession planning for our communities.
- consideration be given to the reporting progress on attainment of children in schools, rather than Ofsted ratings of school achievement.
- that officers report on the timeliness of response by Social Workers to requests for help when dealing with vulnerable children.

In response, the Head of Knowledge and Insight advised the Medium Term Plan was due to be revised and she would brief colleagues on the Committee's proposals.

RECOMMENDED that the proposals provided by the Committee be considered when a revision of the MTFP was undertaken.

CROSC/18/55.Task Force Report on the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) Funding Review

The Vice-chairman introduced the Task Force report on the VCS Funding Review. The review had focussed on Infrastructure Organisations which were due to lose their funding and, in order to maintain the level of services provided by them, the Task Force recognised the need to continue funding until a wider review was undertaken.

It was recognised that the VCS Infrastructure Organisations help to ensure a local thriving and robust voluntary sector. The withdrawal of their funding would see a decline in community cohesion as well as a risk to contracts and arrangements the Council has with the voluntary sector.

In light of the report, a Member queried the amount of £69,000 the Task Force had recommended to fund the three Infrastructure Organisations. In response, the Chairman advised this amount would maintain the level of funds the Organisations had received annually.

Members agreed that a bigger piece of work was needed to fully understand the Council's relationship with the voluntary and community sector, future funding provision and officers use the information to create a strategy to take the Council forward.

RECOMMENDED that subject to a closer inspection of financial matters in Phase II, the Voluntary and Community Sector Funding Review, Phase I, be fully endorsed.

CROSC/18/56.Work Programme 2018/19 & Executive Forward Plan

The Committee considered the current work programme and Executive Forward Plan. The Work Programme was agreed subject to the addition of the Investment Strategy report to the work programme for January 2019.

(Note: The meeting commenced at 10.00 a.m. and concluded at 12.15 p.m.)

Chairman.....

Date.....