

CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE COUNCIL

At a meeting of the **CUSTOMER AND CENTRAL SERVICES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE** held at Council Chamber, Priory House, Chicksands, Shefford on Monday, 26 April 2010

PRESENT

Cllr J G Jamieson (Chairman)
Cllr D J Hopkin (Vice-Chairman)

Cllrs J A E Clarke
P A Duckett
A Fahn

Cllrs M Gibson
R W Johnstone
D Jones

Members in Attendance: Cllrs R A Baker
D Bowater
M R Jones
S F Male
A Shadbolt
J Street
Mrs C Turner
J N Young

Officers in Attendance: Mr R Carr – Chief Executive
Mrs C Carruthers – Assistant Director Property & ICT
Mr B Carter – Overview & Scrutiny Manager
Mr R Ellis – Director of Customer and Shared Services
Mr A King – Head of Corporate Finance
Mr L Manning – Democratic Services Officer

CCS/10/1 **Minutes - Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

RESOLVED

that the Minutes of the meeting of the Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 1 March 2010 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

CCS/10/2 **Minutes - Business Transformation Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

RESOLVED

that the Minutes of the meeting of the Business Transformation Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 22 March 2010 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

CCS/10/3 **Members' Interests**

(a) **Personal Interests:-**

None notified.

(b) **Personal and Prejudicial Interests:-**

None notified.

(c) **Any political whip in relation to any agenda item:-**

None notified.

CCS/10/4 **Chairman's Announcements and Communications**

The Chairman thanked the members of the Corporate Resources and Business Transformation Overview and Scrutiny Committees for the work they had undertaken during the first year of the new Council. He also thanked Councillor Clarke, as his Vice Chairman on the Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee, and Councillors Gibson and Johnstone, as the Chairman and Vice-Chairman respectively of the Business Transformation Overview and Scrutiny Committee for their assistance.

The Chairman advised the Committee that the running order of business had changed and that agenda item 11 (Treasury Management Strategy Update) would now be considered after agenda item 13 (ICT Review: Verbal Update).

CCS/10/5 **Petitions**

No petitions were received from members of the public in accordance with the Public Participation Procedure as set out in Annex 2 of Part A4 of the Constitution.

CCS/10/6 **Questions, Statements or Deputations**

No questions, statements or deputations from members of the public were received in accordance with the Public Participation Procedure as set out in Annex 1 of Part A4 of the Constitution.

CCS/10/7 **Call-In**

No matters were referred to the Committee for a decision in relation to the call-in of a decision.

CCS/10/8 **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.

CCS/10/9 **Sustainable Community Strategy**

The Committee considered a report by the Chief Executive which set out the statutory requirement and process adopted by the Council to develop a Sustainable Community Strategy for Central Bedfordshire. Members also had before them a copy of the draft Strategy document which had been circulated as an appendix to the report.

The Chief Executive introduced the report and accompanying draft Strategy and explained that the latter set out a proposed shared long term vision for the area. He emphasised that the eight key priorities which had been identified required collective action to deliver them, which reinforced why the draft Strategy had been developed under the auspices of the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP).

The Chief Executive then drew Members' attention to the key priorities which had been identified for inclusion within the Strategy and which covered issues such as maximising employment opportunities, supporting and caring for an ageing population and educating, protecting and providing opportunities for children and young people.

The meeting noted that under the LSP were various thematic partnerships, such as the Children's Trust, which would be responsible for leading work on specific priorities and that the Council was a member of each of the partnerships. In addition many of the Council's individual service related strategies, which had informed production of the draft Sustainable Community Strategy, had been considered already by the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committees. In response to a question about the level of detail that it was appropriate for the Strategy to go into about how specific objectives would be delivered the Chief Executive stressed the importance of ensuring aspirations were clear whilst allowing flexibility over the means by which they were attained.

A Member asked about the consultation that had taken place over the preparation of the draft document. In response the Head of Partnerships and Community Engagement reported on the various organisations and other bodies which had been consulted as well as the two residents' surveys and a workshop which had occurred. He also advised that consultation on individual aspects of the Strategy had taken place.

In response to a query about the availability of financial incentives to companies to start up or relocate to Central Bedfordshire the Chief Executive explained that the Council did not offer comparable incentives to other parts of the country. He explained that the Council would struggle to compete against areas with access to Government or European funding specifically for this purpose. Furthermore, some companies would take advantage of such incentives and simply move on when they could. However, there was scope to do more to attract and retain businesses and the role of the Council as a local planning authority was important in this context.

With regard to encouraging business at a local level the Chief Executive acknowledged the important role played by smaller businesses and referred to the insights into what could be done following the work undertaken in Dunstable on this issue.

On the role of Local Delivery Vehicles (LDV's) in business development the Chief Executive stressed that although these bodies were currently under review, all the time they existed, it was important to maximise their potential.

Following discussion the Chairman stressed that the Committee would wish to monitor the progress made with the implementation of the Strategy. He also asked if the individual priorities could be aligned to the relevant committee/Directorate and an indication given where these had already been scrutinised by an Overview and Scrutiny Committee. To further improve monitoring it was also suggested that the person responsible for each priority be identified. In addition the Chairman requested that the principles regarding Total Place be given greater emphasis within the Strategy.

RESOLVED that the draft Sustainable Community Strategy be supported.

NOTED

- 1. that the draft Sustainable Community Strategy will be submitted to the Local Strategic Partnership for its final approval on 13 May 2010;**
- 2. that the draft Sustainable Community Strategy will be submitted to the Executive for its final approval on 8 June 2010;**
- 3. that draft Sustainable Community Strategy will be submitted to Council after 8 June 2010.**

CCS/10/10 **Budget Setting Process Task Force: Verbal Update**

The Chairman of the Committee circulated a presentation he had prepared setting out the initial findings of the Budget Strategy Task Force.

The Chairman thanked the members of the Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Overview and Scrutiny Officer for their contribution to the work of the Task Force. He then introduced his presentation working through each of the following sections:

- background
- work programme
- issues
- findings
- recommendations

With regard to the recommendations the Chairman referred specifically to the need for the Council to have clear, focused objectives with a proper Medium

Term Financial Plan, and a budget pack circulated by the end of May, with Directorate submissions received by mid July in order to allow sufficient time for adequate Portfolio Holder, Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Member challenge. The Director of Customer and Shared Services confirmed that he was already seeking to achieve this timetable.

The meeting noted that capital expenditure was still to be examined. The Chairman explained that, unfortunately, there had not been time to examine this matter but this would form the next task and he stressed the need to better integrate revenue and capital.

Following further comment and discussion by Members the Director of Customer and Shared Services welcomed the work of the Task Force and stated that the conclusions of the officer review were similar. He added that a report to be submitted to the Corporate Management Team (CMT) on 28 April included all the issues raised and he would also relay the Committee's discussions to that meeting.

The meeting was aware that the final report of the Budget Setting Process Task Force was scheduled to appear on the agenda for the Committee's next meeting on 17 May 2010 and that this would set out full recommendations for consideration.

NOTED the report.

CCS/10/11 **ICT Review: Verbal Update**

The Portfolio Holder for Customers, Systems and Assets provided a verbal update on the current ICT review being undertaken on behalf of the Council by Deloitte. He advised Members that the review would examine the reasons for the recent major ICT failure and the response to it. The Portfolio Holder stated that a report arising from the review was due to be issued by Deloitte within the next few weeks and that, after he and relevant officers had had the opportunity to examine it, he would report further to the Committee's next meeting on 17 May if the timescale allowed this or to the 21 June meeting if it did not.

It was noted that should the Deloitte report contain major implications for the Council, such as proposals for an improvement in ICT resilience, then it would need to be submitted to the Executive.

With regard to ICT provision for Members the Portfolio Holder commented that there was widespread dissatisfaction with the equipment provided by the Council. As a result a questionnaire was to be issued that day to all Members seeking their views on what action they felt should be taken. In response Members, whilst praising the support received from staff, generally criticised the quality and type of hardware which they had received and referred to the difficulties which they had experienced as a result. Following discussion the Assistant Director Property and Asset Management undertook to respond by email to Members' queries regarding the reduction in the number of software applications used by the Council, the problem of power outages and the recent non availability of the planning website.

Following comment on the need for additional background information and clarification on aspects of the Council's ICT service the Portfolio Holder stated that his forthcoming report to the Committee would set out proposals on the way forward.

NOTED the verbal report.

CCS/10/12 **Treasury Management Strategy Update**

The Committee considered a report of the Portfolio Holder for People, Finance and Governance which provided an update on treasury management activity for the financial year 2009/10. The Head of Corporate Finance introduced the report which referred to the following issues of note:

- borrowing
- investments
- cashflow

The meeting was reminded that the Treasury Management Annual Report 2009/10 was attached as an appendix to the report. The appendix summarised details of borrowing and investment transactions that took place in 2009/10 and confirmed compliance with the Prudential Indicators set out in the Treasury Management Strategy Statement for 2009/10. The Head of Corporate Finance highlighted that the restructuring of debt undertaken in the 2009/10 financial year would bring an estimated revenue saving of £0.2m in the last financial year and estimated savings of £1m per annum in future financial years.

The Committee raised a query regarding whether it was possible to use overdraft facilities or other internal borrowing arrangements to bridge any short-term funding gaps and the premium paid. The Head of Corporate Finance undertook to investigate and reply to Members.

The Committee requested that the Head of Corporate Finance provide additional information on the profile of the authority's long term debt. This should include analysis of debt/investment maturities and interest rates and also cashflows. The Chairman undertook to provide a suggested template for the additional information.

NOTED the report.

CCS/10/13 **Work Programme 2010-2011 & Executive Forward Plan**

The Committee considered its current work programme and the latest Executive Forward Plan.

RESOLVED that the reports scheduled to be considered at the Committee's forthcoming meetings be amended as follows:

1. **that the report on proposals for Property Services be deferred to a later meeting (possibly 21 June);**

- 2. that a presentation on the Procurement and Commissioning Strategy be made to a future meeting (possibly 21 June);**
- 3. that the report on the review of the budget timetable 2010/11 scheduled for consideration on 21 June 2010 be brought forward to 17 May and considered in conjunction with the report on Budget Setting Process Task Force – Review Outcomes;**
- 4. that the Chairman and Vice-Chairman discuss the Committee’s future work programme with Portfolio Holders and Directors and submit a proposal to the next meeting.**

NOTED that the report on the Community Engagement Strategy and Delivery Plan scheduled to be considered by the Executive on 4 May 2010 had been delayed.

(Note: The meeting commenced at 10.00 a.m. and concluded at 12.07 p.m.)