

CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE COUNCIL

At a meeting of the **CUSTOMER AND CENTRAL SERVICES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE** held at Room 14, Priory House, Monks Walk, Shefford on Monday, 11 October 2010

PRESENT

Cllr J G Jamieson (Chairman)

Cllrs J A E Clarke
P A Duckett

Cllrs M Gibson
D Jones

Apologies for Absence: Cllrs A Fahn
D J Hopkin
R W Johnstone
Ms J Nunn

Substitutes: Cllrs L Birt (In place of D J Hopkin)
P Snelling (In place of Ms J Nunn)
J N Young (In place of R W Johnstone)

Members in Attendance: Cllrs D Bowater
M R Jones
B J Spurr
R C Stay

Officers in Attendance: Mr M Bowmer – Assistant Director Finance
Miss S Branagan – Customer Relations Manager
Mr I Brown – Interim Assistant Director Assets
Mr B Carter – Overview & Scrutiny Manager
Mr R Ellis – Director of Customer and Shared Services
Mr C Jones – Assistant Director Customer and Assets
Mr L Manning – Democratic Services Officer
Mr I Melville – Head of Service Development

CCS/10/65 **Minutes**

RESOLVED

that the Minutes of the meeting of the Customer and Central Services Committee held on 6 September 2010 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

CCS/10/66 **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/10/67 **Chairman's Announcements and Communications**

The Chairman advised the meeting that the running order of the agenda had changed and Item 11 (Budget Process Task Force: Recommendations Regarding the Management of Capital Projects) would now be considered prior to Item 10 (Q1 Performance Report).

CCS/10/68 **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/10/69 **Questions, Statements or Deputations**

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

CCS/10/70 **Call-In**

No decisions of the Executive had been called-in to be reviewed in accordance with the Call-In Procedure as set out in Part D2 of the Constitution.

CCS/10/71 **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/10/72 **Portfolio Holders' Updates**

The Committee received verbal updates from the Portfolio Holders for Finance, Governance and People and Policy and Performance.

The Portfolio Holder for Finance, Governance and People reported that Mr McFarlane, the Acting Assistant Director People, was leaving the authority at the end of October to take up the post of Head of Human Resources Strategy at the London Borough of Tower Hamlets. On behalf of the meeting the Portfolio Holder thanked Mr McFarlane for the contribution he had made towards the creation of Central Bedfordshire and expressed his best wishes to him for the future. The Portfolio Holder added that, as HR was currently under consultation prior to reorganisation, it had been decided to recruit an interim replacement.

The Portfolio Holder next reported on the Customer and Shared Services Recovery Programme. He advised the meeting of the various issues faced by the Directorate including a projected overspend during the current financial year and the demands on HR and Finance. In response a Recovery Programme had been formulated together with an Officer Recovery Board. To ensure effective Member governance of the Recovery Programme, a Cabinet Sub-Committee had been appointed and this would update the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the progress made. It was noted that the Programme had been modelled on the very successful Adult Social Care Recovery Programme.

The Portfolio Holder reported that the £6m overspend predicted under the Quarter 1 budget monitoring had been considerably reduced and that the Quarter 2 report would be brought to the Committee in December.

The Portfolio Holder referred to the final accounts and stated that it had been necessary to submit further working papers for clarification purposes.

The Portfolio Holder reported that reliable information on employee numbers would be submitted under the Quarter 2 budget monitoring report. With regard to this point the Chairman reminded the Portfolio Holder that he had raised a query at the previous meeting (minute 10/53 refers) regarding the increase in employees within the former Corporate Resources Directorate within Quarter 4. In response the Portfolio Holder explained that employee numbers had been in a state of flux during this period.

The Chairman queried the absence of any information on Invest to Save projects. The Assistant Director Finance undertook to circulate a note, which would include information from the previous financial year, to all members of the Committee following the meeting.

The Chairman referred to the decision taken at the last meeting (minute 10/62 refers) for a verbal update to be submitted regarding estimated benefit fraud levels within Central Bedfordshire and related matters. The Director of Customer and Shared Services provided the information requested.

A Member queried the decision to only appoint an interim Assistant Director People. In response the Director of Customer and Shared Services explained the need for the interim officer to have particular skillsets in order to carry out the HR function during the forthcoming 9-12 months Recovery Programme.

In response to a Member's comments regarding the demise of the Audit Commission the Portfolio Holder for Policy and Performance reported that many of its functions would transfer to the National Audit Office whilst others would simply cease.

The Portfolio Holder reported on developments with regard to Total Place which sought the better use of funds through service provision based on geographical location rather than individual service provider. He added that progress had been made at the local Chief Executives' Forum where a number of new workstreams had been identified for collaboration across public services in Bedfordshire. The Portfolio Holder also stated that a triage system for benefits would be developed in conjunction with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and Job Centre Plus (JCP) at Leighton Buzzard and Dunstable as a direct outcome of the Total Place pilot work on Access to Benefits.

The Portfolio Holder reported that Local Area Agreements (LAA's) were likely to be scrapped at the end of 2010/11 as they did not comply with the requirements of localism. He added that the Government was currently consulting on what should replace Comprehensive Area Assessments (CAA's).

The Portfolio Holder reported that The "Show Racism the Red Card" event held at Dunstable Community Fire Station in September had been very successful.

The Portfolio Holder reported on developments relating to community engagement and the role of ward Members and the Big Society.

The Portfolio Holder reported that the next edition of News Central would be issued on 15 November. He went on to explain that web content changes were underway in order to make it more user friendly.

Arising from consideration of the Council support given to events such as "Show Racism the Red Card" discussion took place on the cost to the Council in terms of both funding and officer time. The Chairman stated that he would wish to see the detail on what funding and officer time was spent on. Following further discussion the Portfolio Holder undertook to submit an update on Total Place after the budget process in either March or April 2011.

Following the discussion at the last meeting regarding the provision of Wi-Fi (minute 10/59 refers) the Assistant Director Customer and Systems undertook to email an update on Wi-Fi availability to all Members.

CCS/10/73 **Budget Task Force: Recommendations Regarding the Management of Capital Projects**

The Committee considered a report by the Budget Task Force which sought the Committee's approval of the recommendations arising from the Task Force's recent review of the Council's management of capital projects. Members noted that the recommendations adopted by the Committee would be considered by the Portfolio Holder for Finance, Governance and People who would respond to the Committee at its next meeting in November. Members noted that, due to time constraints and workload pressures, the Portfolio Holder had been unable to respond earlier to the Task Force's recommendations.

The Chairman introduced the report and briefly outlined the range of issues examined by the Task Force. He drew Members' attention in particular to the recommended creation of a separate class of Capital Projects known as Invest to Save projects which would not be subject to the same restrictions as standard Capital projects. They would be treated separately from the main Capital Budgeting process and defined as projects with the primary objective of reducing operating costs or realising income/capital for the Council to a level that the Section 151 Officer was willing to sign off that the project would enhance the financial position of the Council, with a suitable margin.

Discussion followed during which the Assistant Director Finance responded to the Task Force recommendations. With regard to Invest to Save projects he advised Members that the Government worked on a five year payback period on such projects but warned that that this could change under the forthcoming spending review. The Assistant Director suggested caution before the outcome was known as there could be a major reduction in Capital funds. However, the Chairman commented that a reduction in funding did not prevent good management.

The Committee was aware of the Task Force's request that it (the Committee) should have sight of a comprehensive list of Council owned assets and review S106 funding to assess the opportunity to increase this source of funding for the Council's Capital programme.

In connection with the former a Member commented that the need to borrow could be avoided through asset disposal, hence the need to have knowledge of all Council assets. He acknowledged that it was not the optimum time for disposal but this was outweighed by the need to secure funds and therefore reduce the requirement for, or eliminate, borrowing. He also sought confirmation that work on asset disposal was proceeding. In response the Interim Assistant Director Assets stated that a list of Council assets would be presented to the Committee at its November meeting when a Property Portfolio Position Statement would be submitted. He also confirmed that asset disposal was proceeding and £1.5m had been raised during the current financial year through sales. He added that the target sales figure for 2011/12 was £5m.

Turning to S106 funding a Member expressed concern that the Council was failing to make the best use of this resource. The meeting was advised by the Assistant Director Finance that a register of all S106 funding was being drawn

up and it was felt that the register should be circulated to all members for information and considered by the Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee as the relevant body.

RESOLVED

- 1 that the recommendations regarding the management of capital projects, as set out in Appendix A of the report of the Budget Task Force, be endorsed;**
- 2 that the Committee receive the joint response of the Portfolio Holders for Finance, Governance and People and Customers, Systems and Assets to the Task Force recommendations at the Committee's next meeting on 15 November 2010;**
- 3 that the Chairman of the Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee be requested to receive and consider the register of S106 funding.**

CCS/10/74 Quarter 1 Performance Report

The Committee considered a report by the Portfolio Holder for Policy and Performance which highlighted the Quarter 1 performance for the Customer and Shared Services Directorate and Corporate Health Indicators for the Council. Members were aware that additional papers, in the form of a full set of the Council's indicators taken from a report originally submitted to the Executive on 28 September 2010, had also been circulated.

The Portfolio Holder advised the meeting that revised Key Performance Indicators (KPI's) had been drawn up and he was due to meet with the Leader of the Council to seek approval in principle for their adoption. He added that it was intended that between 6-10 KPI's would be adopted for use by each Directorate.

Discussion took place in particular regarding a drop in staff performance relating to National Indicator 181 (time taken to process Housing Benefit, Council Tax, new claims and change events). The Portfolio Holder reminded Members of the disruption to service provision caused by the formation of the new authority. The Assistant Director Finance acknowledged that a large backlog had existed but explained that there had been a significant reduction over the previous three weeks. Following further comment he stressed that benefit applications would be prioritised where cases of hardship were identified. Further discussion followed with regard to the level of housing benefit awarded, legacy debt levels and the collection of Council Tax arrears.

The Chairman commented on the need to examine the KPI's and determine the format of those which the overview and scrutiny committees would wish to consider.

RESOLVED

that a Task Force composed of the Chairmen of the Council's overview and scrutiny committees and representative Portfolio Holders be created to examine the Key Performance Indicators and determine the format of those that should be examined by these committees.

CCS/10/75 2010/11 Efficiencies Update

The Committee considered a joint report by the Portfolio Holders for Policy and Performance and Finance, Governance and People which provided a brief update on the progress made against the Council's 2010/11 efficiencies target of £12.076m. The meeting noted that as at 31 August £10.9m of efficiencies were forecast to be achieved leaving a potential gap of £1.175m. Compensatory savings were being sought to offset the potential gap and achieve the target figure.

To further assist Members the Portfolio Holder for Policy and Performance circulated an efficiencies update briefing note which provided additional background information regarding the delivery of the 2010/11 efficiencies and developing efficiency proposals for 2011/12 onwards.

Following comments by the Chairman the Assistant Director Finance confirmed that the Quarter 2 Budget Monitoring report to be considered by the Committee in December would contain detailed information relating to Red/Amber/Green (RAG) savings and guidance as to whether any savings not achieved in the current financial year could be achieved in 2011/12.

The Portfolio Holder for Finance, Governance and People referred to the importance of securing compensatory savings and reminded the meeting that those agreed by the Executive were reported within the Delegated Decisions Digest which was a public document.

NOTED

the progress to date against the 2010/11 savings target.

RESOLVED

that the Committee receives quarterly updates on the savings target as part of the Budget Monitoring report.

CCS/10/76 Shared Services

The Committee considered a report by the Portfolio Holder for Finance, Governance and People which outlined work which had been undertaken in relation to the provision of the former Bedfordshire County Council services on a shared basis between Central Bedfordshire Council and Bedford Borough

Council. The Portfolio Holder also updated Members on recent developments regarding the delivery of shared services by the Borough Council.

The Chairman reminded the meeting that a Task Force already existed to consider shared service provision and he suggested that it could be instructed to examine the governance arrangements with the Borough Council and whether they were effective. He also suggested that the Task Force could consider which of the service level agreements (SLA's) should be temporary and which longer term and how Central Bedfordshire could deal with the sudden cessation of an SLA.

The Director of Customer and Shared Services reminded the meeting that the proposed Task Force workload spanned the remit of the other overview and scrutiny committees and that further work to examine the robustness of the shared services was being undertaken separately by this Council's Internal Audit and that of the Borough Council. The Director commented that the opportunity therefore existed for joint working and, possibly, joint scrutiny on this topic.

The meeting recognised that shared service arrangements existed with other bodies and that future arrangements needed to be considered but it was felt that these issues should be dealt with as later, separate, phases.

RESOLVED

that the Shared Services Task Force reconvene to consider the governance arrangements of the Council's shared services with Bedford Borough Council, such consideration to include work already proposed by this Council's Internal Audit and possible joint scrutiny of the subject with Bedford Borough Council.

(Note: The Committee adjourned at 11.50 a.m. for a short break and reconvened at 11.58 a.m.)

CCS/10/77 Customer Relations Quarterly Monitoring

The Committee received a presentation by the Customer Relations Manager setting out the Council's three complaints procedures (general, Children's Services and Adult Social Care), the complaints about the Council received for the periods Quarter 4 (2009/10) and Quarter 1 (2010/11), service improvements implemented and future action. A copy of the presentation is attached at Appendix A to these minutes.

In response to a Member's query regarding how officers dealt with those persons who regularly complained without good reason the Customer Relations Manager stated that a policy was in place and was available on the intranet for examination. She added that the Customer Relations team could offer assistance if requested.

Discussion followed on what constituted a complaint (whether it arose as a result of dissatisfaction with a decision or action which had been arrived at in a proper manner or whether it came about as the result of the Council failing to do something it should have done) and whether complaints were registered and processed in a transparent manner.

The meeting noted that the Council was currently unable to provide a list of complaints by Directorate as it lacked a system to do so. Members gave their support for an integrated case management system. The Customer Relations Manager stated that systems were currently under consideration.

NOTED

CCS/10/78 **Work Programme 2010-2011 & Executive Forward Plan**

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

RESOLVED

That the Committee's Work Programme be amended as follows:

15 November 2010:	add ICT Strategy
17 January 2011:	add Asset Strategy

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