

CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE COUNCIL

At a meeting of the **CUSTOMER AND CENTRAL SERVICES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE** held at Room 15, Priory House, Monks Walk, Shefford on Monday, 13 December 2010

PRESENT

Cllr D J Hopkin (Vice-Chairman in the Chair)

Cllrs A Fahn
M Gibson
R W Johnstone

Cllrs D Jones
Ms J Nunn

Apologies for Absence: Cllrs J A E Clarke
P A Duckett
J G Jamieson (Chairman)

Substitutes: Cllrs L Birt (In place of P A Duckett)
A D Brown (In place of J A E Clarke)
J N Young (In place of J G Jamieson)

Members in Attendance: Cllrs P N Aldis
D Bowater
M R Jones
S F Male

Officers in Attendance:	Mr P Ball	– Finance Manager
	Mr M Bowmer	– Assistant Director Financial Services/Chief Finance Officer
	Mr B Carter	– Overview and Scrutiny Manager
	Ms D Clark	– Interim Assistant Director People
	Mr R Ellis	– Director of Customer and Shared Services
	Mr R Gregan	– Head of Procurement and Contract Management
	Mr C Jones	– Assistant Director Customer and Systems
	Mr I Porter	– Assistant Director Strategy and Performance
	Mrs G Stanton	– Assistant Director Communications

CCS/10/95 **Minutes**

RESOLVED

that the Minutes of the meeting of the Customer and Central Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 15 November 2010 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

CCS/10/96 Members' Interests

(a) Personal Interests:-

There were no declarations made.

(b) Personal and Prejudicial Interests:-

There were no declarations made.

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

There were no declarations made.

CCS/10/97 Chairman's Announcements and Communications

The Chairman referred to a briefing paper circulated by email on Friday, 10 December 2010 regarding Business Support/Administration within the Council, which would be considered as part of the Portfolio Holders' Updates at CCS/10/102.

CCS/10/98 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/10/99 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/10/100 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/10/101 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/10/102 **Portfolio Holders' Updates**

The Committee received verbal updates from the Portfolio Holders for Customers, Systems & Assets and Finance, Governance & People, and also considered a briefing paper from the Director of Customer & Shared Services relating to Business Support / Administration within the Council.

The Director explained that the briefing paper provided summary details of Full Time Equivalent (FTE) levels and potential efficiencies that could be gained from any further rationalisation of business support activity/administration across Central Bedfordshire Council (over and above efficiencies already being implemented in 2010/11 and/or proposed for 2011/12).

In considering the paper, Members commented on the need to strike the right balance between reducing administrative posts and ensuring senior staff were undertaking tasks commensurate with their grade. Members also commented on the need to ensure a reduction in the use of agency staff where appropriate.

The Director confirmed that a programme was in place to oversee further work in this area, which would take account of the comments made by Members today.

The Portfolio Holder for Customers, Systems & Assets provided the Committee with an update on the ICT stability programme, which was progressing as planned and drew Members' attention to the Council's website, a new version of which would be launched at the end of April 2011. With regard to the current website, the Portfolio Holder specifically informed Members about the schools pages, which provided parents with details of school closures as a result of adverse weather (snow), etc.

In response to a question, the Portfolio Holder confirmed that no out of hours helpdesk currently existed for ICT queries.

In considering the issue of school closures as a result of adverse weather, a Member commented that it would be useful in such times if all schools (i.e. not just those that have closed) could post details of their status to these web pages, thereby helping to avoid any confusion over which schools were still open for business. The Portfolio agreed to raise this issue with the Director of Children's Services.

The Portfolio Holder for Finance, Governance & People informed the Committee that publication of the local government finance settlement was imminent (expected today). Once published, the information would help enable the Council to finalise its revenue budget for 2011/12.

The Portfolio Holder also took the opportunity to provide the Committee with an overview of the corporate budget monitoring position for the second quarter ending 30 September 2010.

CCS/10/103 **Quarter 2 Performance Monitoring**

The Committee considered the report of the Portfolio Holders for Customers, Systems & Assets, Finance, Governance & People and Policy & Performance, which provided Members with the opportunity to review quarter 2 performance against the Corporate Health Indicators and Key Performance Indicators for the Customer & Shared Services Directorate and the Office of the Chief Executive.

The Committee discussed sickness absence levels and sought further information from the Portfolio Holder for Finance, Governance & People regarding the balance between long term and short term sickness. Members also questioned the appropriateness of the target for sickness absence and expressed concern about the total number of days (and cost) lost as a result.

The Director of Customer & Shared Services confirmed that managing sickness absence effectively was a high priority and acknowledged the additional pressure sickness absence placed on the workforce generally.

The Committee also discussed the level of debt outstanding over 91 days, which had increased considerably since the last quarter. The Assistant Director Financial Services explained that much of this debt was attributable to legacy authorities and Bedford Borough Council. Management was aware of the issue and were taking steps to address it.

RECOMMENDED

- 1 that extra vigilance be taken to ensure sickness absence is managed effectively; and**
- 2 that future performance monitoring reports detail both long and short term sickness levels.**

CCS/10/104 **Budget Management Report Quarter ended 30 September 2010 for Office of the Chief Executive**

The Committee considered the report of the Portfolio Holder for Finance, Governance & People, which provided Members with the opportunity to review the financial position and latest forecast of the Office of the Chief Executive for the period to 30 September 2010 (quarter 2).

In considering the report, a Member commented on the cost of producing News Central and asked whether it was worth publishing.

The Assistant Director Communications confirmed that the magazine was now self financing, by way of advertising revenue and would continue to be published 6 times per year. The magazine however was part of the wider communications and web strategies and was but one channel, of a number, the Council employed to keep its residents informed of council news and activities.

NOTED

the report.

CCS/10/105 **Budget Management Report Quarter ended 30 September 2010 for Customer and Shared Services**

The Committee considered the report of the Portfolio Holder for Finance, Governance & People, which provided Members with the opportunity to review the financial position and latest forecast of the Customer & Shared Services Directorate for the period to 30 September 2010 (quarter 2).

In considering the report, Members drew attention to the high cost of agency staff when compared against savings made as a result of vacancies, particularly in Revenues Management.

The Assistant Director Financial Services confirmed that this was a short term issue, which had arisen as a result of the need to employ agency staff whilst the revenues management service was restructured and before new roles could be filled on a permanent basis.

The Portfolio Holder for Customers, Systems & Assets brought the Committee's attention to additional budget pressures within Assets and Customer Services, which had come to light since publication of the report.

NOTED

the report.

CCS/10/106 **Budget Strategy Update**

The Committee considered the report of the Portfolio Holder for Finance, Governance & People, which had been submitted to the Executive at its meeting of 7 December 2010 and which provided Members with the opportunity to review the further savings proposals contained within the updated corporate budget strategy.

The Committee made the following specific comments and recommendations regarding the Customer & Shared Services Directorate and the Office of the Chief Executive:

- a) C&SS16 Reduce Number of Print Rooms to One

Members were provided with further context regarding this proposal.

RECOMMENDED to the Executive

that the proposal to amalgamate the 2 print rooms and seek competitive bids to provide the service be endorsed.

b) C&SS19 Transfer of Provision of Public Conveniences

Members debated this proposal at length and expressed concerns over the apparent high cost of cleaning each facility, the existing contract implications and the lack of adequate and timely consultation with relevant town councils with regard to transfer. Members also expressed concern over the possibility of any closures should transfer not be managed effectively.

RECOMMENDED to the Executive

that, whilst the Committee supports the transfer of these facilities in principle, due to the concerns expressed above, it calls upon the Executive to investigate full and meaningful consultation with relevant town councils, ensuring any transfer occurring as a consequence, does so within a mutually agreed timeframe.

(Cllr D Jones requested that the minutes reflect his abstention from the vote regarding this recommendation)

c) C&SS20 Capital Financing Charges

Members were provided with further context regarding this proposal.

RECOMMENDED to the Executive

that the proposal be endorsed.

d) OCE9 Review Provision of Performance Management

e) OCE10 Internal Communications

f) OCE11 Customer Relations/FoI

g) OCE12 Programme Management – Analysts

h) OCE13 Risk Management

RECOMMENDED to the Executive

that the proposals be endorsed.

The Committee made the following specific comments and recommendations regarding cross cutting proposals:-

i) CC6a Passenger Transport Review Increased Target

The Chairman of the Sustainable Communities Overview & Scrutiny Committee confirmed that his Committee agreed with the approach

proposed and also confirmed that the potential existed to explore further savings opportunities regarding this particular review.

RECOMMENDED to the Executive

that the proposal be endorsed and that the Executive seek to explore the potential to realise further savings from this review.

j) CC35 Delay Harmonisation of Council Tax

Members were provided with further context regarding this issue and were informed that harmonisation of council tax was a condition of the Council's unitary bid but could be delayed until 2014.

RECOMMENDED to the Executive

that the proposal be endorsed.

(Cllr D Jones requested that the minutes reflect his abstention from the vote regarding this recommendation).

CCS/10/107 **Base Budget Build and Savings Proposals**

The Committee considered the report of the Portfolio Holders for Customers, Systems & Assets, Finance, Governance & People and Policy & Performance, which provided Members with the opportunity to review the base budgets for the Customer & Shared Services Directorate and the Office of the Chief Executive.

Members were informed that the base budget build had been a major piece of work, which had been undertaken as part of the budget setting process to provide additional assurance on the 2011/12 budget.

Members were further informed of the approach taken to build the base budgets for the Customer & Shared Services Directorate and the Office of the Chief Executive and this was put into context with regard to the council wide position. Whilst the Committee was pleased to see implementation of its previous recommendation to introduce a base budget build, it did however express concern about the way in which next year's base budgets had been built, using as they did current year's budgeted spend rather than current year's actual spend.

RECOMMENDED to the Executive

that the Executive considers implementing the practise of building base budgets using current year to date spend rather than current budgeted spend.

CCS/10/108 Treasury Management Strategy

The Committee considered the report of the Portfolio Holder for Finance, Governance & People, which provided Members with the opportunity to review the changes being proposed to the Council's Treasury Management Strategy.

Members were informed that Central Bedfordshire agrees its Treasury Management Policy and Treasury Management Strategy annually. Additionally, and in response to the greater risk and uncertainty in investment markets CIPFA had revised both the Treasury Management Code of Practice and the Prudential Code for Capital Finance in Local Authorities in the autumn of 2009. As a result, there continues to be a greater focus on risk in the two codes and this had been recognised in the Council's strategy.

Members were further informed that due to the continued lack of confidence in the markets the Strategy sought to diversify the investment portfolio although there had also been some recapitalisation of the UK banking institutions and this would enable longer term lending, up to two years, to take place if appropriate.

RECOMMENDED to the Executive

that the Executive continues to minimise investments commensurate with risk in order to maximise the savings that would be realised by such action.

CCS/10/109 Work Programme 2010-2011 & Executive Forward Plan

The Committee considered its current work programme and latest Executive Forward Plan and noted that an additional meeting would be held at 2.00 p.m. on 24 January 2011 to consider non-budget items originally scheduled for 17 January 2011.

Members also noted that in addition to those items listed for consideration on 24 January 2011, a further item had been added relating to consideration of the Short Term Corporate Asset Management Plan.

NOTED

the report.

(Note: The meeting commenced at 10.00 a.m. and concluded at 1.00 p.m.)

Chairman.....

Date.....