

## CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE COUNCIL

At a meeting of the **CUSTOMER AND CENTRAL SERVICES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE** held in Room 15, Priory House, Monks Walk, Shefford on Monday, 19 December 2011.

### PRESENT

Cllr P A Duckett (Chairman)  
Cllr Miss A Sparrow (Vice-Chairman)

Cllrs L Birt  
J A E Clarke  
Mrs R J Drinkwater

Cllrs Dr R Egan  
R W Johnstone  
Mrs M Mustoe

Apologies for Absence: Cllrs J Murray

Substitutes: Cllrs

Members in Attendance: Cllrs P N Aldis  
D Jones  
M R Jones

Deputy Leader and  
Executive Member for  
Corporate Resources

Officers in Attendance: Mr B Carter – Corporate Policy & Scrutiny  
Manager  
Ms D Clarke – Interim Assistant Chief Executive  
(People & Organisation)  
Mr C Warboys – Chief Finance Officer & Section  
151 Officer

Others in Attendance

CCS/11/70 **Minutes**

### RESOLVED

**that the Minutes of the meeting of the Customer and Central Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 28 November 2011 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.**

CCS/11/71 **Members' Interests**

(a) **Personal Interests:-**

None.

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

Cllr R Egan.

**CCS/11/72 Chairman's Announcements and Communications**

The Chairman had no announcements.

**CCS/11/73 Petitions**

No petitions were received from members of the public in accordance with the Public Participation Procedure as set out in Part D2 of the Constitution.

**CCS/11/74 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/11/75 Call-In**

The Panel was advised that no decisions of the Executive had been referred to the Panel under the Call-in Procedures set out in Appendix "A" to Rule No. S18 of the Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rules.

**CCS/11/76 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/11/77 Executive Member Update**

The Deputy Leader and Executive Member for Corporate Resources brought to the Committee's attention the possible need to review delivery of the "Let's Talk Together" meetings, which currently give members of the public and local groups the opportunity to meet and talk with Councillors and representatives from key organisations, and is a communication tool used by Central Bedfordshire Together (the local strategic partnership) to engage with the community.

Members of the Committee were unanimous in their opinion that such a review was required, expressing a number of concerns about the current framework, particularly in relation to a lack of public attendance and the geographical areas covered by such meetings. The Committee therefore agreed to establish a Member Task Force to review the issue, with a view to reporting back findings to a future Committee meeting, and Councillors Birt, Duckett, Johnstone, Mustoe and Sparrow volunteered to take part.

**RECOMMENDATION**

**That a Member Task Force be established to review delivery of "Let's Talk Together" meetings, which would report back findings to a future Committee meeting.**

CCS/11/78 **Draft Budget 2012/13, Medium Term Financial Plan 2012 - 2016 and Capital Programme 2012/13 to 2015/16**

The Deputy Leader and Executive Member for Corporate Resources presented the Council's Draft Budget 2012/13 report, which also contained details of the Medium Term Financial Plan 2012 to 2016 and Capital Programme 2012/13 to 2015/16. In doing so, he drew the Committee's attention in particular to the Council's formula grant, budget assumptions, pressures and efficiencies, and to those comments received from the other Overview & Scrutiny Committees, which had considered the same report at their meetings in the previous week.

Members of the Committee discussed the contents of the report in detail and raised a number of queries regarding the following issues, which were addressed by the Executive Member and officers in attendance:

- The Channel Shift programme and the savings that would accrue as a result. The Executive Member confirmed that the programme was currently at design stage and service specific savings could not yet be identified. It was anticipated however that circa £1.5M would be saved in total over the course of the 3 year programme;
- Given the harsh economic environment, the soundness of the Council's assumptions with regard to receipt of formula grant. The Chief Finance Officer confirmed that whilst he was confident that grant funding for 2012/13 would be as expected, later years could only be indicative at present;
- Given rising unemployment, the soundness of the Council's assumptions with regard to its ability to fund the increasing cost of housing and council tax benefits. The Chief Finance Officer confirmed that whilst it was difficult to predict future pressures, at current claimant levels, the Council's proposed budget was sufficient. In a related matter, Members also discussed the need for the Council to maintain its robust stance with regard to the investigation and prosecution of benefit fraud;
- Traded Services to Schools and the sufficiency of the Council's communication and support to schools (particularly lower schools) whilst the Council undertook its fundamental review into the provision of such services. In a related matter, the administration of the staff appeals process was raised;
- The New Homes Bonus and the need for the Council to establish a policy regarding use of this income stream, albeit acknowledging that it was not a ring fenced grant and continued receipt could not be guaranteed;
- The as yet unidentified additional savings targets within Corporate Services for 2012/13. The Executive Member confirmed that these additional savings targets would be identified in time for Executive consideration at its 14 February 2012 meeting;

- The ambitious nature of the Council's capital programme bearing in mind scheme slippage in previous years. The Executive Member acknowledged the issue and confirmed that an allowance for slippage of 10% of the net capital requirement in each programme year had been made.

At the end of the debate, the Committee agreed by majority vote (7 for, nil against, 1 abstention) to note the comments raised by the other Overview & Scrutiny Committees and confirm that in overall terms, the budget was sound and could be endorsed.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

**That the Draft Budget 2012/13, Medium Term Financial Plan 2012-16 and the Capital Programme 2012/13 to 2015/16 be endorsed as set out.**

CCS/11/79 **Fees and Charges 2012/13**

The Deputy Leader and Executive Member for Corporate Resources presented the Council's Fees & Charges 2012/13 report and whilst doing so, drew the Committee's attention specifically to those fees and charges pertaining to Corporate Services, detailed on Pages 53 to 57.

Members of the Committee noted the contents of the report and confirmed that in their opinion the fees and charges contained therein were fair and equitable.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

**That the proposed fees and charges relating to Corporate Services for the financial year 2012/13 be endorsed for consideration by the Executive at its meeting on 14 February 2012.**

CCS/11/80 **Revenue Budget Management Report Quarter ended 30 September 2011 for Corporate Resources**

The Deputy Leader & Executive Member for Corporate Resources introduced the Revenue Budget Monitoring Report for the second quarter of 2011/12, which covered those services contained within Corporate Services.

During presentation of the report, Members of the Committee asked a number of specific questions, all of which were answered by the Executive Member and officers in attendance. In particular Members questioned and received assurances on the Council's communication and support to schools whilst the Council undertook its fundamental review into the provision of such services in the future (an issue discussed previously at CCS/11/78 above).

**RECOMMENDATION:**

**That the report be noted.**

CCS/11/81 **Capital Budget Management Report Quarter ended 30 September 2011 for Corporate Resources**

The Deputy Leader & Executive Member for Corporate Resources introduced the Capital Budget Monitoring Report for the second quarter of 2011/12, which covered those schemes relating to Corporate Services.

During presentation of the report, Members of the Committee asked a number of specific questions, all of which were answered by the Executive Member and officers in attendance.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

**That the report be noted.**

CCS/11/82 **Work Programme 2011 - 2012 & Executive Forward Plan**

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

**RESOLVED**

**1. That the Committee's Work Programme be noted.**

(Note: The meeting commenced at 10.00 a.m. and concluded at 12.30 p.m.)

Chairman.....

Date.....