

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, 16 January 2012.

PRESENT

Cllr P A Duckett (Chairman)

Cllrs L Birt
J A E Clarke
Mrs R J Drinkwater
Dr R Egan

Cllrs R W Johnstone
J Murray
Mrs M Mustoe

Apologies for Absence: Cllrs Miss A Sparrow (Vice Chairman)

Substitutes: Cllrs Mrs C F Chapman MBE

Members in Attendance: Cllrs P N Aldis
M R Jones

Deputy Leader and
Executive Member for
Corporate Resources

Officers in Attendance: Mr I Brown – Interim Chief Assets Officer
Mr B Carter – Corporate Policy & Scrutiny
Manager
Ms D Clarke – Interim Assistant Chief Executive
(People & Organisation)
Ms V Oakes – Head of HR Business Partners &
Major Programmes
Mr C Warboys – Chief Finance Officer & Section
151 Officer

Others in
Attendance

CCS/11/83 **Minutes**

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the meeting of the Customer and Central Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 19 December 2011 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

CCS/11/84 **Members' Interests**

(a) **Personal Interests:-**

None.

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

None.

CCS/11/85 **Chairman's Announcements and Communications**

The Chairman had no announcements.

CCS/11/86 **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/11/87 **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/11/88 **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/11/89 **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/11/90 **Executive Member Update**

The Deputy Leader and Executive Member for Corporate Resources provided the Committee with an update on current activities pertaining to his portfolio, particularly concentrating on the current public consultation with regard to the 2012/13 Budget, which included amongst other initiatives, business breakfast meetings, a Town & Parish conference and the canvassing of residents in the streets.

CCS/11/91 **Corporate Asset Management Strategy**

The Deputy Leader and Executive Member for Corporate Resources presented the Council's draft Corporate Asset Management Strategy for the period 2012 to 2016, which set out the Council's approach to the effective management and development of its land and property assets over the next four years. In doing so, he also explained to the Committee that the approach adopted had been framed within the context of the Council's strategic objectives, vision and values, and Medium Term Financial Plan. The Interim Chief Assets Officer also referred the Committee to an additional document setting out roles and responsibilities, which had been circulated at the meeting.

Members of the Committee discussed the contents of the report in detail and raised a number of queries, which were addressed by the Executive Member and officers in attendance. The Committee also made a number of other comments and observations regarding the following issues:

- The need to improve delivery of the schools capital programme. In this respect the Interim Chief Assets Officer acknowledged that delivery of the programme in 2010/11 had been poor (circa 28%) but confirmed that delivery in 2011/12 had improved considerably and was currently 90%;
- Concerns over the high value attached to the Council's liability regarding its maintenance backlog, currently estimated at £140M. The Interim Chief Assets Officer confirmed that this figure had been derived following condition surveys of approximately 30% of the Council's property assets and as this percentage increased (via a 5 year rolling programme of surveys), the liability estimate would be refined further;
- With regard to the Council's maintenance backlog liability, the Committee requested further detail regarding the impact on schools, and the status and progress of conditions surveys at schools. The Interim Chief Assets Officer agreed to provide this further detail to all Members via email ;
- The need to ensure full and early consultation with ward Members when any Council asset was being considered for disposal;
- Concerns over the speed at which the Council intended to vacate Technology House and the adverse impact this would have on Priory House and Watling House in terms of the quality of the working environment for staff and the adequacy of car parking facilities for staff, Members and visitors alike;
- The challenge of improving financial returns on investment properties particularly in the current difficult economic climate;
- The need for the draft strategy to revisit its analysis of current gaps/greatest need with regard to property assets within Social Care, Health and Housing. It was Members' opinion that there was a scarcity of 2 bed properties in the area to support in particular the elderly and/or disabled, many of whom required an extra bedroom to accommodate carers.
- Concerns over the Council's ability to meet its commitment to reduce carbon emissions, given the fact that schools accounted for a significant proportion of these emissions and many had or were converting to Academies; and
- The need for the Council to be receptive to approaches from voluntary organisations and Town & Parish Councils to manage and/or own Community Assets.

At the end of the debate, the Committee agreed by majority vote (8 for, nil against, 1 abstention) to endorse the draft Corporate Asset Management

Strategy subject to Executive consideration of the comments and observations as set out above.

RECOMMENDATION:

That the draft Corporate Asset Management Strategy be endorsed subject to Executive consideration of the comments and observations of the Committee as set out in the bullet points above.

CCS/11/92 **Recovery Programme**

The Interim Assistant Chief Executive (People & Organisation) and the Chief Finance Officer delivered a presentation, which provided the Committee with an overview of progress made in delivering the previously approved Recovery Programme for Corporate Services. The presentation covered:-

- The Recovery Programme's inception and objectives;
- Programme highlights;
- Key milestones/activities in the following work streams; People, Finance, Revenues & Benefits, ICT, Assets, Procurement and SAP Optimisation;

The Interim Assistant Chief Executive (People & Organisation) concluded the presentation by confirming that Corporate Services was expected to come out of recovery by March 2012 albeit acknowledging the additional work still required, particularly within Procurement and SAP Optimisation.

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

- The decision to bring the Council's payroll service in-house;
- The revised Finance structure and operating model;
- The need for a robust procurement regime, which had the capacity to deliver significant financial savings. In this respect, it was noted that the Committee was due to consider a report covering procurement priorities at its next meeting; and
- The need to continue to improve the speed at which the Council processed housing and council tax benefit claims (both new claims and those relating to a change in circumstances). In this respect, the Chief Finance Officer agreed to bring forward a report to the Committee's April meeting, which would provide a cost v benefit analysis of reducing the backlog to zero and maintaining processing speeds at target levels.

RECOMMENDATION:

That the Chief Finance Officer bring forward a report to the Committee's April meeting regarding Housing & Council Tax Benefit Processing, which would provide a cost v benefit analysis of reducing the backlog to zero and maintaining processing speeds at target levels.

CCS/11/93 **Traded Services to Schools**

The Deputy Leader and Executive Member for Corporate Resources presented a report covering the Council's Traded Services to Schools, which sought the Committee's views with regard to a proposal to withdraw from the provision of a number of such services.

The proposal recommended cessation of HR, Payroll, Bursary, Insurance, ICT and Property services to schools in a structured way, providing appropriate support to schools to secure alternative suppliers and provide clarity over statutory responsibilities.

Members of the Committee discussed the contents of the report in detail and raised a number of queries, which were addressed by the Executive Member and officers in attendance. It was the Committee's unanimous opinion that the Council had no alternative but to withdraw from these services although Members were comforted by the assurance given by the Deputy Leader that schools (and lower schools in particular), would be fully supported during the transition.

RECOMMENDATION:

That the proposal to withdraw from the provision of traded services to schools be endorsed.

CCS/11/94 **Quarter 2 Performance Monitoring**

The Deputy Leader and Executive Member for Corporate Resources presented the second quarterly performance report for Corporate Services, which provided an overview of performance in 2011/12 for the period to 30 September 2011 for those corporate health indicators presented to this Committee.

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

- The amount of debt outstanding. The Committee was informed that significant progress had been made with regard to ongoing negotiations with Bedford Borough Council to reduce the debt owed by this organisation; and
- The timeliness of performance reports. The Deputy Leader confirmed that it was his wish to ensure that performance data was reported earlier in future and at the same time as quarterly budget monitoring reports;

RECOMMENDATION:

That the report be noted.

CCS/11/95 **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 with the addition of the following items:

- **Let's Talk Together Review report (27 February meeting)**
- **Housing & Council Tax Benefit Processing (16 April meeting)**

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

Chairman.....

Date.....