

CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE COUNCIL

At a meeting of the **CORPORATE RESOURCES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE** held in Room 14, Priory House, Monks Walk, Shefford on Tuesday, 19 June 2012.

PRESENT

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

Cllrs L Birt
Mrs R J Drinkwater
Dr R Egan

Cllrs Mrs M Mustoe
I Shingler

Apologies for Absence: Cllrs J A E Clarke
R W Johnstone

Substitutes: Cllrs B Saunders

Members in Attendance: Cllrs P N Aldis
C C Gomm
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 A Fleming – Project Director - Business
Services
Mr G Muskett – Head of Revenues & Benefits
Mr C Warboys – Chief Finance Officer & Section
151 Officer

Others in Attendance

CROSC/12/1 Minutes

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the meeting of the Customer and Central Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 16 April 2012 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

CROSC/12/2 Members' Interests

(a) Personal Interests:-

None.

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

None.

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

None.

CROSC/12/3 Chairman's Announcements and Communications

The Chairman had no announcements.

CROSC/12/4 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.

CROSC/12/5 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.

CROSC/12/6 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.

CROSC/12/7 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.

CROSC/12/8 Executive Member Update

The Deputy Leader and Executive Member for Corporate Resources provided the Committee with an update on the closure of accounts process and revenue outturn for 2011/12, which showed a small surplus against budget. The Committee acknowledged this good news and the Executive Member further confirmed that such fiscal management had been achieved without any deterioration in the quality of services provided by the Council.

During discussion of the item, a Member raised concerns about funding for the Woodside Link. Officers in attendance confirmed that this issue was a challenge but that options were being explored and a report would be presented to the Executive in October 2012.

Related to this issue, Members of the Committee also discussed concerns regarding the allocation of monies received via the current S106 process and

the new Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL), being implemented in April 2014. It was Members' opinion that a policy was required to clarify the allocation of such monies, which could be prepared by a joint working group of Members of this Committee and of the Sustainable Communities Overview & Scrutiny Committee (SCOSC). Officers confirmed however that some work had already been undertaken by the SCOSC on this subject. It was therefore agreed that the Chairman would liaise with the Chairman of the SCOSC to determine the most appropriate way forward.

CROSC/12/9 **Customer First**

The Interim Assistant Chief Executive (People & Organisation) delivered a presentation, which provided the Committee with an update on progress made with delivery of the Customer First programme. Specifically, the presentation covered:-

- The Customer first vision and story so far;
- Details regarding the 15 services in the initial phase;
- An analysis of business processes and the conclusions reached;
- An analysis of the technical infrastructure and the conclusions reached;
- The RAG status of the back office systems;
- An analysis of customer preferences and the conclusions reached;
- The new operating model, linked to the Medium Term Plan, enabling 24/7 customer access; and
- A high level implementation plan and timeline.

In conclusion, the Interim Assistant Chief Executive (People & Organisation) confirmed that the organisation now knew that: there was latent demand for on line services from the majority of customers; the existing infrastructure was inadequate but the Council understood what was required for the future and staff wanted to see the improvements proposed.

Members of the Committee raised a number of queries during the presentation regarding the following issues, which were addressed by the Executive Member and officers in attendance:-

- Members were concerned to ensure that the good work and recommendations of the Web Development Task Force, which had met over 2 years ago, were not lost. The Interim Assistant Chief Executive (People & Organisation) was content to give such an assurance and confirmed that the Chief Communications Officer, who had previously supported the Task Force, was also a member of the Customer First Programme Board;
- The Committee expressed some concern regarding the level of investment required to successfully deliver the Customer First programme. In this respect, the Executive Member confirmed that full details of the investment required would be contained in the business case being presented to the Executive at its meeting on 3 July; and
- Members were interested to note that a significant minority (20%) of customers would not access services on line despite the improvements

envisaged through the Customer First programme and were therefore concerned to ensure the Council continued to offer alternative means of service access to these customers.

In conclusion, the Committee thanked the Assistant Chief Executive (People & Organisation) for an informative presentation and requested a further update in due course.

RECOMMENDATION:

That the presentation be noted.

CROSC/12/10 ICT Framework

The Project Director for Business Services delivered a presentation, which provided the Committee with an update regarding delivery of the ICT Framework. Specifically, the presentation covered:-

- The Information Systems operating model;
- Details of the 5 integrated work streams;
- The Stability2 programme;
- A Technology road map;
- An Information & Knowledge road map;
- A Systems Implementation road map;
- A Journey to Excellence road map; and
- Achievements in 2012/13.

Members of the Committee raised a number of queries during the presentation regarding the following issues, which were addressed by the Executive Member and officers in attendance:-

- Our reliance on ICT infrastructure at Bedford Borough Council (BBC). In this respect, the Project Director for Business Services confirmed that although the Council still relied upon a number of servers at BBC, this will have ceased by March 2013;
- How the Council compared with its peers in terms of the stability of its ICT infrastructure and systems. The Project Director for Business Services confirmed that whilst we were not alone, there was a recognition that our baseline needed to improve and the ICT Framework (and road maps contained therein) were designed to do this and deliver a sustainable, safe status by March 2013. The Executive Member also acknowledged the issue and confirmed that although priorities had quite rightly been concentrated on the provision of front line services (i.e. adult social care and children's services) in the first 3 years of the Council's life, ICT was now very much a Council priority; and
- In terms of the Stability2 programme, some Members commented that this was not the first time the Committee had been given guarantees regarding the stability of the Council's ICT systems and infrastructure, and therefore sought assurance that this time efficient and effective ICT would be

delivered within the timeframe set out. The Project Director for Business Services was content to give such assurance.

In conclusion, the Committee thanked the Project Director for Business Services for an informative presentation and requested a further update in due course.

RECOMMENDATION:

That the presentation be noted.

CROSC/12/11 Revenues and Benefits Service Performance

The Chief Finance Officer presented his report, which summarised the performance of processing Housing Benefit claims, incoming work items and outstanding work items relating to Housing Benefit claims and Council Tax changes in liability.

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

- The spike in claims volumes in April/May, which related to increased activity as a result of the issue of annual Council Tax bills;
- The implications of the payment of Housing Benefit direct to claimants rather than landlords, which is now a statutory requirement although it was confirmed that landlords do have the facility to claim themselves should claimants slip into arrears of more than 8 weeks;
- The local democratic accountability implications of the DWP administering centrally the payment of Universal Credit, when this is introduced in October 2013;
- Trends in processing speeds;
- The benefits of using Risk Based Verification (RBV) to assess new claims; and
- The trend in notifications arising as a result of the DWP's introduction of its Automatic Transfer to Local Authorities System (ATLAS)

At the end of the debate, the Committee congratulated the Chief Finance Officer and his Revenues & Benefits Team for their continuing good work in processing claims against a backdrop of increasing volumes.

RECOMMENDATION:

That the report be noted.

CROSC/12/12 Work Programme 2012 - 2013 & Executive Forward Plan

The Committee considered its current work programme and the latest Executive Forward Plan and agreed a number of amendments.

Additionally, the Chairman raised the issue of the Council's farm estate and requested a report to a future meeting detailing our portfolio and how we manage it, and how our leasing agents operate.

RESOLVED

1. That the Committee's Work Programme be noted, with the following amendments:-

- **A presentation on Customer Perception Survey Results to 31 July meeting;**
- **The draft Council Tax Support Policy to 11 September meeting;**
- **A SAP Optimisation report to 11 September meeting;**
- **The removal of the ICT Framework report from the 11 September meeting; and**
- **A Farm Estate report to 11 September meeting.**

(Note: The meeting commenced at 10.00 a.m. and concluded at 12.10 p.m.)

Chairman.....

Date.....