

CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE COUNCIL

At a meeting of the **CORPORATE RESOURCES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE** held in Council Chamber, Priory House, Monks Walk, Shefford on Tuesday, 31 July 2012.

PRESENT

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

Cllrs L Birt
Mrs R J Drinkwater
R W Johnstone

Cllrs Mrs M Mustoe
I Shingler

Apologies for Absence: Cllrs Dr R Egan

Substitutes: Cllrs D Jones

Members in Attendance: Cllrs P N Aldis
R D Berry
D Bowater
C C Gomm
M R Jones

Chairman of Audit
Committee

Deputy Leader and
Executive Member for
Corporate Resources

B Saunders
M A G Versallion

Executive Member for
Children's Services

Officers in Attendance: Mr B Carter – Corporate Policy & Scrutiny
Manager
Mr A Fleming – Project Director - Business
Services
Mrs G Stanton – Chief Communications Officer
Mr C Warboys – Chief Finance Officer & Section
151 Officer

Others in
Attendance

CR/12/13 **Minutes**

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the meeting of the Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 19 June 2012 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

CR/12/14 Members' Interests

There were no declarations of interest or political whip in relation to any agenda items.

CR/12/15 Chairman's Announcements and Communications

The Chairman informed the Committee that Item 17, the supplementary item added to the agenda regarding Council Tax Support, would be considered as part of Item 9, the Executive Member Update.

The Chairman also provided the Committee with an update regarding his discussion with the Chairman of the Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Assistant Director, Planning about the possible creation of a Member working group to consider policy regarding the allocation of monies received via the New Homes Bonus and Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL). The Chairman confirmed that the creation of such a working group may still proceed but only following work in preparing a CIL, which would not be complete until March 2013. Bespoke Member briefings and workshops would be delivered by officers during this period to help inform this preparatory work. In the meantime, the Chairman had requested officers to provide further detail regarding the extent and availability of funds via S106 agreements to finance local infrastructure schemes.

CR/12/16 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.

CR/12/17 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.

CR/12/18 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.

CR/12/19 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.

CR/12/20 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, which covered the following issues:-

- Proposed improvements to the 2013/14 budget process, which would mean no presentation of base budget reports to individual Overview and Scrutiny Committees (OSCs) but rather, a presentation to this Committee only at its 23 October meeting, which would highlight the key issues and assumptions in preparation of the 2013/14 budget. All Members would be invited to this meeting and draft budgets would continue to be presented to all OSCs at their December cycle of meetings; and
- The latest position regarding localised Council Tax Support and the impact its introduction would have on precepting authorities. A draft Council Tax Support policy would be presented to the Executive at its 21 August meeting and this would be followed by extensive consultation including consideration by this Committee at its 11 September meeting. In response to a question, the Executive Member confirmed that a number of representations were being made at local, regional and national levels to central government regarding the less than satisfactory way in which the introduction of this new initiative was being managed.

CR/12/21 **Customer Perception**

The Chief Communications Officer delivered a presentation, which provided the Committee with details of the methodology and results of the Council's latest customer satisfaction survey. Specifically, the presentation covered:-

- The rationale for research;
- The methodology and sample used;
- Details of the questions asked;
- The drivers of satisfaction;
- Headline results; and
- The actions needed to maintain/improve satisfaction.

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

- The importance of continuing to engage with our customers face to face;
- The methodology of the survey particularly with regard to the sample used and the timing of the survey. Members were keen to ensure the survey was representative of all socio-economic groups within Central Bedfordshire and the Chief Communications Officer confirmed that this was indeed the case; and
- With regard to telephone surveys, a Members asked how the hearing impaired were expected to engage. The Chief Communications Officer agreed to investigate and respond directly to the Member concerned.

In conclusion, the Committee thanked the Chief Communications Officer for an informative presentation and requested a further update following the next survey, which was due to be conducted in September.

RECOMMENDATION:

That the presentation be noted and a further update be provided following the next survey scheduled for September 2012.

CR/12/22

11/12 Provisional Outturn Revenue Budget Monitoring Report

The Deputy Leader and Executive Member for Corporate Resources presented his report, which set out the Council's revenue position to the end of March 2012.

He further explained that the full year provisional revenue outturn position for 2011/12 was a £0.494M under spend against budget, very much in line with expectations. He also discussed the General Fund Reserve, which was now at the minimum prudent level 2 years earlier than planned.

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

- The planned use of, and increases in, earmarked reserves. In particular, Members queried the increase in the Redundancy/Restructure Reserve and how many redundancies this increase was intended to cover. The Executive Member confirmed that this number was unknown at present and would not be until the completion of consultation with staff. The reserve was a prudent provision only at this stage and would be returned to the general fund in due course should it not be used;
- The impact on staffing levels following a reduction in the Safer Communities grant. The Executive Member for Children's Services confirmed that part of this grant (and therefore staff) would transfer to the soon to be established Police and Crime Commissioner and staff were being fully consulted on this transfer;
- The latest position with regard to the NIRAH project and related earmarked reserve. The Executive Member confirmed that the position was static, with no further progress to report; and
- The contribution from the Schools Forum of £975k to Children's Services. The Executive Member for Children's Services confirmed that this was a one-off contribution, and that the sustainability of Children's Services' budgets going forward would need careful management.

RECOMMENDATION:

That the report be noted.

CR/12/23

11/12 Provisional Outturn Capital Budget Monitoring Report

The Deputy Leader and Executive Member for Corporate Resources presented his report, which set out the Council's capital position to the end of March 2012.

He further explained that the full year provisional capital outturn position for 2011/12 was a £21.5M under spend against a £86.5M approved budget. He

also discussed the need for the Council to review its capital programme and processes to ensure a realistic and deliverable programme in future.

Members of the Committee supported such a review and raised a number of other minor issues, which were addressed by the Executive Member and officers in attendance.

RECOMMENDATION:

That the report be noted.

CR/12/24

11/12 Provisional Outturn Revenue Budget Monitoring Report - Corporate Services Directorate

The Deputy Leader and Executive Member for Corporate Resources presented his report, which set out the revenue position for Corporate Services to the end of March 2012.

He further explained that the full year provisional revenue outturn position for 2011/12 was £27.8M, a £1.4M over spend against budget. This figure did however include proposed transfers to earmarked reserves of £2.05M, making the operational result before transfers an under spend of £0.65M.

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

- The £48k pressure within Revenues & Benefits regarding printing costs;
- The £75k pressure regarding historic electricity bills at Priory House;
- The £260k under spend relating to Premature Retirement Costs; and
- Debt management generally, with specific reference to S106 debts and the need to pursue developers for such outstanding sums. The Chief Finance Officer confirmed that he would raise the issue with colleagues in the Sustainable Communities directorate and report back to a future Committee meeting.

RECOMMENDATION:

That the report be noted.

CR/12/25

11/12 Provisional Outturn Capital Budget Monitoring Report- Corporate Services Directorate

The Deputy Leader and Executive Member for Corporate Resources presented his report, which set out the capital position for Corporate Services to the end of March 2012.

He further explained that the full year provisional capital outturn position for 2011/12 was a gross spend of £5.0M, with proposed slippage into 2012/13 of £4.3M.

Members of the Committee discussed the contents of the report in detail and raised a number of minor issues, which were addressed by the Executive Member and officers in attendance.

RECOMMENDATION:

That the report be noted.

CR/12/26 **Quarter 4 Performance Report**

The Deputy Leader and Executive Member for Corporate Resources presented the final quarterly performance report for Corporate Services, which provided an overview of performance in 2011/12 for the period to 31 March 2012 for those corporate health indicators presented to this Committee. He further stated that, despite the budget savings achieved in 2011/12 (as mentioned in the previous agenda items), Council performance generally was good and improving.

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 time taken to process Housing and Council Tax Benefit claims and our performance when compared to geographical neighbours; and
- The average number of days lost per employee. Members were concerned to note that performance in this area had deteriorated when compared to 2010/11 and requested further detail regarding our performance when compared with other organisations, both nationally and regionally and in both the public and private sectors. Members also requested further detail regarding the measures in place to address the issue and improve performance. The Chief Communications Officer confirmed that a written response would be provided to Committee Members in due course.

RECOMMENDATION:

That the report be noted.

CR/12/27 **Work Programme 2012 - 2013 & Executive Forward Plan**

The Committee considered its current work programme and the latest Executive Forward Plan, and agreed to add an item in the Autumn regarding community engagement activities and progress towards achieving the actions contained within the Community Engagement Strategy.

RESOLVED

That the Committee's Work Programme be noted, with the addition of an item regarding Community Engagement sometime during Autumn 2012.

(Note: The meeting commenced at 10.00 a.m. and concluded at 12.00 p.m.)

Chairman.....

Date.....