

CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE COUNCIL

At a meeting of the **CORPORATE RESOURCES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE** held in The Council Chamber, Priory House, Monks Walk, Shefford on Tuesday, 23 October 2012.

PRESENT

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

Cllrs L Birt
Mrs R J Drinkwater
C C Gomm

Cllrs R W Johnstone
Mrs M Mustoe
I Shingler

Apologies for Absence: Cllrs Dr R Egan

Substitutes: Cllrs D Jones (In place of Dr R Egan)

Members in Attendance: Cllrs P N Aldis
Mrs A Barker Chairman of the Council
A R Bastable
R D Berry
M C Blair
D Bowater Chairman of Audit
I Dalgarno Deputy Executive
Members for Sustainable
Communities - Services
D J Hopkin Deputy Executive
Member for Corporate
Resources
M R Jones Deputy Leader and
Executive Member for
Corporate Resources
K C Matthews
Ms C Maudlin Vice-Chairman of the
Council
D McVicar Chairman of Sustainable
Communities Overview &
Scrutiny Committee
B Saunders
A Shadbolt Chairman of
Development
Management Committee
B J Spurr Executive Member for
Sustainable
Communities - Services
A M Turner Deputy Executive
Member for Social Care,
Health & Housing

N Warren
B Wells

Deputy Executive
Member for Sustainable
Communities - Services
Executive Member for
Sustainable
Communities - Strategic
Planning and Economic
Development

J N Young

Officers in Attendance:	Mr P Burt	– Head of Property Assets
	Mr B Carter	– Corporate Policy & Scrutiny Manager
	Ms D Clarke	– Interim Assistant Chief Executive (People & Organisation)
	Mr R Edwards	– Interim Head of Procurement
	Mr C Warboys	– Chief Finance Officer & Section 151 Officer

Others in Attendance

CR/12/45 **Minutes**

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the meeting of the Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 11 September 2012 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

CR/12/46 **Members' Interests**

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

CR/12/47 **Chairman's Announcements and Communications**

The Chairman had no announcements.

CR/12/48 **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/12/49 **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/12/50 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/12/51 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/12/52 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 were not already included on today's agenda and which covered the following issues:-

- The draft localised Council Tax Support Scheme, currently the subject of public consultation. The Executive Member confirmed that there had been a further recent ministerial announcement regarding changes to the scheme, the implications of which were currently being assessed;
- The SAP Optimisation programme, which was progressing as planned and which had recently included a software upgrade allowing the organisation to proceed to install the ESS/MSS self service option;
- The increasing Child Protection caseload, which had necessitated the employment of two additional solicitors within the Council's Legal Service; and
- The Customer First Member Briefing, scheduled for Thursday, 1 November 2012 at 2 pm in Watling House, Dunstable.

CR/12/53 2013/14 Budget

The Deputy Leader and Executive Member for Corporate Resources introduced this item, which was supplemented by a presentation from the Chief Finance Officer. The presentation specifically covered:-

- The background and context to this year's budget setting process, including the delayed Autumn statement by the Chancellor of the Exchequer (now scheduled for 5 December), which would have an impact on consideration of the draft budget;
- The major funding changes being introduced by central government, including the replacement of Council Tax Benefit with a locally designed Council Tax Support Scheme, the retention of Business Rates locally and the inclusion of standalone grants within the Formula Grant, which brought additional uncertainty to the budget setting process this year;
- A new approach to budgeting consisting of a programme of reviews with every Head of Service;
- The lessons learned from this new approach and emerging themes;
- A resource summary including receipt of Council Tax Freeze Grant;

- An expenditure summary covering inflation, pressures, efficiencies and savings yet to be identified;
- Efficiencies by directorate and financial year; and
- Next steps for the Budget and Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP), including scrutiny of draft budgets at the January cycle of Overview and Scrutiny Committee meetings (rather than December as previously advised).

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:-

- The spread of pressures within the organisation. The Chief Finance Officer confirmed that the greatest pressures revolved around children's and adults social care, although pressures were being experienced across all directorates. He further explained that all pressures (and efficiencies) would be the subject of further and thorough review to ensure a balanced budget going forward;
- The confusion surrounding the Council's ability to amend the single persons discount, as part of a locally designed Council Tax Support Scheme, which could address the funding pressure of £2.5M caused as a result of the introduction of the new Council Tax Support Scheme. The Executive Member confirmed that representations had been made to the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government regarding this issue but that a further ministerial announcement was required to clarify the situation; and
- Concerns regarding the potential gap between available funding and demand for services in the future, which could have a detrimental impact on the long term provision of discretionary services. The Chief Finance Officer confirmed that he was aware of a variety of modelling work, which had been undertaken to forecast national demands (and costs) on local government as a result of, specifically, an aging population but these were long term forecasts, and scenarios would differ according to local circumstances. The MTFP was designed however to address these pressures over a 4 year period.

The Committee thanked the Chief Finance Officer for an informative presentation and noted the delay in the consideration of the draft budget caused by the revised date of the Chancellor of the Exchequer's autumn statement. Notwithstanding this delay, the Committee requested a further update regarding the budget process at its 18 December meeting (as part of the Executive Member's standard verbal update).

As part of this item, the Deputy Leader and Executive Member for Corporate Resources also delivered another presentation, which outlined the details of a recent Capital Programme Review. The presentation specifically covered:-

- The capital programme review process and the proposal for prudential borrowing to fund specific schemes (the BEaR project and Woodside Link);

- Notification that a related report would be presented to the Executive's 8 November 2012 meeting;
- The funding details behind the BEaR project;
- The funding details behind the Woodside Link Road; and
- Funding risks and risk mitigation.

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:-

- Confirmation that the continuing primary objective of the BEaR project was to deliver savings (when set against the alternative of increasing landfill tax without delivery of such a project). The Executive Member was content to provide such confirmation;
- The inclusion of the prudential borrowing option within the original contract specification of the BEaR project. The Executive Member confirmed that such an option had always existed; and
- Whilst recognising the imperative of the Woodside Link project, Members sought assurance from the Executive Member that the Council would endeavour to identify external funding for this project prior to calling upon the use of S106 contributions. The Executive Member was content to provide such assurance.

RECOMMENDATION:

That the presentations be noted.

CR/12/54

Customer First

The Interim Assistant Chief Executive (People & Organisation) delivered a presentation which provided the Committee with an update on progress made regarding the Customer First programme, together with details of the Face to Face Review and Accolaid issue. The presentation specifically covered:-

Customer First Programme

- The story so far including Executive approval, the appointment of technology partners, consultation with service areas, contract authorisation and the preparation of implementation plans;
- The Services Implementation Plan in detail; and
- The need to maintain momentum.

Face to Face Review

- Details of the 5 customer service centres and the types of service request;
- The rationale for the review;
- The consultation process and methodology;
- Responses to the consultation;
- Consultation feedback by customer service centre; and
- Recommendations.

Accolaid Issue

- An explanation of why the issue had occurred;
- The impact on average call handling times, which had increased as a result of the issue;
- Management actions to mitigate the impact whilst a permanent fix was sought; and
- Confirmation that the issue had now been resolved and that average call handling times had now returned to normal levels, although on the day of the Committee, delays associated with another system, Citrix, were causing problems.

Members of the Committee raised a number of queries during the presentation regarding the Face to Face Review in particular and these are outlined below, together with the responses of the Executive Member and Interim Assistant Chief Executive (People & Organisation):-

Amphill Customer Service Centre

- Whilst the Committee concurred with the recommendation to close the Amphill centre, install a Customer Access Point (CAP) in close proximity and work with the Town Council to provide services, some concern was expressed regarding the consultation process and its credibility given the recent news regarding the use of the site as a location for the Bedfordshire Coroners Office. The Committee sought assurance that future consultations would not be undermined, which the Executive Member was content to give.
- The location of the CAP, with some Members favouring the library site. The Interim Assistant Chief Executive (People & Organisation) confirmed that its location was currently being considered and that an additional CAP was also a possibility in Flitwick. Members requested full consultation with both Amphill and Flitwick Town Councils before any decisions were made, which the Executive Member confirmed would be the case;

Shefford Customer Service Centre

- The Committee was pleased to note that a customer service presence would continue at Priory House and supported the recommendation that it be merged with reception and that a CAP be also installed. The Interim Assistant Chief Executive (People & Organisation) confirmed that the Council would also explore the possibility of an additional CAP in Shefford town centre; and
- With regard to the merger with reception, Members were concerned to ensure that a suitable facility for members of the public to discuss matters in private remained. The Interim Assistant Chief Executive (People & Organisation) confirmed that such a facility would remain.

Sandy CAP

- Whilst there were no changes proposed at Sandy, some Members asked whether the historic technical problems experienced with the CAP had been resolved. The Interim Assistant Chief Executive (People & Organisation) confirmed that they had.

Dunstable Customer Service Centre

- Whilst there were no fundamental changes proposed at Dunstable, the Interim Assistant Chief Executive (People & Organisation) confirmed that the Council was intending to include receptionists within customer services so that they were able to handle some customer service requests using a simple triage system. The Committee was content with this proposal.

Leighton Buzzard Customer Service Centre

The recommendation to reduce the opening days of the Leighton Buzzard Customer Service Centre to 3 days per week caused considerable debate amongst Committee Members, with a number of concerns expressed regarding:-

- The cost and necessity of the recent renovations given the recommendation now proposed;
- The prominence of Job Centre Plus (JCP) staff, particularly its G4S security staff, and its role in the management and operation of the centre;
- The sequencing of consultation with Members, with one Member having been unaware of the proposals before other stakeholders;
- The validity of the recommendation when measured against the number of customers per customer service advisor per hour and how this measure compared with other customer service centres;
- The fact that Leighton Buzzard was the largest town in Central Bedfordshire and the need therefore for it to retain a full customer service presence, with the possibility of an additional CAP elsewhere in the town; and
- The need for further detail regarding the savings anticipated should the recommendation be implemented;

As there was a considerable degree of debate on the proposals for Leighton Buzzard, the Interim Assistant Chief Executive (People & Organisation), in consultation with the Executive Member for Resources, undertook to carry out further consultation with ward members and to not implement the particular proposal with regard to Leighton Buzzard, pending the outcome of such consultation. A report would be presented to the 18 December meeting of this Committee, which would provide Members with the opportunity to consider these outcomes.

The Committee also reflected on the need for the Council to ensure it conducted full and meaningful consultation with town councils regarding these proposals and communicated effectively with members of the public about the benefits innovations such as Customer Access Points (CAPs) would bring.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. That the recommendations regarding the Ampthill and Shefford customer service centres be endorsed;
2. That implementation of the recommendation regarding the Leighton Buzzard customer service centre be postponed and that a further consultation with Members and other relevant stakeholders be undertaken, the outcomes of which be presented to this Committee at its 18 December 2012 meeting; and
3. That the Council ensures it conducts full and meaningful consultation with town councils regarding these proposals and communicates effectively with members of the public about the benefits innovations such a Customer Access Points (CAPs) will bring.

CR/12/55 Asset Disposals List

The Deputy Leader and Executive Member for Corporate Resources introduced his report, which proposed that the Executive delegates authority to the Service Director, Business Services, in consultation with him, to dispose of all of the properties on the Assets Disposals List, attached as Appendix A, at the best values obtainable. The Executive Member added that the delegated authority would provide the Council with the opportunity to be proactive with regard to the disposal of its surplus assets and act quickly when negotiations commenced.

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

- The need to ensure Ward Members were notified in advance of any sale. The Executive Member was content to give such assurance and confirmed that such a provision already existed within the Council's Constitution;
- The processes used to obtain the best possible price for an asset including sealed bids and relevant conditions;
- The use and appointment of the District Valuer and local agents when valuing assets for disposal;
- The Council's policy and process regarding the disposal of small parcels of land and the additional surveyor recently appointed to manage the process more effectively;
- New Community Rights under the Localism Act 2012; and
- Various specific queries regarding the Asset Disposal List attached at Appendix A.

RECOMMENDATION:

That the Committee endorses the proposal for the Executive to delegate authority to the Service Director, Business Services, in consultation with the Deputy Leader and Executive Member for Corporate Resources to

dispose of properties on the Asset Disposal List, subject to the prior notification of Ward Members.

CR/12/56

Procurement Review & Priorities

The Interim Head of Procurement delivered a presentation, which provided Members of the Committee with details of the progress made with regard to implementation of the Council's procurement strategy. The presentation specifically covered:-

- The changes to the Council's approach to procurement;
- The progress made against the following priorities:
 1. Agreeing a clear plan for improving procurement;
 2. Continuing to provide strategic support and advice;
 3. Raising the capability of the procurement resource;
 4. Selecting high value suppliers and negotiating efficiencies;
 5. Collecting and analysing spend data;
 6. Exploring opportunities for collaboration;
 7. Making full use of IT systems.
- Next steps including restructure of the team, development of a category management approach, embedding the strategy across the organisation, enhancing the use of IT and closer working with contract managers.

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:-

- Compliance with procurement procedure rules and financial thresholds;
- The need for robust contractor management and monitoring; and
- The possibility of providing the Committee with a periodic list of contracts put out to tender. The Executive Member agreed to consider this request.

The Committee thanked the Interim Head of Procurement for an informative presentation and requested a further update to a future Committee meeting.

RECOMMENDATION:

That the presentation be noted.

CR/12/57

Work Programme 2012 - 2013 & Executive Forward Plan

The Committee considered its current work programme and the latest Executive Forward Plan and agreed to the following amendments to the list of items due for consideration at its 18 December meeting:-

- The postponement of the 2013/14 draft budget to the 22 January 2013 meeting;

- The postponement of the Property Joint Ventures item to a future meeting;
- The addition of the Treasury Management Strategy Statement; and
- The addition of a report on the Leighton Buzzard customer service centre (as referred to at Minute No. CR/12/54 above).

RESOLVED

That the Committee's Work Programme be updated to include the above mentioned amendments.

CR/12/58 **Exclusion of the Press and Public**

RESOLVED

that in accordance with Section 100A (4) of the Local Government Act 1972 the public be excluded from the meeting for the following item of business on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 7 and 12 of Part I of Schedule 12A of the Act.

CR/12/59 **Asset Disposals List Appendix A**

See Minute No CR/12/55

(Note: The meeting commenced at 10.00 a.m. and concluded at 12.35 p.m.)

Chairman.....

Date.....