

CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE COUNCIL

At a meeting of the **CORPORATE RESOURCES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE** held in Room 15, Priory House, Monks Walk, Shefford on Tuesday, 30 July 2013.

PRESENT

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

Cllrs	Mrs A Barker	Cllrs	J Murray
	L Birt		B Saunders
	Mrs C F Chapman MBE		T Woodward

Apologies for Absence: Cllrs Dr R Egan

Members in Attendance:	Cllrs	R D Berry	
		D Bowater	Vice-Chairman of the Council
		A D Brown	Deputy Executive Member for Sustainable Communities - Strategic Planning and Economic Development
		C C Gomm	
		M R Jones	Deputy Leader and Executive Member for Corporate Resources
		M A G Versallion	Executive Member for Children's Services

Officers in Attendance:	Ms D Clarke	–	Director of Improvement and Corporate Services
	Mr N Earp	–	Head of Asset Management
	Mrs P Everitt	–	Research and Business Support Officer
	Mr G Muskett	–	Head of Revenues & Benefits
	Mr C Warboys	–	Chief Finance Officer

CR/13/28 **Minutes**

RESOLVED

That the Minutes of the meeting of the Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 10 June 2013 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

CR/13/29 **Members' Interests**

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

CR/13/30 Chairman's Announcements and Communications

There were no Chairman's announcements or communication.

CR/13/31 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/13/32 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/13/33 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/13/34 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/13/35 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 the agenda and which covered the following:-

- Figures for 2013-2014 were on track to achieve a balanced budget.
- Interviews were scheduled for 9 August 2013 to appoint a Head of Legal and Democratic services.
- It was expected that the 2014-2015 budget settlement would not be received until late December, 2013, in which case it could be necessary to hold an additional meeting of the Committee.

NOTED the update

CR/13/36 Customer First 2

The Director of Improvement and Corporate Resources gave a presentation on the Customer First project and updated Members on phase one and the plan for phase two. Specifically, the presentation covered:-

- Progress on website developments, transactional functionality, E.communications, telephony, face to face and customer intelligence.

- The challenges, which included supplier issues.
- The revised and provisional programme.
- The revised plan and financial implications.

In light of the presentation, Members of the Committee raised a number of queries, which were addressed by the Executive Member and Improvement and Corporate Services Director as follows:-

- Members were assured that customers who did not have access to, or were not able to use, ICT would still be able to contact the Council using other means.
- Matters relating to trees would be included in the update provided to Councillors by Amey.

During their discussion the Committee requested that officers investigate the possibility of a customer contact centre in the Stotfold/Arlesey area.

In conclusion, the Committee thanked the Director for Improvement and Corporate Services for an informative presentation and requested that the business case Customer First 2 be presented to a future meeting.

NOTED the presentation.

CR/13/37

Revenue and Benefits Service Performance & Impact of the Welfare Reforms

The Chief Finance Officer introduced a report on the Revenues and Benefits service performance and the impact of welfare reforms. The report summarised the performance of processing Housing Benefit claims and Council Tax changes in liability. In particular the report highlighted the impact arising from the introduction of Welfare Reforms.

Members were informed that information was being collated on the impact of the reforms on residents, however, it was presently too early to make any assessment. Advice was being offered by CBC staff and the Citizens Advice Bureau and Members wished to extend their thanks to each member of staff for their outstanding achievement in dealing with the large increase in workload.

There had been a large increase in the numbers of applications for discretionary housing payments as a result of the new regulations that limited the level of housing benefit payments in respect of the number of bedrooms deemed to be appropriate to the claimants' circumstances. The Interim Head of Operations in Housing Services was presently preparing a detailed report on the impact of the reforms on council tenants.

Members commented on the introduction of Universal Credit in October 2013, which would be administered by the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP). The Deputy Leader and Executive Member was urged to request the Local Government Association (LGA) to lobby Government to introduce partnership working between the DWP and the Council to ensure a smooth transition to the new scheme.

NOTED the report and recommended that the Committee receive an update on Universal Credit administration changes at a future meeting.

CR/13/38 **Farm Management Strategy Update**

The Head of Assets delivered a presentation that provided an overview of the work being undertaken to inform the Farm Management Strategy to be considered by the Committee at their meeting on 22 October, 2013.

Work had commenced to update tenancy information, rent reviews, lease renewals and farm inspections. Engagement with directorates, to understand synergies with other Council strategies, was nearing completion and draft estate objectives would be drafted following the completion of engagement.

Following the presentation Members of the Committee raised several questions, which related to the following:-

- Whether Bidwells were issuing 12 month leases. The Head of Assets explained that the Council wished to keep leases on a short term basis in some cases to retain flexibility and be in the best position to introduce the Farm Strategy.
- Once a clear picture of the CBC estate was known the Council could make informed decisions on the use of available premises.
- The use of the Farm Strategy to support the Local Development Framework process.
- Engagement with tenants, which was being carried out through the National Farmers Union.

Following discussion the Committee requested that officers provide a map showing all farm land owned by the Council. The Head of Assets undertook to provide map.

NOTED the presentation and recommended that Head of Assets circulate a map detailing farm land owned by the Council to Members of the Committee.

CR/13/39 **Q4 Outturn Capital Report 2012/13**

The Chief Finance Officer delivered a presentation, which provided the Committee with key points to note on:

1. The general fund revenue as at March 2013
2. Revenue outturn 2012/13
3. Main variances in outturn for Adult Social Care, Children's Services, Sustainable Committee and Corporate Services
4. Movement in earmarked reserves
5. General fund debt written off
6. Treasury management
7. Capital position, outturn, achievements and
8. Housing revenue account

In light of the presentation Members welcomed the new style of reporting as well as the key points and actions arising from the reports listed above, the full details of which would continue to be available to Members.

A Member queried the value of the information in the presentation as it was historical information relating to the March outturn figures. The Deputy Leader and Executive Member was asked to consider whether more up to date information could be provided in the future. A Member requested that an update on NiRAH be reported to a future meeting.

NOTED the presentation and recommended that more up to date figures be provided in the future. An update on NiRAH be reported to a future meeting.

CR/13/40 Q4 Outturn Revenue Report 2012/13

The content of this item was considered under CR/13/39 referred above.

CR/13/41 Q4 Outturn Housing Revenue Account Report 2012/13

The content of this item was considered under CR/13/39 referred above.

CR/13/42 Q4 Outturn Capital Report 2012/13 - Corporate Services

The content of this item was considered under CR/13/39 referred above.

CR/13/43 Q4 Outturn Revenue Report 2012/13 - Corporate Services

The content of this item was considered under CR/13/39 referred above.

CR/13/44 Work Programme 2013 - 2014 & Executive Forward Plan

The Committee considered its current work programme and the latest Executive Forward Plan and were informed that the Director of Improvement and Corporate Services would advise on the availability of the following reports for the next meeting:

1. Joint venture proposal
2. Draft Information Assets Strategy

RESOLVED that the work programme be approved subject to the availability of the reports outlined in the Minute above.

(Note: The meeting commenced at 10.00 am and concluded at 12.10 pm)

Chairman.....

Date.....