

CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE COUNCIL

At a meeting of the **CORPORATE RESOURCES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE** held in Council Chamber, Priory House, Monks Walk, Shefford on Tuesday, 22 October 2013.

PRESENT

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

Cllrs	Mrs A Barker	Cllrs	J Murray
	Mrs C F Chapman MBE		B Saunders
	Dr R Egan		T Woodward

Apologies for Absence: Cllrs L Birt

Members in Attendance:	Cllrs	P N Aldis	
		A R Bastable	
		R D Berry	
		M C Blair	Chairman of Audit
		C Hegley	Executive Member for Social Care, Health & Housing
		J G Jamieson	Leader of the Council and Chairman of the Executive
		D Jones	
		M R Jones	Deputy Leader and Executive Member for Corporate Resources
		M A G Versallion	Executive Member for Children's Services
		R D Wenham	Deputy Executive Member for Corporate Resources
		J N Young	Executive Member for Sustainable Communities - Strategic Planning and Economic Development

Officers in Attendance:	Ms D Clarke	–	Director of Improvement and Corporate Services
	Mrs M Clay	–	Chief Legal and Democratic Services Officer
	Mrs P Everitt	–	Research and Business Support Officer
	Mr P Meigh	–	Chief Procurement Officer
	Mr M Scott	–	Chief Information Officer
	Mr C Warboys	–	Chief Finance Officer

CR/13/56 **Minutes**

RESOLVED

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

CR/13/57 Members' Interests

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

CR/13/58 Chairman's Announcements and Communications

The Chairman announced that thank you letters had been sent to all Revenues and Benefits staff on behalf of the Committee as requested at the last meeting.

CR/13/59 Petitions

No petitions were received.

CR/13/60 Questions, Statements or Deputations

No questions, statements or deputations were received.

CR/13/61 Exclusion of Public and Press

RESOLVED

That the public and press be excluded from the meeting by virtue of section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972 during consideration of items 7 and 19 on the grounds that the consideration of the item was likely to involve the disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 3 of Part I of Schedule 12A of the Act.

CR/13/62 Call-In

The Committee were advised that a decision of the Executive on the Next Generation Network had been referred to them under the Call-in Procedures set out in Appendix A to Rule No. S18 of the Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rules.

Whilst the meeting took place in private a Member asked that their concerns be recorded which were in summary as follows:-

- Concerns that the cost of entering into a partnership with Bedford Borough Council or Buckinghamshire County Council had not been made available.
- Concerns that Committee had not been provided with evidence of the detailed work undertaken by officers in relation to discussing alternative proposals.
- The distance and expense relating to travel costs that could be incurred by officers in taking a contract with Essex County Council
- The length of the proposed contract and concerns that the Council had had not gone through the normal tender process.

Following discussion the Committee voted on the proposals and the recommendation was agreed (Cllrs Dr Egan and Murray requested their votes against this resolution be recorded).

RESOLVED

That no further action be taken and the original Executive decision be effective immediately.

(The remainder of the meeting was conducted in public)

CR/13/63 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/13/64 Executive Member Update

The Deputy Leader and Executive Member for Corporate Resources provided the Committee with an update regarding the following:

- Confirmation that the Chancellor's Autumn Statement would be announced on Wednesday 4 December. For this reason the Draft Budget report would be submitted to the Executive on 14 January 2014 and to Corporate Resources OSC on 28 January 2014.
- A revised template had been designed for Town and Parishes to request their Council Tax requirement. A working group had been set up to give feedback and a meeting to inform Town and Parish Clerks and members had been arranged for 7 November 2013.
- The number of complaints from customers regarding the Call Centre had increased. 18 advisers had resigned their posts and the slow down of the computer system had caused significant issues for the Customer Services Team resulting in the increase in complaints.

Members of the Committee raised several issues on the update, which were addressed by the Executive Member and officers present as follows:-

- Assurance that staff within the Call Centre had been replaced. The Director of Improvement and Corporate Services advised that exit interviews had taken place and there were a variety of reasons for staff moving on. A recovery plan had been put in place for the Call Centre and the details would be shared at a future meeting. A team working on the computer slow down had isolated the causes and were working on a solution.
- Problems relating to the citrix portal had been resolved to enable voice recognition software to be introduced at the end December/January 2014.

CR/13/65 Farms Estate Strategy 2013-2023

The Director of Improvement and Corporate Services introduced the emerging Farm Estate Strategy. Member's views were sought on the approach and

process for developing the Strategy over a 10 year period between 2013 and 2023 and the next steps in gathering evidence set out in Chapter 4.

Members of the Committee raised several issues relating to the Strategy, which were in summary as follows:

- Whether objective 5 to achieve a yield of 2% per annum was feasible? The Director of Improvement and Corporate Services confirmed the figure had been given by the Council's adviser, Bidwells. In order to consult on the Strategy and this key issue, it was proposed to set up a Farmers' Forum so that feedback could inform the Strategy.
- Concern that farmers were being offered short tenures. The Director of Improvement and Corporate Services reported that progress had been made to review tenancies and Bidwells were helping in this process. The length of tenures being offered would be checked and reported to a future meeting.
- The importance of stakeholders such as the National Union of Farmers and the Country Landowners Association being consulted on the proposals.
- Concern at the proposal to reduce the number of holdings, such as farm houses and redundant buildings. Members were reassured that officers would look at each proposal on a case by case basis.

In addition to these concerns the Committee suggested that officers undertake a consultation when considering a change of use of a piece of land.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Executive be aware of the issues detailed in the Minutes above and that the approach and process for developing the Farm Strategy and the next steps in gathering evidence be approved.

CR/13/66

Budget and Medium Term Financial Plan Update

The Deputy Leader and Executive Member for Corporate Resources introduced the Budget and Medium Term Financial Plan presentation. The Chief Finance Officer raised key points during the presentation including:-

- Confirmation of the Autumn Statement announcement on 4 December 2013.
- The Government's decision to continue to pay the Council Tax Freeze grant into 2015/16, which was worth £1.2m.
- Concern regarding the Governments continued austerity measures, including a 1% cut in local authority funding.

Members of the Committee raised a number of issues during the presentation which were addressed by the Executive Member and officers present as follows:-

- That new businesses in the area were welcomed and all businesses informed of work the Council was doing on their behalf, in relation to Business Rates (NNDR). The Chief Finance Officer advised this area was controlled by Central Government, however the Regeneration Team also

undertook work proactively. In order to support this work the Committee supported the revival of Breakfast meetings with businesses in the area.

- Members were advised the Community Infrastructure Levy policy was not yet available.

NOTED the presentation.

CR/13/67 Q1 Capital Report 2013/14

The Committee received the quarter 1 capital projected outturn position for 2013/14 for the Council.

NOTED the projected capital outturn position 2013/14.

CR/13/68 Q1 Revenue Report 2013/14

The Committee received the quarter 1 revenue projected outturn position for 2013/14 for the Council.

NOTED the projected revenue outturn position 2013/14.

CR/13/69 Q1 Capital Report 2013/14 - Corporate Resources

The Committee received the quarter 1 capital projected outturn position for 2013/14 for the Corporate Resources Directorate.

NOTED the projected capital outturn position 2013/14 for the Corporate Resources Directorate.

CR/13/70 Q1 Revenue Report 2013/14 - Corporate Resources

The Committee received the quarter 1 revenue projected outturn position for 2013/14 for the Corporate Resources Directorate.

NOTED the projected revenue outturn position 2013/14 for the Corporate Resources Directorate.

CR/13/71 Q1 Housing Revenue Account 2013/14

The Committee received the quarter 1 Housing Revenue Account projected outturn position for 2013/14.

NOTED the projected Housing Revenue Account outturn position 2013/14.

CR/13/72 Work Programme 2013 - 2014 & Executive Forward Plan

The Committee considered its current work programme and the latest Executive Forward Plan and were informed that a report on Council Tax

Support Strategy would be submitted to the December meeting. The draft budget 2014/15 reports would be deferred to the January 2014 meeting.

NOTED the Corporate Resources Work Programme.

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

Chairman.....

Date.....