

CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE COUNCIL

At a meeting of the **CORPORATE RESOURCES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE** held in Room 14, Priory House, Monks Walk, Shefford on Tuesday, 17 December 2013.

PRESENT

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

Cllrs Mrs A Barker
L Birt
Dr R Egan

Cllrs J Murray
B Saunders
T Woodward

Apologies for Absence: Cllrs Mrs C F Chapman MBE

Substitutes: Cllrs C C Gomm (In place of Mrs C F Chapman MBE)

Members in Attendance: Cllrs D Bowater
D J Hopkin
M A G Versallion
Vice-Chairman of the Council
Deputy Executive Member for Corporate Resources
Executive Member for Children's Services

Officers in Attendance: Ms D Clarke – Director of Improvement and Corporate Services
Mrs P Everitt – Scrutiny Policy Adviser
Mr G Muskett – Head of Revenues & Benefits
Mr C Warboys – Chief Finance Officer

Others in Attendance

CR/13/73 **Minutes**

RESOLVED

That the Minutes of the meeting of the Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 22 October 2013 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

CR/13/74 **Members' Interests**

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

CR/13/75 Chairman's Announcements and Communications

The Chairman had no announcements to make on this occasion.

CR/13/76 Petitions

No petitions were received.

CR/13/77 Questions, Statements or Deputations

No questions, statements or deputations were received.

CR/13/78 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/13/79 Requested Items

No items were referred to the Committee for consideration at the request of a members.

CR/13/80 Executive Member Update

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

- That approval from the Cabinet Office to join the Public Service Network had been confirmed allowing officers to access Department of Work and Pension records.
- Central Bedfordshire Council had been entered on the LGC shortlist for the Efficiency Award.
- Tax base information requested by Town and Parish councils had been sent out.
- Approval from General Purposes Committee to change email system protocol that would see OWA access removed as it is not secure.

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

- Not all ward members had received tax base information for their wards sent out in November 2013 and emails would be resent in those instances.
- Concerns relating to the Your Space 2 project and the low morale of staff working in much closer proximity to one another. The Director explained that all staff would be out of Technology House by March 2014 and there would be an element of tidying up at the end of this process and feed back from staff would be gathered. The responsible officer would be invited to attend the next meeting of the Committee.

CR/13/81 Council Tax Support Strategy

The Deputy Leader and Executive Member for Corporate Resources introduced the report and explained the Council was required to approve a Council Tax Support Scheme by January 2014 and failure to do so would see the Government impose a scheme. The Strategy kept the essential elements of the scheme agreed in January 2013, as a full cycle of data would not be available until next year to inform the scheme. It was reported there had been a reduction in Council Tax collection rates locally and nationally following the introduction of localised schemes.

Members of the Committee raised a number of queries regarding the report, which were addressed by the Deputy Leader and officers in attendance:-

- The level of uncollected Council Tax. The Chief Finance Officer advised this figure was around 25% for those paying council tax for the first time, however, collection remedies were in place and there was an increase of 22% in the number of summons issued.
- The uptake of crisis loans had not been as high as expected, however, the winter period may see demand increase.
- There had been an increase in discretionary housing payments and a Member asked if the Council's website directed claimants who wished to apply for a payment. The Chief Financial Officer agreed to see check this information were available.
- The Head of Revenues and Benefits confirmed the number of people taken to court for none payment was c.6,000. Any resident unable to pay their Council Tax should contact the Revenues and Benefits team as a support plan was available to help people. The Council has a statutory duty to collect Council Tax and would chase those who refused to pay.
- Officer would continue to liaise with other Councils to collect monies owed by residents who moved around to avoid payment.

RECOMMENDATION:

That the Committee endorses the Council Tax Support Scheme for approval and adoption by full Council.

CR/13/82

Q2 Capital Report 2013/14

The Chief Finance Officer provided a presentation that highlighted the key points in relation to the forecast capital expenditure and external funding for 2013/14 for the Council. The capital budget for 2013/14 excluding HRA is £94.6m and the attention of the Committee was drawn to a forecast variance of £0.8mk underspend and slippage of £19.2m and that capital receipts to date are £0.96m compared to a forecast of £3.98m.

In response to a query as to how realistic the budget for Children's Services was, the Portfolio Holder for Children's Services explained the service was making estimates on the demographic growth to cater for the service. All local authorities had seen an increased in looked after children. The Deputy Leader and Executive Member for Corporate Resources shared his concerns on the

pressures being put on this service and assured the Committee he would address the matter in the forthcoming budget planning proposals.

NOTED the report

CR/13/83 Q2 Revenue Report 2013/14

The Chief Finance Officer provided a presentation that highlighted the key points in relation to the forecast revenue outturn for 2013/14 for the Council. The attention of the Committee was drawn to a forecast variance of £1.8m overspend. The main pressures impacting the forecast outturn were in Children's Services (£2.7m over) and related to Children in Care, Fostering and Adoption, Transport and the loss of Dedicated Schools Grant contributions to central overheads. The overspend in Children's Services is after the use of £3.7m of earmarked reserves brought forward from 2012/13.

NOTED the report

CR/13/84 Q2 Housing Revenue Account 2013/14

The Chief Finance Officer provided a presentation that highlighted the key points in relation to the HRA Revenue and Capital position which continues to perform well with a forecast outturn surplus of £7.131m.

In response to a query the Executive Member explained under the Right to Buy scheme, the Council retained 30% of the value and the remainder goes to the Government.

It was also confirmed that a pilot scheme on the buying of bonds was in progress with many authorities interested in the outcome of this.

NOTED the report

CR/13/85 Q2 Capital Report 2013/14 Corporate Resources

The Senior Finance Manager provided a presentation that highlighted the key points in relation to the forecast capital expenditure and external funding for 2013/14 for Community Services. The attention of the Committee was drawn to a forecast variance of £5,114k underspend.

NOTED the report

CR/13/86 Q2 Revenue Report 2013/14 - Corporate Resources

The Senior Finance Manager provided a presentation that highlighted the key points in relation to the forecast revenue outturn for 2013/14 for Community Services. The attention of the Committee was drawn to a forecast variance of £153k underspend.

NOTED the report

CR/13/87 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 Your Space 2 programme and Customer First programme updates would be included in the Work Programme for the January and March meeting respectively. With regards to the Procurement of Insurance Arrangements 2014/15, this item would no longer be considered by the Executive in March.

NOTED the Corporate Resources Work Programme.

(Note: The meeting commenced at 10.00 a.m. and concluded at 11.35 a.m.)

Chairman.....

Date.....

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