

CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE COUNCIL

At a meeting of the **CORPORATE RESOURCES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE** held in Council Chamber, Priory House, Monks Walk, Shefford on Tuesday, 16 December 2014.

PRESENT

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

Cllrs	Mrs C F Chapman MBE	Cllrs	J Murray
	Dr R Egan		Mrs M Mustoe
	R W Johnstone		N Warren
	D Jones		T Woodward

Substitutes: Cllrs B Coleman

Members in Attendance:	Cllrs	C Hegley	Executive Member for Social Care, Health & Housing
		D J Hopkin	Deputy Executive Member for Corporate Resources
		M R Jones	Deputy Leader and Executive Member for Corporate Resources
		B J Spurr	Executive Member for Community Services
		B Wells	Deputy Executive Member for Community Services
		R D Wenham	Deputy Executive Member for Corporate Resources

Officers in Attendance:	Mrs M Clay	– Chief Legal and Democratic Services Officer
	Ms M Damigos	– Corporate Lawyer
	Mr P Hughes	– Schools Energy Officer
	Mrs E Malarky	– Head of Programmes & Performance Management
	Mr S Mooring	– Environmental Policy Manager
	Mr G Muskett	– Head of Revenues & Benefits
	Mrs R Preen	– Scrutiny Policy Adviser
	Mr C Warboys	– Chief Finance Officer

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CR/14/47. **Minutes**

RESOLVED

that the minutes of the meeting of the Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 21 October 2014 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record. Also that the Minutes of the co-convened OSC held on 23 September 2014 be signed as a correct record.

CR/14/48. **Members' Interests**

Cllr Chapman MBE and Cllr Sparrow declared an interest in relation to Item 11 (NNDR Discretionary Relief Policy) as they were members of various charities.

CR/14/49. **Chairman's Announcements and Communications**

None.

CR/14/50. **Petitions**

None.

CR/14/51. **Questions, Statements or Deputations**

None.

CR/14/52. **Call-In**

None.

CR/14/53. **Requested Items**

None.

CR/14/54. **Executive Member Update**

The Executive Member for Corporate Resources informed the Committee that the Local Government Settlement, which set grants for the forthcoming year would be announced in the House of Commons on 17 December 2014. Central Bedfordshire Council would have access to the data on 18 December which would provide information as to the extent of the Council's grant.

A letter had been received by the Chief Executive regarding how well the Revenues and Benefits department was performing under the current management team.

Improvement and Corporate Services had been shortlisted for a Local Government Chronicle award regarding their outstanding work and the Executive Member would update the Committee when the outcome was known.

An unplanned fire alarm at Watling House on 16 December 2014 had caused long queues on the telephone, repeat callers and a slightly higher abandonment rate than usual within Customer Services.

CR/14/55. **Budget Consultation and Residents Survey**

The Chief Communications Officer delivered a report regarding the Budget Consultation and Resident Survey, in light of which the Committee discussed the following aspects in detail:-

- The methodology of the survey and concerns that it was not representative.
- There was no information contained within the report detailing the questions asked and by whom.
- As a result of the survey, concerns had been raised by residents regarding road maintenance, public transport provision and the local retail industry. Members queried the strategy with regards to road repairs, whether anything could be done to improve public transport links given that they were largely commercially run and that the Regeneration and Business directorate would have some responsibility with regards to improvements within this area, particularly with regards to supporting retail development.

In response to the queries and concerns raised by the Committee, the Chief Communications Officer confirmed that the telephone survey had been carried out by Ipsos Mori and agreed to provide Members with details of the questions residents were asked via an email circulation. The Chief Communications Officer explained it was the same methodology used by other Local Authorities and had been used in the previous survey carried out by Central Bedfordshire Council, which meant the data was comparable.

Various outcomes had been identified as requiring attention, which would be the focus of work to increase standards but overall the survey responses had been very positive. The survey had identified that many residents felt that communication via Social Networking sites would be beneficial and there were now plans to ensure an increase in this area as a result. The use of smart phones for residents to log incidents such as road defects had proved very popular and Members agreed that the information cards available to residents detailing this feature had been an invaluable tool.

RECOMMENDED that the report be endorsed. Cllr Egan asked for her dissent to be noted due to the methodology used when carrying out the survey.

CR/14/56. **NNDR Discretionary Relief Policy**

The Head of Revenues and Benefits delivered a report regarding the NNDR Discretionary Relief Policy in light of a previous high level presentation delivered to the Committee in July 2014.

In light of the report the Committee sought clarification with regards to the following issues:-

- The procedure businesses should follow with regards to applying for rate relief in the eventuality they were negatively affected by regeneration

projects, road closures and events out of their control. The Head of Revenues and Benefits explained that there were two possible routes for businesses to take. If there was a wholesale change to the business environment then the rateable value could be reduced by the Valuation Office Agency. If it was a short term disruption due to regeneration projects then hardship relief could be applied for via the Council.

- The rate of relief to which charity shops were entitled. It was confirmed they could receive the 80% mandatory relief, applying if they wished for the discretionary 20% relief as well. In this case their goods for sale would be assessed and a decision made accordingly.
- Concerns about those organisations who declared charity status but who were selling predominantly new rather than used, donated goods. The Head of Revenues and Benefits clarified that staff could at any time verify the charity status of a shop or rate paying organisation and they could spot check them if they received intelligence which led them to believe an investigation was necessary.
- The reasons why long term empty properties received rate relief. It was clarified that this was for those who took occupation of those properties as an incentive to ensure they were occupied. It was not available to those which stood empty, they would be liable for full business rates.
- Whether shops within a conservation area would be exempt from business rates. It was confirmed that they were not, listed buildings were exempt regardless of the area but those not listed and within a conservation area would have to pay full business rates.

RECOMMENDED that the report be endorsed.

CR/14/57. **Energy Efficiency Update**

The Director for Improvement and Corporate Services introduced a report following which the School's Energy Officer delivered a presentation, which summarised reductions in energy usage in addition to projected increases in energy costs and the impact of the Electricity Market Reform from 2016. The presentation also detailed several specific energy efficiency projects currently underway. It was highlighted that if no action was taken to increase energy efficiency across the Corporate and Schools Estate then the increase in costs equated to around 70% over the next 7 years.

In light of the report and presentation Members discussed the following issues:-

- Caddington Village School and Leedon Lower School, which were examples of good practice with regards to energy efficiency and cost savings. They had introduced efficiencies such as regulated heating times and the installation of solar panels which produced electricity, enabling them to sell it back to the grid, generating income. It was suggested that all Members be informed of the Caddington School model as many Members were school governors who could promote solar panels as a worthwhile investment.

- Approximately 40% of schools were actively engaged in the SCRAP programme and the Council were working hard to ensure other schools also signed up to it. The Executive Member highlighted that the SCRAP programme was included within the capital budget and that the business case detailed the cost savings against the long term plan.
- Queries regards the efficiencies that would be generated by re-glazing Watling House. The Director of Improvement and Corporate Services explained that the payback period describing costs versus savings was detailed within the presentation.
- Whether modelling had been carried out with regards to oil prices as it was not clear with regard to savings on capital costs. The Environmental Policy Manager explained that the 5% increase in prices detailed in the report addressed this issue.

RECOMMENDED

- 1. That the Energy Efficiency Scheme continue as a priority for the Executive.**
- 2. That a more detailed and targeted forward plan of action regarding school's uptake of the initiative be provided.**
- 3. That the scheme continue to be supported within the Capital Programme.**
- 4. That a further update be provided to the Committee in 12 months.**

CR/14/58.

Councillor Code of Conduct Complaints

The Chairman of the Committee introduced the report, explaining that it had been produced due to concerns regarding time and cost resource to the Council.

The Chief Legal Officer delivered the report, which set out that changes to the Constitution had been proposed in order to find better ways of managing the complaints process and to respond to the significant changes to the old Member Standards Committee and the Localism Act. More extensive management of the situation was required due to the sharp increase in cases in recent months and the time it had taken to resolve cases, which in some instances had been up to 12 months.

In light of the report Members commented that they felt Town and Parish Councils should manage and be responsible for their own complaints, it should not be the responsibility of the Monitoring Officer. The Chief Legal Officer explained it was a statutory requirement for the Monitoring Officer to investigate formal complaints. It was also queried whether Town and Parish Councils had been made aware of this issue. A seminar with Town and Parish Councils to provide clear information and training for Town and Parish Council clerks in addition to early intervention to prevent complaints reaching the formal stage would be beneficial.

RECOMMENDED

1. That the General Purposes Committee adopt the recommended amendments to the Constitution.
2. That a specific seminar to be held no later than spring 2015 to address these issues with the Town and Parish Councillors and clerks.

CR/14/59. **Work Programme 2014/15 & Executive Forward Plan**

The Committee considered its current Work Programme and the latest Executive Forward Plan. It was noted that the West of A1 Agenda item would not be considered by the Executive in January 2015.

RECOMMENDED that the work programme be amended as outlined above.

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

Chairman.....

Date.....