

CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE COUNCIL

At a meeting of the **CORPORATE RESOURCES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE** held in Room 14, Priory House, Monks Walk, Shefford on Tuesday, 25 August 2015.

PRESENT

Cllr P A Duckett (Chairman)

Cllrs	Mrs C F Chapman MBE	Cllrs	D McVicar
	K Ferguson		T Swain
	J Kane		N Warren

Apologies for Absence: Cllrs J Chatterley
R W Johnstone

Substitutes: Cllrs C C Gomm (In place of R W Johnstone)

Members in Attendance:	Cllrs	K M Collins	Deputy Executive Member for Corporate Resources
		S Dixon	Deputy Executive Member for Corporate Resources
		J G Jamieson	Leader of the Council and Chairman of the Executive
		R D Wenham	Executive Member for Corporate Resources

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

Public: 0

CR/15/12. Minutes

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 23 June 2015 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

CR/15/13. Members' Interests

None.

CR/15/14. **Chairman's Announcements and Communications**

None.

CR/15/15. **Petitions**

None.

CR/15/16. **Questions, Statements or Deputations**

None.

CR/15/17. **Call-In**

None.

CR/15/18. **Requested Items**

None.

CR/15/19. **Executive Member Update**

The Executive Member for Corporate Resources provided an update which included the following:-

- A new system that would significantly improve Wi-Fi connections was being introduced across the Council.
- New software that was being installed to support mobile working for staff.
- The capability for new Housing Benefit claimants to apply online. Further measures to include existing claims would be introduced in the future.
- The highways app had proved very popular with residents and was being integrated into the Council systems to enhance efficiency.
- The telephony and customer service systems tender was now complete and a new contract was under consideration.
- Regional pay briefings that would be undertaken in September 2015 to consider the new living wage and annual pay awards for staff, both of which would create pressures and impact the Council.
- A recent IT security audit had raised concerns which were being addressed by the Council. There would be an e-learning package introduced for staff to minimise the possibility of further breaches.
- The annual return for electoral registration was currently underway but there had been some negative feedback from residents.
- A planning application had been submitted for the relief road on the land east of Arlesey. Tele Royale had been brought in as a partner to support this process.

In light of the update a Member expressed concern that the wording of the electoral registration form was confusing which may have led to the negative feedback from residents. In response the Director for Improvement and Corporate Services explained that the Council had used a national form, but the department would ensure the covering letter was clearer.

A Member queried the method used to determine staff pay scales. The Director confirmed the method incorporated Central Bedfordshire Council's internal grading system and a national model.

In response to a Member query the Executive Member for Corporate Resources confirmed that the Council was working on opportunities for reinvestment and land acquisition. The Committee acknowledged the importance of protecting capital investment for the future.

CR/15/20. **Central Bedfordshire's Five-year Plan: 2015-20**

The Director for Improvement and Corporate Resources delivered a report and presentation which set out the draft priorities in relation to the Council's Five Year Plan. In addition the Leader explained the importance of ensuring the priorities and areas of focus were appropriate.

In light of the presentation Members discussed the following in detail:-

- Whether it was correct to prioritise housing for older people, as housing for families was equally as important.
- The importance of ensuring that every school leaver was work ready, in terms of practical skills as well as academic achievement.
- Whether an efficient and responsive Council should be considered 'business as usual' rather than a specified priority. In response the Chief Finance Officer urged caution in changing this priority as there was detail contained within it with regards to freezing Council Tax.
- The need for excellent transport infrastructure (including road, buses and rail) and the need for a robust parking strategy due to existing and future pressures. The Deputy Executive Member highlighted the need to re-educate people with regards to the use of cars and that the Council had a duty to be proactive in providing alternative methods of travel and parking provision. The current lack of rail provision in Dunstable was highlighted as a concern, particularly with regards to the large scale development required in the area.
- The use of jargon within the document which the Director agreed would be amended.
- The additional pressures placed on the Council due to funding decisions taken by the NHS as some services were transferred to Local Authority control.
- The need for promotion of the use of open spaces to influence positive outcomes with regards to health, families and anti social behaviour.

RECOMMENDED:-

- 1. That the Committee support the strategic vision and priorities listed within the Five Year Plan;**
- 2. That in light of the feedback provided by the Committee, Officers provide more detail on the specific areas discussed by the Committee in the document provided to the public.**

CR/15/21. **Budget Strategy and Medium Term Financial Plan**

The Chief Finance Officer introduced a report, which provided the Committee with an opportunity to comment upon the Medium Term Financial Planning Framework for 2016-17 through 2019-20.

In light of the report Members queried the figures in relation to reducing Council Tax revenue in 2016/17. In response the Chief Finance Officer explained that as a result of better than anticipated Council Tax collection over previous years the Council had seen an increase in revenue. However this was not anticipated to continue to the current levels.

In addition Members queried whether the Revenue Support Grant was protected. In response the Chief Finance Officer confirmed that although there was a strong possibility it would be reduced, this should be partially mitigated by an increase in business rates income.

NOTED the report

CR/15/22. **Council Tax Support Scheme 2016/17**

The Executive Member for Corporate Resources explained that the Committee were being given the opportunity to receive the report earlier than in previous years in order to include their input to the final report to the Executive.

The Head of Revenues and Benefits delivered a report on the Council Tax Support Scheme which broadly reflected the previous Council Tax Benefit scheme with some minor changes. The proposed scheme would remain identical to the 2015/16 scheme and would not be subject to any inflationary increase.

In light of the report the Committee discussed the following points in detail:-

- The number of residents in receipt of the Single Person Discount (SPD), which was confirmed to be around one third of Central Bedfordshire residents.
- It was noted that regular entitlement checks with regards to SPD were undertaken and that most recently over 1000 people had been removed from entitlement.
- The Council Tax collection rate within Central Bedfordshire which was higher than many other Local Authorities at 97.8%.

RECOMMENDED that the Council Tax Support Scheme be approved.

CR/15/23. **Q4 Budget Monitoring Report 2014/15**

The Chief Finance Officer delivered a presentation detailing the financial position of the Council at the end of Quarter 4. The report highlighted the overspend in Social Care, which reflected the pressures the Council was under. The overall position was a small underspend against budget.

RECOMMENDED that the strong financial performance of the Council in Q4 be acknowledged.

CR/15/24. **Q1 Revenue Budget Monitoring Report 2015/16**

The Chief Finance Officer delivered a presentation detailing the financial position of the Council at the end of Quarter 1. The report highlighted that short term borrowing had enabled the Council to secure a lower interest rate on its borrowings. In addition the Executive Member stated that he anticipated a reduction in debt over the coming months.

NOTED the presentation

CR/15/25. **Work Programme 2015/16 & Executive Forward Plan**

RECOMMENDED that the Corporate Resources OSC Work Programme be agreed subject to the addition of Superfast Broadband in October 2015.

(Note: The meeting commenced at 10.00 a.m. and concluded at 12.50 p.m.)

Chairman.....

Date.....