

## CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE COUNCIL

At a meeting of the **CORPORATE RESOURCES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE** held in Council Chamber, Priory House, Monks Walk, Shefford on Tuesday, 2 February 2016.

### PRESENT

Cllr P A Duckett (Chairman)  
Cllr J Chatterley (Vice-Chairman)

Cllrs K Ferguson  
R W Johnstone  
J Kane

Cllrs T Swain  
N Warren

Apologies for Absence: Cllrs Mrs C F Chapman MBE  
D McVicar

Members in Attendance: Cllrs S Dixon  
R D Wenham  
Deputy Executive  
Member for Corporate  
Resources  
Executive Member for  
Corporate Resources

Officers in Attendance: Mrs K Aspinall – Consultation Manager  
Mrs D Broadbent-Clarke – Director of Improvement and  
Corporate Services  
Mr D Galvin – Head of Financial Performance  
Mr J Partridge – Head of Governance  
Mrs R Preen – Scrutiny Policy Adviser  
Mrs G Stanton – Chief Communications Officer  
Mr C Warboys – Chief Finance Officer

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#### CR/15/53. Minutes

**RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting of the Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 15 December 2015 be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

#### CR/15/54. Members' Interests

None.

#### CR/15/55. Chairman's Announcements and Communications

The Chairman informed the Committee that the Overview and Scrutiny Coordination Panel (OSCP) had recently convened and agreed future methods of working. In addition, Members were working closely with officers and

departments to support increased efficiency savings across the Council in light of the recent financial settlement.

CR/15/56. **Petitions**

None.

CR/15/57. **Questions, Statements or Deputations**

None.

CR/15/58. **Call-In**

None.

CR/15/59. **Requested Items**

None.

CR/15/60. **Executive Member Update**

The Executive Member for Corporate Resources informed the Committee that the tender for data centre management had recently been released. The tender would determine the Council's future IT model and enable the Council to evaluate IT security and defences. The Executive Member confirmed that no agreement had been reached with Unions regarding the National Joint Council Pay Award and that the national living wage would come into effect from 1 April 2016. Members were being encouraged to join a trial of paperless meetings and it was anticipated that by the middle of 2016 the Council would be fully paperless where possible.

Members discussed the need for robust infrastructure to support a paperless Council and the Executive Member confirmed that incompatibilities with some devices were being investigated.

In light of a Member query the Executive Member confirmed that the impact of National Living wage rises would be minimal in 2016/17 due to the fact that most staff were at or near the threshold. There would be a greater impact in 2019/20 when the living wage rose further. There were no plans to raise pay scales directly above the minimum tier but the Council always sought to pay appropriately and competitively.

In response to a Member concern the Executive Member reassured the Committee that the Council had a strong track record at identifying efficiency savings without arbitrary cuts to services.

CR/15/61. **Draft Budget, Capital, HRA and MTFP 2016/17**

The Chief Finance Officer delivered a report highlighting financial pressures, proposed efficiency savings, consultation timelines and a proposed increase to Council Tax of 3.95%, 2% being ring fenced for Social Care funding. The Committee were provided details of specific challenges and efficiencies

identified within the Improvement and Corporate Services directorate, particularly with regards to staff restructuring, shared services and a fundamental review of procurement procedures. The Executive Member highlighted the need to ensure the impact of the Capital programme on the Revenue Budget was kept to a minimum and careful management of the sale of Capital Assets. The Executive Member confirmed plans to rebuild reserves as it was not sustainable to use them in the long term.

In light of the report Members discussed the following:-

- The difficulties the Council faced in light of the government settlement and that any increase in Council Tax would not provide additional funds, but help mitigate the unexpected shortfall.
- Whether the level of NNDR the Council was permitted to retain was guaranteed; the Chief Finance Officer confirmed that figures were estimates but as accurate as possible and Central Bedfordshire's ability to attract business investment would help generate income.
- Whether income from housing growth had been taken into account and the pressure on children's services and adult social care as result of continued growth. The Executive Member was confident that housing growth figures could be maintained.
- Concerns regarding the government settlement taking into account the Council's reserves figures; the Chief Finance Officer confirmed that the settlement was calculated based on the Council's capacity to raise council tax.
- Concern that the 2% ring fenced precept for adult social care would set a precedent for further government interventions by way of extended ring fencing. The Executive Member confirmed that another authority had a precept for flooding which suggested a possible trend whenever specific financial pressures were identified.
- The need to be proactive to secure appropriate business growth.
- As regards the Landlord Business plan (HRA Budget) concerns that changes to social rent would impact revenue streams and the ability to deliver social housing.
- The importance of maintaining investment as part of the Council's ongoing Landlord business plan.

**NOTED the report and endorsed the proposed efficiencies as detailed within the Draft Budget, acknowledging the strong position with regards to debt repayment measures in the HRA.**

#### CR/15/62. **Treasury Management Strategy and Treasury Policy**

The Executive Member for Corporate Resources introduced a report, highlighting the Council's robust approach to Treasury Management. The Chief Finance Officer provided details of debt management, compliance with CIPFA indicators and the flexibility afforded to the Council due to the short term nature of interest rates.

**AGREED that the Committee endorse the Treasury Management Strategy and Policy and acknowledge the strong performance of the department.**

**CR/15/63. Traded Services to Schools & Academies – Proposed charges for 2016/17.**

The Head of Financial Performance and Support delivered a report which detailed charges for non statutory traded services to schools and Academies for 2016/17.

In response to a Member query it was confirmed that the Council sought to ensure any charges covered the costs incurred as it was against regulations to generate profit.

**RECOMMENDED**

- 1. That the Committee endorse the document for Executive approval.**
- 2. That the Children’s Services OSC be requested to explore efficiencies with regards to debt recovery, pre payment methods and appropriate pricing of services.**

**CR/15/64. Developing News and Information Services**

The Chief Communications Officer provided Members with details of the changing nature of news and information services, improvements to digital channels across the Council and the importance of website access using any mobile device. Members were also advised of efficiency savings identified due to the withdrawal of distributing News Central to individual homes.

Members queried the methods by which the Council monitored online traffic and comments, including those received out of hours. The Head of Communication Channels and Campaigns confirmed that as many sites as possible were monitored and where appropriate responses provided.

Members commented that the process of developing the new website had been positive and queried whether it was possible to charge other agencies for using the Council’s website space. The Executive Member confirmed that ensuring the Council’s need was met was a priority but there was potential to expand and work with other agencies in the future.

**NOTED the presentation**

**CR/15/65. Scrutiny Enquiry on Council Responsiveness**

The Head of Governance provided Members with an overview of resident survey data detailing resident satisfaction relating to customer contact and influence on Council decision-making.

**NOTED the presentation and agreed that a working party comprising Cllrs Duckett, Kane and Chatterley be created to progress the enquiry over the coming months.**

**CR/15/66. Work Programme 2014/15 & Executive Forward Plan**

**RECOMMENDED that the Corporate Resources OSC Work Programme be agreed subject to the addition of the following:-**

- 1. The Assets Strategy – June 2016**
- 2. Digital Transformation – June 2016**
- 3. Working Smarter – June 2016**
- 4. Scrutiny of the Council’s Insurance Policies – October 2016**
- 5. The Shortfall of Later Life Housing Accounts – October 2016**
- 6. The Council’s Debt Collection Process – October 2016**

(Note: The meeting commenced at 10.02 a.m. and concluded at 1.30 p.m.)

Chairman.....

Date.....