

CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE COUNCIL

At a meeting of the **CORPORATE RESOURCES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE** held in Room 14 - Priory House, Monks Walk, Shefford, SG17 5TQ on Tuesday, 24 May 2016.

PRESENT

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

Cllrs Mrs C F Chapman MBE
N B Costin
J Kane

Cllrs D McVicar
T Swain

Apologies for Absence: Cllrs R W Johnstone
B Saunders
T Woodward

Substitutes: Cllrs Mrs A Barker
C C Gomm
M A G Versallion

Members in Attendance: Cllrs S Dixon (Executive Member) Executive Member for Education and Skills
R D Wenham (Executive Member) Executive Member for Corporate Resources

Officers in Attendance: Mrs D Broadbent-Clarke – Director of Improvement and Corporate Services
Mr M Coiffait – Director of Community Services
Mr S Girling – AD Assets
Mrs R Preen – Scrutiny Policy Adviser
Mr C Warboys – Chief Finance Officer

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CROSC/16/78. Minutes

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 22 March 2016 be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

CROSC/16/79. Members' Interests

None.

CROSC/16/80. Chairman's Announcements and Communications

The Chairman announced the departure of the Director for Improvement and Corporate Services and extended formal thanks on behalf of the Committee for the contribution she had made to the Council over her tenure.

CROSC/16/81. Petitions

None.

CROSC/16/82. Questions, Statements or Deputations

None.

CROSC/16/83. Call-In

None.

CROSC/16/84. Requested Items

None.

CROSC/16/85. Executive Member Update

None.

CROSC/16/86. Asset Management Strategy

The Director for Community Services introduced the Corporate Asset Management Strategy, outlining proposals to manage, develop and utilise the Council's property and land assets portfolio, highlighting operational requirements, the need to support the farm estate and the continued regeneration of Central Bedfordshire. The Committee were informed that a full public consultation process would be undertaken as the implementation of the strategy unfolded.

(The meeting adjourned from 14:15-14:25)

In light of the report the Chairman queried the apparent lack of detail around housing solutions and in response the Director confirmed that the Housing Strategy was included as one element of the overarching Asset Management Strategy. As each individual element was implemented the appropriate focus, specific timelines and detail would be applied.

Members highlighted that the description of Quadrants could appear confusing once the document was made public and requested that the Directorate consider including more familiar North/South denominations when describing areas.

Members agreed the importance of utilising assets to their full potential as an alternative to selling them and queried the process by which the disposal of an asset with apparently insufficient income was determined. In response the

Executive Member explained that an industry standard process was deployed in order to determine viability and that in each instance a full business case would be created to ensure the most appropriate outcome. The Director confirmed that it would depend upon the nature of an individual asset in relation to any decision as to where something would be bought, sold or built.

In response to a Member query the Executive Member confirmed that a data capturing exercise was currently under way in order to address the issue of shop vacancy rates.

A discussion arose around the process of managing farmland and the Director explained that other factors in addition to yield would be assessed when determining the overall viability of a farm as farmland was not retained for this sole purpose, but also to encourage and support farmers and the industry as a whole.

RECOMMENDED:-

- 1. That the Committee endorse the document for Executive approval.**
- 2. The inclusion of a Member communication protocol within the strategy in order to facilitate clear understanding of the direction of travel at every stage.**
- 3. That individual elements of the strategy be considered at the appropriate Overview and Scrutiny Committees and included within work programmes accordingly.**

CROSC/16/87. Acquisitions Policy

The Executive Member for Corporate Resources introduced the item and explained that the document had evolved from the draft seen at a previous Overview and Scrutiny meeting and that comments made by the Committee had been included in the updated version, including a revised title. The Director for Community Services confirmed that the policy complied with the necessary legal requirements such as avoiding land speculation and demonstrated the continued sustainability of the Central Bedfordshire land holdings.

In light of the report the following was discussed:-

- The Chief Finance Officer highlighted the current lack of provision within the Capital Programme for the acquisition of land and that the document, if agreed by the Executive and Council facilitated purchases when supported by a valid business case.
- In response to a Member query the Director confirmed that unspent allocated funds would roll over to future years.
- A Member queried the legal implications with regards to replenishing land at the same rate with which it was sold and the Director confirmed that this was not a requirement but that the market would be assessed according to need.

A discussion arose around the need for flexibility when delivering the Acquisitions Policy in order that capital receipts were used for both purchases and other capital projects. It was confirmed that other Local Authorities would have similar policies and strategies but that each one would be crafted to meet local need and demand.

The Executive Member confirmed that although it may be possible to purchase land on the border or outside of Central Bedfordshire, it wouldn't necessarily be the favoured course of action; it would need to be considered on a case by case basis and the most beneficial outcome for Central Bedfordshire.

RECOMMENDED that the Committee endorse the document for Executive approval.

(Note: The meeting commenced at 2.00 p.m. and concluded at 3.45 p.m.)

Chairman.....

Date.....