

**Minutes of the
CENSUS JOINT COMMITTEE
(CENTRAL SUSSEX PARTNERSHIP)**



27 March 2015

Present:

Councillors: Jonathan Ash-Edwards (Chairman), Mid Sussex District Council
Helena Croft, Horsham District Council
Jim Funnell, Adur District Council
Neil Parkin, Adur District Council
Daniel Humphreys, Worthing Borough Council
Gary Marsh, Mid Sussex District Council

Apologies:

Councillors: Gordon Lindsay, Horsham District Council
Bryan Turner, Worthing Borough Council

Also present:

Hannah Martin, Senior Democratic Services Officer, Mid Sussex District Council
Paul Brewer, Director for Digital & Resources, Adur & Worthing Councils
Kathryn Hall, Chief Executive, Mid Sussex District Council
Tim Delany, Head of CenSus Revenues and Benefits, Mid Sussex District Council
Katharine Eberhart, Director of Corporate Resources, Horsham District Council
John Ross, Head of CenSus ICT
Carol Stephenson, CenSus Programme Manager

CJC/26 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Joint Committee held on 12 December 2014 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

CJC/27 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

CJC/28 URGENT ITEMS

None.

CJC/29 CENSUS BUDGET 2015/16

The Director of Corporate Resources for Horsham District Council introduced the report to the Committee. She advised that there were no changes in the budget from when the Committee received the report in December.

There being no questions, the Chairman took the Committee to the recommendation, which was agreed.

RESOLVED that the draft revenue and capital budgets for both the Revenues and Benefits Service and the ICT Service be approved.

The Joint Committee received a report from the Head of CenSus Revenues and Benefits, setting out the service's activity since the previous report in December. With regard to Benefits, overall performance is good and has improved after previous setback. The expenditure on Discretionary Housing Payments were now close to coming in line with the agreed budgets and it was proposed that through careful monitoring in the coming year that this can be repeated despite the small reduction in budget received from the DWP. The collection of Council Tax was on target though there was a slight drop for Horsham District Council which may be as a consequence of the introduction of their CTSS (Council Tax Support Scheme) however until detailed analysis is undertaken following the year end this cannot be certain. With regards to National Non-Domestic Rates the recent change from offering customers a 12 monthly payment plan as opposed to the historical 10 monthly payment plan has resulted in the anticipated catch up during February and March; year-end collection was expected to be on target. There was a further update on the subsidy audit and after officers' contention of the auditor's extrapolation of errors found in earnings cases was incorrect, this has now been accepted. Work was still being undertaken on the Mid Sussex and Horsham audit but the final outcome of the Horsham audit will be a revised clawback by the DWP amounting to £5,800. The overall budget was on target despite expenditures made on the self service module from Capita and interim fixes for telephony at Horsham.

The Head of CenSus Revenues and Benefits provided further updates for the Committee with regards to annual billing this year and advised that due to the outsourcing of the process from printing to dispatch and more efficient processes within the CenSus teams, the procedure had run very smoothly. With the interim fix for the telephony issues this has produced a better experience for the customer and there have been no complaints about not being able to get through being escalated to senior management.

The Chairman thanked the Head of CenSus Revenues and Benefits for the update and the hard work of staff on the claw back from the subsidy audit. He asked Members if they had any questions on the report.

One Member asked for further explanation on the subsidy audit and the reasons why the auditors have now agreed that their extrapolation of errors in the caseloads were incorrect. The Head of CenSus Revenues and Benefits explained that this lay in miscommunication between the auditors and officers and that the auditors had not been clear in the information they had wanted from officers before carrying out their extrapolations. He also raised some concerns about the skills of the auditors that carried out the work and while accepting that officers had made some errors he had raised his concerns with the Audit Director about the extrapolations across the whole caseload.

The Chief Executive of Mid Sussex District Council confirmed that she had recently met with the Audit Director at Ernst & Young to explain their concerns about the methodology used by the auditors and the need for greater communication moving forward. In addition, she advised Members that 78% of local authorities nationally had received a qualification and there has not been an instance of an authority moving out of qualification once it has received it. Therefore it was highly unlikely moving forward that despite measures being put in place to improve performance and accuracy that CenSus will become unqualified.

Another Member asked about the action plan as outlined in page 14 of the report and queried how long it would take to implement. The Head of CenSus Revenues and Benefits advised that everything was already in place and officers are ready to embrace the changes in working practice in order to achieve the desired results. He went on to say that high level quality control checking will be on-going from May.

Another Member agreed that the action plan was good but commented that it was too late to implement good practices to affect the results of the 2012/13 audit and how will it be possible to avoid this moving forward. The Head of CenSus Revenues and Benefits agreed that due to the timing of the audit taking place and of the initial results of the audit being released, the year has now closed and therefore there is no time to correct or implement change to affect the final result. However, the changes being implemented now will feed into the audit of the current year but it is ultimately down to the auditors to decide when they will carry out the audit. The Chief Executive of Mid Sussex District Council advised that in her discussions with the Audit Director she has tried to see if they would be able to move their audit to earlier in the year so that staff can have time to make the necessary changes.

One Member commented on the interim fix to telephony in Revenues as this was a key frontline service which needed to be addressed.

The Chairman took the Committee to the recommendations which were agreed:

RESOLVED that the Committee note the performance and activity of the service, together with the current position following the 13/14 subsidy audit and agree the 15/16 targets.

CJC/31 **ICT SERVICE QUARTERLY UPDATE**

The Joint Committee received a report from the Head of CenSus ICT on the service for the final quarter of 2014/15. He updated on the latest performance information where all delivery targets were met across all sites. He also advised that there was a 50% reduction in the number of calls outstanding from August. There were still difficulties with Capita meeting deadlines on the WAN project but the recent rollout of a new internet provision at Horsham District Council has quadrupled processing speed. The PSN reaccreditation for all sites will be due in June and project work is taking place and a specialist security contractor has been brought on board to help with this work. There is also a trial of a new product G/ON which is a small device which will allow the safe and secure access to the Council Network of any device. It is hoped that this will be ready to roll out for the new Member intake following the May elections. The service is slightly over budget from contractor costs due to difficulties of retaining staff with the right skill set. The Head of CenSus ICT advised that to combat this he was in the process of drawing up a restructure business case for the service with an emphasis on more accountability at each site.

One Member asked about the CenSus ICT Service Improvement programme as outlined in page 29 of the report and whether the Head of Service was confident that these projects were achievable whilst still maintaining the critical day to day systems. The Head of CenSus ICT confirmed that he was satisfied that the

service was resilient enough to accommodate these projects and continue to maintain the critical systems and he hopes the new restructure will help with instilling proper governance.

A Member asked if the work on the Horsham Transformation Project would affect resources across the rest of the service and the Head of CenSus ICT confirmed that 90% of the project work had already been completed and there were no anticipated operational effects across the rest of the service.

One Member asked about disaster recovery and that there appeared to be a large underspend. The Head of CenSus ICT advised that he had highlighted the work being undertaken on disaster recovery in his summary on page 10 and that a software product called Veeam had been procured to help with this. As regards to the underspend he advised that the majority of expenditure this year had been revenue rather than capital work and thus had created the underspend.

Another Member asked for further information on Infrastructure Monitoring. The Head of CenSus ICT that they had now procured SCOM monitoring which had never fully been rolled out before and this was exposing underlying issues that needed to be addressed in order to improve performance.

A Member asked about the Capita WAN and what measures can be used to force them to commit to deadlines. The Head of CenSus ICT advised that he has sent several legal letters to West Sussex County Council asking them to comply with their obligations but as the CenSus contract is a relatively small contract this is not a priority for them. He advised that on balance the cost of pulling out of the contract is too high and as the WAN does work it is just difficult getting Capita to meet the Council's deadlines.

Another Member asked about the budget and asked if the underspend in disaster recovery could be used to offset overspend in other areas. The Head of CenSus ICT advised that the budget in other areas was in line and was attempting to hold this position. It is hoped that there will be no overspend in any of the projects.

The Chairman took the Committee to the recommendations which were agreed:

RESOLVED that the operational performance of the CenSus ICT service, the current status of the CenSus ICT project progress, the ICT non-CenSus projects (site-specific projects) and status of major ICT incident occurrence within the last quarter, be noted.

CJC/32 **DRAFT WORK PROGRAMME 2015/16**

The Joint Committee received a report from the CenSus Programme Manager detailing the work programme for the Joint Committee for 2015/16. She advised that Members will have the opportunity to amend the items for discussion throughout the year.

The Chairman took the Committee to the recommendation which was agreed:

RESOLVED that the draft work programme for 2015/16 was agreed.

CJC/33 **DATES OF MEETINGS FOR CENSUS JOINT COMMITTEE 2015/16**

The Joint Committee received a report from the CenSus Programme Manager with the schedule of meetings of the PMB and CenSus Joint Committee for 2015/16. It was noted that for 2015/16 the Joint Committee meetings will be hosted by Adur and Worthing Councils.

The Chairman took the Committee to the recommendation which was agreed:

RESOLVED that the proposed dates and locations for 15/16 meetings were agreed.

The meeting commenced at 10:00 a.m. and ended at 10:42 a.m.

CHAIRMAN