

CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE COUNCIL

At a meeting of the **GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE** held at Room 14, Priory House, Monks Walk, Shefford on Thursday, 7 October 2010.

PRESENT

Cllr Mrs J G Lawrence (Chairman)

Cllr A Fahn (Vice-Chairman)

Cllrs J A E Clarke
J Murray

Cllrs R C Stay
Mrs P E Turner MBE

Apologies for Absence: Cllr P Rawcliffe

Substitutes: Cllr K C Matthews (In place of P Rawcliffe)

Officers in Attendance: Mr J Atkinson Head of Legal and Democratic Services
Mrs C Jones Head of Strategy
Mr L Manning Committee Services Officer
Mr G McFarlane Acting Assistant Director People

GPC/10/22 **Minutes**

RESOLVED

that the minutes of the meeting of the General Purposes Committee held on 24 August 2010 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

GPC/10/23 **Members' Interests**

(a) **Personal Interests:-**

None notified.

(b) **Personal and Prejudicial Interests:-**

None notified.

GPC/10/24 **Chairman's Announcements and Communications**

The Chairman reminded Members that, at its last meeting, the Committee had considered reports on the Market Rate Supplement Policy (minute 10/18 refers) and Violence and Aggression Policy (minute 10/19 refers) and that it had been agreed that further information relating to those topics should be made available to Members. On this basis the Chairman asked that the officers update the Committee.

Turning first to the Violence and Aggression Policy, and the application of the Council's Indemnity as it applied to Members, the Head of Legal and Democratic Services explained that the purpose of the Indemnity was to protect both Members and officers should they find themselves subject to legal action as a result of undertaking their duties on behalf of the Council.

In response to queries the Head of Legal and Democratic Services stated that both Members and officers enjoyed the same level of protection. He also stated that the presumption was that the Council would not fund litigation on behalf of Members or officers. A Member sought clarification regarding a situation in which councillors suffered personal attack in the form of defamation whilst undertaking Council business. It was felt by other Members that councillors should not seek financial support from the Council to engage in retaliatory legal action but, instead, accept that this type of comment constituted a normal, if unpleasant, part of the political process.

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services concluded by emphasising that the Council had appropriate Indemnity in place and that, in view of the statutory restrictions imposed on the Authority, it would not be prudent to attempt any extension of this.

Turning next to the Council's Market Rate Supplement Policy the Acting Assistant Director People circulated a document which summarised those supplements made to employees within the Council's Directorates.

Following Members' queries the Acting Assistant Director explained that the driving force behind the award of supplements was supply and demand and he referred to the national shortage of social workers for children as an example of how such supplements were necessary in order to attract staff. He stressed that the payments were not performance related. The officer then added that the vast majority of supplements were legacy arrangements and that, though subject to review, each would have a different review date. The Chairman commented that should the same group of employees repeatedly appear for review then Members would seek an explanation for this.

At the request of the Committee the Acting Assistant Director undertook to supply regular reports to the January and July meetings of the Committee regarding the payment of supplements starting in January 2011.

GPC/10/25 **Petitions**

No petitions were received from members of the public in accordance with the Public Participation Procedure as set out in Annex 2 of Part 4 of the Constitution.

GPC/10/26 **Questions, Statements or Deputations**

No questions, statements or deputations were received from members of the Public in accordance with the Public Participation Procedure as set out in Annex 1 of Part A4 of the Constitution.

GPC/10/27 **Lone Working Policy**

The Committee considered a report which sought Members' approval of the adoption of a Lone Working Policy for all non schools based employees. A copy of the Policy was attached at Appendix A to the report.

The meeting was aware that the Council had a duty of care to take reasonable action to provide protection to its employees and Members when they were carrying out their duties as employees or as Members of the Council. At its last meeting on 24 August 2010 the Committee had approved the adoption of a Violence and Aggression Policy and the proposed Lone Working Policy was a closely interlinked element with this in helping the Council to exercise its duty of care.

The Head of Strategy stated that the Policy content had been discussed with Directorates and the Policy and supporting guidance notes had been well received. In addition the unions had worked closely with HR on the content of the Policy.

A Member queried the relevance of the Policy to Councillors, given they also worked alone, such as when attending ward surgeries, as there was only one passing reference to them in the introduction to the document. He suggested that the Policy was acceptable as long as it was only meant for employees. However, in response another Member reminded the meeting that advice was given on this issue during the Members' induction process and the Policy was primarily directed at employees. The Head of Strategy confirmed that the document was for employees but reference had been made to Members because elements of the Policy could also be of use to them. However, she fully accepted that a Member dedicated document would be of value and undertook to liaise with the Head of Legal and Democratic Services regarding the information that was given to Members. She also undertook to ensure a paragraph was added to the Policy referring Members to the dedicated document.

In response to a Member's query regarding the ability of the Policy to stand up to legal scrutiny the Acting Assistant Director People stated that its content was based on Health and Safety Executive (HSE) best practice. The meeting felt that, on this basis, there was no need to put the Policy to test.

RESOLVED

- 1 that the Lone Working Policy for non schools based employees, presented to the Committee under Appendix A of the report of the Acting Assistant Director People, be adopted with immediate effect subject to the following amendment:**

Page 4, Managers/Supervisors Responsibilities

The first sentence to now read:

‘Lone working shouldn’t carry any more risk than normal working but managers must recognise that the risks to lone workers are potentially greater because there is a reduced level of immediate support available’;

- 2 that the Head of Strategy prepare a dedicated Lone Working Policy document for Members following liaison with the Head of Legal and Democratic Services.**

GPC/10/28 **Date of Next Meeting**

NOTED

that the next meeting of the Committee will be held on Thursday, 13 January 2011.

GPC/10/29 **Acting Assistant Director People**

The Committee was aware that the Acting Assistant Director People was leaving the Authority at the end of October to work at the London Borough of Tower Hamlets. On behalf of the Committee the Chairman thanked the Acting Assistant Director for his contribution and wished him well in his new post.

(Note: The meeting commenced at 10.00 a.m. and concluded at 10.48 a.m.)

Chairman

Dated