

CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE COUNCIL

At a meeting of the **GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE** held at Room 15, Priory House, Monks Walk, Shefford on Thursday, 6 October 2011

PRESENT

Cllr Mrs J G Lawrence (Chairman)
Cllr R C Stay (Vice-Chairman)

Cllrs J G Jamieson
D Jones

Cllrs M R Jones
K C Matthews

Apologies for Absence: Cllrs J A E Clarke

Substitutes: Cllrs Mrs C F Chapman MBE (In place of J A E Clarke)

Members in Attendance: Cllrs M A G Versallion

Officers in Attendance: Mr J Atkinson – Head of Legal and Democratic Services
Mr B Dunleavy – Democratic Services Manager
Ms R Hobbs – Head of Resourcing and Development
Mr L Manning – Committee Services Officer

GPC/11/17 **Minutes**

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the meeting of the General Purposes Committee held on 4 August 2011 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record subject to the following amendment:

Minute GPC/11/15 (Combined Referendum and Local Elections – 5 May 2011)

Amend the last sentence in paragraph 8 by deleting ‘the Council’s’ and inserting ‘his Party’s’. The sentence to now read:

‘A Member commented that the Deputy Prime Minister had already been advised of his Party’s views on the decision to hold a combined election.’

GPC/11/18 **Members' Interests**

(a) **Personal Interests:-**

None.

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

None.

GPC/11/19 **Chairman's Announcements and Communications**

The Chairman first made an announcement regarding the introduction of new terms and conditions for employees. She reminded the meeting that the implementation date had been, for most staff, Monday, 3 October as it was the first working day of the month. The Chairman stated that out of 2,240 staff affected (the figure taking into account leavers and starters since the first letters were sent) only six had not attended work on that day and had, therefore, left the Council's employment. She also stated that, whilst it had been a relief that that so few staff had chosen not to take up the new contracts, Members should be mindful that it had been a difficult time for many staff with some reporting that they would struggle financially.

In response, and on behalf of the Committee, the Vice-Chairman asked that Members' thanks to staff for their commitment be recorded. Members also expressed their thanks to the Assistant Chief Executive - People and Organisation and her HR officers for steering the Council through the process to a result which had proved less serious to the organisation than it could have been.

The Chairman then advised the meeting that the running order of the agenda had been changed. Item 9 (Exclusion of Press and Public) would now be considered before Item 8 (Market Rate Supplement Payments Update) because considering the report on market rate supplements as an exempt item at the same time as the existing exempt Appendix B to the report would enable the Committee to undertake a fuller discussion on this matter.

GPC/11/20 **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 A4 of the Constitution.

GPC/11/21 **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/11/22 **Boundary Commission for England - Parliamentary Constituency Boundaries Review**

The Committee considered a report by the Head of Legal and Democratic Services which set out the initial proposals by the Boundary Commission for England arising from its current review of Parliamentary constituencies.

The meeting was aware that new Parliamentary rules required a significant reduction in the number of constituencies in England and that every constituency (apart from two specified exceptions) should have an electorate that was no smaller than 72,810 and no larger than 80,473. The Commission had the task of making a formal report to the Government by 1 October 2013 with its recommended changes. Subject to parliamentary approval the changes would be implemented in time for the next General Election scheduled for May 2015.

The meeting noted the timeline for the consultation process for the review. It was further noted that the consultation period on the Commission's initial proposals ran from 13 September to 5 December 2011 and that a public hearing for the Eastern Region proposals would take place on 7/8 November 2011.

The officers sought the Committee's views on whether to accept the Commission's initial proposals for the constituencies contained within the Central Bedfordshire Council area (which fell within the Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire Sub-Region of the Eastern Region) or formulate a revised scheme.

Lengthy debate took place during which Members expressed major concern at the impact of the initial proposals should they be adopted. A large number of Central Bedfordshire parishes would be lost to neighbouring authorities within Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire in what, it was felt, was an attempt to ensure that constituencies within the Sub-Region met the Government's size requirements. This appeared to be at the expense of any close alignment between Parliamentary and local authority boundaries and to the detriment of any sense of community. Further, Central Bedfordshire's electorate would be served by six MP's rather than the current four and some wards would have one or more parishes being represented by a different MP from the remainder of the ward. The proposals would see only one of the six MP's solely representing Central Bedfordshire. Disquiet was also expressed at the detrimental impact on Central Bedfordshire Council as a recently created unitary authority and, as such, the need to support the Council whilst it became fully established.

The need for any constituency boundary review to take full note of a sense of locality and place was emphasised.

The Committee noted that Luton Borough Council had accepted the initial proposals as they affected that Council in full. The Committee also noted that Bedford Borough Council was likely to seek only minor amendments to the initial proposals that were of relevance to that Authority.

The Committee was aware that the electorate figures used for the review were, as a result of the requirements of the Parliamentary Constituencies Act 1986 (as amended), those from electoral registers two years and ten months before the review was required to report to the Government. For the 2013 review this meant that the electorate figures used were from the electoral registers required to be published on or before 1 December 2010. Further, the proposals took no account of the affect of potential housing development on the basis that properties might not be occupied.

RESOLVED

- 1 that the General Purposes Committee register its major concern regarding the Boundary Commission for England's initial proposals, arising from its review of Parliamentary boundaries, as they affect Central Bedfordshire;**
- 2 that officers, in consultation with the Chairman of the General Purposes Committee and having regard to the views of all interested parties, develop revised alternative proposals for those Parliamentary boundaries as they affect the Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire Sub-Region of the Eastern Region for submission to the Council for approval on 24 November 2011;**
- 3 that the concern expressed by the General Purposes Committee about the Boundary Commission for England's initial proposals be reported to the public hearing for the Eastern Region at Luton Borough Council on 7/8 November 2011.**

RECOMMENDED to Council

that the alternative proposals for those Parliamentary boundaries as they affect the Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire Sub-Region of the Eastern Region, as revised by the officers in consultation with the Chairman of General Purposes Committee, be approved and adopted and then submitted to the Boundary Commission for England for consideration.

GPC/11/23 **Exclusion of Press and Public**

RESOLVED

that in accordance with Section 100A (4) of the Local Government Act 1972 the Press and Public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information under paragraphs 1 and 2 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act:

- (a) Market Rate Supplement Payments Update**
- (b) Appendix B to the Market Rate Supplement Payments Update.**

GPC/11/24 **Market Rate Supplement Payments Update**

The Committee considered a report by the Assistant Chief Executive – People and Organisation which provided an update on the current market rate supplements paid to Central Bedfordshire Council staff. Members had resolved to receive this report as an exempt item so it could be considered in conjunction with exempt Appendix B and thereby facilitate discussion.

Members were aware that exempt Appendix B, which set out those market rate supplements which had been inherited from the legacy authorities and those agreed in accordance with Central Bedfordshire Council's policy, had been revised and the new version they had received included the date that individual market rate supplements would be reviewed or when they ended.

The Chairman reminded the Committee of its previous resolutions seeking the submission of information on market rate supplement payments. She expressed some concern regarding the content of previous reports as she felt they had not been sufficiently detailed.

The Head of Resourcing and Development introduced the report before Members, explaining how market rate supplements bridged the gap between salary levels and the current market rate of pay. She advised that this approach was used to respond to problems in recruiting and retaining staff groups, roles or skills, that it was supported by a market survey and that its application for individual posts required the approval of the Corporate Management Team.

Full and frank discussion then took place regarding all aspects of the Council's current application of market rate supplements.

NOTED

the information highlighting the current application of market rate supplements to posts across Central Bedfordshire Council.

RESOLVED

that the Executive Member for Corporate Resources, having full regard to Members' comments and queries, update the General Purposes Committee at its next meeting on the application of market rate supplements across Central Bedfordshire Council.

(Note: The meeting commenced at 10.00 a.m. and concluded at 11.28 a.m.)

Chairman

Dated