

CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE COUNCIL

At a meeting of the **GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE** held at Room 15b, Priory House, Monks Walk, Shefford on Thursday, 18 July 2013

PRESENT

Cllr P Hollick (Chairman)
Cllr R C Stay (Vice-Chairman)

Cllrs P N Aldis
A L Dodwell
M R Jones
D J Lawrence

Cllrs Mrs J G Lawrence
J Murray
B Saunders
N Warren

Apologies for Absence: Cllrs J G Jamieson
Mrs C F Chapman MBE

Substitutes: Cllrs K C Matthews (In place of Mrs C F Chapman MBE)
M A G Versallion (In place of J G Jamieson)

Members in Attendance: Cllr D Bowater

Officers in Attendance: Mrs C Jones – Head of HR Policy and Development
Mr L Manning – Committee Services Officer
Ms D Clarke – Director of Improvement and Corporate Services
Mr J Atkinson – Head of Legal and Democratic Services

GPC/13/12 **Minutes**

RESOLVED

that the minutes of the meeting of the General Purposes Committee held on 16 May 2013 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

GPC/13/13 **Members' Interests**

None.

GPC/13/14 **Chairman's Announcements and Communications**

None.

GPC/13/15 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/13/16 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/13/17 Annual Report on the Arrangements for Ethical Standards

The Committee considered a report by the Head of Legal and Democratic Services/Monitoring Officer on developments in respect of ethical standards since the Localism Act 2011 was brought into force on 1 July 2012.

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services/Monitoring Officer introduced his report which provided a summary of how the arrangements for the new Code of Conduct, the submission of register of interests forms and use of independent persons had worked in practice over the previous 12 months. He also drew Members' attention to the procedure adopted for the handling of complaints, the number of complaints received by Central Bedfordshire Council since 1 July 2012 and a comparison with the number received in previous years.

The meeting noted that the comparison had revealed a rise in the number of complaints received regarding town and parish council members, mainly in connection with an alleged failure to disclose interests and a failure to show courtesy and respect to others. The Head of Legal and Democratic Services/Monitoring Officer stressed that, whilst the comparison had shown an increase in the number of complaints, their origin was essentially limited to a few parish councils.

The Committee considered the means by which town and parish councillors could be encouraged to attend training, it being noted that the majority had failed to attend recent training sessions organised by the Head of Legal and Democratic Services/Monitoring Officer. The possibility of using the quarterly conference between Central Bedfordshire Council and local town and parish councils as a means to raise the issue was suggested though it was acknowledged that town and parish council attendance at the conference was not representative. The Director of Improvement and Corporate Services sought the cooperation of those Members who were also town and parish councillors to help reduce the number of trivial complaints submitted in view of the cost to this Council in officer time and effort.

The Committee considered the impact of the combination of a lack of training and personal experience on following correct procedure and the failure to acknowledge personal accountability and the democratic process. Members

emphasised the importance of training for councillors to ensure the proper governance of town and parish councils, especially those where the clerk lacked formal training.

Concern was also expressed by Members regarding the failure by some town and parish councillors to return new register of interests forms. In response the Head of Legal and Democratic Services/Monitoring Officer explained that he was in contact with town and parish councils over this issue. However, he added that, whilst under the Localism Act, register of interests forms had to be submitted within 28 days of election, there was no statutory requirement for new forms to be submitted by councillors if they had been elected before 1 July 2012 when the legislation had come into force. He would continue, nonetheless, to encourage the completion and return of new forms.

NOTED

the outcome of the arrangements made by Central Bedfordshire Council to comply with its obligations in respect of ethical standards under the Localism Act 2011 following the first year of their operation.

RESOLVED

that the Head of Legal and Democratic Services/Monitoring Officer work with the Bedfordshire Association of Town and Parish Councils to arrange training for town and parish councillors and encourage their participation in such training.

GPC/13/18 **Work Programme**

Members considered a report by the Head of Legal and Democratic Services setting out the proposed Work Programme for the Committee for the remainder of 2013/14.

In response to a Member's query regarding the consideration of an item on the Annual Report of the Leader the Head of Legal and Democratic Services first explained that the intention was to submit any proposed constitutional changes to the Committee's December meeting so that any suggested amendments, if eventually adopted, could be in place by the date of Annual Council. He then stated that the specific reference to the Annual Report of the Leader was in connection with the need to consider a possible amendment to the Constitution to allow Members to ask questions on the Report.

The Chairman referred to the delay in submitting a report which dealt with review of the Member/Officer protocol and how this delay was specifically linked to Members use of emails. The meeting was assured that the report would be submitted to the Committee's October meeting.

RESOLVED

that the proposed General Purposes Committee Work Programme for the remainder of 2013/14, as attached at Appendix A to the report of the Head of Legal and Democratic Services, be approved.

GPC/13/19 **Exclusion of Press and Public**

RESOLVED

that in accordance with Section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972 the Press and Public be excluded from the meeting for the following item of business on the grounds that consideration of the item is likely to involve the disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraphs 1 and 2 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act.

GPC/13/20 **Market Rate Supplement Payments - Update**

Further to minute GPC/13/11 of its last meeting the Committee considered a report by the Director of Improvement and Corporate Services setting out additional information on the current application of Market Rate Supplements (MRS) to posts across Central Bedfordshire Council. The report described the impact of national shortages in some qualified and experienced staff on the current market rate of pay. The report also provided information relating to the proportion/percentage of the total pay bill (including on-costs) for each Directorate budget used to fund the payment of MRS. Detail for the years 2011/12 and 2012/13 was provided in order to allow a comparison and establish what change, if any, had taken place. Also shown was the number of MRS payments against salary bandings in 2011/12 and 2012/13 and information to show how many MRS payments were made by MRS payband and by Directorate.

The Director of Improvement and Corporate Services provided the local context for the continued use of MRS within Central Bedfordshire Council, the shortcomings relating to the system and the possible remedial action.

Full and lengthy discussion took place. Members fully acknowledged the underlying challenges regarding aspects of the Council's existing pay and grading structure and the measures being undertaken or contemplated at both national and local levels to meet staffing requirements.

RESOLVED

- 1 that the action taken by officers to secure savings with regard to Carlyle Managed Services be formally endorsed;**
- 2 that the Committee record its support for the introduction of remedial action to correct the inconsistencies within Central Bedfordshire Council's pay and grading structure;**

- 3 that future annual reports on the use of Market Rate Supplements within Central Bedfordshire Council include information on staff turnover rates, including the specialist employment areas affected, and trends that have developed;**
- 4 that any urgent trend relating to staff turnover be reported to the Committee as soon as is possible.**

(Note: The meeting commenced at 10.00 a.m. and concluded at 11.13 a.m.)

Chairman

Dated