

CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE COUNCIL

At a meeting of the **GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE** held at Room 15, Priory House, Monks Walk, Shefford on Thursday, 28 March 2019

PRESENT

Cllr Mrs J G Lawrence (Chairman)

Cllrs Mrs A L Dodwell
D J Lawrence
K C Matthews

Cllrs R D Wenham
A Zerny

Apologies for Absence: Cllrs J G Jamieson
G Perham
B J Spurr
N Warren
S Watkins

Substitutes: Cllrs E Ghent (In place of J G Jamieson)
M A G Versallion (In place of G Perham)

Members in Attendance: Cllrs R D Berry
S Dixon

Officers in Attendance: Mrs V Chapman – Assistant Director People
Mr B Dunleavy – Democratic Services Manager
Ms S Fecondi – HR Business Partner
Mrs S Hobbs – Senior Committee Services Officer
Ms S Hughes – Community Engagement Manager
Mrs C Jagusz – Committee Services Officer
Mr S Rix – Interim Monitoring Officer
Mr C Warboys – Director of Resources

GPC/18/38. **Minutes**

RESOLVED

that the minutes of the meeting of the General Purposes Committee held on 13 December 2018 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

GPC/18/39. **Members' Interests**

None.

GPC/18/40. **Chairman's Announcements and Communications**

The Chairman noted that in the minutes from the General Purposes Committee which took place on 13 December 2018, GPC/18/37 referred to the Monitoring Officer reporting back on the Planning Call-in Process. The Monitoring Officer confirmed that the changes to the Planning Call-in Process were made under minor delegated powers and were published.

GPC/18/41. **Petitions**

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

GPC/18/42. **Questions, Statements or Deputations**

There were no questions, statements or deputations were received from members of the public in accordance with the Public Participation Procedure as set out in Part 4G of the Constitution.

GPC/18/43. **NJC Pay Spine Review Update**

The Committee considered a report that provided an update on the National Joint Council (NJC) Pay Spine Review for implementation on 1 April 2019.

This report set out significant changes to the nationally negotiated pay spine structure in response to the National Living Wage and to update the lower end pay spine.

Points and comments included:

- The need to implement the new approach to apply service increments, where eligible, to staff.
- That the pay scales and banding for Central Bedfordshire Council were more complex due to the 2011 pay reduction for those earning above £21,000.
- The changes adopted were affordable within the current provisions in the Council's Medium Term Financial Plan.
- The next Pay Policy would be amended to reflect the new pay scales and a further update would be taken to a future meeting of this Committee.

NOTED

that the NJC Pay Spine Review Update be noted and implemented from 1 April 2019.

GPC/18/44. **Outside Bodies**

The Committee considered a report setting out the proposed changes to the Outside Bodies Policy and proposals to review the current list of Outside Bodies for appointment or removal.

Points and comments included:

- It was noted that an amendment be made to paragraph 22 of the report regarding financial implications with the addition of the wording: 'The financial implications arising from this report occur in the payment of travel expenses for Members to attend meetings of the outside body they have been appointed to. These costs are covered by the existing budget'.
- A survey had been completed in October 2018 by Members which provided information regarding those bodies for which an appointment continued to provide value and those where an appointment was no longer deemed appropriate.
- Further investigations were made where gaps were identified and three new bodies were added: Case Community Trust, Eggington Community Fund and London Luton Airport Consultative Forum.
- The Committee highlighted several outside bodies that needed further consideration due to recent changes for that area/service.
- The Committee also observed that there was no formal way for those appointees to report back on the work carried out by each body and it was suggested that an annual review be considered by this Committee.

RESOLVED

that the Committee:

- 1. approves the list of Outside Bodies requiring appointment attached at Appendix B including three new bodies (CASE, Eggington Community Fund and London Luton Airport Consultative Forum);**
- 2. note that this Committee approves the addition of and removal of Outside Bodies to the list attached at Appendix B, taking into account comments from the Committee on those bodies whose removal should be reconsidered in light of further information;**
- 3. note the Monitoring Officer has delegated authority, after consultation with appropriate Members of the Council, and where required in accordance with their wishes, to make appointments, removals or replacements to Outside Bodies;**
- 4. note the reasons for the list of Outside Bodies no longer requiring an appointment as attached at Appendix C; and**
- 5. approve the proposed changes to the Policy for Councillor representation on Outside Bodies in Appendix D.**

GPC/18/45. Central Bedfordshire Council - Electoral Review

The Committee considered a report on the Electoral Review for Central Bedfordshire Council and the proposal to establish a Member Working Group to carry out the review.

The report noted that the review would ensure a fair representation at Local Government Elections and would concentrate on two main areas: Council size and ward boundaries.

Points and comments included:

- The current Register of Electors, informed by the Annual Canvass, provided data for the Local Government Boundary Committee for England (LGBCE) to consider representation within Central Bedfordshire. The LGBCE determined that a review was required and revised arrangements would be in place for the elections in 2023.
- The LGBCE had given a presentation to Members prior to the meeting of Council on 17 January 2019.
- The first part of this review would determine the number of Councillors to be elected and it is expected that a submission on this number be provided by Central Bedfordshire Council to the LGBCE by September 2019. If there is no submission, the LGBCE would impose a number based on their findings for a balanced representation.
- The Committee raised concerns that a minimum figure could be detrimental and that Councillors carry out community work alongside their appointments to Committees.
- It was requested that an additional meeting of the General Purposes Committee be arranged for after Annual Council.

NOTED

- 1. that a Working Group of Members be established to work with officers to develop proposals and carry out consultation with stakeholders concerning proposals for a submission to the Local Boundary Committee for England (LGBCE) relating to revised electoral arrangements;**
- 2. that the Working Group reflects the overall political composition of the Council following the elections scheduled to take place on 2 May 2019.**
- 3. that the Working Group be established after the Elections but would comprise of 4 to 6 Members; and**
- 4. that the proposals of the Working Group be brought back to this Committee for recommendation to Council.**

GPC/18/46. Protocol for Member/Officer Communication

The Committee considered a report that set out the Council's proposed response to a recent survey of Members on their experience of communicating with officers.

Points and comments included:

- The report had been requested with a view to investigating response times to enquiries made by Members to officers within the Council in line with Part 5D of the Constitution.
- The Committee noted that whilst the requirement was a substantive response within 2 working days, this may not be possible due to officer workloads and expectations should be managed.
- It was noted that the Highways reporting system was problematic and this would have impacted on response times for this service.

- Improvements were being made including guidance being provided to Members as part of their induction programme and guidance and training was being developed for officers.
- It was requested that a review be brought back to a future meeting in 6 months time.

NOTED

- 1. that the recommendations contained within the report be developed and delivered in early 2019 in order to improve performance across the Council; and**
- 2. that a progress report be brought to a future meeting of the General Purposes Committee.**

GPC/18/47. Proposed changes to the Director of Children's Services Delegated Powers relating to Education and Maintained Schools

The Committee considered a report setting out the proposed changes to the Director of Children's Services delegated powers relating to Education and Maintained Schools.

The report explained that greater clarity was needed with regard to the delegated powers held by the Director of Children's Services concerning the establishing and discontinuance of maintained schools. It was also noted that the delegations would be revised to reflect the current legislation.

RECOMMENDED to Council

that the proposed changes to the Director of Children's Services delegated powers, as set out in Appendix A, be approved and incorporated into Part 3E of the Constitution.

GPC/18/48. Report on the Arrangements for Ethical Standards

The Committee received a summary of the Council's ethical governance and arrangements since October 2018 and considered the areas of best practice as recommended by the Government's Committee on Standards in Public Life.

The Committee considered the areas of best practice, as set out in the report, and commented as follows:-

Best Practice 1 – the Committee agreed that similar wording could be considered as currently contained in the Council's officers disciplinary policy and guidance with examples of the type of behaviour.

Best Practice 2 - the Committee agreed to include a provision in the Code of Conduct requiring Councillors to comply with formal standards investigations.

Best Practice 3 – Members were not minded to review the Code of Conduct every year but agreed it would be reviewed by the General Purposes Committee at their second meeting after Annual Council.

Best Practice 4 – the Code of Conduct was accessible on the Council's website.

Best Practice 5 – Gifts and Hospitality were listed as part of the Councillor's Register of Interest which was available on the Council's website.

Best Practice 6 – the referral criteria listed in Part 5B of the Constitution was similar to a public interest test and it was noted that the Monitoring Officer (MO) would take into account public interest when considering code of conduct allegations.

Best Practice 7 - it was noted that the Council has access to 4 independent persons and they were paid as and when they completed work for the Council.

Best Practice 8 – it was noted that this was part of current practice except where the MO deemed a complaint to be without merit, vexatious or not disclosing a potential breach of the Code of Conduct in which case the Independent Person is generally not consulted.

Best Practice 9 – Decision Notices were published as per current practice.

Best Practice 10 – it was noted that this was current practice and available on the Council's website.

Best Practice 11 – this was not applicable to this Council.

Best Practice 12 – the MO currently provides advice, support and management of investigations and the arranging of standards hearings for Town and Parish Councils.

Best Practice 13 – the MO will arrange for a provision to be included in Part 5B of the Constitution to address any conflicts of interest when undertaking a standards investigation, including asking the MO from a different authority to undertake the investigation.

Best Practice 14 – it was noted that 'separate bodies' would mean wholly owned companies such as LGSS Law Ltd and the new Council owned Housing Company and reporting would be via the annual governance statement submitted to the Audit Committee.

Best Practice 15 – Senior officers already meet with group leaders as and when the need had arisen and it was not considered necessary to hold a regular meeting for this.

Points and comments included:

- It was noted that Part 5B of the Constitution was recently amended to enable the MO to dismiss code of conduct complaints where there was no potential breach of the Code of Conduct.
- The Committee noted that the return rate for Councillors register of interest forms for Town and Parish Councils was poor and suggested that a letter

should be sent to all Town and Parish Councils advising of any outstanding forms (preferably six months after the May elections).

RESOLVED

1. that the Council had complied with its obligations in respect of ethical standards under the Localism Act 2011 for the period since October 2018; and
2. the areas of best practice, as outlined in the report, be implemented in accordance with the Committees comments above.

GPC/18/49. **Work Programme**

The Committee considered a report which set out the Committee's work programme.

The Chairman noted that report on the Configuration of Overview and Scrutiny Committees may be too early to be considered in June 2019 and it was suggested that this be taken to the October meeting of the Committee.

RESOLVED

1. that the General Purposes Committee Work Programme be noted; and
2. that consideration be given to moving the item for Configuration of Overview and Scrutiny Committees to the October meeting.

(Note: The meeting commenced at 10.00 a.m. and concluded at 11.35 a.m.)

Chairman

Dated