

CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE COUNCIL

At a meeting of the **GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE** held at Room 14, Priory House, Monks Walk, Shefford on Thursday, 8 December 2011

PRESENT

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

Cllrs J A E Clarke
J G Jamieson
D Jones

Cllrs M R Jones
K C Matthews

Members in Attendance: Cllr B Saunders

Officers in Attendance:

Mr J Atkinson	– Head of Legal and Democratic Services
Ms D Clarke	– Interim Assistant Chief Executive (People & Organisation)
Mr B Dunleavy	– Democratic Services Manager
Ms R Hobbs	– Head of Resourcing and Development
Mr L Manning	– Committee Services Officer

GPC/11/25 **Minutes**

RESOLVED

that the minutes of the meeting of the General Purposes Committee held on 6 October 2011 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

GPC/11/26 **Members' Interests**

(a) **Personal Interests:-**

Member	Item	Nature of Interest	Present or Absent during discussion
Cllr M Jones	7	Son is resident of Fairfield.	Present

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

None.

GPC/11/27 **Chairman's Announcements and Communications**

None.

GPC/11/28 **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/11/29 **Questions, Statements or Deputations**

The Committee received statements from three members of the public with regard to Item 7 (Community Governance Review – Stotfold Parish (Area of Fairfield)). The statements were presented in accordance with the Public Participation Procedure as set out in Annex 1 of Part A4 of the Constitution.

The first member of the public addressed the Committee as Chairman of the Fairfield Community Action Group. He drew Members' attention to the high level of support for the creation of a Fairfield Community Council expressed through both the petition originally submitted by the Action Group to the Committee at the latter's meeting on 4 August 2011 and the results of Central Bedfordshire Council's subsequent consultation with Stotfold Parish residents, members of the public and interested organisations between August and November 2011. The speaker urged the creation of the proposed community council as quickly as possible to ensure that the precept raised could be used to fund much needed investment in local facilities, in particular for young people and the provision of a community centre. The Chairman of the Action Group concluded by explaining why the Group opposed the alternative boundary option (Option 1) proposed by the Town Council.

The second member of the public addressed the Committee as a private resident of Fairfield Park. He emphasised that Fairfield had now evolved as a separate community as illustrated by the development of distinct local events. He also referred to the view expressed by some residents that they had moved to Fairfield Park and not to Stotfold. The speaker then commented that Fairfield residents had fully accepted that they were required to pay both a service charge and the Town Council precept and that criticism of the Town Council had arisen because it had failed to spend any of its precept on the Fairfield area. The member of the public stressed the need for investment in local facilities before commenting that the Town Council had chosen to focus on how detrimental the loss of income would be to the remaining residents of Stotfold should Fairfield gain its own community council whilst ignoring the effect on Fairfield of the Town Council's inaction.

The final speaker addressed the Committee as the Mayor of Stotfold Town Council. He first commented that most of the Town Council's views had been set out within its submission (dated October 2011) in response to the consultation organised by Central Bedfordshire Council. He then referred to

the Action Group's letter (dated 3 November 2011) in which the Action Group had stated that the Town Council had knowingly deceived the residents of the town by using inaccurate and misleading precept figures. The speaker stressed that the figures, which had been based on data supplied by Central Bedfordshire Council, had been clearly marked as estimates and until the actual figure could be confirmed would remain valid. The speaker next referred to the Action Group's claim that Fairfield residents 'subsidised' the remainder of Stotfold because the Town Council did not provide services in that area of Stotfold as they did elsewhere in the Parish. In response he explained that the Town Council was obviously aware that the management companies provided services which would usually be provided by the Council but it had been restricted by statute in how it could offer some form of alternative assistance to Fairfield. The speaker next referred to particular areas of land outside Fairfield and stated that he was not aware that any such areas had been approved for development. Lastly, he explained that the Town Council rejected the Action Group's wish to see Fairfield expand beyond its existing tree and hedge line boundary which had been determined by the Planning Inspector as the envelope for development.

GPC/11/30 **Community Governance Review - Stotfold Parish (Area of Fairfield)**

The Committee considered a report by the Head of Legal and Democratic Services which provided Members with an update on the progress of the Community Governance Review for the area of Fairfield within the Parish of Stotfold.

The meeting noted that, under the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007, Central Bedfordshire Council had been required to consult the local government electors for the area under review together with any other person or body who appeared to have an interest in the review. The meeting further noted that, in order to comply with the legislation, every household within the Parish of Stotfold had been consulted over a 12 week period together with a range of interested parties, a list of which was attached as an appendix to the report. The results of the consultation, including a full analysis of the comments received and the full reproduction of the comments, was also attached as an appendix to the report. The Committee noted that 73% of those responding supported the creation of a new community council for the area of Fairfield.

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services then explained the Committee's role following the outcome of the consultation and the range of options available to it. He stressed that, whilst the Committee should have regard to the results of the consultation and the representations which had been received, it was also required to consider the impact of any decision regarding the creation of a new parish council on community cohesion within the locality. Further, it was open to the Council to make a recommendation which was different from that the petitioners wished the review to make.

In response to queries by the Vice-Chairman the Head of Legal and Democratic Services drew Members' attention to the maps contained within Stotfold Town Council's consultation response document, attached as an

appendix to his report, which set out three boundary options which the Town Council had identified. To assist Members further the Democratic Services Manager circulated copies of maps illustrating possible areas of local development over the next ten years.

Full discussion then took place on the outcome of the consultation and the role of the management companies and the Town Council in providing facilities within the area of Fairfield. The Committee sought clarification on a number of related issues from both the Chairman of the Action Group and the Mayor who outlined the constraints acting upon the management companies and Town Council respectively. The Committee recognised the financial inequity created by the current 'double taxation' experienced by Fairfield residents and discussed how this situation could be rectified.

The Committee next considered the composition of the current Town Council and the possibility of creating a separate Fairfield ward within the Parish as an alternative to the creation of a community council for the Fairfield area. It was noted that the allocation of seats to a Fairfield ward would be four out of a current total of fifteen.

Arising from this debate the Chairman commented that Stotfold was one of the few towns within Central Bedfordshire which was not fully warded yet the experience of other towns was that warding could help to overcome divisions within the community. The Chairman added that retaining a single town council unit would enable it to be more effective and efficient when undertaking its duties. She therefore suggested that the possibility of warding the Parish should be explored.

However, a Member expressed concern at this suggestion mindful that the recent public consultation had made no reference to this as an option. He added that, on the basis of the consultation results, the views of local people clearly supported the creation of a separate community council. However, in response the Chairman reminded the meeting that, whilst recognising the problems experienced by Fairfield residents and the views which had been expressed, the Committee was required to consider the wider issue of community cohesion. A Member then suggested that, if warding was adopted, the Parish of Stotfold could be divided into, say, three or four wards. This would provide local representation whilst preventing a 'them and us' division within the Parish should only two wards be created.

Nonetheless, the Vice-Chairman expressed his support for the creation of a community council for Fairfield. He felt the consultation results to be valid, reminded the meeting that the consultation had not included the possibility of warding the Parish and that the views of local people should be sought before any action was taken. In response to a query by the Democratic Services Manager as to whether warding could be applied to the whole Town given that the Community Governance Review related to the possibility of a separate Fairfield Community Council, the Head of Legal and Democratic Services assured the meeting that the possibility of warding was a natural consequence of the original request and so the Committee was entitled to consult upon it if it wished to do so.

The Democratic Services Manager explained that Stotfold was already divided into polling districts which could be used as the basis for introducing warding if the Committee felt this to be the way forward.

Objection to the possible warding was again raised within the Committee as it was felt that so doing would fail to ensure that Fairfield residents were represented at the most local level through their own council. However, in response it was emphasised that this was purely an exploratory action at this stage to acquire additional information.

Mindful that the first consultation exercise had taken three months to complete the meeting acknowledged that it would not be possible to undertake a second consultation in time for a report to be submitted to the next scheduled meeting of the Committee on 9 February 2012.

RESOLVED

- 1 that the Head of Legal and Democratic Services explore the concept of warding the Parish of Stotfold based on existing polling districts and report his findings to a meeting of the General Purposes Committee in early March 2012;**
- 2 that, following consultation by the Head of Legal and Democratic Services with the Chairman of the General Purposes Committee regarding the content of any communication, Stotfold Town Council be informed that the Committee recognises that the residents of Fairfield experience 'double taxation' through being required to make payments to both the Town Council and the management companies for the provision of local services and the Town Council be requested to submit its views on how it feels this situation can be remedied to the next meeting of the Committee.**

GPC/11/31 **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 item of business on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information under paragraphs 1 and 2 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act:

Market Rate Supplement Payments Update.

GPC/11/32 **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 application of market rate supplements to posts across Central Bedfordshire. The meeting noted that the Executive Member for Corporate Resources had reviewed an

updated summary list of the payments as at 1 November 2011 which included start dates and review dates. An overview summary of the payments as at 1 November 2011 was attached at Appendix A to the Assistant Chief Executive's report.

Arising from his review the Executive Member confirmed that the market rate supplements for the posts outlined in the overall summary were all required.

Whilst acknowledging the need to attract and retain the right employees through the payment of such supplements Members expressed their support for a regular annual review by the Committee. The meeting was aware that such a review had been approved at a previous meeting of the Committee (minute GPC/10/18 refers).

The meeting discussed matters relating to pay levels and the various determining factors which were experienced.

NOTED

the update on the current application of market rate supplements to posts across Central Bedfordshire.

(Note: The meeting commenced at 10.00 a.m. and concluded at 11.45 a.m.)

Chairman

Dated