

CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE COUNCIL

At a meeting of the **GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE** held at Room 15, Priory House, Monks Walk, Shefford on Wednesday, 11 April 2012

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: Cllrs P N Aldis
B Saunders

Officers in Attendance: Mr J Atkinson – Head of Legal and Democratic Services
Mr L Manning – Committee Services Officer

GPC/11/39 **Minutes**

RESOLVED

that the minutes of the meeting of the General Purposes Committee held on 9 February 2012 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

GPC/11/40 **Members' Interests**

(a) **Personal Interests:-**

None.

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

None.

GPC/11/41 **Chairman's Announcements and Communications**

The Chairman reminded Members that at the last meeting (minute GPC/11/35 refers) she had advised that a report on the possible warding of the Parish of Stotfold, as a part of the Community Governance Review for the area of Fairfield, would be submitted to this meeting of the Committee. At the request of the Chairman the Head of Legal and Democratic Services then explained that it had taken longer to analyse the outcome of the recent public consultation

on a proposal to divide the Parish of Stotfold into electoral wards than had been anticipated and the results had only just been received. He added that the headline result indicated that the majority of consultation respondents did not support the warding of the Parish. The Head of Legal and Democratic Services stated that a full report on this matter would be submitted to the next ordinary meeting of the Committee.

The Chairman next referred to the need to increase the number of meetings for the General Purposes Committee should the annual meeting of the Council approve the expansion of the Committee's role. Members noted that the Committee would consider a revised timetable at its first ordinary meeting and make its recommendations to the Council in June.

GPC/11/42 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/11/43 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/11/44 Localism Act 2011 - Standards

Members considered a report by the Chairman of the Committee regarding the requirements contained in the Localism Act 2011 relating to ethical standards. The meeting noted that the statutory framework governing the Council's Code of Conduct and the arrangements for dealing with complaints that Members had failed to comply with the Code had been repealed by the Act. Further, the Act contained new arrangements governing ethical standards in local authorities which would come into force on 1 July 2012.

The meeting was aware that the Ethical Standards Task Force, drawn from members of the General Purposes Committee and including representation from the Bedfordshire Association of Town and Parish Councils, had considered how the Council should prepare for the implementation of the Act's provisions. The Committee was also aware that the Constitution Advisory Group had given consideration to whether any changes should be made to the Council's committee structure in respect of corporate governance, including ethical standards, and that the Advisory Group had recommended to Council that the General Purposes Committee's governance remit be expanded. It was intended that all the changes proposed would be submitted to the annual meeting of the Council on 19 April 2012.

The Committee considered the outcome of the work by the Task Force and Advisory Group on the following issues:

- New Code of Conduct
- Arrangements for Handling Complaints
- Register of Interests
- Town and Parish Councils
- The Standards Committee
- Appointment of Independent Persons

To assist Members a copy of a proposed replacement draft Code of Conduct was attached at Appendix A to the report. In addition, a description of the transitional arrangements to apply until 30 June 2012 was circulated as Appendix B.

Full discussion followed during which Members sought clarification on a number of points including the possible adoption of the new Code of Conduct by town and parish councils in Central Bedfordshire, requirements relating to the appointment of independent persons and the register and declaration of interests. The Committee acknowledged the need to await the issue of regulations by the Government to bring clarity regarding disclosable pecuniary interests. The meeting strongly supported the preparation of an easy to follow guide to the Register of Interests once this information was available.

With regard to the adoption of a new Code of Conduct, the Chairman reported that the Local Government Association's suggested template for this document had been received but was not particularly helpful. The Vice-Chairman stated the Council was relatively advanced in its production of a new Code of Conduct and that other local authorities had expressed an interest in adopting it.

The Chairman expressed her thanks to all those who had participated on the Ethical Standards Task Force for their efforts.

RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL

- 1 that the draft Code of Conduct, as set out at Appendix A to these minutes, be adopted with effect from 1 July 2012;**
- 2 that, subject to the approval of recommendation 1 above, the Monitoring Officer contact the Clerks to the town and parish councils in Central Bedfordshire and invite them to consider recommending the Code of Conduct for adoption by their councils;**
- 3 that the General Purposes Committee be authorised to take any decisions necessary to implement the provisions contained in Chapter 7 of the Localism Act 2011, so that arrangements are in place when the relevant provisions take effect on 1 July 2012.**

RESOLVED

- 1 that the Head of Legal and Democratic Services prepare a guide on the Code of Conduct in 'Plain English';**

- 2 that the Head of Legal and Democratic Services amend paragraph 5 of the Code of Conduct to reflect the regulations governing disclosable pecuniary interests as soon as the regulations have been issued by the Government;**
- 3 that the Head of Legal and Democratic Services amend Part F of the Constitution to reflect any changes for the provision of ethical standards approved at the annual meeting of Council and submit the amended document to the next ordinary meeting of the General Purposes Committee for approval in order that the arrangements are ready to be applied from 1 July 2012;**
- 4 that the Head of Legal and Democratic Services continue to investigate the possible use of existing independent Members of the Council's Standards Committee, or those of neighbouring local authorities, in the role of independent persons for a transitional period;**
- 5 that the Head of Legal and Democratic Services draw up the person specification and associated criteria relating to the appointment of independent persons together with the public advertisement for the posts.**

NOTED

the transitional arrangements for ethical standards until 30 June 2012 as set out at Appendix B to these minutes.

(Note: The meeting commenced at 10.00 a.m. and concluded at 10.40 a.m.)

Chairman

Dated