

## CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE COUNCIL

At a meeting of the **GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE** held at Room 14, Priory House, Monks Walk, Shefford on Tuesday, 3 December 2013

### PRESENT

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

Cllrs P N Aldis  
Mrs C F Chapman MBE  
J G Jamieson  
M R Jones

Cllrs D J Lawrence  
Mrs J G Lawrence  
J Murray

Apologies for Absence: Cllrs A L Dodwell  
B Saunders  
N Warren

Substitutes: Cllrs K Janes (In place of B Saunders)  
A Shadbolt (In place of A L Dodwell)  
M A G Versallion (In place of N Warren)

Members in Attendance: Cllrs R D Berry  
D Bowater  
D Jones

Officers in Attendance: Ms D Clarke – Director of Improvement and Corporate Services  
Mrs M Clay – Chief Legal and Democratic Services Officer  
Mrs C Jones – Head of HR Policy and Development  
Mr L Manning – Committee Services Officer  
Mr P Meigh – Chief Procurement Officer  
Ms M Peaston – Committee Services Manager  
Mr M Scott – Chief Information Officer

GPC/13/21 **Minutes**

### RESOLVED

**that the minutes of the meeting of the General Purposes Committee held on 18 July 2013 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.**

GPC/13/22 **Members' Interests**

None.

GPC/13/23 **Chairman's Announcements and Communications**

The Chairman welcomed Melanie Clay, the new Chief Legal and Democratic Services Officer, and Paul Meigh, the Chief Procurement Officer, to their first meeting of the Committee.

GPC/13/24 **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/13/25 **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/13/26 **Conversion Incentive**

The Committee considered a joint report by the Deputy Chief Executive/Director of Children's Services and the Director of Improvement and Corporate Services on the proposed payment of a conversion incentive to team members in Children's Services following the conversion of an experienced agency social worker to a permanent employee of the Council.

The Director of Improvement and Corporate Services reminded Members of the continuing difficulties in recruiting and retaining experienced staff in Children's Services in the face of a national shortage in this area. She explained how the need to increase the number of posts was in response to the impact of high profile abuse cases and other factors resulting in the number of Looked After Children in Central Bedfordshire Council rising substantially each year since 2009. Indicators and statistical data showed that the number of Looked After Children would continue to rise in the foreseeable future. However, the increasing number of vacancies had led to a reliance on agency workers who could earn considerably more than an employee, despite the payment of market rate supplements to the latter, although agency workers did not receive benefits such as a local government pension. The national shortage was predicted to continue for approximately a decade.

The Committee noted the work undertaken in Children's Services by a Social Work Development Group which was considering a number of issues within social work including the challenges faced relating to recruitment and retention. Linked to this the Group had examined the benefits of providing incentives to encourage experienced agency social workers to join the Council as permanent employees. A number of options had been considered but it was now suggested that an Agency Worker Conversion Incentive be introduced under which team members would receive the incentive when an agency worker took up a permanent post following the successful completion of the normal recruitment procedures. All team members, excluding managers, would receive an equal share of a payment of £8k in recognition of their creation of an attractive environment that the agency worker wanted to join. Given that the agency worker cost approximately £20k more each year than a permanent employee it was stated that a considerable saving would still be made.

The Director of Improvement and Corporate Services advised the meeting that there had been no briefing or consultation on this proposal with Members or other parties and it was therefore intended that the scheme be first trialled for a period of six months. She stated that details of the scheme itself would be worked up if the Committee indicated its support for it and wider consultation would also take place with the unions.

Although a Member suggested that the trial be postponed to first allow briefing and consultation and the submission of a further report to the next meeting of the Committee, another member of the Committee, drawing on his knowledge as Executive Member for Children's Services, advised against any delay given the challenges being experienced with social worker recruitment and retention. He added that the issues had been considered over the previous six-twelve months and the officer report before the Committee clearly set out the reasons in support of the scheme.

Full discussion took place on how a conversion incentive scheme could operate. Members sought clarification on a number of points and suggested various measures to ensure a scheme's effective and efficient working.

#### **NOTED**

**the trialling for six months of a scheme to encourage and reward staff who persuade agency social workers in Children's Services to take up permanent employment with the Council.**

#### **RESOLVED**

- 1 that, once confirmed, details of the above scheme be circulated to members of the General Purposes Committee for their information;**
- 2 that a report on the outcome of the six month trial for the recruitment incentive scheme in the Children's Services Directorate be submitted to the General Purposes Committee.**

**(Note: minute GP/13/29 also refers).**

GPC/13/27 **Review of the Member/Officer Protocol**

Members considered a report by the Monitoring Officer which proposed amendments to the Protocol for Member/Officer Relations contained within Part F4 of the Council's Constitution.

The meeting noted that the proposed amendments included specific guidance for Members on the use of email when undertaking Council business. In connection with this matter the report referred to the guidance issued by the Information Commissioner setting out Members' responsibilities in relation to the holding and processing of personal information, including the need for councils and Members to be aware of the need to arrange appropriate security. The meeting noted that, over the last two years, the Commissioner had imposed financial penalties ranging between £80k and £120k on local authorities because of disclosures of personal information relating to children and adult social care service users.

The meeting was advised that ensuring that Members complied with the Council's arrangements governing the use of emails was an important part of the Council's own security measures. As such the amended Protocol stated that Members should use their Council email address for Council business. This meant that the Council was the data controller for the purposes of the Data Protection Act and ultimately the Council would be responsible for any breach of security. The amended Protocol also required Members to use the Council's Citrix system when working from a fixed location or from the approved Mobile Device Management solution when using a smart phone or tablet.

A Member expressed some concern on the overall effectiveness of the Council's Citrix system and his own use of alternative software for mobile use. The Member and the Chief Information Officer undertook to discuss this matter further outside the meeting.

The Chief Information Officer stressed to the Committee that the proposed amendments to the Protocol attempted to strike a pragmatic balance between meeting central government requirements and allowing Members to continue to use their own devices.

The Director of Improvement and Corporate Services advised that discussions would be held with each Member on the data protection requirements.

**RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL**

**that the amendments to the Protocol for Member/Officer Relations, as set out at Appendix A to these minutes, be approved and the revised Protocol be included in the Council's Constitution.**

GPC/13/28 **Constitution - Proposed Amendments**

The Committee considered a report of the Executive Member for Corporate Resources which set out a number of proposed amendments to the Constitution. The Committee Services Manager introduced the report, the meeting noting that the proposed amendments fell into two areas. The first, as set out in Appendix A to the report, dealt with minor changes to the Constitution including the correction of errors and the general updating of the document. Because of their nature the Committee could authorise the Monitoring Officer to undertake the amendments.

A Member referred to the proposed amendment to paragraph 2.2.2.17 of Part B5 which removed the words 'and consider' from the wording relating to the receipt of an annual report from the Leader of the Council outlining policy priorities for the forthcoming year. The Member stated that the proposed amendment would remove the opportunity to debate the Council's direction of travel. In response, however, it was stated that the annual report presented a 'state of the nation' paper and that other opportunities to debate the Council's policies existed. Further, the amendment removed any confusion by Members as to the purpose of the report. In response to a comment by the Member regarding the absence of opportunity to formally debate policies elsewhere another member of the Committee, in his capacity as Leader, suggested that the existing item on Council agendas for Executive Members to report orally and answer questions on matters contained within their reports could be used for this purpose. Following comment the Leader undertook to ensure that the Executive Members due to report would be identified on the agenda although he emphasised that this could be provisional and subject to change.

The meeting then considered two proposed amendments to Part H3 of the Constitution to remove the requirement to gain the prior approval of the appropriate Executive Member for determining rate relief for charitable bodies or for businesses suffering hardship. However, Members felt that a political input should remain on these issues and the proposed amendments were rejected.

A Member gave his opinion that the correct sequence regarding the submission of the changes to the Constitution had not been followed and the process had been retrospective in nature.

The meeting turned to consider the second area of proposed changes which related to the Code of Procurement Governance (Part I3 of the Constitution) and which were reproduced in Appendix B to the report and which were introduced by the Chief Procurement Officer. The Vice-Chairman drew the meeting's attention to the proposed wording contained in the new Table 1 within paragraph 5.1 which set out the procurement procedure dealing with the total contract/order value above the EU threshold. He referred to the lack of any indication in the Table of what the threshold figure was. In response the Chief Procurement Officer explained that this figure was variable and was about to be reviewed. The Member stated, however, that a statement providing an 'as of' date could be included and make clear that the figure was subject to change. The meeting indicated its support for this amendment.

The Member next queried the wording contained in the same part of the Chart which referred to the requirement for a minimum of 5 suppliers. The Chief Procurement Officer acknowledged that the number of suppliers stated was not a statutory requirement but a preferred figure and the wording would be amended to reflect this.

Turning next to paragraph 5.4 the Member sought clarification as to why £20k had been chosen as the figure above which every contract would be recorded in the Council's Register of Contracts. In response the Chief Procurement Officer explained that the figure had been chosen because quotations and tenders over this figure required the use of the Council's electronic tendering system and so recording was a straightforward procedure. Members felt that paragraph 5.4 should be amended to include a reference as to the why the threshold figure had been chosen.

### **RESOLVED**

**that the Monitoring Officer be authorised to amend the Council's Constitution as set out in Appendix A to the report of the Executive Member for Corporate Services, subject to the amendments outlined in the preamble above.**

### **RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL**

**that the proposed amendments to Part I3 the Council's Constitution, as set out in Appendix B to these minutes, be approved.**

#### GPC/13/29 **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 and the beginning of 2014/15.

Reference was made to the previous submission of an annual report on standards complaints in July 2013 and Members considered the possible need for an interim report on standards issues to be submitted in January 2014. Following discussion it was felt that an item on this matter should be included on the agenda if it was felt to be required.

Members were aware of the decision taken earlier in the meeting (minute GPC/13/26 above refers) for a report to be submitted on the outcome of the six month trial of a scheme to encourage and reward staff who persuaded experienced agency social workers to take up permanent employment with the Council. It was suggested that the scheduled meeting of the Committee in May 2014 could be rescheduled to June to consider this matter.

**RESOLVED**

- 1 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 subject to the inclusion of a report on standards issues to the meeting on 20 January 2014, the report being subject to requirement;**
  
- 2 that a report on the outcome of the six month trial for the recruitment incentive scheme in the Children's Services Directorate be submitted to the General Purposes Committee in the summer of 2014 and that the Committee meeting due to be held on 22 May 2014 be rescheduled for this purpose if necessary.**

(Note: The meeting commenced at 10.00 a.m. and concluded at 11.06 a.m.)

Chairman .....

Dated .....