

CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE COUNCIL

At a meeting of the **GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE** held at Council Chamber, Priory House, Monks Walk, Shefford on Thursday, 20 November 2014

PRESENT

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

Cllrs A L Dodwell
J G Jamieson
M R Jones
D J Lawrence
Mrs J G Lawrence

Cllrs K C Matthews
J Murray
R B Pepworth
M A G Versallion

Members in Attendance: Cllrs D Bowater

Officers in Attendance:

Ms J Clarke	– Social Work Student
Mrs M Clay	– Chief Legal and Democratic Services Officer
Mr B Dunleavy	– Democratic Services Manager
Mr R Gould	– Head of Financial Control
Mr G Jones	– Assistant Director Children's Services Operations
Mr L Manning	– Committee Services Officer
Ms A Munt	– Senior Practitioner
Ms S Tobzic	– Social Worker

GPC/14/27. **Minutes**

RESOLVED

that the minutes of the meeting of the General Purposes Committee held on 17 July 2014 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

GPC/14/28. **Members' Interests**

None.

GPC/14/29. **Chairman's Announcements and Communications**

The Chairman welcomed three social workers who were attending the meeting in connection with the update on social worker recruitment (agenda item 8). The Chairman stated that each of the social workers would comment from their own perspective on this issue.

In order to allow the social workers to return to work as quickly as possible the Chairman stated that agenda item 8 would be brought forward for consideration before agenda item 7 (Review of Polling Districts and Polling Places).

GPC/14/30. **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/14/31. **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/14/32. **Social Worker Recruitment Update**

Members received a presentation on children's social worker recruitment by the Assistant Director Children's Services Operations which provided an update to the presentation on this topic submitted to the Committee on 29 May 2014 (minute GPC/14/9 refers).

The Assistant Director stressed the importance of securing a greater percentage of in-house social workers because it provided stability in the provision of the service to those who were most vulnerable as well as being financially beneficial to the Council. He added that nationally it was envisaged that demand for social workers would not match supply until 2022. The meeting was also advised that the average career span was only seven years, with one in three social workers leaving their local authority in 2012/13. The Assistant Director referred to the difficulties faced by social workers in achieving a work/life balance and the recruitment challenges which had arisen as a result of the recent high profile national failures in local authority social care and the resulting publication of highly critical reports on children's social care standards.

The Assistant Director Children's Services Operations then introduced his presentation which was entitled 'Recruiting, Retaining and Inspiring Children's Social Workers in Central Bedfordshire'. The presentation covered the following issues:

- What we are trying to achieve
- National context
- Local context and impact
- Impact
- Actions since May 2014
- Current recruitment campaign

- Recruiting and developing newly qualified social workers (ASYE's)
- Inspire! – the Social Work and Early Intervention Academy
- Outcomes by November 2014
- Challenges
- Next Steps
- Future developments
- Case example: H Family
- Financial costs of family breakdown

At the end of the presentation the Chairman invited three social workers, who were all at different stages of their careers, to speak to the Committee about their roles and their professional experience of working in Central Bedfordshire. At the conclusion the Vice-Chairman then thanked the Assistant Director Children's Services Operations and the social workers for helping him to understand the essential role of Market Rate Supplements in this context.

Members then considered a range of issues relating to children's social worker recruitment. Consideration was given in particular to the issue of staff retention. In response the Assistant Director referred to the import role played by training and career development. Concern was expressed that the Council was training staff only for them to leave and work elsewhere but a Member emphasised that the problem of staff shortages could not be answered by local authorities appropriating each other's employees but only by training sufficient numbers. Members were aware of Central Bedfordshire's Social Work and Early Intervention Academy and the meeting noted the efforts of other authorities to implement a similar approach to training provision. The meeting was also advised that the Academy provided training for social workers from outside Central Bedfordshire thus helping to increase the pool of qualified persons.

Members expressed their thanks to the Assistant Director and the accompanying social workers for their contributions. The Chairman added his personal thanks to them for assisting him to understand the challenges faced by their profession. He asked that they take back the Committee's support to their colleagues and Members' appreciation of the difficult job they carried out.

NOTED

the presentation by the Assistant Director Children's Services Operations which updated Members on the recruitment, retention and inspiring of children's social workers.

GPC/14/33. **Review of Polling Districts and Polling Places**

Members considered a report of the Executive Member for Corporate Resources which advised the Committee of the requirement under the Electoral Administration Act 2006 for all councils to review their UK Parliamentary polling districts and polling places at least once every four years. The meeting was also advised that, under Section 17 of the Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013, a review had to be carried out within

the sixteen month period beginning on 1 October 2013 and be completed in time for the Parliamentary elections scheduled for 7 May 2015. It was noted that future reviews would be required to be completed every fifth year to coincide with Parliamentary elections.

The Committee noted that public notice of the start of the review in Central Bedfordshire was given on 21 October 2013 with the closing date for the submission of comments being 31 December 2013. Although the review was of polling districts and polling places it was accepted that polling stations, which were chosen by the Returning Officer, were inextricably linked to the review and comments were also invited on those proposed or any suggested alternatives.

An article had been placed in News Central and documents published on the Council's website. All Central Bedfordshire councillors, Members of Parliament and Members of the European Parliament, all local town and parish councils, political parties and Returning Officers for Parliamentary constituencies wholly or partly in the Council's area were consulted. In addition polling station inspectors at the European election held in May 2014 were asked to provide feedback regarding each of the current polling places. The review also sought representations from people or organisations with particular expertise in relation to access to premises or facilities by persons with a disability.

The Committee was informed that all proposed new polling station venues had been visited by election officers and had been considered suitable.

A summary of the Acting Returning Officer's recommendations regarding polling districts was attached at Appendix A to the report and a summary of the Acting Returning Officer's decisions regarding polling stations was attached at Appendix B. Evaluations of the various responses received were set out in the scheduled contained at Appendix C to the report.

Following an introduction by the Democratic Services Manager a Member expressed concern at the proposed extensive use of Astral Park Community Centre as the main polling station for the Grovebury Polling District within the Leighton Buzzard South Ward. She commented that this would not only generate traffic issues but the Community Centre's distance from some of the electorate would effectively disenfranchise them.

In response the Democratic Services Manager set out the reasons for the use of Astral Park Community Centre and reminded the meeting that the decisions with regard to polling stations rested with the Acting Returning Officer. He indicated that, in view of the concerns expressed, he could write to local residents offering them the opportunity to be issued with postal ballot papers should they feel that they would be unable to attend the Community Centre because of the travel distance. Following discussion the Committee was of the opinion that further consideration of this matter should be given outside of the meeting.

Members emphasised that schools should not, if possible, be used for polling stations because of the disruption this caused to children's education. However, the Democratic Services Manager explained that, whilst approaches

were made to alternative venues such as village halls, there were occasions when these were not available and it was necessary to make use of school premises.

RESOLVED

that the recommendations of the Acting Returning Officer in relation to polling districts and polling places, as set out in Appendices A and C to the report of the Executive Member for Corporate Resources, be approved.

GPC/14/34. Local Government Pension Scheme Update

The Committee considered a report by the Section 151 Officer which provided an update on recent developments with regard to the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS).

The meeting was reminded that the previous report to the Committee on the LGPS and the Bedfordshire Fund had detailed the governance of the Bedfordshire LGPS, the results of 2013 Actuarial valuation, the implementation of the LGPS 2014 and the Fund's investment strategy. The current report before Members provided information on the following:

- the development of mechanisms for cost capping across Public Service Pension Schemes
- the implementation of Local Pension Boards
- the Fund's asset management.

The Head of Financial Control then worked through the report highlighting issues of particular importance.

The Chairman referred to the proposed national referendum on UK membership of the European Union in 2017 and queried what preparations Bedford Borough Council's Pensions Committee might consider in view of the possibility of a run on UK equities should there be a vote in favour of the UK leaving. In response a Member, who also sat on the Pensions Committee, explained that authority was delegated to the Fund's Investment Managers who would monitor the situation. He added, however, that risk management was due to be considered by the Pensions Committee.

The Chairman requested that the next update report on the LGPS to the General Purposes Committee include risk management.

NOTED

the report of the Section 151 Officer on recent developments with regard to the Local Government Pension Scheme.

RESOLVED

that the next report of the Section 151 Officer on recent developments to the LGPS include the issue of risk management.

GPC/14/35. Work Programme

Members considered a report by the Chief Legal and Democratic Services Officer which set out the Committee's proposed work programme for the remainder of the 2014/15 municipal year.

The Committee was advised of the concerns raised by some Members the day before regarding the comprehensiveness of the minutes of meetings. Although Members had been reminded that the forthcoming introduction of webcasting would capture any debate in full and that they already had the opportunity to influence the content of minutes it was felt that further consideration of this issue was required. On this basis it had been agreed that Members' concerns would be reported to the General Purposes Committee with the intention that consideration would be given to the possible inclusion of an item on this issue on the Committee's work programme.

In response a Member reminded the meeting that this matter had already been discussed on a prior occasion. He added that if a Member felt that a particular point of debate should be recorded in the minutes of a meeting then he or she could request that this be done at the time the item was being considered. Alternatively, should a Member feel that the minutes of a meeting failed to satisfactorily reflect the debate, the Member could request, at the time that the minutes of the meeting were being confirmed, that they be amended accordingly.

The General Purposes Committee was of the view that verbatim minutes were unnecessary.

Members then turned to consider items scheduled for the next meeting of the Committee and the Chairman queried the possible submission of an update on Standards complaints. In response the Chief Legal and Democratic Services Officer explained that she would not be submitting a report to the General Purposes Committee but that she would be submitting a report to Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee regarding the costs incurred to Central Bedfordshire Council as a result of Town and Parish Council Code of Conduct complaints and the processes which had been adopted to minimise costs to Central Bedfordshire Council.

Following a query from a Member regarding the possible recouping of costs from town and parish councils for undertaking work related to standards issues the Chief Legal and Democratic Services Officer stated that there was no statutory basis to enable this to take place. She added that an emphasis was being placed on the resolution of such issues at the local level which had the benefit of reducing costs to this authority.

A Member emphasised the need to empower ward councillors with information they could use when attending local town and parish council meetings and, in addition, placing this on the Council's website. In response the Chief Legal and Democratic Services Officer assured the meeting that these issues were under consideration.

RESOLVED

- 1 that, subject to deleting the reference to a six month update on standards complaints in January 2015, the proposed General Purposes Committee Work Programme for the remainder of the 2014/15 municipal year, as attached at Appendix A to the report of the Chief Legal and Democratic Services Officer, be approved;**
- 2 that no further action be taken with regard to revising the style or comprehensiveness of the minutes of the authority's meetings but that Members be reminded that they could request that specific points be included within the minutes at the time an item was under consideration and that they could also request that the minutes of a meeting be amended to include specific points at the time that the minutes were being considered for approval.**

(Note: The meeting commenced at 10.00 a.m. and concluded at 11.55 a.m.)

Chairman

Dated