

CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE COUNCIL

At a meeting of the **GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE** held at Room 14, Priory House, Monks Walk, Chicksands on Thursday, 24 March 2016

PRESENT

Cllr Mrs J G Lawrence (Chairman)
Cllr G Perham (Vice-Chairman)

Cllrs L Birt
Mrs C F Chapman MBE
P Hollick
J G Jamieson
K C Matthews

Cllrs M A G Versallion
N Warren
B Wells
A Zerny

Officers in Attendance:

Mr Q Baker	– Assistant Director Legal and Democratic Services (interim) and Monitoring Officer
Mrs D Broadbent-Clarke	– Director of Improvement and Corporate Services
Ms M Damigos	– Senior Commercial Lawyer (interim)
Mr L Manning	– Committee Services Officer
Ms M Peaston	– Committee Services Manager

GPC/15/24. **Minutes**

RESOLVED

that the minutes of the meeting of the General Purposes Committee held on 17 December 2015 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

GPC/15/25. **Members' Interests**

None.

GPC/15/26. **Chairman's Announcements and Communications**

The Chairman advised the Committee that the report entitled 'Amendment to the Terms of Reference of the Wixams Joint Development Control Committee and Delegated Powers to Officers' (item 8) had been withdrawn. She stated that she would raise this matter again when Members considered the Committee's work programme (minute GPC/15/32 below refers).

GPC/15/27. Petitions

No petitions were received from the members of the public in accordance with the Public Participation Procedure as set out in Annex 2 of Part A4 of the Constitution.

GPC/15/28. 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/15/29. Code of Conduct Matters - Update

The Committee considered a report which provided Members with a summary of the Council's ethical governance arrangements since August 2015 and sought Members' approval of a proposal to extend the term of appointment of the panel of Independent Persons.

The Senior Commercial Lawyer (interim) introduced the report. She drew Members' attention to, and clarified the role of, the Independent Persons. She also detailed the collaborative arrangements with Luton and Milton Keynes Councils, Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue Service and Milton Keynes Fire Authority regarding their appointment following the recruitment originally carried out on their behalf by Central Bedfordshire Council. The Senior Commercial Lawyer (interim) advised that the current appointments were due to end in September 2016 and, in view of the arrangements having been satisfactory, it was proposed that they be extended for a further four years. The agreement of the Independent Persons and the partner authorities was being sought and, once this had been obtained, an extension could be arranged.

The Chairman referred to the major reduction in the number of outstanding Code of Conduct complaints which had left only one case yet to be resolved. On behalf of the Committee she congratulated the officers for this achievement.

Whilst noting that fewer code of conduct complaints had been received the Chairman commented that town and parish councils had been encouraged to manage complaints themselves in the first instance rather than refer all complaints directly to Central Bedfordshire Council.

In response to a question about costs the Committee was advised that all the partner authorities contributed towards the cost of training the Independent Persons. The cost of the annual retainer paid for each of the Independent Persons was also shared between the partner authorities.

A question was asked about the position of the Central Bedfordshire councillor who had yet to update their register of interests. The Senior Commercial Lawyer (interim) explained that the Member concerned had already completed a Register of Interests form when previously a member of the Council and,

having been re-elected in May 2015, that form remained valid. She added that a meeting with the Member was scheduled to take place the following week to assist them in updating their interests.

Concern was expressed about the number of town and parish councillors (38) who had yet to submit completed forms. The Senior Commercial Lawyer (interim) advised that the failure to submit a form constituted an offence but the only recourse was to report the offender to the Police. She added that reminder letters continued to be sent out. She also stated that she had offered assistance to those town and parish council clerks with regard to interests.

NOTED

that Central Bedfordshire Council has complied with its obligations in respect of ethical standards under the Localism Act 2011 for the six month period since August 2015.

RESOLVED

that the proposal to extend the term of appointment of the panel of Independent Persons for a further period of four years to a date to be agreed be approved.

GPC/15/30. Amendment to the Terms of Reference of the Wixams Joint Development Control Committee and Delegated Powers to Officers

This item was withdrawn (minutes GPC/15/26 and GPC/15/32 also refer).

GPC/15/31. Review of Updates to the Constitution June 2015 - February 2016

The Committee considered a report of the Executive Member for Corporate Resources which set out the amendments made to the Council's Constitution between June 2015 and February 2016. A schedule setting out the amendments made by the Monitoring Officer, by the General Purposes Committee under powers through the Localism Act 2011 and by full Council was attached at Appendix A to the report.

NOTED

the changes made between June 2015 and February 2016 to maintain the Council's Constitution as set out in Appendix A to the submitted report.

GPC/15/32. Work Programme

Members considered a report which set out the Committee's work programme for the remainder of the 2015/16 municipal year and the 2016/17 municipal year.

Further to her earlier comments (minute GPC/15/26 above refers) the Chairman explained that the report entitled 'Amendment to the Terms of Reference of the Wixams Joint Development Control Committee and Delegated Powers to Officers' had been withdrawn because incorrect documents had been submitted with the report. In addition, it was recognised that additional revisions were required to the Terms of Reference for this body and that it would be more effective to consider them all at the same time. The Chairman therefore suggested that consideration of this matter be considered at the General Purposes Committee to be held on 30 June 2016.

A Committee member, who was the Co-chairman of the Wixams Joint Development Control Committee, confirmed that the Committee's existing Terms of Reference dated from 2000 and required wide ranging revision.

The Chairman next referred to the pilot scheme being undertaken to deliver a new office layout, including furniture in First West and, shortly, to Ground West at Priory House. She expressed the view that it would be beneficial to examine the impact and suitability of the pilot scheme and requested that a presentation be made to the next meeting of the Committee immediately followed by a guided tour for Committee members. As the pilot would not be completed until August she felt that there was sufficient time for any revisions to be made to the scheme before it was applied throughout Priory House.

Discussion then took place on whether it was the General Purposes Committee or the Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee which held responsibility for oversight of the changes, with a Member expressing concern that, unless clarified, duplication of effort could arise. It was therefore proposed that the Chairmen of both committees discuss this issue and clarify where responsibility lay.

Following consideration it was also proposed that the Director of Improvement and Corporate Services arrange a briefing for all Members explaining the reasons for the new office layout and furniture.

Last, the Committee Services Manager advised Members that, given the submission of a report reviewing updates to the Constitution earlier in the meeting (minute GPC/15/31 above refers) it was unlikely that the item entitled 'Constitution Update', scheduled for consideration on 30 June, would proceed on that date.

RESOLVED

- 1 that a report on the revisions required to the Terms of Reference for the Wixams Joint Development Control Committee, including delegated powers to officers, be added to the Committee's work programme for consideration on 30 June 2016;**
- 2 that the Chairmen of the General Purposes Committee and the Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee establish which of these committees is responsible for oversight of the scheme for the new office layout and furniture in Ground West and First West, Priory House;**

- 3 that, subject to the identification of the General Purposes Committee as the responsible committee for the above changes, an item on this issue be added to the Committee's work programme for consideration on 30 June 2016;**
- 4 that the Director of Improvement and Corporate Services arrange a briefing for all Members in order to explain the reasons for the new office layout and furniture.**

(Note: The meeting commenced at 10.00 a.m. and concluded at 10.25 a.m.)

Chairman

Dated