

CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE COUNCIL

At a meeting of the **GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE** held at Room 14, Priory House, Chicksands, Shefford on Thursday, 30 June 2016

PRESENT

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

Cllrs L Birt
Mrs C F Chapman MBE
Mrs A L Dodwell
P Hollick
M R Jones

Cllrs K C Matthews
N Warren
R D Wenham
A Zerny

Members in Attendance: Cllr R D Berry

Officers in Attendance: Mr Q Baker – Monitoring Officer
Mrs D Broadbent-Clarke – Director of Improvement and Corporate Services
Mrs C Jones – Chief People Officer
Mr L Manning – Committee Services Officer
Mr J Partridge – Head of Governance
Ms M Peaston – Committee Services Manager

GPC/16/3. **Minutes**

RESOLVED

that the minutes of the meetings of the General Purposes Committee held on 24 March 2016 and 19 May 2016 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

GPC/16/4. **Members' Interests**

None.

GPC/16/5. **Chairman's Announcements and Communications**

The Chairman reminded the Committee that, Deb Broadbent-Clarke, the Director of Improvement and Corporate Services, would be leaving the Council that day. The Chairman set out the roles undertaken by the Director since joining the Council in 2010 and the contribution she had made in moving the Council forward. On both a personal level, and on behalf of the meeting, the Chairman thanked the Director for her assistance and efforts during her time at the authority and wished her well for the future. The Chairman concluded by

asking Members to remain at the end of the meeting to make their individual farewells.

GPC/16/6. 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/16/7. 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/16/8. Market Rate Supplements - Annual Updates

The Committee considered a report by the Director of Improvement and Corporate Services which set out an update on the current application of Market Rate Supplements (MRS) to posts across Central Bedfordshire Council. The report provided information covering:

- The number of MRS payments against salary bands
- The number of MRS payments by MRS band
- The percentage cost of MRS payments against the total salary bill by directorate
- Staff turnover in the service areas in receipt of MRS.

The Assistant Director People introduced the report, drawing Members' attention to the payment of Enhanced MRS to particular staff that were already in receipt of Standard MRS. In connection with this the meeting noted that all staff in posts requiring a social work degree received a Standard MRS but those experienced workers (Social Worker level 2 and above) with case holding responsibilities in those teams with hard to fill vacancies also received the Enhanced MRS. The meeting noted that that this had proved to be a successful strategy and had enabled the Council to compete in the highly competitive job market. Further, the recruitment of experienced social workers had enabled a reduction in the use of agency staff and, therefore, a reduction in the overall spend on agency workers. Whilst there had been an increase in the proportionate spend on MRS payments to permanent members of staff this represented a better use of resources than funding the long term use of agency/interim workers. It also maximised the chance of a child building a long term relationship with their social worker rather than be subject to frequent changes through the use of temporary members of staff.

The Assistant Director People drew Members' attention to the recent approval by the Council's Corporate Management Team for the increase and extension of the current MRS payments for particular posts in social care to overcome

recruitment and retention difficulties. The Assistant Director People stressed that the supplements were mainly paid to middle ranking posts and not to senior members of staff. Further, they were only paid to those officers 'in post' and not to agency staff.

Various queries followed from Members. Arising from discussion on the substantial increase in the voluntary turnover rate within Information Technology during 2015/16 Members requested that future reports include the total number of people within a particular team together with the number of staff actually leaving so that the context could be established. The Assistant Director undertook to supply such information in future reports.

A Member referred to the development of capped rates paid to agency workers in the Eastern Region in an attempt to managing costs and sought additional information on this matter. In response the Assistant Director People stated that a maximum rate had been agreed by councils and the results had proved so successful that other regions were considering adopting the same approach. In response to a further query regarding the overall saving in agency worker costs the Assistant Director People undertook to examine this issue and advise Members.

A Member referred to Appendix C to the report which set out MRS as a percentage of salary costs over the last three financial years and expressed concern at the rapid increase in MRS costs from approximately £0.5m in 2013/14 to approximately £1.0m in 2015/16. In response the Assistant Director People explained that the costs had increased because permanent experienced staff, who attracted MRS payments, had replaced agency staff in teams where vacancies had been hard to fill. She added that she did not envisage this cost being reduced. However, she emphasised that whilst an increase in such permanent staff had led to increased MRS costs there was an overall saving because the cost of the permanent staff, even with MRS payments, was less than the cost of agency staff. Another Member reminded the meeting of the positive impact of the Academy of Central Bedfordshire at which social workers were being trained and developed 'in-house' and how this approach, although medium term in its contribution towards easing the current shortage of social workers, had been adopted to varying degrees elsewhere.

RESOLVED

that the annual update on the current application of market rate supplements to posts across Central Bedfordshire Council be received.

GPC/16/9. Amendments to the Council's Constitution

The Committee considered a report which set out proposed changes to the Council's Constitution. The changes, which affected Parts A2, A4, A5, E2, H1, H3, H4, I3 and J3, were set out in a schedule attached at Appendix A to the report. Members were aware that any changes agreed by the Committee would need to be submitted to full Council for approval.

Members noted that the proposed amendments arose from the ongoing review and updating of the Constitution to ensure its accuracy, clarity and fitness for purpose. In undertaking the review consultation had taken place with Directors together with the examination of relevant legislation. In addition, Members had submitted comments and suggestions. The review had also been informed by the consideration of recommendations made by external bodies which had had cause to comment on the Council's processes or governance structures.

With regard to future annual reviews the meeting noted that it was proposed to introduce a more structured and formal process of consultation engaging with all senior officers, elected Members and key stake holders.

The Committee noted the proposed changes to the Procurement Procedure Rules which would need to be implemented to align them with the principles contained in the Constitution should the proposed amendments to Part I3 (Code of Procurement Governance) be approved by Council. The meeting was aware that the Procurement Procedure Rules were maintained by the Procurement Team itself and did not form part of the Constitution. The proposed changes to the Procurement Procedure Rules were set out at Appendix B to the Monitoring Officer's report.

The Monitoring Officer then introduced his report. He explained the background to the updating of the Constitution and how, at least once every 12 months, he undertook a focussed review of the Constitution to pick up any key issues that had emerged.

The meeting noted that the key issues highlighted for consideration in the current annual review had been those relating to the processes followed when considering proposals involving collaborative or joint working or procurement with external bodies such as other local authorities and health bodies. The Monitoring Officer informed the meeting that, with regard to the proposed inclusion of a new paragraph 6 (6.1-6.5) in Part I3 he now also recommended the inclusion of an additional paragraph (paragraph 6.6) to those already listed. The additional paragraph would require any partnership to have a formal mechanism and structure of governance to be set out in a written document.

A second specific area of focus in the review had been that of the provisions relating to Overview and Scrutiny and in particular, the mechanism by which matters were referred for consideration. However, the Monitoring Officer felt that this mechanism should be left unchanged and any matters dealt with through issuing greater clarity and additional advice and guidance to report writers by Democratic Services. Members concurred with this approach.

The Monitoring Officer then responded to Members' queries regarding shared service arrangements. The Monitoring Officer stressed that the proposed new paragraph 6.4 in Part I3 was not a template for such arrangements but a list of guiding principles. At the request of Members he then outlined the operational arrangements in place for LGSS Law Ltd as an illustration of how such organisations could work. In response to a further query he also explained how, in drawing up the proposed changes, he had focused on the recent guidance issued by the Council's external auditor (Ernst & Young LLP) and followed their recommendations closely.

In addition to the above, and although the content of Central Bedfordshire Council's Constitution shared much in common with that of other councils, the Committee was advised that the layout and structure of the document departed from the model version followed by the vast majority of councils. Whilst this did not present any technical problems it was considered that consistency of layout would be beneficial and so authority was sought for the Monitoring Officer to order and format the Constitution in the standard form once the proposed changes to the Constitution had been approved by Council. The reordered Constitution would then be submitted to a suitable meeting of the General Purposes Committee for consideration.

RESOLVED

that no action be taken to amend the provisions relating to Overview and Scrutiny and, in particular, the mechanism by which matters are referred for consideration.

RECOMMENDATION TO COUNCIL

- 1 that Council approve and adopt the changes to the Constitution as set out above and detailed in Appendix A to these minutes;**
- 2 that Council approve the ordering and formatting of the Constitution in the standard form;**
- 3 that Council authorise the Monitoring Officer to implement the changes and take any steps consequential, incidental or necessary to bring them into effect;**
- 4 that Council note the proposed amendments to the Procurement Procedure Rules set out at Appendix B to these minutes.**

GPC/16/10. Member Development Programme

The Committee considered a report which provided a summary of the learning and development events delivered as part of the Member Development Programme. In addition an overview of events planned for the remainder of the Programme was provided.

The Head of Governance first thanked those officers who had organised the events given the difficulties which often arose in their preparation and scheduling. He then introduced the report during which he emphasised how the Programme's sessions had been designed to inform Members about the key themes they would encounter over the four years of the current Council. He also reminded Members that, in addition, other learning opportunities had been offered, including workshops and briefings delivered by officers. Many of the briefings arose from requests by Members for more information on particular subjects.

The Head of Governance stressed the importance of obtaining feedback from Members as a means of contributing towards continuous improvement of the Programme. The meeting noted that, to date, the feedback had been largely positive. The Head of Governance also referred to the proposed monitoring actions set out within the report. Their role was to provide a mechanism through which to establish whether or not the sessions had delivered the intended outcomes.

Turning to the proposed events planned for the four month period until the end of September 2016 the Chairman suggested a course on communications skills to assist members when being filmed. She felt that the inclusion of rehearsals would add to the value of the training. A Member suggested that councillors be provided with training on the wide range of issues faced by the Council and how they were dealt with.

The Head of Governance advised that a second Member survey would be held to inform the Programme and highlight Members' interests. He undertook to include the issues raised by Members at the meeting.

A Member referred to difficulties arising from the timing of some of the sessions; the school holidays being particularly problematic. She also requested that the notes of the events be placed on the intranet so that Members who missed sessions could catch up. In response the Head of Governance stated that the notes of the formal sessions were already available but those for informal sessions were not. He acknowledged that the latter would also be helpful for Members and undertook to examine their inclusion on the intranet.

Another Member commented that she felt that insufficient notification was given of the sessions. She also commented that some officers were good presenters but others lacked the necessary skills.

Finally a Member referred to the need for training on issues which arose quite suddenly and in areas which lay outside the Council's responsibilities but which could, nonetheless, have a 'knock on' impact on the Council.

NOTED

the events and participation in the Member Development Programme from May 2015 to April 2016.

RESOLVED

- 1 that the proposed Member Development Programme events scheduled for the period to the end of September 2016 be approved;**
- 2 that the following actions to monitor whether the sessions have delivered the intended outcomes be approved:**

- a) **Surveying the Chairmen of committees to identify whether they feel the Committee is operating effectively and whether the learning and development sessions have contributed to this.**
- b) **Monitoring the feedback received after the sessions and subsequent engagement from Members requesting further learning/information.**
- c) **Sending a follow-up survey, between 4-6 month after the session, asking for Members' views on whether the learning has been put into practice and the impact it has had on their work.**
- d) **Continuing with the annual survey (initially sent in September 2015) asking Members for their views and suggestions about future learning sessions as part of a continuous improvement policy to ensure the Member Development Programme of events is relevant.**

GPC/16/11. **Revisions to the Terms of Reference for the Wixams Joint Development Control Committee**

The Committee considered a report which set out the recommendation made by the Wixams Joint Development Control Committee (Wixams JDCC) held on 15 March 2016 regarding proposed revisions to the Terms of Reference and Standing Orders relating to that Committee. The report also proposed the inclusion of the Standing Orders of the Joint Committee in the Council's Constitution for ease of reference.

Members were aware that the Wixams JDCC was a body operated as the result of a joint arrangement between Central Bedfordshire Council and Bedford Borough Council.

The report was introduced by the Committee Services Manager who highlighted various points for Members' information. The meeting was aware that the proposed revisions aimed to provide clarity and certainty as to which types of planning application would be considered and determined by the Wixams JDCC and which would be determined through officer delegated powers. The proposed revisions also provided updated guidance which reflected the formation of Central Bedfordshire Council and its location at Chicksands.

In addition to the above the Committee considered a schedule of further amendments to the Terms of Reference which had been submitted by a member of the Committee drawing on his experience as Chairman of the Council's Development Management Committee. To this end he proposed that the Wixams JDCC Terms of Reference be amended to, largely, reflect those of the Development Management Committee. The Member advised that the proposed amendment, which would see the inclusion of Chairman of each Council's Development Management Committee or Planning Committee in the membership, had not been supported by the Borough Council and so it was proposed that the form of words in the schedule submitted by the Member with regard to Standing Order 2 be amended by inserting the word 'normally' between 'shall' and 'be included'. The Borough Council had raised no further objections.

The Member informed the Committee that the last meeting of the Wixams JDCC had not been held in compliance with the current Terms of Reference. However, all decisions had been made unanimously and its decisions were binding.

RECOMMENDATION TO COUNCIL

- 1 that the proposed revisions to Part J2 of the Council's Constitution, comprising the Terms of Reference of the Wixams Joint Development Control Committee, as reproduced at Appendix C to these minutes, be approved;**
- 2 that the full Standing Orders of the Wixams Joint Development Committee, including the Scheme of Public Participation, be set out in the Council's Constitution, as shown at Appendix C to these minutes.**

GPC/16/12. **Work Programme**

Members considered a report which set out the Committee's work programme. Members were aware that there was only one report scheduled for consideration at the next meeting on 25 August though two additional items relating to the Constitution had been identified and these would require scheduling.

The Chairman advised that she would be absent from the August meeting.

NOTED

the report on the General Purposes Committee's work programme.

(Note: The meeting commenced at 10.00 a.m. and concluded at 11.10 a.m.)

Chairman

Dated