

CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE COUNCIL

At a meeting of the **GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE** held at Room 14, Priory House, Chicksands, Shefford on Thursday, 22 June 2017

PRESENT

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

Cllrs Mrs C F Chapman MBE
Mrs A L Dodwell
K C Matthews

Cllrs S Watkins
A Zerny

Apologies for Absence: Cllrs J G Jamieson
B J Spurr
N Warren
R D Wenham

Substitutes: Cllrs R D Berry (In place of B J Spurr)
D Bowater (In place of R D Wenham)
E Ghent (In place of J G Jamieson)
D J Lawrence (In place of N Warren)

Officers in Attendance: Mr Q Baker – AD Legal Services (Monitoring Officer)
Ms M Damigos – Corporate Lawyer
Mrs C Jones – Chief People Officer
Mr L Manning – Committee Services Officer
Mr J Partridge – Head of Governance

GPC/17/2. **Minutes**

RESOLVED

that the minutes of the meetings of the General Purposes Committee held on 30 March 2017 and 18 May 2017 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

GPC/17/3. **Members' Interests**

None.

GPC/17/4. **Chairman's Announcements and Communications**

The Chairman informed the Committee that the agenda item running order had changed. Because the Council's Monitoring Officer was required to attend another meeting at 11.00 a.m. his report entitled 'Reordered Constitution'

(agenda item 9) had been brought forward and would now be the first to be considered.

GPC/17/5. 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/17/6. 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/17/7. Reordered Constitution

The Committee considered a report which provided an update on the final re-ordered and indexed draft Constitution and sought authority to proceed with its formal adoption. An electronic copy of the re-ordered draft Constitution had been made available on the Council's website for examination.

Points and comments included:

- an introduction by the Corporate Lawyer who explained that any minor outstanding amendments had now been made out and that the new Constitution was now ready for adoption. She explained that discussion was taking place with the Head of Governance on the introductory process which would include articles within the Members' Information Bulletin and Staff Central.
- the Assistant Director Legal Services (Monitoring Officer) suggested that the re-ordered Constitution become effective once it was published on the Council's website. He stated the Committee would be advised by email once a publication date had been agreed. The Committee welcomed this suggestion.

RESOLVED

- 1 that the final draft version of the re-ordered Constitution be formally adopted and become effective once it is published on the Council's website on a date to be agreed;**
- 2 that an introductory process for the re-ordered Constitution be implemented within the Council.**

GPC/17/8. **Market Rate Supplement Payments - Annual Update**

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Resources which provided an update on the current application of Market Rate Supplements (MRS) to posts across Central Bedfordshire Council. Members noted that the application of an MRS was an attempt to bridge the gap between the Council's salary levels and the current 'market' rate of pay for professionals who were key to the delivery of Council services.

Points and comments included:

- reference to the initiative to differentiate the level of MRS payments made to different teams of social workers within Children's Services. Under the initiative the teams that had the most demanding roles received a higher level of MRS and the MRS paid to newly qualified social workers had been reduced. This approach had been successful in attracting and retaining experienced social workers in a highly competitive market whilst allowing the Council to manage its staffing costs.
- despite the introduction of MRS for qualified practitioners three years ago Adult Social Care continued to face recruitment and retention difficulties. Recent legislation had resulted in an increase in demand for adult social workers whilst benchmarking data revealed that Central Bedfordshire was paying less than neighbouring local authorities for some qualified and experienced Adult Social Care staff.
- the MRS payments for Planning and Building Control were under review. However, in view of current market conditions and the related difficulty in recruiting experienced staff it was envisaged that the payments would continue albeit following a possible reassessment of their value.
- following a Member's query on the use of 'golden hello's' by another local authority to attract staff the Assistant Director People stated that adopting such a policy at Central Bedfordshire could prove divisive as it further singled out a small number of employees from the majority. She commented that there were other factors which attracted and retained staff. The payment by the Council of professional training fees for staff and their repayment by staff if they left the Council within a specified timescale was discussed.
- the Assistant Director People explained that MRS remained in place for a three year period and were then reviewed. MRS had been reduced or removed in the past if it was possible to do so.

NOTED

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

GPC/17/9. **Corporate Style of Minutes**

Consideration was given to a report on the corporate style of minuting following comments by a Member at Council on 20 April 2017. The Committee was reminded that the Member had expressed concern regarding the level of detail contained in the minutes of the previous Council meeting and queried whether the preamble had captured the debate and met statutory requirements.

Points and comments included:

- confirmation by the Head of Governance that the existing minuting style exceeded the current statutory requirements, although there were slight variations in style depending on the type of meeting being minuted. In addition, where the webcasting of a meeting took place, and a verbatim record therefore existed, the minutes produced were as succinct as possible. Where a webcast had not been made however, or there was substantial public interest in an item, then a more detailed written record was made.
- a letter from the Member who had raised the original concerns was read out. The letter set out the Member's concerns in detail together with a suggested way forward.
- the Assistant Director Legal Services (Monitoring Officer) confirmed that only a committee's decision needed to be recorded and there was no legal requirement to record the debate leading to the decision. However, Members were strongly of the opinion that, whilst there was no legal requirement to record a preamble, there was an issue of public perception regarding the extent to which Members utilised the democratic process and the level of detail contained in the minutes needed to be increased in order to provide a full summary of the main points of debate. The recorded webcast of a meeting was regarded as unreliable, difficult to navigate and not always available. The possibility of an audio only recording of debate was suggested.
- in response to comment regarding the accuracy of some minutes the Chairman reminded the Committee that the accuracy of the minutes could be challenged before they were signed. The Head of Governance acknowledged that the six month time span that the recorded webcast was available was insufficient. He also reminded Members that the individual agenda items were 'flagged' during the webcast so it was possible to locate them without watching the whole recording.

RESOLVED

- 1 that the following principle be adopted for all meetings:**

As soon as practicable after any meeting a written statement of the proceedings at that meeting will be published that will provide the following:-

- a) a statement of the matter under consideration;
 - b) a few bullet points that provide a concise summary of the main points made in discussion, incorporating all motions and amendments presented to meetings in the exact form and order as put to the meeting;
 - c) a summation of the item as provided by the Chairman (where applicable); and
 - d) a record of the decision and date it was made including the reasons for the decision, the details of any alternative options considered and rejected, either detailed in the written report or proposed and seconded during the discussion of the report at the meeting; and any conflicts of interest.
- 2 that the number of votes for and against a motion be recorded;
 - 3 that the main points of debate, which would impact on the outcome, be included in the minutes.
 - 4 that should a Member raise a particular point that he or she wishes to have recorded in the minutes he or she should inform the Chairman of the meeting at that point in the debate;
 - 5 that Members who do not attend a meeting but fail to provide their apologies be recorded as 'Absent'.

GPC/17/10. **Work Programme**

Members considered a report which set out the Committee's work programme.

Points and comments included:

- the Chairman reporting that she had been advised by the Head of Governance that his report on the future provision of webcasting at the Council would be ready to be submitted to the Committee on 26 October. Some concern was expressed that, given the need to follow a strict procurement procedure, considering this matter in October rather than at the Committee's next meeting in August, could lead to a delay in implementing any changes.

RESOLVED

that a report on the future provision of webcasting at Central Bedfordshire Council be added to the Committee's work programme for consideration on 26 October 2017.

(Note: The meeting commenced at 10.00 a.m. and concluded at 11.03 a.m.)

Chairman

Dated