
GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the Meeting held in the Council Chamber, Swale House, East Street, Sittingbourne, Kent, ME10 3HT on Monday, 6 October 2014 from 7.00 - 8.11 pm.

PRESENT: Councillors Derek Conway, Duncan Dewar-Whalley (substitute for Councillor Mike Cosgrove), Mike Haywood, David Simmons, Adam Tolhurst, Mike Whiting, Ted Wilcox (substitute for Councillor Gerry Lewin) and Steve Worrall.

OFFICERS PRESENT: Keith Alabaster, Katherine Bescoby, Alan Marolia, Mark Radford, Dena Smart and Nick Vickers.

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE: Councillors Mike Henderson.

APOLOGIES: Councillors Bowles, Mike Cosgrove and Gerry Lewin.

268 ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN

Councillor David Simmons was elected as Chairman for the meeting. The Committee's thoughts were with Councillors Mike Cosgrove and Gerry Lewin.

269 MINUTES

The Minutes of the Meeting held on Monday 16 June 2014 (Minute Nos. 85 – 87) were taken as read, approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

270 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No interests were declared.

Part A Minutes for Recommendation to Council

271 POLLING DISTRICTS AND PLACES

The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager introduced the report, referring to the consultation that had taken place on the proposals agreed by the Committee in February 2014. The report set out details of the consultation responses and the proposed polling districts and places, based on the new ward boundaries that took effect in May 2015, together with the Returning Officer's views. There were currently 77 polling districts for 25 wards, and under the new scheme proposed there would be 80 polling districts for 24 wards.

The Committee was asked to consider the proposals and make recommendations to the Council on 22 October 2014. Attention was drawn to the tabled papers advising of a change to the proposal for Homewood Ward, and updated maps. The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager also confirmed that Stalisfield Village Hall would be available for polling in May 2015.

Members asked a number of questions regarding the proposals. The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager answered Members' questions, explaining that each parish was a separate polling district and referring to the Electoral Commission's guidance of no more than 2500 electors allocated to a polling station.

The Meads – it was likely that the community facility would not be ready in time for the elections in May 2015 and so it was likely that a portacabin would be located in the ward for use as a polling station.

Sheerness - Vincent Court was not available for hire as a polling station for security reasons. The Committee considered that voters in that area should have a polling station and a portacabin was suggested in Vincent Gardens.

Murston – a Member suggested that an additional polling station should be considered for voters at the Great Easthall Estate. A portacabin was suggested for this area.

During the discussion the Returning Officer was thanked for his negotiations to secure a polling station at the Sittingbourne Community College site. A Member also asked about the arrangements in the Woodstock ward which he was happy with.

Recommended:

That subject to (a) an additional polling district in Sheerness Ward for Vincent Gardens and (b) consideration being given to an additional polling station in the Murston Ward near the Great Easthall Estate, the Council be asked to approve the polling districts and places as outlined in Appendix I and II of the report.

Part B Minutes for Information

272 EMPLOYER PENSION DISCRETIONS

The Head of HR Services introduced her report which explained that the Local Government Pension Scheme regulations had changed significantly in 2013; and under the regulations all employers must set their own policy on some of the regulations. The Committee was asked to agree to the amended policy on Employer Discretions as set out in Appendix I of the report.

The Head of Finance advised that if those discretions were exercised, there would be some additional costs to the Council and so he recommended that the General Purposes Committee should receive a report if the discretions were exercised, for the purposes of openness and transparency.

The Head of HR Services explained that managers would need to demonstrate how to pay for the additional cost from within existing budgets, as part of a business case.

During the discussion, it was confirmed that the Head of Finance, the Head of HR Services and the relevant Director would decide on the discretions; and that spending limits did apply. It was also confirmed that there was an appeal process for staff.

In respect of Regulation 17(1), the Committee asked for some clarity and additional wording was suggested to make this clearer.

In response to questions regarding time limits referred to in Regulation 100 and Regulation 16, the Head of HR Services advised of the procedures and that the deadlines were made clear to staff. She also answered questions regarding the 'rule of 85' and the consultation process, which was undertaken at national level.

Resolved:

That the amended policy on pension discretions, as set out in Appendix I, be agreed subject to the following:

(a) Amended wording of the second line of Regulation 17 (1) to read as follows: 'However, this policy will be reviewed from time to time by the Head of Human Resources in conjunction with the Chief Finance Officer, and then the decision is subject to Member's approval.'

(b) A report being submitted to the General Purposes Committee if discretions were exercised.

Part A Minutes for Recommendation to Council

273 CHANGES TO CONTRACT STANDING ORDERS

The Contracts Manager – Procurement/Operations – Grounds Maintenance and Leisure Centres introduced his report, which asked Members to consider changing Standing Orders to assist local small and medium enterprises (SME's) in procuring lower value opportunities between £0 - £15,000. Under the proposals, those procurements up to £5000 would not be advertised on the Swale website; one quote would be needed for up to £1000, and two quotes would be needed for contracts between £1001 – £5000. Those over £5000 would go on the SBC website, and those over £15000 would also go on the Kent Portal and the South East Business Portal. Attention was drawn to the tabled papers which set out the proposals in detail.

The Contracts Manager – Procurement/Operations – Grounds Maintenance and Leisure Centres also drew attention to the proposals relating to waivers as set out in the tabled papers.

A discussion ensued regarding the proposals, during which it was suggested that Officers should develop a list of local SME's that officers could use to identify who to seek a quote or quotes from. There was also discussion about the proposal not to advertise contracts under £5000 via the SBC website; the aim of the changes to make it easier for officers to use local businesses and to make it less onerous for SMEs to quote for small works. There was also discussion about identifying local SMEs, and not always to ask the same suppliers each time.

Recommended:

That the amendments to Contract Standing Orders be approved.

Chairman

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All Minutes are draft until agreed at the next meeting of the Committee/Panel