

Decisions of the General Functions Committee

11 November 2015

Members Present:-

Councillor Joan Scannell (Chairman)
Councillor Wendy Prentice (Vice-Chairman)

Councillor Richard Cornelius
Councillor Kathy Levine
Councillor Charlie O-Macauley

Councillor Barry Rawlings
Councillor Daniel Thomas

1. MINUTES

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 12 October 2015 be agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

2. ABSENCE OF MEMBERS

None

3. DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTERESTS AND NON PECUNIARY INTERESTS

None

4. REPORT OF THE MONITORING OFFICER (IF ANY)

None

5. PUBLIC QUESTION AND COMMENTS (IF ANY)

None

6. MEMBERS ITEM (IF ANY)

None

7. BARNET COUNCIL'S ANNUAL HEALTH AND SAFETY REPORT

The Head of Health, Safety and Wellbeing (Commissioning Group) presented the report which provided information on the Council's health and safety performance for the period 2014/15 based on data recorded in the accident / incident reporting system, together with independent audit results, corporate training records and ill health data.

The Committee asked questions of the officer including how the data measured against results shared by comparator local authorities (accident / incident rates) or public sector organisations (reporting of injuries, diseases and dangerous occurrences (RIDDOR)). The Committee understood that Barnet Council performed relatively well in comparison to other local authorities but recognised that it was important to set priorities which would, in part, focus on areas which could continue to be improved. The officer

undertook to include comparative benchmarking data in future editions of the annual report.

In respect of stress-related illnesses affecting employees, the Committee discussed the sources of support made available by Barnet Council. Further discussion around statistics collected in respect of incidents of verbal assault revealed the benefit of quarterly reports (which provided breakdowns of incident types) being reported to General Functions Committee meetings on a twice-yearly basis.

In response to questions about reporting levels, the officer advised that under-reporting was anticipated across all industries including the public sector. It was estimated that 100% of major incidents were reported, compared to between 50 to 60% of minor incidents and 20 to 30% of near misses. The Committee commended the officer on his continuing work to promote the practice of employees reporting work-related incidents.

The Committee was asked to consider and confirm the proposed priorities for the 2015/16 period.

RESOLVED to:

1. **note the report and approve the priorities for the period 2015/16 as outlined in section 3 of the Annual Health and Safety Report (Appendix 1 to the committee report);**
2. **recommend that future editions of the Health and Safety Annual Report include comparative benchmarking data; and**
3. **request the Head of Safety, Health and Well-being (Commissioning Group) to report quarterly monitoring statistics to the General Functions Committee on a twice-yearly basis.**

8. COMMUNICATIONS WITH THE PUBLIC BY TEXT AND SOCIAL MEDIA FOR MEMBERS POLICY

The Information Strategy Manager presented the report. The Committee was asked to comment on and approve the policy, which had been designed to offer guidance to Members of the Council on how they may be affected by data protection standards in the context of social media communications, particularly where personal data was being communicated.

Following discussion, the Committee endorsed the policy being included as part of the Members' Information Management Policy.

RESOLVED to approve the Communications with the Public by Text and Social Media for Members policy, which forms part of the Members' Information Management Policy.

9. COMMUNICATIONS WITH THE PUBLIC BY TEXT AND SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY FOR STAFF

The Information Strategy Manager presented the report and explained that following consideration of this policy at the last General Functions Committee meeting, the Committee's suggestions had been incorporated and a revised policy was presented for comment. The Committee understood that the policy explained how data protection standards and duties could be maintained within social media communications where personal data was being communicated.

With reference to section 6.6 of the policy for staff, the officer sought to reassure the Committee of the use of Business Skype™ by staff, particularly licence arrangements, software security, safeguarding responsibilities and the cost involved. It was reported that the Council did not presently use Skype to engage with customers but reference to Skype was included in the policy as a means of future-proofing it and to provide guidance on relevant considerations should Skype or similar video media be used - either on a one off basis, or more regularly in the future.

It was further reported that it was the Information Management team's understanding that Skype had been used once by Barnet Council under specific direction of a court order in relation to a safeguarding case.

The Committee was advised that staff did not have administration rights on their machines (making it an inaccessible application) and therefore Skype would have to be installed by the Information Systems team, which was not done at this time. Whilst Skype for Business was part of Microsoft Office™, there were no plans to deploy the software and all aspects of security, licensing and technical requirements would be considered before doing so. The Committee requested that any plans to approve the use of the software by staff on a regular basis (for communicating with the public) be brought back to the General Functions Committee.

RESOLVED to:

- 1. approve the Communications with the Public by Text and Social Media for Members policy which is in place for staff; and**
- 2. request the Head of Information Management to ensure that any plans to approve the use of any internet chat/video media software by staff (to communicate with the public) be brought back to the General Functions Committee for comment and approval.**

10. NOMINATION AND APPOINTMENT OF LOCAL AUTHORITY REPRESENTATIVES ON SCHOOL GOVERNING BODIES

The Head of Governance (Assurance Group) presented the report which invited the Committee to review whether the Council's management of the nomination and appointments process was both compliant with legislation and efficient.

The Committee discussed the difficulties in identifying candidates who were prepared to serve as local authority governors and how valuable contribution from experienced candidates could be lost if governing bodies focused on addressing a narrow skills specification. The Committee expressed concern that the process of nominating local authority representatives had become unnecessarily onerous but acknowledged that this was, in part, attributable to the legislative changes outlined in the report. The Committee highlighted the importance of a local authority representative being independent of the school and providing an objective contribution.

The Head of Governance relayed the extent of previous correspondence with school governing bodies concerning the implications of legislative changes. The Committee reviewed the proposed draft correspondence to school governing bodies (Appendix A to the committee report) and suggested that it could be strengthened by referencing the key attributes which differentiated the category of a local authority governor, such as their knowledge of the Council and independence from the school.

Discussion ensued regarding the statutory guidance and whether it would be beneficial to require prospective candidates to complete the NGA Skills Audit, together with a brief application form to record their relevant skills and experience. The Committee did not feel that it was necessary to ask prospective candidates to provide references as Group Secretaries effectively provided assurance in putting forward each nomination.

The Committee was concerned that the recommendations within the statutory guidance, which arose from the legislative changes, were overly prescriptive and would not benefit the composition or work of school governing bodies.

RESOLVED to:

1. **authorise the Head of Governance, following consultation with the Committee Chairman, to approve and distribute the final draft of the letter to school governing bodies (Appendix A to the report) incorporating the Committee's comments; and**
2. **request the Head of Governance to provide an update report upon realisation of the project deliverables identified in Appendix C to the report.**

11. DECISION OF A SCHOOL GOVERNING BODY NOT TO APPOINT A LOCAL AUTHORITY REPRESENTATIVE NOMINATED BY THE COUNCIL

The Head of Governance (Assurance Group) presented the report which asked the Committee to note the decision of a school governing body to not appoint a local authority nominee, together with the reasons for that decision.

RESOLVED to note:

1. **that the governing body of a school considered Council's nomination and decided not to appoint the candidate;**
2. **the reason for the reason for the governing body's decision (sections 1.5 to 1.7 of the report inclusive); and**
3. **that the local authority governor position at the school remains vacant.**

12. GENERAL FUNCTIONS COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

The Head of Governance presented the report. The Committee was asked to consider and comment on the work programme for the municipal year 2015-16.

The Committee recommended the inclusion of quarterly monitoring statistics (health and safety) to be reported to the General Functions Committee by the Head of Safety, Health and Well-being (Commissioning Group) on a twice-yearly basis.

RESOLVED to:

1. **amend the work programme to include quarterly monitoring statistics (Safety, Health and Well-being) on a twice-yearly basis; and**
2. **agree the work programme as amended.**

13. ANY ITEM(S) THAT THE CHAIRMAN DECIDES IS URGENT

None

14. MOTION TO EXCLUDE THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

The Chairman moved a motion to exclude the press and public which was duly seconded and unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED to exclude the press and public:

- in accordance with section 9 of part 19 of the Constitution (Access to Information Rules); and
- by virtue of Paragraph 2 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended by the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006 being information which was likely to reveal the identity of an individual; and
- because the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighed the public interest in disclosing the information.

15. DECISION OF A SCHOOL GOVERNING BODY NOT TO APPOINT A LOCAL AUTHORITY REPRESENTATIVE NOMINATED BY THE COUNCIL (EXEMPT)

The Head of Governance (Assurance Group) presented the report which identified the school governing body concerned. A chronology of the communications exchanged between the candidate and the governing body was relayed to the Committee.

RESOLVED to note the report.

The meeting finished at 7.53 pm