

Report of Director of Resources

Report to General Purposes Committee

Date: 30th August 2012

Subject: Deputation to full Council – Falun Gong

Are specific electoral Wards affected? If relevant, name(s) of Ward(s):	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Are there implications for equality and diversity and cohesion and integration?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Is the decision eligible for Call-In?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information? If relevant, Access to Information Procedure Rule number: Appendix number:	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No

Summary of main issues

1. The purpose of this report is to consider the Deputation received by full Council on the 11th July 2012 from Mary Man regarding practitioners of Falun Gong and the Council's response to it.
2. Ms Man's deputation asked that Council consider;
 - Making a proclamation to call to stop the persecution of Falun Gong Practitioners in China, and;
 - Follow other cities' example in naming a "Falun Dafa Day" in recognition of the courage and sacrifices of Falun Gong practitioners in China and abroad."

Recommendations

It is recommended that General Purposes Committee;

- a) note the issues raised by Ms Man;
- b) request that the Chief Executive to:-
 - write to Ms Man on the Council's behalf thanking her for her presentation;
 - bring the issues raised by Ms Man to the attention of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office;
- c) reaffirms unequivocal support for the right of freedom of expression and views with concern any actions that may deny this basic human right.

1. Purpose of this report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to consider the deputation received by full Council on the 11th July 2012 from Ms Man regarding practitioners of Falun Gong and the Council's response to it.

2. Background information

- 2.1 The deputation was presented at full Council on 11th July 2012 by Ms Man, a resident of Kirkstall. Shen Jingmin, Li Qiong, Alex Rostron and Chris Sugden attended and supported Ms Man at the full Council meeting. The full speech is attached at Appendix 1.

3. Main issues

- 3.1 Ms Man, and those who accompanied her at full Council, are concerned about the persecution of practitioners of Falun Gong.
- 3.2 The deputation draws attention to a number of reported incidents of ill-treatment of Falun Gong practitioners and to a recent Amnesty International call for action.
- 3.3 Ms Man's deputation concluded in asking the Council to consider;
- Making a proclamation to call to stop the persecution of Falun Gong Practitioners in China, and;
 - Follow other cities' example in naming a "Falun Dafa Day" in recognition of the courage and sacrifices of Falun Gong practitioners in China and abroad."
- 3.4 Full Council resolved to refer the matters raised by Ms Man to the General Purposes Committee for further consideration.

Role of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office

- 3.5 In his foreword to the 2011 Foreign and Commonwealth Office Report, Foreign Secretary William Hague stated that the promotion and protection of human rights is at the heart of UK foreign policy.
- 3.6 The issue of persecution of the Falun Gong community have been considered in the House of Commons where the Government has confirmed that reports of the harassment and detention of Falun Gong practitioners have been raised with the Chinese government.
- 3.7 Given the substantial and influential role of the UK Government on these matters, General Purposes Committee may wish to consider bringing the issues raised, and specific requests made by Ms Man in her deputation, to the attention of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

Falun Dafa Proclamations and designated Days

- 3.8 Officers are aware of no cities in the UK that have made proclamations or designated particular days as Falun Dafa days. There are some examples elsewhere, most notably North America and Canada, where a day in mid May is designated as World Falun Dafa day.

3.9 Leeds is a multicultural city where a wide range of faiths and cultures are represented, many of whom have current and historic human rights concerns. Campaigns and activities in respect of these issues are often brought to the attention of the Council. The Council supports a number of days designated by bodies such as the UN for worldwide concern. However in other cases it is considered that a general statement of values and beliefs is a more helpful approach rather than giving support to particular designated days. This reinforces the view that the Council supports freedom of expression and human rights in all circumstances.

3.10 As such, in recognition of the issues raised in the deputation, General Purposes Committee may wish to consider restating this view as follows;

‘That General Purposes Committee reaffirms unequivocal support for the right of freedom of expression and views with concern any actions that may deny this basic human right’

4. Corporate Considerations

4.1 Consultation and Engagement

4.1.1 Deputations provide a direct route for citizens to make representations to the Council.

4.2 Equality and Diversity / Cohesion and Integration

4.2.1 The Council has a general public duty under the Equalities Act 2010 to:

- eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment, and victimisation;
- advance equality of opportunity; and
- foster good relations.

4.2.2 These duties are placed upon the Council when delivering or redesigning services or doing anything else, for example under the general power of competence set out in the Localism Act 2011.

4.3 Council policies and City Priorities

4.3.1 The issues raised by Ms Man do not directly link with any of the City Priorities set out in the City Priority Plan 2011-15.

4.4 Resources and Value for Money

4.4.1 There are no implications in respect of resources or value for money.

4.5 Legal Implications, Access to Information and Call In

4.5.1 There are no legal implications arising from this report.

4.5.2 The report is an open item and is not otherwise restricted by the Council’s Access to Information obligations. As the matter is not related to an Executive function Call In does not apply.

4.6 Risk Management

4.6.1 There are no specific implications in respect of the Council's risk management arrangements.

5. Recommendations

5.1 It is recommended that General Purposes Committee;

- a) note the issues raised by Ms Man.
- b) request the Chief Executive to:-
 - write to Ms Man on the Council's behalf thanking her for her presentation;
 - bring the issues raised by Ms Man to the attention of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.
- c) reaffirms unequivocal support for the right of freedom of expression and views with concern any actions that may deny this basic human right.

6. Background documents¹

None.

¹ The background documents listed in this section are available for inspection on request for a period of four years following the date of the relevant meeting. Accordingly this list does not include documents containing exempt or confidential information, or any published works. Requests to inspect any background documents should be submitted to the report author.