

NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL

GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE

Tuesday, 3 November 2009

PRESENT: Councillor Garlick (Chair); Councillor Woods (Deputy Chair);
Councillors Glynane, J. Conroy, Davies, Duncan and Edwards

1. APOLOGIES

There were none.

2. MINUTES

These were agreed as a true record and signed by the Chair.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were none.

4. DEPUTATIONS / PUBLIC ADDRESSES

RESOLVED: That Councillor Tony Clarke be granted leave to address the Committee in respect of item 6 'The Powers of the General Purposes Committee.'

**5. MATTERS OF URGENCY WHICH BY REASON OF SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES
THE CHAIR IS OF THE OPINION SHOULD BE CONSIDERED**

There were none.

6. THE POWERS OF GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE

The Chair registered his apologies for the delay in bringing the report to the Committee.

Councillor Clarke addressed the Committee and advised that this item had been outstanding for some time. Several meetings of the Committee had been cancelled and the attendance had been sporadic. He asked for the item to be on the agenda as he wanted a solution and challenged whether Councillors time was used effectively or if the processes were more traditional and historic.

He referred to the report and confirmed that he wanted to take it further to include the possible future role of General Purposes and how it would fit in with other Local Authorities. Some other Councils merged their General Purposes and Audit Committees whereas others have split the Committees however, not many of them have limited the Committee to staff matters. He suggested that the Committee could serve the Council better and the brief of General Purposes could include permission to review reports and take a decision. Areas where the Committee could be involved in were Health and Safety, Human Resources, Electoral matters, Boundary Review, Annual Governance Report, members allowances, constitutional matters, the Mayoralty and possibly byelaws. These items were reviewed by other General Purposes Committees in other Local Authorities and he considered it would

be beneficial to the Council if the Committee had a broader remit. This would also eliminate the need for so many Working Parties as the Committee could consider the item and refer to Cabinet or Council if necessary. They would have the permission of Council and the direction of Cabinet in overseeing and reviewing reports.

The Borough Solicitor presented the report and elaborated thereon. He apologised for the technical nature of the report and advised that the political governance of the Council was structured in the way that particular decisions were made by specific bodies. Under the Local Government Act 2000 executive decisions had to be made by the executive ie Cabinet or members of Cabinet; Overview and Scrutiny Committee had their own particular powers; regulatory committees and committees of Full Council for example General Purposes. General Purposes was a decision-making Committee unlike Overview and Scrutiny who could only use their powers under the 2000 Act to make recommendations to the Executive and the Audit Committee who could only review financial procedures. Council had decided how this Committee would operate and its level of involvement. If the Committee wanted to extend its role then this was something for Full Council to decide. This could be achieved by asking the Constitutional Review Working Party to consider and recommend to Full Council if appropriate. He would shortly arrange meetings of the Constitutional Working Party.

Councillor Woods confirmed that in a 2005 restructure an Improvement Board was formed and the General Purposes Committee as then existed was deleted. Then Council decided to re-establish the General Purposes Committee to consider issues that the executive could not determine, but many of the issues that the original committee considered were considered in other groups. The Audit Committee reviewed financial processes and not the current financial position which was the function of Cabinet.

Councillor Davies agreed that the Committee would have a lot of work to do within the next 12 months although would have the capacity to take more on. He expressed concerns that the Constitution Working Party had not met and agreed that generally the Committee's role had to be more defined and have a proper agenda to deal with.

Councillor Garlick suggested that a recommendation be made to the Constitutional Working Party to consider the role of the General Purposes Committee and list the possible items the Committee could deal with outlined previously. The Committee would also recommend to the party to consider if their role is as it should be and if items for consideration were being dealt with in the most appropriate place.

Resolved:

For the Constitutional Working Party to review these minutes and consider the role of the General Purposes Committee is as it should be and if items for consideration were being dealt with in the most appropriate place.

The meeting concluded at 18.35