

NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL

GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE

Monday, 21 October 2013

PRESENT: Councillor Hibbert (Chair); Councillor Parekh (Deputy Chair);
Councillors Aziz, Beardsworth, Begum, Duncan and Ford.

1. APOLOGIES

None.

2. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 10 September 2013 were agreed and signed by the Chair.

The proposer of the motion contained on the agenda for the previous meeting had requested to speak on the minutes but was informed that only the accuracy of the minutes was being considered at this meeting. A Member stated that the proposer and seconder of the motion had not been informed that the motion was on the agenda and had not attended the meeting. The Chief Executive stated that the Members who had proposed and seconded the motion had been present at the Council meeting on 15 July 2013 when the motion had been referred to this Committee for consideration.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

4. DEPUTATIONS / PUBLIC ADDRESSES

Mr Huffadine-Smith and Mr Leach (the presenter of the petition) were given leave to address the Committee on item 6 – Petition submitted to Council.

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

None.

6. PETITION SUBMITTED TO COUNCIL

The Committee considered a petition which had been received at the meeting of the Council held on 16 September 2013 and which had been referred to this Committee. The petition asked the Council to change its policy on accepting petitions to include forms such as works of art to convey messages of public discontent.

The Chief Executive stated that three items which were asserted to be petitions had been submitted at recent Council meetings on a mattress, then on a bed sheet, then

on sheets of paper. The first two had not been accepted as there had not been clear names and signatures of any petitioners nor any clarity over what the petitioners were asking the Council to do, or consider. He stated that petitions did not need to be submitted on paper but had to be recognisable in law as petitions, indicating who had signed them, that the signatories were representative, that the signatories were residents in the Borough, and being clear in the action requested from the Council. He stated that petitions should also be presented in a manner which maintains the dignity of the Council meeting.

The Solicitor then detailed the procedures for submitting and dealing with petitions, as set out in the Council's Constitution.

Mr Huffadine-Smith then addressed the Committee stating that the Council needed more young people with imagination to take an interest in politics to keep the Council in touch with the people it served and that consultations often did not work. He referred to the potential value of a work of art, such as the mattress which had been submitted.

Mr Leach then addressed the Committee stating that the Council's policy did not allow equal access to all and restricted freedom of expression under the Equalities Act 2010 and the European Convention on Human Rights, in that blind or partially sighted people might not know what they were signing or what a petition was asking for. Also, not everyone was happy to give their addresses and signatures on a petition. He asked that video and audio recordings and other forms of media be accepted and that the Council should set the lead in this area.

Members noted the issues that Mr Leach had raised in relation to blind and partially sighted people. The Chief Executive stated that petitions might be presented in more creative forms but suggested that petitioners should take advice on formats from officers before submitting a petition. He stated that petitions should not lower the tone of the Council meeting and referred to the language used in writing on the mattress which had been rejected as a petition at the Council meeting held on 15 July 2013. It should also be clear what the petitioners were requesting the Council to do.

It was noted that petitions did not always express public discontent but could be requesting the Council to take a particular form of action and that messages of public discontent alone may not constitute a petition, which should include a request to the Council to take a particular action.

RESOLVED:

That no further action be taken in respect of the petition.

7. CRAFT TERMS AND CONDITIONS PROJECT UPDATE

The Committee received an update in respect of the change of terms and conditions for the Craft workforce which the Committee had agreed at its meeting held on 26 March 2013. Members had requested an update at the Committee meeting held on 9 July 2013.

It was noted that 25 of the 69 Craft workforce had accepted the revised terms and conditions. The remainder of the Craft workforce had been dismissed and re-engaged on the revised terms and conditions with an effective start date of 1st August 2013. Training plans had been implemented for staff who had development needs. Apprenticeship schemes were in place and are being supported by management. A Member asked if information on the apprenticeship schemes could either be reported to the Committee or sent to Members direct.

In answer to a question Members were informed that the trade unions had been interested to see that a correct consultation process is followed, and it was confirmed that the appropriate consultation process was undertaken. There are no current issues with the trade unions in respect of this process.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

The meeting concluded at 6:40 pm