

**NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE**

Your attendance is requested at a meeting to be held at  
The Jeffrey Room, The Guildhall, St. Giles Square, Northampton, NN1 1DE  
on Tuesday, 25 March 2014  
at 6:00 pm.

**D Kennedy  
Chief Executive**

**AGENDA**

- 1. Apologies**
- 2. Minutes**  
(Copy herewith)
- 3. Declarations of Interest**
- 4. Deputations / Public Addresses**
- 5. Matters of Urgency which by reason of special circumstances the chair is of the opinion should be considered**
- 6. European Elections Count Venue 2014**  
Report of Borough Secretary (Copy herewith)
- 7. Exclusion of Public and Press**

THE CHAIR TO MOVE:

“THAT THE PUBLIC BE EXCLUDED FROM THE REMAINDER OF THE MEETING ON THE GROUNDS THAT THERE IS LIKELY TO BE DISCLOSURE TO THEM OF SUCH CATEGORIES OF EXEMPT INFORMATION AS DEFINED BY SECTION 100(1) OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972 AS LISTED AGAINST SUCH ITEMS OF BUSINESS BY REFERENCE TO THE APPROPRIATE PARAGRAPH OF SCHEDULE 12A TO SUCH ACT.”

**Public Participation**

Members of the public may address the Committee on any non-procedural matter listed on this agenda. Addresses shall not last longer than three minutes. Committee members may then ask questions of the speaker. No prior notice is required prior to the commencement of the meeting of a request to address the Committee.

## **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

Appendices:  
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## GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE REPORT

Report Title	European Elections count venue 2014
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**AGENDA STATUS: PUBLIC**

<b>Committee Meeting Date:</b>	25 <sup>th</sup> March 2014
<b>Policy Document:</b>	No
<b>Directorate:</b>	Chief Executive
<b>Accountable Cabinet Member:</b>	Councillor Mackintosh

### 1. Purpose

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1.1 To advise the Committee of the new location to hold the European Elections count in 2014 and for members to comment and ask questions on this matter.

### 2. Recommendations

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2.1 To note the change of counting venue from Lings Forum to Royal & Derngate, and for members to advise of any concerns or questions on this matter.

2.2 To note that a further report will be brought forward to this Committee evaluating the operation of the venue after May 22<sup>nd</sup>/23<sup>rd</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup>, and will also consider options to use the same venue for the Borough Council elections 2015, and related options for the next General Election.

### 3. Issues and Choices

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#### 3.1 Report Background

3.1.1 The Council have previously held the election counts at the Lings Forum Leisure Centre in Brookside Ward, Northampton. However, following the evaluation of options, the Returning Officer is relocating to a new venue for the

European election verification and count. These will take place at the Royal & Derngate theatre complex, located in the Cultural Quarter of the town, in close proximity to the Guildhall.

Currently, main election counts take place at Lings Forum which is located approximately 4 miles from the Guildhall. The Royal & Derngate is located much closer to the Guildhall and has excellent facilities. These include an excellent communications area where the media will be able to carry out their functions within allocated spaces, better facilities for staff and candidates, and a much more central area for polling staff to drop off ballot boxes. There is also the potential to speed up verification processes as such a central location would aid the fast delivery of ballot boxes after close of poll.

Other advantages have been identified such as the reduction in travel expenditure on staff, and as postal votes would be transported to the Guildhall and kept secure overnight, this would reduce the costs of security and other operational costs such as car park arrangement at Lings.

No decision has yet been taken with regard to the Borough Council elections in 2015 but if the forthcoming European election verification and count work well at this new venue then a change of Borough Council election verification and count venue to the Royal and Derngate is likely. To enable this, a full evaluation will be produced after the European Parliamentary elections and there will be a further report to this Committee.

The General Election is also planned to take place on the same day as the Borough Council elections. The Acting Returning Officer will be responsible for the Northampton North and Northampton South constituencies. Again, an evaluation of the best verification and count venue or venues for the two constituencies will be undertaken based on the experience of using the Royal and Derngate this year.

## **4. Implications (including financial implications)**

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### **4.1 Resources and Risk**

- 4.1.1 There is potential for there to be a significant reduction in costs as identified in the body of the report due to operational benefits to the electoral process.
- 4.1.2 A key risk to be evaluated at the European Parliamentary elections will be the capacity of the venue, particularly whether the venue would be able to cope sufficiently well with a combined and more complex election as planned in 2015

### **4.2 Legal**

- 4.2.1 There are no legal implications. The decision on venue is a matter for the Local Returning Officer in liaison with the Regional Returning Officer.

### **4.3 Equality**

4.3.1 None specifically arising from this report. The Royal and Derngate has high standards of accessibility.

### **4.4 Consultees (Internal and External)**

4.4.1 Northampton Leisure Trust and the Regional Returning Officer have been consulted on this proposal and raised no objections.

### **4.5 Other Implications**

4.5.1 None

## **5. Background Papers**

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5.1 None.

**Judy Goodman**  
**Borough Secretary's Department**  
**Ext 7409**