

**MINUTES OF THE GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE
MONDAY, 25 SEPTEMBER 2006**

Councillors Griffith (Chair), C. Harris, Whyte, Aitken, Bull and EganAitken (substituting for Beynon), Bull (substituting for Adje) and Egan (substituting for Dobbie)

Apologies Councillors Adje, Beynon, Dobbie

MINUTE NO.	SUBJECT/DECISION
GPCO16.	<p>APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (IF ANY)</p> <p>Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Bloch. Apologies for absence were also received from Councillor Adje, who was substituted for by Councillor Bull, Councillor Dobbie, who was substituted for by Councillor Egan and Councillor Beynon, who was substituted for by Councillor Aitken.</p>
GPCO17.	<p>URGENT BUSINESS</p> <p>The committee received the report of item 7, Annual Governance Report, as urgent business, as the authority was awaiting receipt of the Annual Governance Report from the Audit Commission. The report was not able to be issued at an earlier date as it was reliant on the substantial completion of their annual audit, which was not scheduled to be concluded until the end of September.</p>
GPCO18.	<p>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST</p> <p>There were no such declarations.</p>
GPCO19.	<p>DEPUTATIONS/PETITIONS</p> <p>There were no such items.</p>
GPCO20.	<p>MINUTES</p> <p>With regards to minute GPCO15 (General Purposes Committee, 19th July 2006), Members requested clarification if the new IT officer structure was to be reported back to the committee. The Head of Personnel stated that there was no recommendation in either the report or from Members at the special meeting of 19th July 2006, that the matter be reported back to the committee.</p> <p>RESOLVED:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. That the minutes of the meeting held on 29th June 2006 be confirmed and signed. 2. That the minutes of the special meeting held on 19th July 2006 be confirmed and signed.

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GPCO21.	<p>MINUTES OF GENERAL PURPOSES SUB-BODIES</p> <p>The Monitoring Officer's representative notified Members and colleagues for information that in respect of minute PASC40 of the meeting of the Planning Applications Sub-committee of 25 July 2006, sections 1 and 2, relating to Cecile Mews, it was noted that due to procedural irregularities the decision was referred back to the meeting of 11 September 2006, where the application was not approved.</p> <p>RESOLVED:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">i) That the minutes of the meeting of the Pensions Panel of 23 March 2006 be noted.ii) That the minutes of the following meetings of the Planning Applications Sub-committee be noted:<ul style="list-style-type: none">- 27 February 2006- 27 March 2006- 24 April 2006- 5 June 2006- 25 June 2006- 25 July 2006iii) That the minutes of the following meetings of the Council & Employee Joint Consultative Committee be noted:<ul style="list-style-type: none">- 6 March 2006- 26 June 2006
GPCO22.	<p>ANNUAL GOVERNANCE REPORT</p> <p>The committee received the statutory Annual Governance Report of the Audit Commission which reported on their annual audit of the Council's statutory accounts, Value for Money and other relevant information. It was noted that the report needed to be considered before a final opinion of the Council's financial statements for 2005/06 was given, and that it was a concluding statement on the Council's arrangements for securing economy, effectiveness and efficiency in the use of resources.</p> <p>The committee was pleased to learn that the Audit Commission would shortly be giving the Council an Unqualified Opinion for the first time in a number of years, and welcomed this success.</p> <p>The Audit Commission informed the committee of the following recommendations made to the Council.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">i) That improvements should be made so the qualitative aspect of the Council's related party transactions note in the future.ii) That the Council should continue to review its closedown processes

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	<p>so that relevant deadlines are met and working papers continue to improve.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">iii) Improve the quality of the Council's arrangement for allocations and lettings.iv) Maintain budgetary control to deliver financial balance for 2006/07 and the medium to long-term.v) Continue to implement the action plan in response to the Audit Commission review of the Tech Refresh Projectvi) Continue to embed the challenge for value for money Council-wide. <p>The Audit Commissioners reported to the committee that the Arms Length Management Organisation (ALMO) was covered in the report through a range of services; Members were informed that the review extended itself beyond that housing stock which was transferred. Members enquired how the housing aspect of the Audit would link in with the April 2007 Audit Commission Housing Inspection, and were informed that this would form part of the follow-up phase of the inspection.</p> <p>The Commission confirmed they had no comment to make on the Council's new IT structure in the aftermath of the Tech Refresh project.</p> <p>Member enquired as to the correspondence received from the Commission by Members of the public, and the procedure by which these were handled. The Commission informed Members that they always considered matters drawn to its attention, and stated that a first step would be to seek the Council's views, and share correspondence with the Council itself.</p> <p>Members requested clarification on remedial action being taken with regards the projected budget overspend for 2006/07 of £3.5million. Members were assured this topic was addressed at regular budget meetings between the Chief Executive and the Directors of Service, with separate reports on methodologies to balance the budget due to be delivered by the end of the year.</p> <p>RESOLVED:</p> <p>That the contents of this report and the actions proposed that arose from the statutory report of the Audit Commission be noted.</p>
GPCO23.	<p>OPTIONS FOR FLEXIBLE RETIREMENT</p> <p>This report outlined new policy arrangements for dealing with requests for flexible retirement following changes to the Local Government Pension Scheme regulations 2006.</p> <p>The committee noted that the Local Government Pension Scheme Regulations 2006 outlined that from 6 April 2006, pension scheme members aged over 50 could request early payment of their pension if they worked at a lower grade or reduced their working week by a number of hours, subject to the agreement of the employer.</p> <p>Members requested information on whether potential employees who were</p>

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'stepping down' to a lower grade would be subject to interview process. The Head of Personnel confirmed that this was indeed the case, and that the planned procedure would be similar to that currently employed for redeployment; comprising both an interview and a skills assessment.

The Head of Personnel stated that the provision in the recommendations to bar those who had retired from returning to work within three years was an opening position in negotiations with the trades unions, and may be amended by the time that a full set of proposals was brought back to the committee.

The Head of Personnel agreed to ensure that the proposals took into account the provision of the Civil Partnerships Act 2005. It was noted that the proposals would apply to all grades of officer who were members of the Local Government Pension Scheme.

Members requested their oversight and involvement in the process of approving flexible retirement cases, and the Head of Personal agreed to incorporate their concerns into the final proposals.

Members raised concerns over former Council employees returning to work for the Council as Consultants. It was noted that there was no legal bar to former employees returning to Council employment in this capacity, and that a policy on monitoring and controlling the level, duration and use of consultants had been included as part of the setting up of the Temporary Staff Resource Centre.

With regards to the status of former employees who were used as consultants with regards to their pension, The Head of Personnel responded that if the consultants were being employed as part of a contract for services, there would be no noticeable impact on the pension. However, if the employee was engaged in a contract of employment above a certain salary ceiling, there was a possibility of impact on the employee's pension.

In response to enquiries over the appropriate forum for high-level early retirement cases, the Monitoring Officer's representative informed the committee that the General Purposes Committee and the Pensions Panel had dual jurisdiction over these matters, although that the General Purposes Committee had been used more in recent times.

The Head of Personnel agreed to draft the policy and negotiate with the Unions, taking the concerns of Members, mentioned above, onboard.

RESOLVED:

1. That the proposals for a policy on flexible retirement contained in the report be agreed.
2. That the Head of Personnel be delegated authority to develop a policy incorporating the proposals, in consultation with the trades unions.
3. That all other recommendations of the report be agreed.

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GPCO24.	CHANGES TO CONSTITUTION OF COUNCIL & EMPLOYEE JOINT CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE This report proposed changes to the constitution of the Council and Employee Joint Consultative Committee. The changes comprised: <ul style="list-style-type: none">- altering the Quorum of the meeting to 1 in 4 for each of the Employer and Employee side- making the Craft Convener no longer part of the Committee and removing the references the JNC Craft & Associated Employees- Basing the Membership on the Employee side on a ratio of 1 in 600 instead of 1 in 500. It was noted that this proposal had come before the Council and Employee Joint Consultative Committee itself in the weeks prior to the current meeting. It was further noted that equivalent full-time Union official comprised 11.5 from UNISON (to be reduced from January 2007), 1 from the Transport & General Workers Union, 1 from the GMB and appointees from the teacher unions. RESOLVED: <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. That the constitution of the Council and Employee Joint Consultative Committee be amended as set out in the recommendations of the report.
GPCO25.	NEW ITEMS OF URGENT BUSINESS There were no such items.

Councillor EDDIE GRIFFITH

Chair