

**APPOINTMENT OF INDEPENDENT MEMBERS TO THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE
REPORT OF THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE INDEPENDENT PERSONS
APPOINTMENTS PANEL**

Agenda Item 5

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Background Papers:- The Relevant Authorities (Standards Committees) Regulations 2001
Financial Implications:- None
Equalities Implications:- None
Legal Implications:- Regulations require Standards Committee membership to comprise at least 25 per cent independent members
Options: Appoint fewer independent persons subject to statutory minimum. See 'Legal Implications' & paragraph 3.2 of Report.
Risks: Failure to appoint sufficient number of independent members will leave the Standards Committee inquorate and unable to fulfill its statutory requirements

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 Terms of office for the four independent members of the Standards Committee expire on 7 October 2007.
- 1.2 The vacancies were advertised from 16 May to 13 July, the closing date. Nine applications were received.
- 1.3 The Standards Committee Independent Persons Appointments Panel met on 17 July to consider the applications and draw up a shortlist.
- 1.4 Three candidates were interviewed by the Panel on 23 August.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO COUNCIL. That:

1. Trefor Jones, Peter Schwier and Christopher Webb be re-appointed as independent (non-councillor) members of the Standards Committee for a second four year term commencing on 8 October 2007; and
2. Hazel Paton be appointed as the fourth independent (non-councillor) member of the Standards Committee for a four year term commencing on 8 October 2007.

APPOINTMENT OF INDEPENDENT MEMBERS TO THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE

1. Background

1.2 The Relevant Authorities (Standards Committees) Regulations 2001 require membership of the Standards Committee to include at least 25 per cent independent (non-councillor) members.

1.3 On 8 October 2003 full Council agreed to the appointment of 4 independent members to the Standards Committee. The Committee comprises:-

- 4 independent members;
- 3 District Councillors; and
- 2 Town/Parish Council representatives.

1.4 On 22 December 2004, the Council approved the following recommendation from the Standards Committee:-

“That a Panel comprising one District Councillor of the Standards Committee, one Parish Councillor of the Standards Committee and the Monitoring Officer (or his Deputy) be appointed for the purpose of making a recommendation to Council to fill a vacancy amongst independent members of the Committee”.

1.5 The terms of office of the four independent members expire on 8 October 2007.

1.6 At its meeting on 13 June 2007, the Standards Committee appointed District Councillor John Gyford, Town Councillor Steven Goodfellow and the Monitoring Officer as the Standards Committee Independent Persons Appointments Panel (“the Panel”).

1.7 The 2001 Regulations require the appointment of independent members to the Standards Committee to be approved by full Council.

2. Filling the Vacancies

2.1 From 16 May until 13 July (the closing date) the vacancies were advertised on the Council page of the local press and on the Council’s website. Copies were also sent to all Town and Parish Councils with a request that they be placed on their notice boards.

2.2 Nine applications were received from across the district including Belchamp Otten, Braintree, Castle Hedingham, Great Maplestead, Great Notley, Halstead and Witham.

2.3 The Panel met on 17 July to consider the applications and draw up a shortlist for interview. The Panel felt that the three existing independent members who had re-applied should be re-appointed on the basis of the experience and knowledge of the working of the Standards Committee gained and demonstrated by them during their first term, their commitment as demonstrated during the last four years and their scoring on

the 'essential' selection criteria.

- 2.4 Interviews for the remaining vacancy were held with the three shortlisted candidates on 23 August.
- 2.5 The Panel were impressed with the overall quality of the candidates and felt that, based on the interviews and scoring against the selection criteria, Hazel Paton is the most appropriate person to sit on the Standards Committee as an independent member.
3. Conclusions
 - 3.1 The Standards Board for England, in its guidance, states:-

“The reason for having an independent representative is to help increase public confidence and provide a clear signal that the Committee is fair. The independent representative also brings a wider perspective from outside experiences. There is no limit to the number of independent representatives that you can have on your Standards Committee”.
 - 3.2 By appointing four independent persons in 2003, the Council made “independent” representation the largest group on the Standards Committee, giving a powerful indication of the significance it attaches to its work. From a practical point of view, having more independent members than the statutory minimum will mean that if one should resign then there will be no need to go through the same advertising and selection process immediately. Also, an independent person must be present whilst the Committee conducts its business and a greater number of independent representatives will ensure that business is likely to be conducted as and when needed.
 - 3.3 If Council agrees, the Committee will have a mix of new and experienced independent members. The experience of returning members will be needed as the Committee moves towards its new role of filtering complaints locally with the new member bringing a fresh perspective.

Recommendations

The Panel's recommendations are set out on the front page of this report.