

## Appointment of Independent Persons

### Report of the Clerk and Monitoring Officer

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### 1 Executive Summary

This report updates the Committee on the recruitment activity which the Monitoring Officer has undertaken in respect of the recruitment of two new Independent Persons for both Telford and Wrekin Council and the Combined Fire Authority. The Committee is asked to recommend the appointment of the preferred candidates to the role of Independent Persons for the Fire Authority.

### 2 Recommendations

The Committee is asked to:

- a) Note the recruitment exercise which has taken place; and
- b) Recommend to the Fire Authority that the appointments of Thomas Senior and Julia Lynch as Independent Persons for the Fire Authority be approved for an initial period of four years.

### 3 Background

Members will recall that as part of the adoption of the Local Government Association (LGA) Model Code of Conduct, the Committee for Standards in Public Life (CSPL) made a series of recommendations which in conjunction with the Model Code of Conduct would strengthen governance in authorities across the country.

One of these recommendations was that authorities should look to appoint at least two Independent Persons to assist the Monitoring Officer when considering standard issues. It is considered best practice to do so because it provides not only flexibility but also assists the Monitoring Officer to avoid potential conflicts of interest, should they arise.

Additionally, the CSPL also recommended that Independent Persons should serve a period of no greater than 8 years as Independent Person for any particular Authority. This is a period which the current Independent Person has already exceeded.

## 4 Summary of Main Proposals

Members will know that the Fire Authority shares its Monitoring Officer and Independent Person with Telford and Wrekin Council. In order to ensure that best practice is being followed, the Monitoring Officer undertook a recruitment exercise seeking to identify up to two candidates for Independent Persons.

During that process which has now concluded, three candidates applied for the role and after discussion between the Monitoring Officer and Deputy Monitoring Officer, two candidates were interviewed. It was the view of the interview panel that both candidates were suitable for appointment as Independent Persons. Both candidates have a working knowledge of local government law, meet the eligibility criteria set out in the Localism Act 2011 and are committed to good governance and the ethical framework relating to the elected member standards.

The two candidates are:

- **Thomas Senior**, who resides within Telford and Wrekin. He is a Senior Lawyer and manager at Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council and has previously worked at City of Wolverhampton Council. He has direct experience of standards work through his employment; and
- **Julia Lynch**, who is a Senior Lawyer at the Information Commissioner's Office and has previously worked within Legal Services at Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council. She has direct experience of conducting standards investigations.

Both candidates are, in the opinion of the Monitoring Officer, suitable for appointment to the role of Independent Person.

## 5 Conclusions

On the basis that the candidates are considered appointable to the role of Independent Person by the Monitoring Officer, the Committee is asked to recommend their appointment as Independent Persons to the Fire Authority for an initial period of four years.

## **6 Financial Implications**

The Independent Person roles will be remunerated by payment of a co-optee fee which is in accordance with Telford and Wrekin Council's Member Allowances. At present that fee is £312 per year. The cost of the two Independent Persons fees will be shared equally by the Combined Fire Authority and Telford and Wrekin Council.

## **7 Legal Comment**

The Fire Authority must, in accordance with the Localism Act 2011, appoint at least one Independent Person. The report sets out that it is considered best practice to appoint more than one Independent Person, should a conflict arise. The recommendations contained within this report will ensure the Fire Authority is meeting its statutory obligations and ensure that Code of Conduct matters can be progressed efficiently and in accordance with the law.

## **8 Equality Impact Assessment**

There are no equality or diversity implications arising from this report. An e-EQIA is not, therefore, required.

## **9 Appendices**

There are no appendices attached to this report.

## **10 Background Papers**

There are no background papers associated with this report.