

Standards Committee

27 May 2011



Composition of Standards Committee

Report of Colette Longbottom, Head of Legal and Democratic Services

Purpose of the Report

1. To update members on the membership of the Standards Committee.

Background

2. At the meeting of the County Council held 23 February 2011 members considered a report of the Head of Legal and Democratic Services regarding the composition of the Standards Committee. The Council's constitution provides for a Standards Committee comprising of 12 County Councillors, 6 persons who are not councillors or officers of the Council or any other body having a Standards Committee (the independent members) and 6 members of parish or town councils within the County. This is 24 members in total.
3. Following the resignation of two independent members of the Committee the County Council were advised that it is a requirement under the Standards Committee (England) Regulations 2008 ('the Regulations') that at least 25% of the members of a Standards Committee are independent members.
8. County Council were further advised that Standards for England guidance allows for independent members of another standards committee (for example police and fire authority standards committees) to be temporarily appointed to another standards committee to consider a particular assessment, review or hearing or for a particular period of time.
9. As both County Durham and Darlington Fire Authority and Durham Police Authority operate standards committees with independent members it was proposed that two independent members from those affiliated committee's be temporarily appointed to the Durham County Council Standards Committee for a particular period of time, in this case until such time as the Decentralisation and Localism Bill comes into force.
10. Following consideration the members of the County Council resolved to delegate authority to the Head of Legal and Democratic Services to temporarily appoint two independent standards committee members from the affiliated authority's to

Durham County Councils Standards Committee, in consultation with the Chair of the Standards Committee, with such appointments to be for a particular period of time, in this case until such time as the Decentralisation and Localism Bill comes into force.

New Members

11. Following the decision of the County Council and a request for expressions of interest from the independent standards committee members from the affiliated authority's, Mr James Armstrong and Mr John Hitchman have been temporarily appointed as independent members of the Standards Committee in accordance with Standards for England guidance.
12. Prior to retiring 3 years ago Mr James Armstrong worked in the Civil Service for 48 years, 20 years of which he worked as a fraud investigator. He has been a governor of Harelaw School, Stanley for 18 years and was in the Territorial Army for 34 years. Mr Armstrong is currently a magistrate on the Sunderland bench and also a Training and Development officer with the Independent Monitoring Board for Prisons. He also served a 12 month secondment as Chairperson of the Independent Monitoring Board at Kirk Levington men's prison. James first became involved in Standards as an independent member of the former Chester le Street District Council Standards Committee and has been an independent member on the County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Standards Committee for 2 years.
13. Mr John Hitchman was principal of a Chartered Architect's practice in Durham City. He is currently a member of the Lord Chancellor's Committee for the Appointment of Magistrates and serves on Durham County Council's Remuneration Panel and the County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Standards Committee as an independent lay member. John is a Non-Executive Director of Finchale Training College, a residential college that retrains adults with disabilities, and serves as a trustee of a number of local charities. Recently he was selected by the Royal College of Anaesthetists to serve on their Patient Liaison Group and other committees.
14. Both new members have met with the Head of Legal and Democratic Services and the Chair and Vice Chair of the Standards Committee and are both due to observe a forthcoming Assessment Sub Committee meeting in order to prepare for future chairing requirements.

Recommendation

15. Standards Committee are invited to note the report.

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