

COUNCIL

24 April 2008

STANDARDS COMMITTEE – INDEPENDENT & PARISH MEMBERS

Report of the Head of Legal and Democratic Services

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that:

- (1) Council appoints Vickie Brickley and Keren Cordwell as two additional independent members of the Standards Committee;
 - (2) Their terms of office be for four years each, with an option to renew for a further four years each;
 - (3) All independent members serve a maximum term of eight years each, reviewed after four years;
 - (4) The current Independent Members, Michael Knott and David Bell, be thanked for their work to date, and asked to continue on the Committee until 2010; and
 - (5) The Head of Legal and Democratic Services continues to seek nominations for 4 Parish Council representatives to serve on the Committee.
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Summary

The Council is asked to approve the appointment of two additional independent members onto the Standards Committee, and to note progress on appointing additional parish council representatives onto the Committee.

Statutory Powers

Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007

Introduction

1. Responsibility for investigations into Member conduct is transferred from the Standards Board for England to principal councils (except in the most extreme cases) on 1 May 2008. As such, the Standards Committee will have a key role to play in these revised arrangements. The Committee, at its meeting on 3 December 2007, and subsequently approved by Council on 24 January 2008, revised its size and composition in order to be equipped to deal with this new 'local filtering' responsibility.

2. It was agreed that the composition of the Committee comprise four Independent Members (currently two); four Parish Council representatives (currently one); and seven Borough Councillors on a politically proportional basis (currently five). A larger committee is needed so that it can be broken down into three or four sub-committees to fulfil very distinct roles which have to be separated, namely:
 - (a) to deal with local filtering of complaints;
 - (b) to provide a mechanism by which there is a review of that decision in the event of it being resolved to take no action;
 - (c) to consider whether to accept the recommendations of the Investigating Officer where there has been an investigation;
 - (d) in the event that the matter is referred for local investigation, to conduct a local hearing following the receipt of the Investigating Officer's report to determine whether they accept the findings in that report and, in the event of any breach of the Code of Conduct being found, to determine the appropriate sanction.
3. An advertisement was placed in both the Southern Daily Echo and Hampshire Chronicle in February seeking two additional Independent Members. Thirteen applications were received.

Independent Member Candidates

4. A Panel comprising Councillors Sortwell (Chair of the Standards Committee), Olson (in place of Councillor Caldwell, Vice-Chair of the Committee) and House, and the Head of Legal and Democratic Services, met on 6 March 2008 to shortlist the applications received. Five applicants were shortlisted and interviews were held on 13 March 2008. The Interview Panel comprised Councillors Sortwell, Caldwell and House, and the Head of Legal and Democratic Services.
5. The Panel Members were unanimous in their view that the positions be offered to Vickie Brickley and Keren Cordwell, subject to the approval of Council.
6. To assist Council in making the appointments, set out below is some information on both candidates:

Vickie Brickley

I bring a wealth of different experiences ranging from 20 years employment as a staff nurse in the NHS to serving the local community as magistrate and generalist advisor for the Citizens Advice Bureau in Southampton. During this time I successfully studied toward, and gained, a degree in English Law. Since September 2006, I have worked as an independent adjudicator for the General Medical Council, in London and Manchester, bringing experience of professional regulation, disciplinary procedures and working within a legal framework.

Valuing diversity and promoting equality has permeated my working and volunteer life. Throughout, I have strived to ensure any process or procedure, I have engaged in, have been fair, objective, transparent and free from discrimination. I work dispassionately, but not uncaringly and maintain an objective and unbiased view towards a cross section of the community and challenge discrimination whenever I encounter it.

On a more personal level, I have lived and, until recently, worked in Southampton for the past 17 years. I attended university locally and my 4 children have all attended local schools. Bringing up my family single handed remains a priority and I am committed to equipping my children with the skills to meet the challenges life will undoubtedly throw at them. I am very much looking forward to taking up my position on the Standards Committee and to extending my knowledge and experience into standards in public life.

Keren Cordwell

I have lived in Netley Abbey with my three children for the past six years. Two of them attend the local school in Netley Abbey and my eldest son has just been accepted into university to study law and criminology. This will be his next positive step in pursuing his chosen career to be a local police officer in Hampshire.

In my current role as a Customer Services Manager for a major Public Transport Operating Company, it is essential that I remain impartial, objective and have a balanced view, or as some would refer to it as a common sense approach. I believe everyone has the right to be treated with respect, fairness, integrity and professionalism. I take a great sense of personal pride and satisfaction in promoting these values.

I also regularly deliver training in my role and enjoy sharing and exchanging views with attendees and this I believe also helps me to grow, adapt and develop my understanding. With twenty years experience myself in the Public Transport Sector in mainly managerial positions. I am now in a privileged position to exchange some of my own experiences, skills and knowledge with others and I hope they can also learn from me. I currently specialise in delivering training in four specific areas; Equality and Diversity Awareness, Customer Service Skills, Disability Awareness and Health and Safety Training. I am a member of the Chartered Institute of Personnel Development and am keen to continue to grow and develop my skills set further.

On a personal note, I feel that being a member of the Standards Committee will be a great unique opportunity for me and I look forward to contributing to my local community.

7. In line with good practice guidance from the Standards Board, it was felt that all independent members should serve a maximum term of office. It is suggested that this be eight years, reviewed after four years.
8. The current Independent Members, Michael Knott and David Bell, have served on the Committee since it first met on a formal basis in April 2004. It is therefore proposed that these appointments continue until April 2010 which would allow for a degree of continuity between Independent Members. This will also ensure that Independent Members do not all retire at the same time.
9. The Council may wish to formally thank Michael Knott and David Bell for their work and input since the Committee was formalised back in 2004.

Additional Parish Members

10. All Parish Councils were approached to make nominations of representatives. So far nominations have come only in from Bursledon Parish Council and Fair Oak and Horton Heath Parish Council (with a possible reserve from Bishopstoke Parish Council). A nomination is still required from the Hedge End, West End and Botley area.
11. Of course, three Parish Councils are up for election this year (Bishopstoke, Botley (uncontested) and Hamble-le-Rice), and so final responses from these Councils are likely to be available only after the elections have been held.
12. The current Parish Member, Councillor Michael Davies from Hamble-le-Rice Parish Council, has indicated that he would be interested in staying on as a Parish representative subject to his re-election. Councillor Davies has been the Parish Council representative since May 2006.
13. Council though may wish to consider maximum terms of office on its Parish Council representatives in a similar vein to the Independent Member representatives. Parish members are however already subject to a test of democratic accountability, so Council may consider term limits for these members not to be necessary.
14. It is proposed that Officers report back once all nominations of Parish Council representatives are available to put forward for Council's consideration.

Financial Implications

15. The recruitment of additional independent and parish members has been contained within existing resources. However, the Committee and Council must be aware that any investigations from now on will incur new costs for the authority.

Risk Management

16. The Council must have in place a robust and appropriately equipped Standards Committee to tackle the new requirements and responsibilities placed upon it under the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act.

Conclusion

17. Council is asked to appoint Vickie Brickley and Keren Cordwell as the two additional Independent Members on the Standards Committee, subject to the parameters as set out in the recommendations above, and note the progress made to date on recruiting additional Parish Council representatives.

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Appendices Attached: None

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972 – SECTION 100D

The following documents disclose facts or matters on which this report or an important part of it is based and have been relied upon to a material extent in the preparation of this report:

None.

