

Report to the Council

Committee: Standards Committee Selection Panel

Date: 25 May 2010

Chairman: Councillor Mrs P Smith

Item: 10

1. STANDARDS COMMITTEE - VACANCY FOR INDEPENDENT MEMBERS

Recommending:

- (1) That Mr Jason Guth be appointed to the vacant independent seat on the Standards Committee with immediate effect;**
 - (2) That Mr Richard Crone be appointed to the forthcoming vacancy once Mr Grenville Weltch has signified when he wishes to resign his seat; and**
 - (3) That arrangements be made for the new members to receive appropriate training before they take up their appointments; and**
 - (4) That the decision of the Leader of the Liberal Democrats Group to appoint Councillor Mrs P Brooks in place of Councillor Mrs A Haigh on the Selection panel be noted.**
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- 1.1 We were appointed at the Council meeting on 20 April 2010 to interview for and recommend the appointment of a successor to Mary Marshall one of the three independent members on the Standards Committee. Councillor Mrs A Haigh was appointed as one of the members of the Panel on the nomination of the Liberal Democrats Group but as she was unable to attend the interviews the Leader of that Group appointed Councillor Mrs P Brooks in her place.
- 1.2 The Monitoring Officer made arrangements to issue the Statutory Notice in the Guardian Group Newspapers inviting applications and full details were also provided on the Council's Website. This publicity resulted in a total of 9 recruitment packs being issued to interested persons. As a result, four applications were received. One inquiry (but not a firm application) about a seat on the Committee was received after the closing date. One applicant had applied for vacancies on both the Standards Committee and the Remuneration Panel but was advised that he could not, under statutory rules, serve on both bodies. This applicant chose to withdraw from applying for a Standards Committee place and asked for his Remuneration Panel application to stand.
- 1.3 All three remaining applications met the selection criteria prescribed by Government regulations and were invited to interview. Three applicants were therefore interviewed on 10 and 13 May 2010.
- 1.4 Interviews for each applicant lasted between 30 - 45 minutes and fell into three phases:

- (a) presentation by each applicant on why they wished to become a member of the Standards Committee and what views and experience they would bring to the position if appointed;
 - (b) set questions asked of each applicant on a range of topics including personal qualities, the importance of Councillors acting in a proper manner, experience on pursuing complaints themselves, the position of Councillors in the planning process, issues of personal conduct which may have arisen in the applicant's own lives, past use of Council's Services, personal experience of conduct and ethical issues and conduct issues for elected representatives;
 - (c) questions by the applicants themselves.
- 1.5 After the interviews had been held, we carried out an assessment based on the key criteria set which we had agreed as part of the recruitment pack. These criteria were as follows:
- (a) demonstrates impartiality and objectivity;
 - (b) demonstrates understanding of ethical standards including the Code of Conduct;
 - (c) demonstrates ability to reach impartial decisions by assessing evidence and reaching balanced judgements;
 - (d) demonstrates ability to analyse information, ask pertinent questions and maintain confidentiality;
 - (e) demonstrates community involvement and commitment;
 - (f) demonstrates involvement in and undertaking of appeal hearing/adjudication processes.
- 1.6 We were assisted by the Monitoring Officer and Deputy Monitoring Officer who were there to answer factual questions but took no part in the final decision and voting.
- 1.7 After careful review of all three candidates, we are recommending unanimously that Mr Jason Guth should be appointed to the seat to be vacated by Mary Marshall with immediate effect.
- 1.8 We approached the interviews in the knowledge that Mr G Weltch, the remaining founder independent member had signified a wish to resign from the Committee. He has, however, deferred his resignation until such time as the Council has found a second independent member to appoint.
- 1.9 In his application, Mr Crone pointed out that his wife is the Parish Clerk at Theydon Bois Parish Council. We have discussed whether this should rule him out of being a member of the Standards Committee and our view, on advice, is that it need not. It has been explained to Mr Crone that he will need to be careful about declaring interests on cases relating to that Parish Council because of any conflict of interest which may arise. We are confident that this will not cause any problems and recommend unanimously that Mr Richard Crone is suitable to be appointed to the Committee on a date to be agreed with Mr Weltch.

- 1.10 We are also recommending that once the Council has made a decision on this appointment the two successful applicants be given training on the Standards Committee prior to taking up their duties.
- 1.11 We wish to advise the Council that such appointments must be voted for by a majority of Councillors and we therefore hope that the Council will support our recommendations.

Members of the Selection Panel:

Councillors Mrs P Smith (Chairman), Mrs P Brooks, R Morgan, Mrs C Pond and Mrs P Richardson.

Background Papers:

Applicants' pack (including assessment criteria) and other correspondence.
Applications, set questions and assessments.