

APPOINTMENT OF INDEPENDENT PERSONS

REPORT OF THE LEGAL ADVISER AND MONITORING OFFICER

**For Approval**

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To consider the Executive Committee recommendation for the appointment of an Independent Persons to the Audit and Governance Committee, following the meeting on 6 March 2026.
- 1.2 That Members approve the appointment of the Independent Persons to the Audit and Governance Committee.

2. RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 That Members consider the Executive Committee's recommendation to appoint Mr Dennis Hall as the Independent Persons to the Cleveland Fire Authority from 1 April 2026 for a four-year term of office.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The Localism Act 2011, specifies that a person 'may not be appointed' unless they have responded to an advertisement and submitted a formal application.
- 3.2 Under the provisions of the Act, the appointment of Independent Persons must be approved by the majority of the Members of the Authority. A relevant authority must have provision for the appointment 'of at least one independent person'. It was generally considered prudent to have more than one Independent Person, particularly to avoid a conflict of interest that might occur in relation to a complaint under the Members Code of Conduct and any subsequent investigation that might be undertaken. In addition, through the Local Authorities (Standing Orders) (England) (Amendment) Regulations, 2015, a 'panel' comprising at least two Independent Persons is required as part of the process where an authority is to consider the outcome of 'disciplinary action' taken against any of its statutory officers.

- 3.3 For members' information, Mr Hall is presently the Independent Person for Sunderland City Council and the Tyne and Wear Fire Authority, having been appointed from 2017. He was admitted as a Solicitor in 1981 and has held a number of senior positions within Local Government. References have been requested and the Authority will be appraised of the information received at the meeting.
- 3.4 The Committee on Standards in Public Life in their review of Local Government Ethical Standards, was published in 2019 with recommendations to adopt some of these recommendations as 'best practice' although the majority of recommendations were reliant on amendments to primary legislation (for the most part certain provisions of the Localism Act, 2011) and through secondary legislation. One of their recommendations was that Independent Persons should be appointed for a two (not four) year term of office, although this term of appointment could be renewed, but only for one further term. The Government's response was that a four-year term, should be retained owing to the difficulties in recruiting Independent Persons.
- 3.5 The role of the Independent Person is an advisory one, with the role profile outlined below for Members information:

INDEPENDENT PERSON - ROLE DESCRIPTION

Responsible to: Cleveland Fire Authority

Liaison with: Monitoring Officer, Members of the Audit and Governance Committee, Officers and Members of the Authority, key stakeholders within the community.

1. To assist the Authority in promoting high standards of conduct by elected and co-opted members of the Authority and in particular to uphold the Code of Conduct adopted by the Authority including the principles of public office, namely, selflessness, honesty, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness and leadership.
2. To be consulted by the Authority through the Monitoring Officer and/or the Audit and Governance Committee before it makes a decision on an investigated allegation and to be available to attend meetings of the Audit and Governance Committee for this purpose.
3. To be available for consultation by the Monitoring Officer and/or the Audit and Governance Committee before a decision is taken as to whether to investigate a complaint or to seek local resolution of the same.
4. To be available for consultation by any elected member, who is the subject of a complaint.
5. To develop a sound understanding of the ethical framework as it operates within the Authority.
6. To participate in training events to develop skills, knowledge and experience and in networks developed for Independent Persons.
7. To attend training events organised and promoted by the Audit and Governance Committee.
8. To act as advocate and ambassador for the Authority in promoting ethical behaviour.

PETER DEVLIN

LEGAL ADVISER AND MONITORING OFFICER