



Forest of Dean
— DISTRICT COUNCIL —

Council name	Forest of Dean District Council
Name and date of Committee	FULL COUNCIL – 18 April 2024
Report Number	LD.732
Subject	APPOINTMENT OF INDEPENDENT PERSON
Wards affected	ALL
Accountable member	N/A
Accountable officer	Sian Roxborough – Monitoring Officer Tel: 01594 812537 email sian.roxborough@fdean.gov.uk
Summary/Purpose	To seek the approval of full Council to appoint Sharon Copsey as an Independent Person for Forest of Dean District Council (FODDC).
Annex	None
Recommendation	Full Council is recommended to: a) <i>Note the report.</i> b) <i>Approve the appointment of Sharon Copsey until the 18 April 2028 for a period of 4 years as an Independent Person for Forest of Dean District Council.</i> c) <i>Thank Christopher Wood for his years of dedicated service as Independent Person for Forest of Dean District Council.</i>
Corporate priorities	Maintenance and promotion of high ethical standards is essential to support the delivery of the Council Plan.
Key Decision	NO
Exempt	NO
Consultees/ Consultation	Human Resources

1. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION

- I.1** Under the provisions of the Localism Act 2011, the way that the Council maintains high standards of conduct and deals with complaints about its elected members requires the appointment of an Independent Person.
- I.2** The Localism Act provides that the Independent Person (IP) is to be consulted by the Council before a decision is made on an allegation that it has decided to investigate in relation to a complaint that an elected or co-opted member of the District Council (or Parish/Town Council) has or may have failed to comply with their members code of conduct. Their views may also be sought on other matters such as by Members (elected or co-opted) who are the subject of an allegation. A further part of the role is to be part of the Committee to advise Full Council in relation to the dismissal of the Head of Paid Service, the Monitoring Officer (MO) or the Chief Finance Officer ('relevant officers') as required by the Local Authorities (Standing Orders) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2015.
- I.3** Independent Persons, as part of the standards regime, are responsible for embedding compliance with The Code of Conduct which is included in our Constitution. The Constitution sets out the governance framework for local authorities, which provides the foundations for any local authority that aspires to be effective, progressive and successful.
- I.4** It is considered important to have more than one Independent Person that can be called upon to assist the Council with Standards matters and to increase resilience and the Committee on Standards in Public Life recommended in its January 2019 report on local government ethical standards that 'Local authorities should have access to at least two Independent Persons.'
- I.5** Following a previous shortlisting and interview process, on the 21 July 2022 Full Council approved the appointment of Christopher Wood until the 1 March 2024 and Simon Carey for a period of 4 years until the 21 July 2026 as Independent Persons for Forest of Dean District Council. Christopher Wood was already IP for the FODDC and this appointment was an extension of the length of his role. He has demonstrated outstanding commitment to this position.
- I.6** As Christopher Wood was approaching retirement and it was considered expedient to start to make arrangements to fill his position and have a hand over period, ensuring resilience, a report was presented to Full Council on 19 October 2023. On this date Full Council approved that the Monitoring Officer should recruit and select a preferred candidate for the role of Independent Person for Forest of Dean District Council for a 4 year period and report back to Full Council for approval to appoint the said candidate.
- I.7** The role was advertised twice in October and November of 2023 with no suitable applicants. The MO then approached Christopher Wood who agreed to extend his position as IP for 6 months, subject to the approval of Full Council, whilst the council continued to seek to recruit to the role. Following a further report to full council on 22 February 2024 Full Council resolved to approve an extension to the appointment of Christopher Wood until the 1 September 2024.

- I.8** The Council is legally required to advertise any vacancy for an Independent Person in such a manner as it considers is likely to bring it to the attention of the public, invite the submission of applications to fill the vacancy and have any proposed appointment approved by a majority of the Council's members
- I.9** The role of Independent Person was readvertised for a third time. An interview process was conducted by a panel consisting of the FODDC Deputy Monitoring Officer and the Business Manager for Democratic Services.
- I.10** The MO received very positive feedback regarding the quality of the candidates and performance at interview. The panel is pleased to recommend Sharon Copsey for appointment as an Independent Person for FODDC. This candidate lives in the Forest of Dean.
- I.11** The candidate holds a number of professional qualifications. A summary of their skills and wealth of experience is set out as follows:

-Legal Executive in private practice, Assistant to Rector and Joint Parish Church Council, Corporate Services Officer in local government. For the last 19 years of their career (up until retirement in 2021), worked for the NSPCC in a variety of roles including a policy adviser and ultimate promotion to Regional Head of Service.

-completed a range of Leadership and Management Courses during employment their with NSPCC and also qualified with a Diploma in Law and Practice from the Institute of Legal Executives (ILEX).

A further summary of Ms Copsey's work experience and skills includes:

- ◆ Strategic and operational leader, experienced in working at Director, Trustee and senior management level.
- ◆ Extensive experience in private business, local authority and voluntary sectors.
- ◆ Experienced national and regional manager within a UK-wide charity, including:
 - Development and implementation of regional strategies and structures;
 - Regional budget management;
 - Staff recruitment, development, training and management, redundancy processes;
 - Services development in a children's social care setting;
 - Strong business management experience: Performance monitoring and quality improvement;
 - External stakeholder management, including working in multi-disciplinary strategic settings and contract negotiation;
 - Media activity including regional spokesperson and press releases;
 - Regional lead for cross-functional teams, including service operations, fundraising, HR, communications, development and evaluation, functions.
 - Knowledge and experience of child protection work, including Regional Management of five area-based child protection teams and circa 1,500 staff.

- Member of national senior leadership team, undertaking discreet strategic projects and activities, including deputising for the Director of Children's Services.
 - Leading discreet organisational projects, including Disciplinary Investigations and Hearings, Investigation of Complaints, Membership of Panels and Committees.
- ◆ Highly developed interpersonal skills, an accomplished communicator at all levels and from a wide variety of cultural and social backgrounds.
 - ◆ Well-developed analytical, project management and problem-solving skills.
 - ◆ Self-reliant, computer literate. A quick learner used to working on own initiative.
 - ◆ Excellent organisational, administrative and time management skills, able to work to tight schedules, pays close attention to detail. Conscientious and dependable.
 - ◆ Strong values base.

2. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 2.1** An annual allowance of £1,000 is paid to each Independent Person.

3. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1** Under the provisions of the Localism Act 2011 the Council has a duty to maintain high standards of conduct. In discharging this duty the Council must adopt a code of conduct, appoint an Independent Person and have in place a regime for the handling of complaints of a breach of the code of conduct by members of both the district council and members of all parish and town councils in the district. The aforementioned legislation prohibits any person who within the last five years has been a Member, voting co-opted Member or Officer of either FODDC or a Parish or Town Council in the Forest of Dean District, from being appointed as the IP. The Localism Act also prohibits the appointment of any person who is a relative or close friend of a Member, voting co-opted Member or Officer of FODDC, or a Parish or Town Council in the Forest of Dean District, as an IP. These criteria were set out in the advert and role profile.

4. RISK ASSESSMENT

- 4.1** Should the Council fail to appoint an Independent Person it would be in breach of its statutory duties under the provisions of the Localism Act 2011. Candidates were subject to a robust interview process to ensure that they have the relevant skills and experience to successfully carry out their roles.

5. EQUALITIES IMPACT

- 5.1** The recruitment process was subject to the Council's equal opportunities, recruitment and selection policies.

6. CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1** None identified.

7. BACKGROUND PAPERS

Council Constitution as published.

The Localism Act 2011

Local Authorities (Standing Orders) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2015.

Advert and role specification