

OPEN

Audit and Governance Committee

29 May 2025

Recruitment of Co-Opted Independent Members

Report of: Janet Witkowski, Acting Governance, Compliance and Monitoring Officer

Report Reference No: AG/09/25-26

Ward(s) Affected: All

For Decision

Purpose of Report

- 1 In line with the Committee's Terms of Reference and following best practice guidance, the Audit and Governance Committee has two co-opted members as part of its membership. Co-opted members have been appointed to the committee for four-year periods, one of which expires in April 2026. The Committee are asked to consider two options; to begin a recruitment process for the appointment which expires, or to extend the period of this appointment to be co terminus with the second appointment, which ends in October 2027.

Executive Summary

- 2 The Audit and Governance Committee carries out an important oversight and assurance role that requires its members to be apolitical and objective. To bolster and support this role, the Committee's membership includes two independent non-elected individuals co-opted to the Committee.
- 3 This report seeks the direction of the Committee with regard to the approach it wishes to take as the term of office approaches its conclusion in April 2026.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Audit and Governance Committee:

1. Resolves to undertake a further recruitment process including the advertisement, interviewing and recommending to Council of the next appointment of a co-opted member, with a view to their commencement in office in May 2026; or
2. Recommends to Council that the current post holder's term of office be extended to October 2027.

Background

- 4 The inclusion of co-opted independent members as part of local authority audit committees has long been recommended, recognising the valuable knowledge and experience which can be provided through inclusion of these roles, benefitting the Committee's overall effectiveness.
- 5 CIPFA's Position Statement re Audit Committees in Local Authorities and Police 2022 sets out CIPFA's view on the audit committee practice and principles that local government bodies in the UK should adopt. The Position Statement states:

"The audit committees of local authorities should include co-opted independent members in accordance with the appropriate legislation. Where there is no legislative direction to include co-opted independent members, CIPFA recommends that each authority audit committee should include at least two co-opted independent members to provide appropriate technical expertise."
- 6 There is currently no legislative requirement directing local authorities to have co-opted independent members of the audit committee, however, the Position Statement was supported by the then Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities and the Home Office.
- 7 The Council's Constitution provides for the members of the Audit and Governance Committee to comprise 9 Councillors and 2 co-opted independent members. Co-opted members to Council committees are not members of the Council itself, therefore other than in limited circumstances (for example, an advisory committee established under s102(4) Local Government Act 1972) they have no voting rights. Co-

opted members would instead be consulted during committee meetings and their views taken into account by voting members of the committee.

- 8 Mr Ron Jones was appointed at the full Council meeting on 27 April 2022 following a recruitment process led by the Committee. Mrs Jennifer Clarkson was appointed at the full Council meeting on 18 October 2023, also following a recruitment process led by the Committee. Both co-opted independent members were appointed for a four-year period.
- 9 As Mr Jones appointment on the committee concludes in April 2026, the members of the committee are asked to consider either beginning the recruitment process again, to ensure no loss of time until the next term of office begins or to recommend to Council the extension of Mr Jones' appointment until October 2027, so that recruitment to both co-opted independent member positions would be undertaken at the same time.
- 10 Should members wish to proceed with recruitment for the co-opted position to begin in April 2026, a further paper outlining the proposed recruitment approach will be brought to July committee.

Consultation and Engagement

- 11 Mr Ron Jones has confirmed that he is willing to extend his appointment period, should the Committee be in agreement.

Reasons for Recommendations

- 12 These recommendations support the completion of the Committee's membership which includes co-opted independent members and ensure the Committee's remit in relation to standards and councillor conduct arrangements are effective.

Other Options Considered

- 13 The Committee could consider not continuing with the co-opted independent members as part of the Committee membership, but for reasons set out elsewhere in this report, their inclusion in the committee membership supports best practice and adds value. This would also require an amendment to the Constitution.

Implications and Comments

Monitoring Officer/Legal/Governance

- 14 The Council's Constitution provides for membership of the Audit and Governance Committee to comprise of 9 councillor and 2 co-opted independent members.

- 15 The recommendations are within the remit of the committee albeit Full Council must approve all non-elected appointments to Committee.

Section 151 Officer/Finance

- 16 There is no proposal to change the current remuneration arrangements for either the co-opted members. Extending the period of appointment for one of the co-opted members will therefore only incur anticipated costs.
- 17 Undertaking one recruitment exercise for the co-opted members as we approach October 2027, rather than two exercises will offer a small resource saving of officer time and support.

Human Resources

- 18 There are no direct human resources implications arising from this report.

Risk Management

- 19 An effective Audit and Governance Committee is a critical part of the Council's governance arrangements providing apolitical and objective oversight and assurance. Co-opted members complement the committee membership with specific skills, experience and knowledge.

Impact on other Committees

- 20 There are no direct impacts on other service or scrutiny committees. Full Council will need to agree the recommendations of the Audit and Governance Committee.

Policy

- 21 There are no direct policy implications arising from this report. An effective Audit and Governance Committee, and effective arrangements for the investigation and determination of councillor misconduct support the strategic objective of "An effective and enabling Council".

Commitment 3: An effective and enabling council
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Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

- 22 There are no direct equality, diversity and inclusion implications arising from this report.

Other Implications

- 23 There are no other direct implications arising from this report.

Consultation

Name of Consultee	Post held	Date sent	Date returned
<i>Statutory Officer (or deputy) :</i>			
Adele Taylor	S151 Officer	13/05/25	23/05/25
Janet Witkowski	Acting Monitoring Officer	13/05/25	20/05/25

Access to Information	
Contact Officer:	Janet Witkowski, Acting Governance Compliance and Monitoring Officer
Appendices:	n/a
Background Papers:	Appointments Report – 10 March 2022 Audit and Governance Committee Appointments Report – 27 April 2022 Council Recruitment of Co-opted Independent Member – 28 September 2023 Audit and Governance Committee