

29TH MARCH 2021

REPORT NO. DC2110

EXTENSION OF TERM OF OFFICE FOR DESIGNATED INDEPENDENT PERSON

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 This report recommends a two-year extension to the term of office for the Council's Designated Independent Person (DIP), Mrs Mary Harris. This is a role which is required under the Localism Act 2011 to assist the Council in promoting and maintaining high standards of conduct amongst its elected Members. A copy of the role description is attached as Appendix 1.

2. BACKGROUND

2.1 Mrs Mary Harris was appointed by the Council in March 2018 as the Council's Designated Independent Person for a three-year term from 2018/19 to 2020/21. The appointment followed a public advertisement, application and interview process which included Member representation.

2.2 The Statutory functions of the DIP are: -

- They must be consulted by the Authority before it makes a finding as to whether a Member has failed to comply with the Code of Conduct or decides on action to be taken in respect of that Member.
- They may be consulted by the Authority in respect of a standards complaint at any other stage; and
- They may be consulted by a Member or co-opted member of the Council against whom a complaint has been made.

2.3 A person is considered not to be "Independent" if: -

- He/she is, or has been within the last five years, an elected or co-opted member or an officer of the Council.
- He/she is, or has been within the last five years an elected or co-opted member of any Committee or Sub-Committee of the Council; or
- He/she is a relative or close friend of a current elected or co-opted member or officer of the Council.

- 2.4 There is no payment for the role, however a small annual retainer allowance is paid which is the same amount allowed for a co-opted committee member (currently £514 per annum). This reflects the need for the Independent Person to maintain up to date knowledge, attend training and to be available to the Council as and when required.
- 2.5 It would be open to the Council to carry out a fresh recruitment process at this time or to make an extension to Mrs Mary Harris' term of office. Since her appointment, Mrs Harris has attended training, attended regular update meetings with the Monitoring Officer, carried out her role diligently and gained experience from which the Council can benefit for a further period. There have been very few Member conduct related complaints and the call on the DIP has been very minimal.
- 2.6 All current Members are being canvassed to confirm that are no close friendship connections with Mrs Harris.

Candidate Details

- 2.7 Mary Harris is a resident of the Borough, with an MBA in Public Policy and substantial experience in parish and town clerk roles with Proper Officer responsibilities. This includes responsibilities for advising on, and experience of working within, the current standards regime. She has also held several senior executive positions for Housing Associations and served in a number of community voluntary roles bringing experience of dealing with difficult and contentious issues and complaints.

3. RECOMMENDATION

It is proposed that the Committee recommend the Council to extend the term of office of Mrs. Mary Harris, as the Council's Designated Independent Person (DIP), for two years until the end of the 2022/23 municipal year.

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MONITORING OFFICER

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ROLE OF INDEPENDENT PERSON – RUSHMOOR BOROUGH COUNCIL

ROLE DESCRIPTION

Responsible to: The Council

Liaison with: Monitoring Officer, members of the Licensing, Audit and General Purposes Committee, officers and members of the Borough, key stakeholders within the community.

1. To assist the Council in promoting high standards of conduct by elected and co-opted members of Rushmoor Borough Council and in particular to uphold the Code of Conduct adopted by the Council and the seven principles of public office, namely selflessness, honesty, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness and leadership.
2. To be consulted by the Council through the Monitoring Officer and/or the Licensing, Audit and General Purposes Committee before it makes a decision on an investigated allegation and to be available to attend meetings of the Hearing Panel of the Committee for this purpose.
3. To be available for consultation by the Monitoring Officer and/or the Licensing, Audit and General Purposes 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 standards complaint.
5. To develop a sound understanding of the ethical framework as it operates within Rushmoor Borough Council.
6. To participate in training events to develop skills, knowledge and experience and in networks developed for Independent Persons operating outside the Borough Council's area.
7. To attend training events organised and promoted by the Council's Licensing, Audit and General Purposes Committee.
8. To act as advocate and ambassador for the Council in promoting ethical behaviour.