

AM 697/24

NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

AUTHORITY MEETING – 17 OCTOBER 2024

APPOINTMENT OF INDEPENDENT PERSONS

Report by: David Stone (Corporate Services Manager and Deputy Monitoring Officer) and Rosalind Alderman (Solicitor and Monitoring Officer)

Summary:

1. In accordance with Section 28(7) of the Localism Act 2011, the Authority is required to appoint one or more independent person(s) (IPs) whose input and advice are to be sought and taken into account during an investigation of an allegation of Member misconduct. The current appointments were for four years and will end on 30 November 2024, but one of the two incumbents stood down from his role earlier in the year due to other commitments. Unfortunately, the other current independent person is not available for reappointment for another term.
2. The Authority has recently finalised interviews for replacement IPs. Pursuant to the Localism Act, the independent person(s) must be recruited through public advertisement and completion of an application. Officers duly advertised these two positions during August with a number of high quality applications being received.
3. Following a shortlisting and interview process, three candidates (Wanda Fojt, Pete Barton and Jacqui Hartas) have been recommended for appointment as the Authority's Independent Persons. Wanda Fojt was a manager at Natural England where she undertook a diverse range of duties including policy advice and standards setting. Pete Barton was a Chartered Builder for over 15 years and also worked for the University of Southampton where he was twice asked to investigate and chair disciplinary hearings. Jacqui Hartas was previously the Chair of Hale Parish Council and of their Standards Committee.
4. It is proposed that the above candidates be appointed as Independent Persons for a four year term commencing on 1 November 2024 and that approval is given for the continued payment of an annual allowance of £168 per person per year (index-linked in the same way as allowances payable under the Members' Scheme of Allowances), plus expenses.

Recommended that Wanda Fojt, Pete Barton and Jacqui Hartas be appointed as the Authority's Independent Persons in accordance with s28(7) of the Localism Act 2011 for a four year term commencing on 1 November 2024 and that approval is given for the continued payment of an annual allowance of £168 per person per year (index-linked in the same way as allowances payable under the Members' Scheme of Allowances), plus expenses.

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Equality Impact Assessment: There are no equality or diversity implications arising directly from this report.