

# METROPOLITAN BOROUGH OF WIRRAL

STANDARDS COMMITTEE - 1 APRIL 2003

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## RECRUITMENT OF INDEPENDENT MEMBERS

### 1. Executive Summary

The purpose of this report is to advise members of the resignation of one of the Independent Members of the Standards Committee, Mrs. Veronica Robertson, the requirement to re-advertise current independent member positions, and to request that the Committee note arrangements for a replacement.

### 2. Background

2.1 Following the last meeting of the Standards Committee, one of the Independent Members, Mrs. Veronica Robertson, has considered her position and has decided that she does not wish to continue her membership of the Standards Committee. I have written to Mrs. Robertson thanking her for her valuable contribution to the work of the Standards Committee. I would ask that the Committee formally endorse those thanks and that I write to Mrs. Robertson appropriately.

2.2 The Standards Committee is required by law to have a membership of at least 25% independent representatives. In accordance with the Council's Constitution, membership of the Standards Committee shall comprise six Councillors and two independent members. Appointment of independent members is made by Council and must be done following advertisements in the local newspaper. An advert will appear in the local press during the week commencing 31 March advertising applications for independent members. In addition, the advertisement will appear on the Council's website.

### 3. Transitional provisions

3.1 In any event, the Regulations which set up the Standards Committee came into force in August 2001, provide that where Standards Committees are already in place, such as in the case of Wirral, then current independent members could remain for a period of two years. After that period, independent members could be reappointed, or new members appointed, following a prescribed advertisement and application procedure. Appointments are to be made by full Council. On that basis, both independent members of the committee would have had to be re-appointed by August 2003. I very much hope that Mr. Haywood, the current independent member, will confirm he wishes to remain on the Standards Committee. If that is the case, a formal reappointment will need to be made following the advertisement and application.

4. Procedure for appointing independent members

- 4.1 Independent members must be appointed by full Council. We need a procedure to enable us to do this. I would propose that once any applications are received by people wishing to be considered as independent members of the Standards Committee they should be considered by the Party Spokespersons and a recommendation made to annual Council. Members may wish to consider whether the two independent members should have a different length of appointment so as to assist with continuity, or whether concurrent terms are more appropriate.

5. Quorum

- 5.1 The Committee should note that it may technically be meeting on an inquorate basis at its meeting on 1 April, given the resignation of one of the independent members, and the fact that in order to be quorate at least 25% of the members present should be independent. This means that with the current size of Standards Committee, the independent members will always need to be present for any decisions to be legally binding, and that may be impractical from time to time. One way of dealing with this is to reduce the current Councillor membership on the Committee, say to three from six and still have two independent members. This would allow the committee to be quorate if only one independent member attended. I would welcome the Standards Committee's views on this in order that a recommendation may be made to Cabinet and ultimately a selection Council. This will become extremely important in the context of local investigation and hearing of complaints referred from the Standards Committee.

6. Financial and Staffing Implications

There are none arising from this report.

7. Any other implications

There are none arising from this report.

8. Recommendations

- 8.1 That Mrs. Veronica Robertson be thanked for her service to Standards Committee over the past two years.
- 8.2 That Party Spokespersons consider any applications for independent membership in consultation with the Borough Solicitor and Secretary so that a report and recommendation to Cabinet and Council may be made.

JOHANNA MILLER  
Borough Solicitor and Secretary