

## **PUBLIC QUESTIONS RECEIVED for Corporate Services Scrutiny Committee – 25 January 2018, from Mr Peter Cleasby**

Response to be made by Councillor Edwards (The Leader).

### **Question 1**

Is the political leadership of the Council satisfied with the procedures in place for making appointments to the Independent Remuneration Panel? Specifically, is the leadership satisfied that the procedures:

- Are efficient, transparent and accountable to local people;
- Ensure the appointment to the panel of people who are not only independent of the Council but are seen to be independent?”

### **Response 1**

Councillor Edwards responded to the question and stated that the Panel was convened under *The Local Authorities (Members' Allowances) (England) Regulations 2003 (SI 1021)*. These regulations, which arose out of the relevant provisions in the *Local Government Act 2000*, required all local authorities to set up and maintain an advisory Independent Remuneration Members' Allowances Panel to review and provide advice on Members' allowances. There was no legislation with regards to the appointment of the Panel members and there was no criteria against which these appointments are made other than the need to ensure they have the time to be actively involved in the annual reviews, and they were independent of any political party. Members were not involved in the selection process, although, he as Leader, was informed of any proposed appointments.

The Panel was made up of people from various sectors of the community. The current panel members are:-

- Derek Phillips Chair of South West Chamber of Commerce, Vice Chair of Devon and Cornwall Business Council , Chair of Area Tourism Partnership;
- Steve Barriball – Chief Executive, Citizens Advice;
- Bryony Houlden - Chief Executive of South West Councils(also a Corporate Member of the South West Council);
- Peter Lacey - retired architect, (Lacey Hickie and Caley Limited). Currently Chair of the Green Infrastructure Board and a Director, Exeter Golf and Country Club.

Two of the panel members also sit on Devon County Council's Independent Remuneration Panel, there is usually a vacancy about every two years.

Councillor Edwards said that he was satisfied that the members of the Panel were independent and that a reasonable person would see them to be so. As politicians, subject to decisions of the Panel, he said that they supported the work of the Panel and refrained from commenting on its procedures, as such statements may have the potential to undermine the Panel's independence, in the absence of a clear public interest in making such statements. He added that he had also been informed that council officers were currently undertaking a review of all aspects of the Independent Remuneration Panel, including the appointment of it's members to ensure that the Council procedures were in line with best practice. It was envisaged that this review would be concluded in the early summer and any proposals would be taken through the relevant decision making process.

Members took the opportunity to debate the question.

With the permission of the Chair, Councillor Sheldon, Councillor Musgrave directed a comment to Mr Cleasby about the current process and whether local people would also think the process was sufficiently accountable. Mr Cleasby responded and did express an element of concern over the absence of a robust criteria. He wished to reiterate that he was in no way casting any doubt on the individuals who made up the Independent Remuneration Panel of the Council, but wished to comment on the independence of two of the individuals' organisational connections to the City Council. Councillor Edwards referred to Mr Barriball's position as Chief Executive of Exeter CVS which required him to lobby on behalf of clients and similarly Bryony Holden's position was as a representative of an organisation.

Councillor Musgrave referred to the remit of the anticipated review, and hoped that the points raised in Mr Cleasby question would be included. Councillor Edwards confirmed that he would ensure that the review took account of current best practice.

Councillor Sheldon commented on the rigorous debate at Council of the Panel's recommendations and added that their recommendations did not have to be taken up by Members. He added that some of the Exeter Panel were on other local authority Panels. Councillor Warwick said that he was satisfied with the current process and involvement of officers to achieve the level of independence for Members. He would be concerned if Members became more involved or were able to exert any influence, and he suggested leaving the discussion to those who had been tasked with the role.

Councillor Morris hoped that the review would also consider a move to a national agreement and she hoped this would be debated in the future.

Mr Cleasby was permitted a response and he said that he was grateful for the opportunity to ask a question of the Leader. He did not wish to suggest that Members became involved in the appointment process, but he felt that Members should be comfortable with the process.

(It was noted that the question and response would be attached to the minutes).