

Armada Way Independent Learning Review Appointment

Briefing Note



I. Background and context

On 20 July 2023, the Leader of Plymouth City Council committed to undertake an independent learning review into the Armada Way decision taken by the former Leader on 14 March 2023. In tasking officers with preparing draft Terms of Reference (ToR) for review by Cabinet the Leader stated that:

- i. The review would be truly independent, and would have an independent and senior chair;
- ii. It would look in detail at the decision-making process that took place, both in terms of legality and governance;
- iii. It would examine how well the Council engaged with stakeholders throughout the process and the extent to which feedback was incorporated into the plan;
- iv. It would examine the impact of the project on the local environment;
- v. It would set out the financial implications of what had happened, including the costs directly to the Council;
- vi. It would commence before the end of the year, and it would be presented to Council on its completion;

This commitment was formalised by the court order which dismissed the Judicial Review proceedings as being academic (the Court Order). As part of the Court Order, the Council provided an undertaking as follows:

- to conduct an independent learning review (ILR);
- to approve the ToR for review at the Cabinet meeting on 20 May 2024;
- that the ToR should reflect matters i – vi listed above;
- to commence the review immediately upon the completion of the extant court proceedings, or the finalisation of the ToR (whichever is the soonest);
- to complete the review within 3 months of commencement;
- to present the findings to full Council once complete;
- to publish the details of the Chair on PCC's website; and
- to appoint the Monitoring Officer as the commissioning officer for the review.

The ToR were subsequently drafted by the Monitoring Officer and approved by Cabinet on 20 May 2024.

2. The Independent Chair and ILR Members

The Monitoring Officer was tasked with commissioning a suitably qualified Independent Chair and ILR members, as set out in the ToR. Such members would be assessed on the following criteria:

- Possessing demonstrable local government experience, along with suitable experience and qualifications in their subject area (Governance, Legal, Planning and Regeneration);
- Demonstrate independence, effective communication skills and the ability to engender trust;
- Scrupulous fairness in assessing complex information and competing interests, sound judgment and a willingness to accept scrutiny and challenge;

- The ability to command respect quickly and to build mutually supportive relationships and networks;
- Comfortable operating in a political environment, whilst also being tenacious and robust.

The process of sourcing potential candidates meeting the above criteria was undertaken by SOLACE who provided a number of CVs for consideration by the Monitoring Officer. Candidates were interviewed and assessed against the criteria by the Monitoring Officer, the newly appointed Interim Director for Growth and the Service Director for Finance (s151 Officer). The three most suitable candidates have now been offered roles appropriate to their experience and expertise through SOLACE and each has accepted the role offered. The contract for the services being provided by the ILR members for the review is between PCC and SOLACE. PCC is not directly contracting with the ILR members.

The ILR members selected are as follows:

Chair

David Williams – former Chief Executive of Portsmouth City Council, Gosport Borough Council and Guildford Council, with experience in leading major regeneration projects.

Planning and Regeneration

Sue Foster OBE – former Strategic Director who has worked in a number of local authorities – including Hackney, Lambeth and Kensington and Chelsea Councils, leading on areas such as Planning, Place, Regeneration and Neighbourhoods.

Legal and Governance

Jeanette McGarry – Monitoring Officer at the Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames and West Lyndsey District Council, with extensive experience in carry out reviews – specifically looking at governance, legal services and decision making.

3. The ILR Process

The ILR members will now proceed with commencing their review. This will include finalising the ToR and then proceeding with the actions as set out in the ToR. The ILR members will be supported by an internal team consisting of the Monitoring Officer, a democratic services officer and administrative and legal support officers who have not been involved with the Armada Way judicial review or contempt of court proceedings.