

APPOINTMENTS TO OUTSIDE BODIES

Appendix I – Briefing Report



Overview

Plymouth City Council currently appoints representative members to 53 outside bodies. Outside bodies are organisations which are independent from the council, but have an impact on our services, represent our residents, or help us to fulfil our responsibilities. In order to maintain effective partnerships with these bodies, representatives of the Council, usually elected councillors, sit on the various committees and forums that are responsible for them. The Council and/or a councillor may be asked to provide a representative on an outside body to strengthen the tie between that body and the Council. These arrangements may be the result of constitutional requirements of the outside body (for example where the Council has established an outside body to carry out functions on its behalf), or they may be the result of the terms of trust funds which leave funds to the Council, subject to requirements to manage the fund.

The Leader of the Council and the Leader of the Opposition appoint representatives to committees and outside bodies, predominantly following local elections and these are agreed at the Annual General Meeting (AGM) of Council each May. The Leader of the Council also appoints members of the Cabinet to outside bodies. A list of the appointments made at the AGM in May 2019 can be found at Appendix II.

Following the Annual General Meeting of Council in May 2019 it was evident that a review of the current list of outside bodies was required; there was a lack of clarity as to whether some outside bodies were still functional and for those that were, their purpose and terms of reference were in some cases not fully understood. Many of these arrangements have been in place a long time and were set up when the role of the organisation and of the Council were somewhat different to their current roles.

Given that the full list of outside bodies has not been reviewed for some time, and following discussions with members of the Audit and Governance Committee, it was suggested that agreement as to the principles for appointment to outside bodies be established, prior to a larger review being undertaken of which outside bodies should be appointed to, on the basis of those agreed principles. Processes and procedures for ensuring effective updating and management of membership of outside bodies going forward will also be revised and strengthened.

This report sets out the principles/expectations of appointments to outside bodies. Should Audit Committee agree, it is recommended that a subgroup of the committee undertake a cross-party working group to review current the current suite of outside bodies and this work be completed by March 2020.

Principles of outside bodies

- Appointments to outside bodies are confirmed at the Annual General Meeting of Council each year, with the exception of appointments of Cabinet members to outside bodies which are confirmed by the Leader.
- Responsibilities of councillors on outside bodies will depend on the type of body in which a member is involved. These appointments create obligations on the council and individual councillors, particularly where a councillor is asked to be a member or director of an outside body. Therefore consideration needs to be given to ensure these obligations are proportionate to the relationship between the Council and that outside body.
- Appointments should be made based on the insight/connection that the appointee can bring, for instance some outside bodies are more relevant to councillors of specific Wards. Consideration should be given as to whether a link or specific interest exists between the appointee and the outside body.
- There should be a memorandum of understanding between the outside body and the appointed representative so that each is aware of and understands their role and obligations. This could include a letter on appointment, provision of insurance cover, expectations as to attendance at meetings etc.
- Where appropriate, outside bodies should be asked to provide suitable insurance cover for those appointed when acting on behalf of that organisation. This is particularly important where the councillor will be as a director or trustee with statutory responsibilities and/or whether they may be taking financial or employment decisions on behalf of the outside body.
- Members appointed to outside bodies should receive sufficient support from officers to ensure they have the information they need to maximise their contribution to these organisations.
- Members on outside bodies should provide regular feedback to officers/Council as appropriate and for larger outside bodies and those of strategic importance, this may be by way of an annual or biannual report to a meeting of Full Council.
- Consideration should be given as to whether an elected member is the most appropriate appointment or whether a Council officer could fulfil the role, especially where outside bodies do not have decision making powers.
- Where councillors are invited to join an outside body, consideration should be given as to whether undertaking an alternative role as a 'friend' to the body could be more appropriate. This allows support for the outside body and its causes without legal responsibility. An outside body could also opt to appoint a 'Council Representative' to act as a liaison and point of contact for the body, without necessarily requiring full attendance at Board meetings.