**Independent Remuneration Panel**

**July 2024**



**OXFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL**

INDEPENDENT PERSONS

Introduction

Oxfordshire County Council is seeking to appoint a number of individuals to the Independent Remuneration Panel, who will be used to help carry out this important role, in accordance with the relevant legislative requirements. The panel receive information from councillors to enable them to reach informed decisions and seek comparative information from other councils, interview councillors and generally undertake whatever research they consider necessary to enable them to make well-founded recommendations.

Oxfordshire County Council consists of 63 elected Members known as Councillors who are re-elected every 4 years; the next elections for Oxfordshire County Council are due to be held in May 2025 when the number of Councillors will increase to 69. The political balance of the authority is currently:

* Liberal Democrat/Green Group: 23
* Conservative Independent Alliance: 20
* Labour and Cooperative Party Group: 14
* The Independent Voice of Oxfordshire: 3
* Non-aligned Independent: 3

All 63 Councillors attend Council meetings which are held at least seven times a year. Council sets the budget and overall policy direction and appoints a Leader who chooses their Cabinet. It is the role of Cabinet (which currently consists of the Leader and nine Portfolio Holders) to make the day-to-day decisions as to how the Council operates.

The remaining Councillors can serve on one of the Council’s five Overview and Scrutiny committees. These provide the “check and balance” on the Cabinet and undertake reviews into corporate priorities or issues of local concern.

In addition, the Council has a number of regulatory Committees, including the Planning & Regulation Committee that considers and decides planning applications, the Audit & Governance Committee and the Pension Fund Committee.

The role of Officers is to implement the Council’s policies and organise the provision of services, and some officers may have delegated powers to make policy decisions. The six Officers which the Council is required to have by law are:

* The Head of Paid Service (this role is fulfilled by the Chief Executive)
* The Chief Finance Officer (this role is fulfilled by the Executive Director Resources and Section 151 Officer)
* The Monitoring Officer (this role is fulfilled by the Director of Law & Governance)
* The Director of Children’s Services
* The Director of Adult Social Services

The Director of Public Health

What is the role of the Independent Remuneration Panel?

The Independent Remuneration Panel have the following functions:

* To make recommendations to the Council as to the amount of basic allowance that should be payable to its elected members;
* To make recommendations to the Council about the responsibilities or duties which should lead to the payment of a special responsibility allowance and as to the amount of such an allowance;
* To make recommendations to the Council about the duties for which a travelling and subsistence allowance can be paid and as to the amount of this allowance;
* To make recommendations as to the amount of co-optees’ allowance;
* To make recommendations as to whether the Council’s allowances scheme should include an allowance in respect of the expenses of arranging for the care of children and dependants and if it does make such a recommendation, the amount of this allowance and the means by which it is determined;
* To make recommendations on whether any allowance should be backdated to the beginning of a financial year in the event of the scheme being amended;
* To make recommendations as to whether annual adjustments of allowance levels may be made by reference to an index, and, if so, for how long such a measure should run;
* To make recommendations as to which members of the Council are to be entitled to pensions in accordance with a scheme made under section 7 of the Superannuation Act 1972;
* As to treating basic allowance and special responsibility allowance as amounts in respect of which such pensions are payable.

What does it mean to be independent?

The element of independence is seen as essential for enhancing the openness and accountability of the Council, sharpened by the appointment of local persons independent of the Council. Independent Persons contribute to the health of local democracy.

A person cannot act as Independent if they are:

* A councillor, co-opted member, or officer of Oxfordshire County Council
* A relative or close friend of such a person

A relative is defined as:

1. The candidate’s spouse or civil partner
2. Any person with whom the candidate is living as if they were spouses or civil partners.
3. The candidate’s grandparent
4. Any person who is a lineal descendent of the candidate’s grandparent
5. A parent, brother, sister or child of anyone in paragraphs a) or b)
6. The spouse or civil partner of anyone within paragraphs c), d) or e)
7. Any person living with a person within paragraphs c), d) or e) as if they were spouse or civil partner to that person.

In addition:

* a person may not be independent if, during the past 5 years they were a member, co-opted member or officer of the authority and
* to ensure that the role is non-political and remains independent you should not be a member of any political party or have/had a public profile in relation to political activities.

Independent Remuneration Panel - particular qualifications or experience?

1. There is no requirement to have any specific qualification or background, save a general interest in and capability to act impartially in a regulatory and consultative capacity.
2. A commitment to the need for high standards in public life and to be aware of the views of the local community in relation to standards would be helpful.
3. An ability to be objective, independent and impartial.
4. An understanding of the need to comply with the Council’s confidentiality requirements.
5. A demonstrable interest in local issues and desire to serve the local community and uphold democracy.
6. A willingness to develop a sound understanding of the ethical and wide regulatory framework within which the Council operates.
7. An interest in public service and local government in particular.
8. Be of good standing in the community
9. An ability to make judgements based on evidence or information presented in order to provide reasoned views.
10. A working knowledge and/or experience of local government or other public service organisations or other large complex organisations would be desirable.

Please note, you will need to be contactable during normal working hours by telephone or e-mail and to be available to attend hearings which may be held in the daytime or evening. It is anticipated that most contact will be by email or telephone and that on occasions attendance is required.

Terms of appointment

* + - 1. The appointment will be on a fixed basis, agreed by Council for a period of two years, which is renewable once with the agreement of Council.
  1. Appointment will be terminable by the Council at any time in the event of:
     + Incapacity
     + Failure to comply with any training requirements
     + Persistent failure to be available for consultation without good reason
     + Failure to observe the standards reasonably expected from an Independent Person AND in this context the Independent Person would be expected to refrain from any activity, political or otherwise, which would conflict with the impartial nature of the appointment.
     + The Council giving three months’ written notice
     + Any other reason/action which, in the view of the Council, is considered not to be commensurate with the expected standards from an Independent Person involved in the work of the Audit and Governance Committee and warrants termination.
  2. Additionally, the Independent Person may, by giving three months’ written notice, resign the appointment at any time. The Independent Person may decline to accept any renewal of a term of appointment.
  3. The role of the Independent Person is unsalaried, but a small payment of £500 per annum, to be reviewed, is payable in recognition of the role undertaken. This is in addition to reasonable expenses claimed for travel and subsistence when meetings have been attended.
  4. In accordance with the Localism Act 2011, the appointment of the Independent Person has to be approved by a majority of the Members of Council. As Council meetings are not held on a monthly basis, this can lead to some delay in the final decision on appointment.

Invitation to apply

The County Council’s Independent Persons make an essential contribution to the health of local democracy in Oxfordshire. This is therefore an interesting and important opportunity to become crucially involved in the future of local democracy in Oxfordshire.

*The County Council is grateful to you for considering this important matter.*

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Job Description

Primary function of appointment

To fulfil the statutory role of an Independent Remuneration Panel under the Local Authorities (Members’ Allowances) (England) Regulations 2003 to consider a Councillor Allowances Scheme and to make recommendations to the Council on any changes to the scheme it believes are appropriate.

Post specifics

* Ability to reach balanced and reasoned conclusions having considered complex material and applied an impartial and fair approach to all of the written and oral material provided.

General

* Ability to demonstrate and promote a commitment to the Council’s equality and diversity policies.
* Ability to attend daytime meetings at County Hall.

OXFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

**INDEPENDENT PERSON**

# APPLICATION FORM

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| **Name:** |
| **Address:**  **Email: ……………………………………. Tel No: ……………………………..** |
| **Your experience**:  Please state the professional and personal experience and qualities that you would bring to the Independent Remuneration Panel. |
| Questions: Are you or have you even been employed by Oxfordshire County Council? YES/NO  If YES, please give details, including the dates of your employment:  Have you ever served as a Councillor on any local or other public authority? YES/NO  If YES, please state the nature of your connection:  How would you describe your knowledge of local government and public service?   * In-depth YES/NO * Reasonable YES/NO * Fair YES/NO * Other (please state): |
| Do you have any experience in the conduct of hearings/meetings? |
| Do you have any experience of disciplinary procedures on codes of conduct? |
| Do you have any experience of disciplinary procedures for employees, particularly senior employees? |
| Do you have any close connections with any serving Oxfordshire County Councillor?  If YES, please state the nature of your connection: YES/NO  Do you have any close connections with anyone currently employed by Oxfordshire County Council? YES/NO  If YES, please state the nature of your connection:  Do you have connections with any political party? YES/NO  If YES, would you describe your connection as:   * Active member YES/NO * Inactive member YES/NO * Spouse/partner of an active member YES/NO * Donor YES/NO * Party official YES/NO   Have you ever been bankrupt or a person who has made a composition order arrangement with creditors, which is still extant? YES/NO  Do you have a criminal record or conviction which remains unspent? YES/NO  If YES, please give details:  Do you have any conviction or disqualification for any corrupt electoral practices at any time?  If YES, please give details: YES/NO |

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| Referees– please give the name and address of a referee, who may be contacted to support your application, if necessary. This person should have been known to you for at least three years.  **Name …………………………………………….**  **Address …………………………………………….**  **…………………………………………….**  **…………………………………………….**  **Telephone ……………………..……………………..**  **Email .……………………..……………………..** |

**Declaration**

To the best of my knowledge I declare that the information contained in this application form is accurate and correct.

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| Signature: Date: |

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| Closing date for applications: noon, 29 July 2024 **Please return to: Simon Harper**  **Head of Governance**  **Governance Scrutiny and Information**  **Oxfordshire County Council**  **County Hall**  **Oxford**  **OX1 1ND**  **Email:** [**simon.harper@oxfordshire.gov.uk**](mailto:simon.harper@oxfordshire.gov.uk) |