

Independent Person's Panel Letter to the Corporation -by email

To Angela Roach

From – Robert Coyle

Dear Angela,

Independent Person's Panel – Corporation of London

As you are aware, I am writing to you on behalf of the Panel of Independent Persons appointed by the Corporation – this letter has been approved by the Panel.

The panel is making good progress in drafting a proposed process for fulfilling our role, together with supporting papers & policies as appropriate.

As discussions have progressed a small number of issues have become apparent, where it is felt that either amendments need to be made to the scheme by which the panel is appointed &/or where some resources are thought to be desirable. I am writing to formally draw this to your attention so that, hopefully we can enter into a discussion as to how to resolve or otherwise move forward the matters.

Panel Size

The Lisvane Report, at paragraph 431, noted "...it may be necessary to have about eight Members of the Panel, to provide Members to constitute Hearing Panels and Appeals Panels, and to provide a degree of collegiate approach and mutual support.". The current panel is nine persons. We propose that this should be increased.

The panel is likely to propose a three tier process for dealing with complaints. The first two tiers needing three panel members each and the third at least two.

Allowing for illness or other non availability of a panel member – or were a member to need to recuse themselves for any reason, the number of panel members is therefore felt to be too few. (We also need to allow for any vacancies in the panel were a complaint to arise).

In addition, there may be a requirement for a panel member (or former member), to be available, in addition to those above, to be consulted by any person subject to a complaint. (While we make some proposals about this towards the end of this letter, those proposals would not be effective for some time: this adds to the need for a larger panel).

We think as a minimum the panel needs to be twelve strong.

Panel Term

Currently members are appointed for two years with a potential to extend their term twice (i.e. six years in total). Additionally it is envisaged that some members (drawn by lot) will serve a one year first term – so that the whole panel does not need to be replaced in one go.

The panel agree that six years in total is sufficient. However it is becoming increasingly clear that panel matters/workings are complex. We would suggest that the initial membership be extended once only by a year – this would be to allow more time for panel members to “get up to speed” on the workings etc. of the panel and its processes.

Panel Member Training

The panel are grateful to the Officers who have generously given their time to provide background material, induct the panel and convene early meetings over the recent weeks.

The Lisvane Report, at paragraph 140, recommends that Members appointed to a Committee should, as a matter of best practice, undertake certain professional training in diversity. The recommendation was for Members to undertake the same mandatory learning as Officers.

The panel welcomes the opportunity to support the Corporation in role modelling best practice in respect of undertaking professional training in diversity. In keeping with the spirit of the Lisvane Report, the panel consider it would be appropriate for all Independent Persons to at least have the opportunity to undertake professional training in diversity and for this to be periodically refreshed.

As a minimum the Independent Persons should undertake all the mandatory and highly recommended professional training in diversity as required by Corporation of Officers. The panel understands this currently includes modules on:

- Unconscious Bias
- Equality Awareness
- Transgender Awareness
- “Equally Yours”

The panel have a range of skills, experience and knowledge. It might be advantageous for some panel members to have the opportunity to undertake other training periodically – such as in current best practice in employment law and/or complaints handling.

The panel are also aware that it is proposed that there will be voluntary induction sessions for new Members later this year. Some of the panel, particularly those who are less familiar with the workings of the Corporation, would welcome the opportunity to attend any induction sessions for Members should this be permissible.

Former panel Member(s) to be available for consultation by subjects of complaints

As a final point it may, in due course, be advisable to have a secondary “panel” of former Independent Persons. These would be available for consultation by the subject person of any complaint as to the working, procedures and processes of the panel.

Conclusion

It would be useful to discuss these points with you. Clearly you may need to report to the Court or consult with it – however it is difficult for the panel to finalise some matters (such as its Terms of Reference), if these matters are not settled. Accordingly an early discussion would be useful, if only to set matters moving.

Finally and as discussed the panel feel that they will soon be in a position to properly function – subject to any final governance/sign-off by the Corporation.

I trust this is all self explanatory but am happy to discuss any points that need clarification.

Yours,

Robert Coyle