

NOTICE OF MOTION – CLLR M ALI – ELIGIBILITY OF RESIDENTS TO POSITIONS WITHIN THE COUNCIL AND RESIDENTS PANEL

Executive Summary

At its meeting on 8 April 2021, the Council referred the following Notice of Motion to the Executive.

Councillor M Ali

“The report on Independent Directors of Subsidiaries (EXE21-010), discussed at the meeting of the Executive on 14 January 2021, stipulates that “Applicants will not qualify for the role of Independent Directors if they are politically active, either Party Political or in an active Protest Group or are conflicted by the nature of their employment or other activity.”

Under a free and functioning democracy, the term “Protest Group” is an egregious definition for residents of Woking who may not agree with the actions and decisions of Woking Borough Council. We should not discriminate against those who take an active interest in local matters merely because they are openly critical of the council.

Similarly, the questionnaire for applying for the council’s Residents’ Panel includes a “Satisfaction Survey” in which the resident has to present their view of the council, including if they agree with statements such as “I trust” WBC, or “ I support WBC to take the appropriate actions today that will benefit my area in the future”. Residents who disagree with these statements may be discouraged from applying as they may think that it will negatively impact their application, and thus contribute to a less diverse Residents Panel. Furthermore, whether or not the resident agrees with these statements should have no bearing on their suitability for the panel. Thus, the council

- I. Resolves that the view of any resident regarding planning policies or other council matters should not be used against them as criteria in determining their eligibility to positions within the council, including but not limited to directorships, resident panels and other bodies.
- II. Moves to delete the term ‘protest groups’ from the criteria and does not use it within WBC to define any residents
- III. Will remove the requirement of filling out a “Satisfaction Survey” in an application to the Residents’ Panel.”

Officer Comment

“Councillor Ali’s Notice of Motion deals with two separate issues. The first relates to the appointment of additional independent directors to the Council’s companies. The second issue concerns the recent satisfaction survey and the Residents’ Panel.

It is important that an “independent director” is truly “independent”. The Officers’ advice to the Executive was that a member of an “active protest group” would not necessarily meet this criteria. During discussion at the Executive, it was made clear that it would be for the Appointment Panel (which was cross-party) and, ultimately, the Council to determine who should be appointed to the independent director roles. What was important was the Council indicated, in advance, that it was not seeking “protesters” or “activists”, but candidates who would add to the quality of governance and oversight of the Council’s companies. This is the correct approach and should guide how the Council determines the suitability of candidates for “independent” roles at the Council.

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The position regarding the recent satisfaction survey and Residents' Panel is as follows: managed by an independent market research agency, The Halo Works, the satisfaction survey and invitation to join the Residents' Panel was sent to 10,000 residents, who were chosen at random. Residents who completed the survey had the option of providing additional information, such as age, gender, ethnicity and where they live, to join the Residents' Panel. This information was only used to ensure that the Panel was representative of our Borough. All residents who asked to join the Residents' Panel have done so (in excess of 7,500 at the end of May 2021). There was no direct link between the satisfaction survey and joining the Residents' Panel. Comments critical of the Council in the satisfaction survey had no effect on the ability of a resident to join the Residents' Panel. There is no requirement for residents to complete a satisfaction survey when applying to join the Residents' Panel via the Council's website."

Background Papers: None.

Reporting Person: Councillor Mohammad Ali
Email: cllrmohammad.ali@woking.gov.uk
Peter Bryant, Director of Legal and Democratic Services
Email: peter.bryant@woking.gov.uk, Extn: 3030

Contact Person: Peter Bryant, Director of Legal and Democratic Services
Email: peter.bryant@woking.gov.uk, Extn: 3030

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Ayesha Azad
Email: cllrayesha.azad@woking.gov.uk
Councillor Simon Ashall
Email: cllrsimon.ashall@woking.gov.uk

Shadow Portfolio Holder: Councillor Ann-Marie Barker
Email: cllrann-marie.barker@woking.gov.uk

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