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| SUBJECT: | RECRUITMENT OF MONMOUTHSHIRE LOCAL ACCESS FORUM |
| MEETING: | County Council |
| DATE: | 20 July 2023 |
| DIVISION/WARDS AFFECTED: | All Wards |

1. PURPOSE:

- 1.1 To agree arrangements for the recruitment of the Monmouthshire Local Access Forum for the next 3-year period of appointment.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 2.1 That a panel of three Members be permanently established and delegated authority to interview and make decisions on the appointment of members to the Local Access Forum, subject on each occasion to ratification by Council.

3. KEY ISSUES:

- 3.1 The Monmouthshire Local Access Forum is a statutory body set up to provide advice to the local authority and other agencies including Natural Resources Wales on the improvement of public access to land in the area for the purposes of open-air recreation and the enjoyment of the area. These bodies have a statutory duty to have regard to relevant advice given by the Local Access Forum. The forum is required to meet at least twice a year, although it usually meets more frequently.
- 3.2 The Council, as appointing authority, is required to establish and maintain membership of the forum, of between 12 and 22 members, in accordance with regulations. In the last period we have been able to maintain membership in this range, currently 15. The regulations only allow members to continue until 3 years from the first meeting of each term, in this case 24 November 2023 (regardless of when an individual was appointed) and so all members are due for re-appointment.
- 3.3 Regulation 6(1) states that the appointing authority must appoint one member (but no more than one) who is either a member or officer of the authority, currently County Councillor B. Callard.
- 3.4 The regulations set out that the Council should, so far as reasonably practical, seek a fair balance between persons of different genders, race, ages, disabilities and other characteristics. A gender balance always has been achieved but past membership has been less diverse on the other characteristics. The regulations also required a reasonable

balance between the interests of users and the interests of owners and occupiers. Clearly the challenge with both is attracting a range of applicants in the first place.

- 3.5 As a result a different approach to this round of recruitment is proposed, comprising a wider approach to new recruitment (beyond the statutory requirements) and to place a wider range of relevant representative organisations more at the centre of the process to encourage nominations (although the eventual appointments are still legally personal ones). A change to the appointment process is also proposed: to establish a member panel (as previously) but for this panel to then consider all the applications together, including those of reapplying existing members, enabling the panel to look at the overall composition and balance of the forum. The opportunity will also be taken to revise documentation around the application process to improve the information available to the panel. The panel would make recommendations to a subsequent Council meeting.
- 3.6 Once appointed and after its initial meeting the forum may also wish to ask the County Council, as appointing authority, to advertise for further individuals to serve on the forum reflecting any specific interests felt not to be appropriately represented. Consequently it is recommended that the selection panel is established permanently to consider and determine any subsequent applications arising. Ongoing member nominations to the panel would then be made by Council in the usual way.

4. EQUALITY AND FUTURE GENERATIONS EVALUATION (INCLUDES SOCIAL JUSTICE, SAFEGUARDING AND CORPORATE PARENTING):

- 4.1 The County Council is required by regulations and guidance to seek to achieve a well-balanced membership reflecting all relevant interests, made up of individuals who meet the suggested criteria for appointment. In particular this includes that the membership of the forum achieves a reasonable balance between the interests of users of countryside access and of owners and occupiers of access land or land over which local rights of way exist and must have regard to the need to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, a fair balance between persons of different genders, races, ages, disabilities and other characteristics.
- 4.2 Once in place the forum will have the opportunity to review the interests reflected and to identify to the appointing authority if specific interests are under-represented and seek assistance in finding further members to reflect this. (See Appendix 1)

5. OPTIONS APPRAISAL

- 5.1 The County Council is required to maintain a Local Access Forum under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 and as Appointing Authority to appoint members in compliance with the Countryside Access (Local Access Forums) (Wales) Regulations 2001. Maintaining a Local Access Forum is also now a qualifying requirement for receiving the full allocation of Access Improvement Grant from Welsh Government.

6. EVALUATION CRITERIA

- 6.1 The appointment and administration of the forum is assessed against the statutory requirements and the published guidance.

7. REASONS:

- 7.1 To meet the requirements of the Countryside Access (Local Access Forums) (Wales) Regulations 2001.

8. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:

- 8.1 Members of the Local Access Forum can claim reasonable expenses from the County Council in respect of meetings

9. CONSULTEES:

Cabinet, SLT
Chief Officer People and Governance
Chief Operating Officer MonLife

10. BACKGROUND PAPERS:

Appendix 1: Equality and Future Generations Evaluation
Local Access Forum Guidance 1: CCW/WAG
[Monmouthshire LAF Annual Report 2022](#)

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