

SUBJECT:	APPOINTMENT OF MONMOUTHSHIRE LOCAL ACCESS FORUM
MEETING:	County Council
DATE:	29 February 2024
DIVISION/WARDS AFFECTED:	All Wards

1. PURPOSE:

- 1.1 To appoint members of the Monmouthshire Local Access Forum for the next 3-year period.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 2.1 That the applicants set out in Appendix 1 be appointed as members of the Monmouthshire Local Access Forum for the next 3-year period. Together with the Council's appointed member that provides a forum of 18 members.
- 2.2 That Councillor Sara Burch be appointed as the Council's member.
- 2.3 That following discussion with the forum at its first meeting to identify any under-represented interests, the appointment panel be given delegated authority to make additional appointments up to the statutory maximum of 22 members.
- 2.4 That the retiring members of the Forum be thanked for their valuable contribution.

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. The regulations only allow a term of 3 years and 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.
- 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. The regulations also require a reasonable balance between the interests of users and the interests of owners and occupiers.

- 3.5 The member appointment panel previously established by Council has interviewed the applicants and recommended the appointment of the 17 individuals set out in Appendix 1. The panel has sought to identify individuals who can bring a wide range of interests and local connections to aid the forum's work.
- 3.6 Once appointed the forum is required to consider any specific interests felt not to be appropriately represented and ask the Council to advertise for further individuals to serve on the forum. The panel has identified that whilst there is a good range of countryside access users / activities there is under representation from landowner interests, from the Severnside / Usk areas and from tourism business, and so a further round of targeted recruitment will be proposed to the forum.
- 3.7 There is sufficient headroom up to the statutory maximum of 22 members to improve the forum's balance and it is recommended that the appointment panel be given delegated authority to make any further appointment.

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 has 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 2)

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 Law & Governance
Chief Officer Customer, Culture & Wellbeing

10. BACKGROUND PAPERS:

Appendix 1: Proposed Members
Appendix 2: Equality and Future Generations Evaluation
Local Access Forum Guidance 1: CCW/WAG

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