

APPOINTMENTS TO COMMITTEES AND OUTSIDE BODIES – APPEALS COMMITTEE AND PANELS, NORTH EAST COMMUNITY FORESTS LIMITED AND GREAT NORTH FOREST PARTNERSHIP STEERING GROUP AND SUNDERLAND ARC

Report of the City Solicitor

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to consider the Council's representation on the Appeals Committee and Panels, North East Community Forests Limited and Great North Forest Partnership Steering Group and the Sunderland Arc.

2.0 Appeals Committee and Panels

- 2.1 The terms of reference of the Appeals Committee includes determining appeals against dismissal, demotion, the withholding of increments, grievances and redundancy situations.
- 2.2 Recently, some problems have arisen in appointing a panel in cases which involved appeals against redundancy as those Members of the panel who sit on Personnel Committee have had to be excluded from the Panel since they had previously participated in the decision and therefore could not adjudicate on an appeal.
- 2.3 In order to address the problem it is recommended that the number of Members on the Committee be increased by five. This larger pool would keep the numbers on the Committee within manageable levels whilst ensuring adequate training and the establishment and retention of experience by Members. The Political Balance on the Committee would change from 10:4:1 to 13:6:1 requiring the nomination of a further 3 Labour Members and 2 Conservative Members on this Committee which would be consistent with the overall political balance requirements.

3.0 North East Community Forests Limited and Great North Forest Partnership Steering Group

- 3.1 Council is advised that, for some time now, there have been issues relating to the viability and administrative arrangements for the North East Community Forest (NECF). The organisation had been dependent upon annual grant from DEFRA, which had been reducing its support, and from individual local authorities also subject to budgetary pressures. Durham County Council had been a member of the NECF Board but have now withdrawn.

- 3.2 This situation culminated in a proposed merger between NECF and the Groundwork Trust. The Groundwork Trust is similar in purpose to the NECF and there was logic in the merger which ensured viability and administrative support.
- 3.3 The merger was handled by private firms of solicitors representing both the NECF and Groundwork respectively and to facilitate this the members of NECF made up of representatives from the relevant local authorities and English Nature were requested to resign their memberships all of which, including Sunderland, did so by 18 July 2008.
- 3.4 The Groundwork Community Forests, (formally North East Community Forests) is now part of the Groundwork West Durham & Darlington Group. A meeting has been held with a representative of Groundwork and a draft service level agreement has been submitted to the Council for consideration of the benefits the Council would obtain from membership of the new arrangements. This aspect will be subject to further reports to Council if appropriate.
- 3.5 In the meantime, the Council is not represented on any body connected with the management of the Great North Forest.
- 3.6 The Council is accordingly recommended to note the position in relation to the merger of the North East Community Forests Limited and Great North Forest Partnership Steering Group with Groundwork Community Forests.

4.0 Sunderland Arc

- 4.1 The Council is currently represented on the Sunderland Arc (the Urban Regeneration Company) by the Leader of the Council. The Company has recently indicated that it is prepared to offer the Council a second position on its Board and the Council is therefore recommended to nominate a further representative to the Board of the Sunderland Arc.

5.0 Recommendations:

- 5.1 The Council is therefore recommended to consider:-
- (i) agreeing the proposed increase of members on the Appeals Committee and nominating a further 3 Labour Members and 2 Conservative Members to the Committee,
 - (ii) noting the position in relation to North East Community Forests Limited and Great North Forest Partnership Steering Group, and
 - (iii) nominating a further representative to the Board of the Sunderland Arc.