

NORTH LINCOLNSHIRE COUNCIL

INDEPENDENT FAMILIES - CHILDREN CABINET MEMBER

15 January 2025

4 APPOINTMENT OF EDUCATION APPEALS PANEL MEMBERS –

The Director: Transformation and Outcomes submitted a report seeking approval to appoint independent members who may be called upon to sit on either the Education Admission Appeals Panel or Independent Review Panel to hear appeals in respect of school admissions and exclusions.

The council was the admissions authority for community and voluntary controlled schools within the borough area and was responsible for ensuring compliance with the Department for Education (DfE) Schools Admissions Code and School Admission Appeals Code (the Code). The Code covered the arrangements for appeals made against refusal of a place at a school. Appeals were heard by an independent Appeals Panel, which consisted of three or five members, including at least one "education expert" and at least one "lay member".

The council was also required, in line with the DfE statutory guidance 'Suspension and Permanent Exclusion from maintained schools, academies and pupil referral units in England including pupil movement', to arrange an Independent Review Panel hearing in response to a parent request following a permanent exclusion of their child from school.

The council made arrangements for Education Admission Appeals Panel and Independent Review Panel hearings on behalf of maintained schools and provided this service to Academy schools under a Service Level Agreement.

The existing pool of volunteer panel members, which comprised 13 individuals, was very experienced but relatively small in the context of recent demand for panel hearings. The size of the pool of members could cause problems in dealing with appeals within the required timescales. It was also mandatory to have at least one "education expert" and one "lay member" in the make up of the panels, which could be difficult given the small pool of panel members and their availability.

It was a requirement of the Code that all appeal panel members were suitably trained every two years. The council appointed an external barrister to train its panel members. The existing panel members were required to be trained by April 2025. Therefore, it was considered desirable to commence a recruitment exercise to extend the number of available panel members, thus allowing them to access the scheduled training.

Accordingly, the council's Communications Team was commissioned to develop and implement a recruitment campaign advertising for new members to express an interest in joining the panel.

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Following closure of the recruitment campaign a number of applications were received, of these 14 are considered suitable to join the panel.

Resolved – That the 14 new applicants, as set out in Appendix 1 to the report, with a view to new members receiving training and being gradually introduced onto panels during 2025, be approved.