

Report subject	Appointment of Independent co-opted persons to Audit & Governance (A&G) Committee
Meeting date	28 July 2026
Status	Public Report
Executive summary	This report asks Council to approve the appointment of two independent co-opted persons to the Audit & Governance (A&G) Committee, in line with CIPFA best practice guidance that encourages the inclusion of independent perspectives to strengthen local authority audit functions. Independent persons will enhance the committee's effectiveness by providing impartial challenge, additional expertise and assurance on governance and financial matters, without holding voting rights. BCP Council adopted best practice in 2023 when it first introduced independent person to the A&G Committee, the tenure of the first two incumbents came to an end on 31/3/2026. The Constitution stipulates that without formal delegation only Council can approve to co-opt individuals onto respective Council Committees; there is currently no such delegation in place for the A&G Committee. A comprehensive recruitment and selection process has been undertaken, including open advertisement, shortlisting, and formal interviews conducted by a cross-party panel of councillors, agreed by A&G committee. From nine initial applicants, four candidates were shortlisted and interviewed using a consistent scoring methodology. The panel reached unanimous agreement on the two highest-ranked candidates, following independent scoring and due diligence checks to confirm their independence and suitability. The proposed appointments are for an initial term covering the 2026/27 and 2027/28 municipal years, with an option to extend for up to two further years. Both candidates have provisionally accepted the roles, subject to formal endorsement by full Council. Following approval, onboarding arrangements will include induction, system access, and compliance with the Members' Code of Conduct and declaration requirements.

Recommendations	It is RECOMMENDED that Council approve the following arrangements for independent members of the Audit & Governance Committee: a. The current tenure period of two municipal years plus a mutually agreed option to extend for two further years, remains fit for purpose; b. The latest appointments are therefore for 26/27, 27/28, with the option to extend to 28/29 and 29/30; c. Council approves the appointment of the two candidates recommended by the A&G convened panel; d. That Council delegates future appointments of A&G Committee Independent Persons, to the A&G Committee.
Reason for recommendations	Best practice suggests the appointment of two independent member(s) to local Authority audit committees, to enhance the effectiveness and knowledge base of such Committees. Legislation may follow, in England, which will require local authorities to include two independent members when forming their audit committees.
Portfolio Holder(s):	Cllr Mike Cox, Portfolio Holder for Finance
Corporate Director	Aidan Dunn, Chief Executive
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Wards	Council-wide
Classification	For Decision

Background

- Many local authorities include independent persons on their audit committees (or similar) as this is seen as strengthening the internal control and governance of the authority. Independent persons with appropriate skills and experience can supplement those of elected members and improve the effectiveness of such committees.
- It is recommended best practice for Audit Committees in local government to include up to two independent persons formally on the committee. Whilst these independent persons have no voting rights, this is reserved for democratically elected council members only, they provide independent insight, test and challenge free from political or group thinking.
- BCP Council adopted best practice in 2023 when it first introduced independent person to the A&G Committee, the tenure of the first two incumbents came to an end on 31/3/2026.

4. The Council approved agreed tenure for independent persons on the A&G committee is two municipal years, plus a mutually agreed option to extend for a further two municipal years. The tenure period, for this latest appointment process, is therefore for the 26/27 and 27/28 municipal years with the option to extend for 28/29 and 29/30.
5. Having sought volunteers from all members of the Committee the Chair, Cllr Eleanor Connolly, convened a selection/interview panel also comprising Cllr Marcus Andrews and Cllr Sara Armstrong. Interviews were conducted over a two week period and the selection process concluded at the end of May 2026.
6. The Constitution stipulates that without formal delegation only Council can approve to co-opt individuals onto respective Council Committees; there is currently no such delegation in place for the A&G Committee. Going forward it is recommended that Council delegates the authority to the A&G Committee to appoint its own independent persons in line with the Council agreed tenures.
7. On Thursday 28 May 2026 A&G Committee were asked (via a verbal presentation because of timing) to note the panel decisions and note the following recommendations to full Council:
 - a. The current tenure period, two municipal years plus two mutually agreed option to extend, remains fit for purpose;
 - b. The latest appointments are therefore for 26/27, 27/28, with the option to extend to 28/29 and 29/30;
 - c. Council approves the appointment of the two candidates recommended by the A&G convened panel;
 - d. That Council delegates future appointments of A&G Committee Independent Persons, to the A&G committee.

Recruitment and Selection Process

8. The following process was followed to recruit and select two independent members:
 - A&G Committee agreed to an openly advertised process – the role was advertised on the Council's website, social media and on LinkedIn.
 - The advert was live for 3 weeks.
 - Nine people expressed an interest in the role.
 - Shortlisting took place initially by officers (x3), which was endorsed by the panel.
 - Two of the nine expressions of interest appeared to be AI generated and were from individuals based outside the UK, despite the advert saying meeting attendance in person was preferred and expected on occasions. These two were not on the shortlisting.
 - Four candidates were shortlisted for interview.
 - All four accepted the invitation to attend interview and did so.
 - Interviews were conducted over a two week period, to manage diary clashes of the panel and candidates.
9. The panel posed seven identical questions, followed on occasion by supplementary clarification questions as needed, to each candidate.
 - Each candidate's answer to the seven questions was scored independently by each panel member using a simple, 1 – 5 scoring system.

5	Excellent	Response addresses question thoroughly and concisely
4	Very good	A very good answer that was not thorough or concise enough to be described as excellent
3	Average	Covered basic requirements of question
2	Below average	Response did not cover key aspects of question
1	Poor	Failed to grasp essentials of questions

- Candidates were accordingly scored out of 35 (7x5) by each panel member.
10. The panel independently recorded their own personal scoring and whilst actual scoring differed slightly the panel unanimously agreed that the same two candidates ranked in either first or second place.
 11. As the same two candidates were ranked in first or second place, the panel did not need to convene to moderate or discuss differing views.

Independence and due diligence

12. Unlike for an employed position, formal references have not been sought. Nonetheless, given the concept of independent persons, it was important for the Council to confirm the candidates interviewed were exactly that. Accordingly the following checks and due diligence have been performed:
 - Candidates were asked to complete and sign an independence statement, amongst wider questions the candidates confirmed – they are not politically affiliated, they are not a relative of a BCP staff member or Councillor, they are not a supplier of works, goods or services to the Council.
 - Candidates were asked in the interview to confirm their independent person status and whether they perceived they may have conflicts of interest looking from the perception of a BCP council area resident.
 - Light touch, open access social media review to confirm the above or to identify any areas of clarification required, candidates were told this social media review would be performed.
 - One preferred candidate is a current member of an A&G committee for a London Borough. The candidate explained they are moving to the BCP area and will continue in their London role until the tenure ends later in the year. This does not present any negative issues for BCP Council and meetings do not clash.

Candidate's provisional acceptance

13. Cllr Connolly, on behalf of the panel, has confirmed with candidates the need for A&G noting and full Council approval of the panel's decision, offers were therefore made on the basis of them being provisional and in principle.
14. Two candidates have confirmed their provisional acceptance, confidential appendix 1 provides a summary overview of the two candidates. This appendix is confidential because it of course contains personal information and should Council wish to discuss the information therein, this will need to be in closed session.
15. Subject to Council approval, it is proposed that a formal BCP Council press release confirms the names of the two approved candidates.

On-boarding and next steps

16. Subject to full Council approval more detailed on-boarding and next steps will begin, including:

- Creation of bcpcouncil.gov.uk email accounts, to safely and securely share data.
 - Access to relevant systems including ModGov to read committee reports.
 - Proportionate training and induction.
 - Set up of payment of allowance, via 1/12th a month transfer.
 - Agree and sign up to appropriate members code of conduct.
 - Make appropriate declarations of interest.
17. It should be noted that independent persons are not provided with BCP Council ICT equipment.

Summary of financial implications

18. Independent persons receive an annual allowance which is set by an independent remuneration panel appointed by the council from time to time, broadly every four years. The next panel review is set for 2027 shortly after BCP Council local elections. In interim years allowances are increased in line with the national local government pay award percentage.
19. The remuneration panel agreed current full year allowance cost for two independent persons is £2,600 (rounded). (£1,300 x 2).
20. This is met from the Members Allowances budget, held by Democratic Services.

Summary of legal implications

21. There is currently no statutory requirement for an independent person to be appointed to the Audit Committee in England.
22. A council's audit committee is established further to the Local Government Acts 1972 and 2000 and its purpose is to give assurance to elected Members and the public about the governance, financial reporting and performance of the Council.
23. The decision in to appoint independent person(s) to the Audit and Governance Committee is a Council decision.
24. Independent persons would have 'co-opted' legislative status under the power to co-opt in the Local Government Act 1972 and further described under section 13 of the Local Government & Housing Act 1989.
25. Whilst co-opted persons are not legally bound by the members code of conduct, they are asked to observe all elements of the code by signing and agreeing to the terms.

Summary of human resources implications

26. Independent persons are required to agree to comply with the Council's Code of Conduct for Members, which sets out standards of behaviour expected from all members. Additionally, they will be required to complete a Declaration of Interests form on an annual basis.

Summary of sustainability impact

27. There are no direct sustainability impact implications from this report.

Summary of public health implications

28. There are no direct public health implications from this report.

Summary of equality implications

29. Applications for the position(s) of Independent person(s) to the Audit Committee was open to any person over the age of 18 and was carried out in accordance with the Council's duties under the Equality Act 2010.

Summary of risk assessment

30. Subject to adequate vetting procedures and adherence to the Person Specification, this initiative should augment the Audit and Governance Committee's independence, provide additional expertise, and provide an opportunity for the community to play an enhanced role in the governance of the Council.

Background papers

CIPFA Publication 2022 - Audit committees: practical guidance for local authorities and police

Appendices

Appendix 1 - Confidential (not for publication) on account of information containing personal information – Personal statements made by candidates to support their application.