



MEETING: Haringey Strategic Partnership - 11th February 2008

Title: Briefing on Public Appointments

1. Purpose:

1.1 To provide background information on Public Appointments and their benefits to local residents.

2. Summary:

2.1 To provide information on the role of Public Appointments and the opportunity to strengthen the involvement of local people.

3. Recommendations:

3.1 Haringey Council and Haringey Teaching Primary Care Trust to lead on developing and identifying opportunities to promote and develop the take-up of Public Appointments.

3.2 To note the positive benefits of securing a wide take up of Public Appointments from local residents.

Lead Officer: Mary Connolly, Haringey Strategic Partnership Manager

4. Background

4.1 What are Public Appointments?

Public Appointments (an appointment to the board of a public body) are set up by government ministers, although are not part of a government department and provide independent advice or deliver some aspect of public service. Although ministers are responsible for them, public bodies, also known as non-departmental public bodies (NDPBs), operate independently of them. There are over 800 public bodies sponsored by UK government departments and these play a large role in shaping and influencing national policy and decision-making. Some provide advice e.g. the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs; others deliver public services e.g. the Training and Development Agency for Schools.

There are around 20,000 Public Appointments, which encompass a wide range of interests, from arts to sport and consumer interests to more specialised areas such as healthcare and education. Examples of appointments include Commissioner for the Commission of Compact, Chair of

NHS Trust, Member of the Health Protection Agency Board, Member of the British Transport Police Authority, and Governor for universities. Anyone is entitled to apply and appointment is based on merit, solely on talent and skills, with an independent assessor involved throughout the process to ensure it is fair, open and transparent. The independent Commissioner for Public Appointments regulates, monitors and reports on Public Appointment procedures and follows a Code of Practice.

Some appointments require specialist knowledge and expertise, although many don't. Most are part time and need around two to three days per month plus time to read papers and prepare for meetings. Remuneration ranges from unpaid, to part salary, to full salary. Applicants need to fill in an application form including details of personal qualities and experience, any conflict of interests, public appointments monitoring form, political activity involvement etc. The Directgov website www.publicappointments.gov.uk offers prospective applicants general background information on public appointments and how to apply.

4.2 Under-represented groups

In terms of diversity, according to Directgov, the diversity of boards of public bodies needs to be improved and applications from women, people with minority ethnic backgrounds and disabled people are particularly welcomed. In terms of government departments, the government has set overall targets to address the under-representation of some groups, including equal representation of women and men, pro-rata representation of people from black and minority backgrounds, and increased participation of disabled people. Each government department sets its own targets and objectives in line with these commitments.¹

4.3 Encouraging the community to take-up Public Appointments

Linking specifically to Public Appointments within central government departments, the table below shows good practice points as recommended in the Civil Service Guidance to encourage the take up of Public Appointments from groups which are currently under represented.²

¹ Link - http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/Gtq11/GuideToGovernment/UKpublicappointments/DG_067109 - 'Summary of diversity Levels'. The table within this link summarises the diversity levels achieved by Departments across all appointments, showing year-on-year comparisons of progress for the past three years.

² 'Making and Managing Public Appointments – A Guide for Departments' Civil Service pp14-15
http://www.civilservice.gov.uk/documents/doc/appointments/public_appt_guide.doc

GOOD PRACTICE POINTS - Equal Opportunities and Diversity
Set criteria which: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognise non-traditional career patterns and experience, such as community involvement and voluntary work, as suitable qualifications for appointments • Do not contain unnecessary requirements which might discourage or eliminate suitable applicants from underrepresented groups • Are realistic – you do not want to raise expectations that cannot be met.
Review the working practices of the board: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can electronic and video conference links or telephone conferences be used to keep face to face meetings, and the travel time they require, to a minimum?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flexible working practices could attract applications from those who might otherwise consider themselves ineligible to apply because of other commitments (e.g. in full-time work, taking a career break, childcare commitments) • Are the timing and location of meetings creating a barrier to entry to currently under-represented groups?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Examine the diversity of your selection panels; try to ensure that all members have undertaken diversity awareness training.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct interviews in a way that is sympathetic to those with less experience of job hunting.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Always select accessible venues for interviewing whether or not you expect disabled candidates to apply.
Think about positive steps, such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offering training in particular skills • Holding open days for members of under-represented groups • Always offer to make appropriate arrangements for disabled candidates (at the application stage as well as at formal interview) such as providing Braille and audiotaped information packs and application forms • Offering compensation for child and other care costs – and make sure this is clearly referred to in the information packs.

The benefits of taking up a Public Appointment, such as an opportunity to contribute to the community and make a difference, share expertise and knowledge, personal career development, build up life skills and the opportunity to meet a variety of people, could be promoted to the local community through a variety of mediums. For example, leafleting, stalls/stands in public places, Haringey's website, and through the support of the Haringey Strategic Partnership, and should include information on Code of Practice, core competencies of members, example letters, application forms, disability awareness, useful contacts, further information, remuneration guidance/tax treatment etc. Workshops and briefings to explain the induction process would be essential to show prospective applicants what provisions are in place in terms of support and development.

Looking at some of the factors which prevent people putting themselves forward, a variety of reasons may exist:

- People are unaware of the opportunities available to them
- Lack of access to information
- Lack of confidence in their own ability
- Lack of remuneration

- Lack of employer support and other commitments e.g. childcare, full-time employment.

In terms of employer support, the HSP could be used as a vehicle to gain local employers' support to encourage employees to take up public appointments. Advantages for employers include employees learning key skills such as team-working, self-confidence, leadership, experience of public service, communication and strategic skills, integrity etc. Other mediums of support to assist people with other commitments could be put into place – e.g. improved childcare provisions, flexibility schemes etc.