South Tyneside Council

item 11

Appointment of Co-opted Members to Audit Committee

This document has been classified as: Not protectively marked

John Gettins, Head of Assurance and Risk

Report to Council

Cabinet Portfolio/Lead Member: Leader of the Council

Report of Stuart Reid, Director of Business and Resources

Subject: Appointment of Co-opted Members to Audit Committee

Date: 19 May 2026

Wards affected: All

Council ambitions: All

Does the report and any appendices contain information which has been identified as confidential or exempt?

- No, this report does not contain information identified as confidential or exempt.

For Executive Decisions only:

Is the decision a Key Decision? No

Is it included in the Forward Plan? Yes

If not in the Forward Plan is the report: n/a

Relevant Scrutiny Chair: n/a

Is the decision eligible for call-in by Scrutiny? No

(If the decision is anything other than any executive decision made by the Cabinet or a Key Decision made by an officer under delegated powers, call-in is not applicable. This should be explained in the report).

Purpose of Report

1. This report invites Council to appoint two Co-opted (Independent) Members to South Tyneside Council's Audit Committee.

Background Information

2. Audit Committees - Practical Guidance for Local Authorities and Police (2018 Edition), published by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA), provides guidance on the function and operation of audit committees in local authorities and represents best practice.

3. This guidance endorses the recruitment of lay, independent members to Audit Committee with the injection of external views often bringing a new approach to committee discussions. This also provides a number of key benefits as follows:
   - They bring additional knowledge and expertise to committee;
   - They reinforce the political neutrality and independence of the committee;
   - They maintain continuity of committee membership where membership is affected by the electoral cycle.

4. An individual cannot be a Co-opted (Independent) Member if they:
   - Are a member, co-opted member or officer of the authority, or has been within the last 5 years;
   - Are a member, co-opted member or officer of a parish council of which the authority is the principal authority, or has been within the last 5 years;
   - Are a relative or close friend, of a person within (a) and (b);
   - Have any personal, legal or contractual relationship with the Council (including employees or Members or former staff), or any other relationship / activity which might represent a conflict of interest or perceived conflict of interest.

5. It is good practice to refresh independent membership on a periodic basis. As well as drawing upon new expertise, it also reduces any perception that they may no longer be free from any interest, position or relationship that could materially interfere with, or could reasonably be perceived to materially interfere with, the exercise of their independent judgement.

6. The work of the Co-opted (Independent) Member will involve attendance at Audit Committee meetings, training and other sessions in order to carry out the tasks involved with Audit Committee.

7. A fixed allowance of £905 per annum (based on the agreed 2025 members allowance scheme) is payable together with reimbursement of travel and subsistence expenses.

Recruitment

8. An advert for the appointment was placed on the North-East Jobs Portal website on 19 March 2026 with a closing date on 2 April 2026. A copy of the Recruitment Pack, which contains the role profiles and person specifications, is attached at Appendix 1 for information.

9. As several suitable candidates applied for the role of Co-opted (Independent) Member Person, all were interviewed by the Director of Business and Resources and the Head of Assurance and Risk. Candidates were asked a series of questions to determine their suitability for the role and experience when compared to the criteria set out in the person specification. Alongside this, there was a general discussion around their understanding of the Council, Audit and Risk and what wider skills and experience they could bring to Audit Committee. This process resulted in 2 clear candidates satisfactorily demonstrating they met the criteria for the role and they both had a good understanding of the role and the necessary experience, skills and enthusiasm to support the Audit Committee.

10. It is recommended to Full Council that the following persons be appointed:

Jessica Shin
Jessica is a qualified accountant who currently works for HMRC as an Internal Audit Manager having worked previously in the National Audit Office. As such she has significant understanding of the role of internal audit with a comprehensive understanding of finance, risk, controls and governance frameworks and her background also means she has significant experience understanding and operating within committee and board environments.

As a resident of the Borough, Jessica is keen to bring her significant experience to the role and make positive contribution to support Audit Committee’s governance and oversight responsibilities.

Sophie Swanson-Newbrook
Sophie currently works for North Tyneside Council in Organisational Development. She has a background working across a number of North-East public sector organisations and has also held Non-Executive Director and Trustee roles for a number of local charities.

Sophie has a history in leadership roles, partnership boards, scrutiny and governance environments throughout her career. This professional experience and her knowledge and skills mean she has developed a curious approach to scrutiny, based around asking the right questions and creating space for open, accountable discussions whilst also understanding the role of internal audit and the benefits of effective risk management.

Sophie currently resides in Gateshead but is looking forward to the opportunity to contribute positively to South Tyneside’s Audit Committee by bringing independent scrutiny, sound judgement, and a people-centred perspective with integrity, honesty and care.

Main issues and Options to be Considered

11. The Council may decline to make the appointments recommended in this report but should have regard to the recruitment process that has been carried out.

12. It is best practice to have Co-opted (Independent) Members on Audit Committee. To continue without such appointments in place could weaken the perceived independence of Audit Committee and leave the Council open to criticism.

13. Under the provisions of the Constitution and terms of reference for Audit Committee, the Council has decided to appoint two Co-opted (Independent) Members to Audit Committee, in addition to the five Elected Members.

Implications

14. As noted above, to accord with best practice and encourage independence, the Constitution and terms of reference for Audit Committee, both propose that the Audit Committee have two Co-opted (Independent) Members, as the terms of the 2 previous members have expired. Continuing without such appointments in place could weaken the perceived independence of Audit Committee and leave the Council open to criticism.

Financial and Resources

15. There are no significant financial implications arising from this report.

16. A moderate allowance of £905 per annum, together with reasonable travel and subsistence expenses, will be payable to each Co-opted (Independent) Member. With four formal Committee meetings per year the cost will be minimal and can be contained within existing budgets.

17. Where appropriate, the Council will pay for the Co-opted (Independent) Member to attend training. These costs would also be met from existing budgets.

Legal and Governance

18. Should no Co-Opted (Independent) Member be appointed the Council is at risk of challenge for not complying with the requirements of its own Constitution.

Risk

19. Should no Co-opted (Independent) Member be appointed the Council is at risk of criticism for not complying with best practice.

20. There is a constitutional requirement to have two Co-opted (Independent) Members in addition to Elected Members. Should no Member be appointed the Council is at risk of challenge for not complying with the requirements of its own Constitution.

Equality and Diversity and Community

21. The recruitment exercise was conducted in accordance with the Council's recruitment arrangements in relation to equality and diversity to ensure fairness and equality of opportunity.

Environmental and Sustainability

22. There are no identified environment and sustainability implications arising from this report.

Council Ambitions, Policies, Strategies and Plans

23. There are no direct links to Council ambitions, Policies Strategies and Plans.

Consultation and Engagement

24. There has been no consultation or engagement process.

Recommendations

25. The Council needs to appoint two Co-opted (Independent) Members and following the completion of the recruitment process detailed above, Council is recommended to appoint the candidates mentioned in this report in Paragraph 10.

26. Council is recommended:
    (a) To appoint Jessica Shin as Co-opted Independent Member to the Audit Committee with effect from the AGM in May 2026 for a fixed term of two

years ending at the Council's AGM in May 2028 with the option of extending for a maximum of a further two years.

(b) To appoint Sophie Swanson-Newbrook as Co-opted Independent Member to the Audit Committee with effect from the AGM in May 2026 for a fixed term of two years ending at the Council's AGM in May 2028 with the option of extending for a maximum of a further two years.

Reasons for Recommendations

27. To ensure the Council complies with best practice around operation of Audit Committee and its Constitutional commitments.

List of Appendices

Appendix 1 – Recruitment Pack

Appointment of Co-opted Members to Audit Committee

The following is a list of the background papers (excluding exempt papers) relied upon in the preparation of the above report:

Background Paper	File Ref:	File Location

APPENDIX 1

APPOINTMENT OF INDEPENDENT MEMBER FOR AUDIT COMMITTEE

Good governance is all about ensuring the Council is doing the right things, in the right way, for the right people, in a timely, inclusive, open, transparent, honest and accountable manner. Our Audit Committee is a key component of the Council's governance framework and adds value by supporting improvement across the organisation and our partners.

The terms of reference for Audit Committee can be found in the Council's Constitution which is published on our website.

The Council understand the value and benefits independent members bring to Audit Committee, which include the following:

- The injection of external views and approach to discussions;
- Their additional knowledge and expertise within areas of responsibility;
- Reinforcing the political neutrality and independence of the committee;
- Maintaining continuity of committee membership where membership is affected by the electoral cycle.

As an independent member you will play an important role in enhancing the skills, experience and knowledge of Audit Committee and supporting it to continue as a cornerstone of our governance and assurance framework.

Independent members will receive a sum of £905 per annum and travel expenses will be covered. The initial term of office is two years with the option to extend for a further two years.

If you are interested in playing a key role in enhancing governance and assurance, you are invited to apply for the position.

Independence

A person can only be an independent person if that person:

a) Is not a member, co-opted member or officer of the authority, or has been within the last 5 years;
b) Is not a member, co-opted member or officer of a parish council of which the authority is the principal authority, or has been within the last 5 years;
c) Is not a relative or close friend, of a person within (a) and (b);
d) Has submitted an application form in response to an advert for the position at the authority;
e) Has had their appointment approved by a majority of the members of the authority.

The regulations say that a 'relative' means:

a) the other person's spouse or civil partner;

b) living with the other person as husband and wife or as if they were civil partners;
c) a grandparent of the other person;
d) a lineal descendant of a grandparent of the other person;
e) a parent, sibling or child of a person within paragraph (a) or (b);
f) the spouse or civil partner of a person within paragraph (c), (d) or (e), or
g) living with a person within paragraph (c), (d) or (e) as husband and wife or as if they were civil partners.

Selection Criteria

The ideal candidate for the position will:

1. Be willing and able to commit the necessary time to the role;
2. Have up to date skills, knowledge and experience within at least one of the fields covered within Audit Committee, i.e. internal audit, risk management, governance, accounting, anti-fraud and corruption;
3. Have good interpersonal skills, including good communication skills both written and oral and the ability to co-operate with others in a committee setting.
4. Have independence of mind, objectivity and impartiality.
5. Contribute proactive, proportionate, independent thought and listen to, and balance, advice;
6. Have a commitment to the general principles governing the conduct of Councillors generally and work to high behavioural standards, demonstrating honesty, probity and integrity;
7. Not be a serving local government officer or councillor;
8. Have no personal, legal or contractual relationship with South Tyneside Borough Council (including employees or Members or former staff), or any other relationship / activity which might represent a conflict of interest or perceived conflict of interest.

Desirable additional criteria are:

1. A suitable professional or management qualification (in internal audit, risk management, governance, accounting or other relevant discipline)
2. An understanding of the complexity of issues surrounding audit, risk management, governance and finance in local government.
3. An understanding of the Council's vision, priorities and objectives
4. Have previous experience as independent / non-executive member of a board or committee and knowledge of procedures for meetings.
5. An ability to understand complex situations and reports, as well as the statutory background to those reports, and ask appropriate questions of officers.
6. Have a broad range of experience, possibly in public, private, voluntary or charitable sector employment or service including self-employed, employed and voluntary positions.

7. Promotes the work of Audit Committee and areas falling under its terms of reference;
8. Have a connection with South Tyneside, e.g. resident, workplace, own a business etc.

You should demonstrate in your application how you meet the above criteria, as this will assist the shortlisting process.

Means of assessment

Application form and by interview.

Appointment

Upon the selection of the 2 most suitable candidates from those applicants interviewed, the Panel will submit a report to Full Council recommending the appointment of those persons.

NOTE:
Meetings can be held in the evening, daytime or at short notice. The successful appointee will therefore need to be flexible in being able to attend such meetings.

INDEPENDENT MEMBER OF AUDIT COMMITTEE

PERSON SPECIFICATION	Essential	Desirable
Qualifications:		
• A suitable professional or management qualification (in internal audit, risk management, governance, accounting or other relevant discipline)		✓
Knowledge & Skills:		
• A working knowledge of general or financial management of large public or private sector organisations.	✓	
• A general knowledge of systems of internal control, risk management, good governance, anti-fraud and corruption.	✓	
• An understanding of the complexity of issues surrounding audit, risk management, governance and finance in local government.		✓
• An understanding of the Council's vision, priorities and objectives		✓
• Experience of participation in Committee or Board meetings.		✓
• An ability to understand complex situations and reports, as well as the statutory background to those reports, and ask appropriate questions of officers.	✓	✓
• Good interpersonal skills, including good communication skills both written and oral and the ability to co-operate with others in a committee setting.	✓ ✓	
• The ability to be objective, independent and impartial.	✓ ✓	
• A commitment to the values and standards of public life.		
• High standard of personal integrity		
• Digitally capable (or willing to undertake necessary training) to access information, reports and communicate electronically.		✓
• Have a broad range of experience, possibly in public, private, voluntary or charitable sector employment or service including self-employed, employed and voluntary positions.		

Competencies:		
• A person in whose impartiality and integrity the public can have confidence		✓
• Understand and comply with confidentiality requirements	✓	
• Able to make a significant contribution to the work of the committee	✓	