

Cumbria Police, Fire and Crime Panel - Co-opted Independent Member: Roles and Responsibilities

Independent co-optees and elected members on the Panel have the same responsibilities and duties. All co-optees are full voting members and will have access to the same level of support and information as elected members on the Panel.

The core roles of all Panel Members (both elected members and independent co-optees) include:

- 1) Scrutinising the work of the PFCC to ensure that the Commissioner's functions are discharged effectively
- 2) Bringing any specialist knowledge, skills, experience and expertise to the scrutiny work of the Panel
- 3) Ensuring that there is an effective independent challenge to the PFCC and that this challenge is constructive to support the Commissioner in carrying out their role

Key Responsibilities of all Panel Members include:

- 4) Attending all formal meetings of the Panel (approximately four per year) within Cumbria.
- 5) Establishing good relations with other members, officers and co-optees
- 6) Attending additional meetings, e.g. working groups or evidence gathering sessions, as required
- 7) Preparing for each meeting by reading the agenda, papers and additional information to familiarise yourself with the issues to be covered during the meeting. Prior to the meeting, considering the questions you may wish to put to the PFCC and other expert witnesses
- 8) Listening carefully at the meetings, asking questions in a way which is non-judgmental, respecting confidentiality and helping the Panel to make practical suggestions for improvements in services
- 9) Assisting in the preparation of reports and the formulation of recommendations - this may involve volunteering to participate in a task group to conduct a scrutiny review
- 10) Attending training and development events as needed
- 11) Abiding by the Panel arrangements and rules of procedure which set out how the Police, Fire and Crime Panel will operate in Cumbria
- 12) Keeping abreast of the key issues in relation to the responsibilities of the PFCC and the priorities within the Police and Crime and Fire and Rescue Plan

- 13) Contributing to achieving an open, accountable and transparent decision-making process in relation to policing and fire and rescue issues in Cumbria

Experience

Coming from a policing or fire background is not a requirement for being an independent member on a panel. There are many different sectors which provide prospective candidates with useful skills to be an effective independent member, and current and past independent members have come from a wide range of backgrounds.

The following suggestions regarding the ideal skills, knowledge and experience of independent members are not exhaustive. You may have particular expertise in one area only, or potentially a different background which nonetheless would make you a strong candidate. It is advised that candidates should meet at least one of the criteria listed below to perform the independent member role effectively.

Knowledge and experience

- knowledge and experience of working in the policing, community safety or wider criminal justice sector
- experience of working in local or central government
- a management role in the public sector or charity sector
- knowledge and experience of working in or with the fire and rescue sector
- experience working in the financial industry
- legal experience, such as a solicitor or legal executive

The Home Office has published a digital learning resource recorded by a serving independent panel member which gives an insight into their experience of the role and responsibilities required to perform in the independent member role effectively. This can be viewed here: <https://youtu.be/P-qbagUzKSs> (Home Office YouTube channel).

Cumbria Police, Fire and Crime Panel - Co-opted Independent Member: Person Specification

Eligibility:

The Following cannot be considered for a position as independent member on the Panel:

- Anyone under 18 years old
- The Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner (PFCC), their close relative or a member of their staff
- A member of staff of the Cumbria Fire and Rescue authority
- A Police Officer/member of the civilian staff of Cumbria Constabulary
- MPs, Members of the National Assembly for Wales, Members of the Scottish Parliament, Members of the European Parliament
- A Councillor of a Westmorland and Furness Council or Cumberland Council

Abilities/skills

As well as being of good character, candidates will need to possess most, if not all, of the following competencies:

- 1) **The ability to think strategically:** To have breadth of vision, to rise above detail, and to see problems and issues from a wider, forward-looking perspective and to make appropriate linkages.
- 2) **The ability to communicate effectively:** To be able to communicate effectively both verbally and in writing – and to interact positively with other members of the Panel, the PFCC and the public.
- 3) **The ability to be analytical:** To interpret and question complex written material, including financial and statistical information and other data such as performance measures and identify the salient points.
- 4) **The ability to be supportive:** To be able to support the PFCC and the other members of the Panel in delivering their duties.
- 5) **The ability to scrutinise and challenge:** To be able to rigorously scrutinise and challenge constructively without becoming confrontational, using appropriate data, evidence and resources.
- 6) **The ability to make good judgements and be decisive:** To take a balanced, open-minded and objective approach, for example, in evaluating the priorities of the PFCC, assessing candidates for top-level appointments or considering complaints against the PFCC.

Other Requirements and Considerations

- 7) **Team working:** The ability to play an effective role in meetings through listening, persuading and showing respect for the views of others.

- 8) **Self-confidence:** The skill to challenge accepted views constructively without becoming confrontational.
- 9) **Respect for others and an ability to work with people from diverse backgrounds:** The capacity to treat all people fairly and with respect, to value diversity and respond sensitively to difference.
- 11) **An interest in policing and fire and rescue issues and current affairs:** Specifically in respect of the ways in which they affect people locally.
- 10) Independent members are expected to prepare for and attend the meetings of the Panel (approximately four per year). They should be willing to attend any necessary training and development sessions (online/in person). Independent members are eligible for the same level of training and development as elected members.

Cumbria Police, Fire and Crime Panel – About the Panel

What is the Cumbria Police, Fire and Crime Panel?

Police and Crime Panels were established in England in 2012 to provide a check and balance function in relation to the function of the newly introduced Police and Crime Commissioners. The remit of the Panel includes reviewing and scrutinising the decisions and actions of the Commissioner in connection with the discharge of the Commissioner's functions. The Panel have oversight of some of the Commissioner's key documents, reports and decisions and can require them to provide information or answer any questions that the Panel considers necessary to carry out its own functions.

Following local government reorganisation on 1st April 2023, transfer of governance for the Fire and Rescue Service was included in the Commissioner's responsibilities. The remit of the Panel was extended to become the Cumbria Police, Fire and Crime Panel to reflect the widening of its scrutiny and support functions.

The Cumbria Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner (PFCC) has responsibility for setting the direction, objectives and budgets of Cumbria Constabulary and Cumbria Fire and Rescue Service, and for holding the Chief Constable and Chief Fire Officer to account.

The Panel provides the key scrutiny and accountability mechanism for the decisions and activities undertaken by the PFCC. The role of the Panel is to scrutinise and support the performance of the Commissioner and specifically to conduct the following statutory functions (as set out in the Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011):

- To review and make recommendations on the Commissioner's proposed level of Council Tax precept for policing and fire. The Panel has a power of veto for the Commissioner's first precept proposal
- To review and make recommendations on the Commissioner's draft Police and Crime Plan and Fire and Rescue Plan
- To review and make recommendations on the Commissioner's draft Annual Report for Police and Crime and Fire and Rescue
- To review and make recommendations on proposed senior appointments in the Commissioner's Office, including the Chief Constable and Chief Fire Officer (in addition to some other senior roles). The Panel has the power to veto proposed appointments for the Chief Constable and Chief Fire Officer
- To consider non-criminal complaints made against the Commissioner

In addition to its statutory functions, the Panel may look at other areas within the Commissioner's Police and Crime and Fire and Rescue Plan and make reports or recommendations as needed, which the Commissioner must take account of and respond to.

How many members does Cumbria's Police, Fire and Crime Panel have?

In Cumbria, the Panel comprises 12 members. There are five councillors from Westmorland and Furness Council and five councillors from Cumberland Council. There are two independent co-opted members.

What is an independent co-opted member?

Panels have two types of member:

- Local councillors – chosen by the two local councils, and
- Independent co-opted members – local people who are not councillors, chosen through an open recruitment process, who bring a non-political dimension to the Panel.

There are 41 Panels across England and Wales and all are required to have a minimum of two independent members who sit alongside elected local authority members. Independent members bring a unique set of expertise, ensuring that the necessary skills and knowledge are available for a Panel to discharge its scrutiny function effectively.

How does the Police, Fire and Crime Panel work?

The Panel meet at least four times a year to carry out its main responsibilities and question the Commissioner about all aspects of their activities. These meetings are usually held in public.

What is the time commitment?

Cumbria's Panel meets formally a minimum of four times a year and there may also be one or two informal briefing sessions throughout the year. It may also decide to set up sub-committees, and if you are assigned to one of those you will be expected to attend those additional meetings which may be online or in person. The time commitment will depend on the work programme approved by the Panel, but might average between 3 and 10 hours a month, including preparation time. Meetings will generally be held during normal office hours and may be at varying locations within Cumbria.

Will I receive any payment?

Independent Co-opted members are entitled to claim travelling expenses such as mileage or public transport costs to get to Panel meetings. A small allowance of approximately £650 per annum is also payable.

How long will I be a member?

The appointment will be for a (full) four year term, with the opportunity to be re-appointed for a further term, without open recruitment, if the majority of the Panel Members agree.

Useful links:

Cumbria Police, Fire and Crime Panel: <https://cumbriapfcp.org.uk/>

Office of the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner for Cumbria: <https://cumbria-pfcc.gov.uk/>

Previous minutes and agendas of the Cumbria Police, Fire and Crime Panel:
<https://westmorlandandfurness.moderngov.co.uk/ieListMeetings.aspx?Committeed=330>

Police, Fire and Crime Panels Guidance (Home Office):
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/police-and-crime-panels/police-fire-and-crime-panels-guidance>