

MINUTES of the meeting of Employment Panel held at Shire Hall, Hereford on Friday 11 September 2015 at 4.00 pm

Present: Councillor AW Johnson (Chairman)
Councillor PM Morgan (Vice Chairman)

Councillors: H Bramer, RI Matthews and AJW Powers

Officers: Annie Brookes, Geoff Hughes and TJ Postles

7. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

8. MINUTES

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the meeting held on 19 June 2015 be approved.

9. DESIGNATION OF POST AS STATUTORY OFFICER (MONITORING OFFICER)

The director, economy communities and corporate, presented the report and explained that he was consulting on a proposed restructure of the directorate. The proposal would reduce by one third the senior management costs in line with reducing budgets across the organisation. The assistant director, law and governance, to which the role of monitoring officer was assigned, had requested voluntary redundancy, which had been accepted. As the post currently designated as monitoring officer was being made redundant, interim arrangements were being proposed to give a maximum nine-month period in which a range of options to provide the monitoring officer role could be explored.

It was proposed that the interim arrangement would be to designate the post of deputy solicitor to the council, regulatory and people, as monitoring officer and that recommendation would be presented to full council for decision if the employment panel agreed.

It was noted that the next meeting of the council was on 25 September.

In answer to a question from the chair regarding the longer-term arrangements for the role, there would be a nine-month cover period to allow for consultation on possible future arrangements which could include, for example, sharing a monitoring officer with another council or scoping a longer term role and a possible recruitment process. It was acknowledged that a proper assessment of options and market testing was needed before making any permanent appointment.

There are currently two deputy monitoring officers (the deputy solicitor to the council, regulatory and people, and the governance manager); the governance manager would be likely to continue as deputy to support the interim monitoring officer.

The chair noted that the departing assistant director holding the role of monitoring officer was also the lead solicitor to the council and therefore asked how the lead solicitor role would be replaced. It was clarified that there was a full legal team in place at present and more specialised advice would be procured if required.

A member expressed regret that the assistant director was leaving and gave thanks for his contribution to the council, and moved that the post of deputy solicitor to the council regulatory and people be recommended to council for designation as interim monitoring officer.

In answer to a Member's question regarding the enhancement that the interim post holder would receive, it was clarified that this would be 5% of her current salary.

It was noted that whilst this arrangement represented a significant reduction in cost, this would not necessarily be realised with a permanent arrangement as any post would have to be evaluated.

A Member noted that this was a statutory role and questioned the validity of voluntary redundancy rather than a resignation. In explanation, the director, economy communities and corporate stated that voluntary redundancy was agreed as part of the consultation and restructuring in which the director's direct reports were affected. The role held by the departing officer was at risk and there would have been competition for a new role. The officer took the decision not to complete and requested voluntary redundancy.

It was clarified that the proposal was not to make the role of monitoring officer redundant but the officer's post carried it as part of the role. The role of monitoring officer is still required and so it was necessary to designate another role. It was agreed this point of clarification would be included in the report to Council.

A member expressed concern about opportunities for officers to gain from leaving the organisation and sought assurance that the severance package was reasonable. It was clarified that the council's policy was based on the statutory calculation multiplied by 1.5; and it was noted that the council had reviewed the redundancy policy to reduce compensation arrangements. There was confidence in the proposed interim post holder and the proposal would allow for quicker reduction in costs.

In answer to the same member's question about other aspects of the departing officer's role, it was explained that the post held a number of other statutory roles such as for Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences (RIDDOR) which would be allocated to other officers. It was noted that as the council was providing fewer services, fewer senior officers were needed and there was confidence that risks were being managed. There were other officers at risk and so there may be further volunteers for redundancy.

RESOLVED

That, subject to making some grammatical changes to the report, it be recommended to Council that the post of deputy solicitor to the council, people and regulatory, be designated monitoring officer for an interim period of up to nine months from the date of approval.

The meeting ended at 4.22 pm

CHAIRMAN