

MINUTES of the meeting of Employment panel held at Committee Room 1, Shire Hall, St. Peter's Square, Hereford on Wednesday 12 October 2016 at 2.00 pm

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

Councillors: WLS Bowen, H Bramer and AJW Powers

Officers: Geoff Hughes, Alistair Neill and Tracey Sampson

6. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor RI Matthews.

7. NAMED SUBSTITUTES (IF ANY)

Councillor WLS Bowen was present as the substitute for Councillor RI Matthews.

8. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made.

9. MINUTES

The minutes of the previous meeting were received.

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on Friday 23 September 2016 be approved as a correct record.

10. RECRUITMENT OF CHIEF FINANCE OFFICER (SECTION 151 OFFICER)

The chairman drew attention to the recommendations contained in the report and invited questions from the panel.

The vice-chairman considered the recommendations sensible and sought clarification about paragraph 13 which read the 'additional costs of recruiting to this post will be capped at a maximum of £20k...'. The head of human resources and organisational development (HR&OD) reported that a previous process had cost £25k and the capping demonstrated that the authority was driving costs downwards; an initial market assessment indicated that this would be achievable.

A panel member suggested that it should be made clear to the public that this was a cost effective approach, especially as it involved a nationwide search. The head of HR&OD explained that a specialist recruitment agency would be engaged to support the recruitment and selection of the best candidates on behalf of the council. Whilst acknowledging £20k was still a substantial sum, the chairman emphasised the strategic importance of the role and noted that the postholder would be responsible for oversight of all the council's financial controls. It was suggested that councillors be apprised of the position.

The following points were made in response to questions from panel members:

- i. The role profile focussed on finance and property, with other arrangements now in place for Hoople Ltd.
- ii. Reference to 'a substantive chief finance officer' had been made to differentiate this permanent post from the recent appointment of an interim director of resources.
- iii. The interim post included ICT but alternative arrangements for ICT would be made going forward.

Drawing attention to paragraph 6 of the report, a panel member commented that some confusion may arise from constitution paragraph 4.9.3.7 which read 'Every appointment of any officer specified in paragraph 4.9.1.2 above [including 'a statutory chief officer'] shall be made by the employment panel...' given that the panel had been advised at the meeting on 23 September 2016 that the constitution 'delegates authority to the chief executive, as head of paid service, to make interim appointments to senior management positions...'. The head of HR&OD advised: provision was made in the scheme of delegation; it was the designation of a section 151 officer that had been within the panel's remit in September; and an interim was engaged but not technically employed by the council.

Clarification was sought about paragraph 8 which read '... the proposed profile, having been reviewed, has been confirmed as remaining at the same salary level as AD level salaries rarely change with responsibilities of a similar magnitude being added or taken away.' The head of HR&OD explained that this was usual practice; changes made to the role profile for the former director of resources post were cited as an example.

Further to points i. and iii. above, the director for economy, communities and corporate (ECC) explained that the role profile did not include human resources and he also outlined options being considered to strengthen the ICT client side.

Attention was drawn to the skills, knowledge and experience section of the proposed role profile (appendix 1 to the report) and the 'Ability to build partnership relationships and influence government policy.' The chief executive explained that government policy was informed by views from local government and the council was playing an increasingly significant role within the regional and national scene. The director for ECC noted the importance of involvement in broader networks, such as the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy and the Local Government Association, and commented that previous postholders had worked proactively and collectively with their counterparts in other councils to influence policy. The vice-chairman added that the previous postholder had helped with the drafting of letters to the local MPs and the information provided may have had some part in making the case for enhanced rural services delivery grant.

The vice-chairman noted that the timetable was ambitious but was keen to see it delivered. Various scenarios were queried by panel members. The chief executive commented that it was important to move smoothly through the budget setting period, so it was anticipated that the interim director of resources would be retained until at least mid/late February. He added that there would be a sensible, but not extended, overlap period with the incoming postholder.

There was a discussion about the options available if an appointment could not be made in December but the chief executive said that, in view of the council's growing reputation and the response to the interim position, there was a reasonable level of optimism about attracting suitable potential candidates for consideration by the panel.

RESOLVED: That

- (a) the role profile at appendix 1 for the post of chief finance officer be agreed and all other terms and conditions associated with the post remain the same; and**
- (b) recruitment for a substantive chief finance officer be initiated.**

The meeting ended at 2.19 pm

CHAIRMAN

