

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE STAFFING COMMITTEE

The meeting took place in a virtual environment using “Zoom” video conferencing technology and members of the public and press were given the opportunity to observe or participate in the meeting.

Held on Friday 24th March 2021 at 7.00pm

PRESENT: Cllr John Haywood, Chairman
Cllr Tony Ring, Town Mayor
Cllr Jeremy Heron, Chairman of Policy & Finance Committee
Cllr Gloria O’Reilly
Cllr Darren Loose

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr Chris Wilkins, Town Clerk
Mrs Jo Hurd, Deputy Town Clerk
Cllr Philip Day
Cllr Rae Frederick

S/0052 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

No members of the public were present.

S/0053 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

No apologies had been received.

S/0054 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No interests were declared.

S/0055 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 20 November 2020, having been circulated, be approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

S/0056 HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGEMENT UPDATE

The Town Clerk updated Members on working arrangements during the current period of lockdown.

It was noted that the grounds team’s hours had been further reduced so that there were no more than three working at any time, as it had not been practical to share vehicles or to work together in the confined workshops. However, now that the weather was improving and some staff had been vaccinated, hours were progressively being increased.

A route out of lockdown had been prepared, based on the government document, which identified key dates for changes at Gateway, Carvers Clubhouse and for the grounds team. It was expected that the Information service would resume on 12th April with reduced opening hours the same as before Christmas and a one in one out policy at the door. This would be reviewed prior to the next key date of (not before) 17th May.

It was envisaged that there would be a progressive return to full service and for other staff to return to work in the office as circumstances allowed.

The Visitor Information Service would not resume this year due to the need to recruit and train new staff to operate the service.

The Clubhouse Manager would attend the next meeting of Recreation, Leisure & Open Spaces Committee to report on plans for re-opening Carvers Clubhouse.

Members wished to thank all staff for their continuing perseverance and adaptability during these unusual times.

RESOLVED: That the verbal report be noted.

S/0057

EMPLOYMENT POLICIES REVIEW

Members considered the Town Clerk's report (*Annex A*).

Review of Employment Policies

It was agreed that it was important for Members to have an oversight of employment policies, but that it should be the responsibility of officers, with advice from the Council's HR advisers, to keep them under review and update when necessary.

Parking Clocks

It was noted that 9 long stay and 3 short stay parking clocks were currently issued to staff. This arrangement had been in place since the office move from Greenways to Gateway and was seen as a contractual benefit.

Some Members were in favour of continuing to issue clocks to existing staff, but not necessarily to any new recruits, and perhaps paying a proportionate contribution of the cost to part time staff.

However, it was noted that there was disparity in the benefit received by some staff. Also, the Council has no control over parking prices and it was possible, given the government's green agenda, that the cost could increase in future putting an extra burden on the Council's budget. Cllr Heron therefore proposed negotiation with staff in order to dispose of the benefit. This was agreed.

Home Working

Some members felt that councillors and the public would be better served by all staff returning to work in the office when conditions allowed, and that no home working should be permitted. However, it was agreed that there would be an expectation for greater flexibility in the future, providing that performance was not compromised. This again would support the government's green agenda as it would lead to a reduction in travel. It was noted that there would be many issues to consider, but that a policy should be put in place.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That employment policies be kept under review by officers, with support from the Council's HR advisers, and that Members be kept informed of any changes required.
- 2) That the Town Clerk seek to negotiate a settlement with staff to dispose of the benefit of parking clocks.
- 3) That officers prepare a draft Home Working Policy for consideration a future meeting of the Committee.

**S/0058
EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS**

RESOLVED: That, in accordance with section 1(2) of the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960, the press and public be excluded because publicity would be prejudicial to the public interest by reason of the confidential nature of the business to be transacted (staffing matters).

**S/0051
OFFICE STAFFING REVIEW**

Members considered the Town Clerk's report (Annex B).

The Town Clerk presented a business case to restore staff capacity to previous levels in order to take pressure off existing staff; ensure the timely performance of Council functions; and increase operational resilience.

Members agreed to increase capacity by 9 hours and for the Town Clerk to use this additional resource to best effect.

RESOLVED: That the proposed staff transfer and recruitment of an Office Manager be approved.

The Town Clerk and Deputy Town Clerk left the meeting at 8.17pm.

**S/0049
TOWN CLERK'S ANNUAL REVIEW**

Members received a verbal report from Cllrs Haywood and O'Reilly and considered what recommendation to make regarding the Town Clerk's pay increment.

Members felt that the Town Clerk's performance for the year was very high even without taking on board the extra challenges that the COVID19 pandemic had generated. Debate extended to the practicalities and technicalities of the pay scales. The possibility of a future job re-evaluation was discussed in the light of the impending increase in the size of the town and the additional increase in council's resources if the neighbourhood plan is accepted.

On the matter of the Town Clerk's career plans and succession planning for a future Town Clerk, members felt that, should the current deputy Town Clerk be interested in the role, appropriate development in the framework of a succession plan would be wholly appropriate.

RESOLVED: That, with the committee's assessment that the Town Clerk's performance greatly exceeded the standard expected and subject to the Council's pay policy, the Town Clerk shall receive two pay increments on the 1st April 2021.

There being no further business, the Chairman closed the meeting at 8.45pm.

Note: The text in the Action Boxes above does not form part of these minutes.

RECEIVED

APPROVED

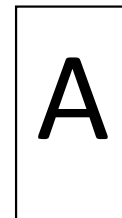
TOWN MAYOR

COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN

STAFFING COMMITTEE

24th March 2021

Report on employment policies



1. Introduction and reason for report

1.1 Effective member oversight of Council policies is an important element of good governance. One aspect of this is regular review of employment policies, a task delegated to this committee. It is suggested that the March meeting is an appropriate occasion for this since the task is a recurrent one and the meeting a fixture in the calendar.

2. Background information

2.1 The Council has adopted many policies relating to employment matters. These are brought together in a handbook for staff. The handbook was reviewed and updated by Ellis Whittam under the contract for the provision of specialist support on employment law and human resources matters. Hard copies are available at each of the Council's workplaces and each employee is sent a copy by email.

2.2 The documentation is so lengthy that a line-by-line review by members would be very demanding, probably impracticable and unnecessary anyway; this is what the Council is paying Ellis Whittam to do. However, members ought to be aware in general terms of the policies which the Council has and have an understanding of their general purpose and content. A copy of the handbook is therefore being emailed to each committee member with this report.

2.3 Officers recommend that members seek to agree at this meeting a general approach to reviewing the policies and invite members to offer guidance on two specific issues detailed below.

2.4 Without in any way restricting how members go about the review, it is suggested that the following questions might be asked:

2.4.1 Is the purpose of each policy understood (at least in general terms)?

2.4.2 Is the content of any policy at variance with the Council's values and purpose?

2.4.3 Are any policies redundant or ineffective?

2.4.4 Conversely, are any important matters of concern not adequately covered by a suitable policy?

2.4.5 Are there any policies of such importance that members wish to examine them in greater detail?

2.4.6 Would it be helpful to review all the policies in greater detail, not all at once but over a four-year cycle, perhaps?

2.5 The first matter meriting more careful consideration is the provision of parking clocks as a benefit in kind to some staff. A fuller account of how this practice developed can be given at the meeting if desired. Since most of the affected employees are currently mainly working from home, the purchase of clocks for 2021 that would normally have been made in December has largely been delayed. However, when greater office working resumes, the matter will have to be addressed. The legal status of the benefit is unclear. The clocks are not

mentioned in employment contracts. However, it seems they were mentioned in the course of some recruitment processes. In any event, the practice of issuing them, apparently as of right, has now continued so long that it might be difficult to argue successfully that they are not now a contractual benefit. The uncertainty can only cause mischief and is best resolved by adopting a policy clarifying their status and specifying which staff are entitled to them. Members may take this opportunity to set relevant parameters for such a policy.

- 2.6 The other issue is home working. Many employees have become so accustomed to working from home out of necessity that they are likely to want the freedom to continue some degree of home working as a matter of choice. Rather than allow this to happen haphazardly and with no clear rules or provisions, it is recommended that the Council adopt a Home Working Policy establishing suitable parameters for it. Officers expect professionally prepared templates to become available soon and suggest that one be selected and brought back to this committee for consideration in due course.

3. Issues for decision and any recommendations

- 3.1 How do members wish to approach the regular review of employment policies?**
- 3.2 Do members wish officers to prepare a draft policy relating to the provision of parking clocks to staff for consideration at a future meeting?**
- 3.3 Do members wish officers to prepare a draft Home Working Policy for consideration at a future meeting?**

For further information, contact:

Chris Wilkins, Town Clerk
Direct Dial: 01425 484720
Email: chris.wilkins@ringwood.gov.uk

Jo Hurd, Deputy Town Clerk
Direct Dial: 01425 484721
Email: jo.hurd@ringwood.gov.uk

STAFFING COMMITTEE

24th March 2021

Report on office staffing

B

1. Introduction and reason for report

- 1.1 Officers desire to update members on office staffing developments and seek approval for proposed changes.

2. Background information

- 2.1 Members will recall that the last Office Manager left on sick leave in September 2018 and formally retired without ever returning to her normal working in July 2019. In May 2020 the previous Mayor's PA and Office Administrator left us and a new post-holder was recruited to that role; having to be selected and then inducted mostly via remote working owing to pandemic restrictions. In November 2020, the Finance Administrator went off sick and is not expected to return until April at the earliest (and is highly likely to require a phased return when she is able to resume working). With effect from 1st January 2021, it was agreed that the Finance Manager's hours should increase from 14 to 21 per week.
- 2.2 There is attached as Annex I a tabulation of the changes in the office staff capacity with comments about staff and managers' experience of capacity issues and concerns at each stage. Members may wish to consider their own experiences of contact with the Council office over the last three years and perceptions of staff capacity to act on members' decisions, priorities and wishes. However, officers judge that it has become increasingly clear that there is now a deficit in office staffing capacity which is leading to excessive pressures on staff and adversely affecting the timely performance of Council functions.
- 2.3 The recent increase in the Finance Manager's hours should suffice to meet financial management needs once he is no longer needed to cover the absent Finance Administrator's functions. Addressing the latter deficiency is the highest priority. However, there is also a need for more provision in general administration support, office and facilities management and in the management of and technical support for projects.
- 2.4 The current Mayor's PA and Office Administrator has expressed a strong interest in transferring to the Finance Administrator role (even at the expense of relinquishing her current role entirely and understanding that her new one may be a temporary appointment only liable to be terminated if the permanent post-holder returns). Agreeing that transfer would create an opportunity to re-think the Mayor's PA and Office Administrator role.
- 2.5 Officers are therefore recommending that the Council agree the transfer requested and replace the Mayor's PA and Office Administrator role with a revived and re-defined Office Manager role on the same pay scale as pre-July 2019 but as a full-time role rather than 28 hours per week. Annex I shows the overall effect this recommendation would have on office staffing capacity, if accepted.
- 2.6 A draft job description and person specification for the Office Manager role as proposed is attached as Annex II.
- 2.7 The recommended changes would require no additional investment in IT and should not over-strain the payroll budget. However, they are not a panacea for all ills. In particular, members should note the following points:

- 2.7.1 It will be necessary for the Town Clerk to supervise management of cemetery applications and records much more closely than has been the case for many years (the want of this in the past has contributed to the unsatisfactory state of the records at present); and
- 2.7.2 Pressures on project work are likely to remain and even intensify in the short term. Aside from the general lack of capacity, the reasons for this are the likely need for officer support for the Neighbourhood Plan and the continuing want of in-house technical skills.

These are not reasons to reject or delay the recommended changes but they point to additional (albeit less urgent) needs likely to require further measures when time and budgetary considerations allow. It would also be realistic to anticipate that implementation of any changes will lead to disruption and upheaval that may require some overtime working in order to overcome.

3. Issues for decision and any recommendations

The Committee is invited to note this report and consider whether to approve the staff transfer proposed above and recruitment of an Office Manager re-defined as above.

For further information, contact:

Chris Wilkins, Town Clerk
Direct Dial: 01425 484720
Email: chris.wilkins@ringwood.gov.uk

Jo Hurd, Deputy Town Clerk
Direct Dial: 01425 484721
Email: [jo.hurd@ringwood](mailto:jo.hurd@ringwood.gov.uk) gov.uk

Annex I - Nominal Office Staffing Capacity

Pre-July 2019

Role	Hours per week	Notes
Town Clerk	37	
Deputy Town Clerk	22	
Finance Manager	14	
Office Manager	28	Inc. Agresso POs – est. 6hrs pw Absent after August 2018.
Meetings Administrator	18	
Finance Administrator	13	
Mayor's PA and Office Administrator	28	Inc. allotments admin.
Total	160	

Adequacy assessment:

Routine work mainly done on time. Finance committee reports often delayed and sometimes missed. Limited problems caused by staff absences (planned and unplanned). Resilience low on account of numerous single points of failure (SPOFs). Some annual tasks delayed, over-looked or skipped. Some project (i.e. non-recurrent) work delayed or on-hold for want of capacity (especially technical support). IT issues (esp. Agresso) were a significant constraint.

July 2019 to December 2020

Role	Hours per week	Notes
Town Clerk	37	Share of cemetery management responsibilities greatly increased
Deputy Town Clerk	22	
Finance Manager	14	
Meetings & Allotments Administrator	25	
Finance Administrator	13	Absent after mid-November
Mayor's PA and Office Administrator	28	New in post from June 2020
Total	139	

Adequacy assessment:

Routine work mainly done on time but with some deterioration since previous (especially in processing cemetery applications after May 2020). Finance committee reports still often delayed and sometimes missed. Significant pressure on finance functions after Administrator's departure. Problems caused by staff absences (planned and unplanned) more serious. Resilience slightly improved but many SPOFs remain. More annual tasks being delayed, over-looked or skipped.

More project (i.e. non-recurrent) work delayed or on-hold for want of capacity (especially technical support).
 IT issues less of a significant constraint. The full potential of recent investments unrealized for want of training and planning.
 Clubhouse Manager and Grounds Foreman experiencing reduced admin support (since Office Manager's effective departure in September 2018).

January 2021 to date

Role	Hours per week	Notes
Town Clerk	37	
Deputy Town Clerk	22	Increasing work on Neighbourhood Plan
Finance Manager	21	
Meetings & Allotments Administrator	25	
Finance Administrator	13	Absent throughout
Mayor's PA and Office Administrator	28	
Total	146	

Note: Since the Information Service was suspended at the start of the current lockdown, the Information Officers have provided useful support in dealing with post, phone calls to the switchboard number and emails to the town.council account. This will largely end when the Service resumes (currently expected on 12th April).

Adequacy assessment:

Routine work mainly done on time. Significant improvement in processing cemetery applications but pressure on finance functions continuing and leading to less urgent work having to be postponed.
 Problems caused by staff absences (planned and unplanned) unchanged. Resilience further improved but some SPOFs remain (e.g. Deputy Clerk's role in payroll processing).
 Project (i.e. non-recurrent) work still delayed or on-hold for want of capacity (especially technical support).
 IT issues unchanged.
 No improvement in admin support to Clubhouse Manager and Grounds Foreman.

Recommended Change

Role	Hours per week	Notes
Town Clerk	37	Continuing greater share of cemetery management responsibilities
Deputy Town Clerk	22	Work on Neighbourhood Plan expected to continue for c.18 months
Finance Manager	21	No change
Meetings & Allotments Administrator	25	No change
Finance Administrator	13	Temporary change of post-holder only (but may become permanent)
Office Manager	37	New recruitment
Total	155	

Adequacy assessment:

This structure is expected to relieve pressures, significantly improving the timely performance of routine functions. It should also enable progress in improving the admin support to the Clubhouse Manager and Grounds Foreman and further eliminating SPOFs. This will, obviously, depend on successful recruitment and induction.

Annex II – Draft Job Description and Person Specification

Ringwood Town Council

Job Description

Job Title: Office Manager

Post Number: TC7

Responsible to: Town Clerk

Hours of Work: 37 hours per week

Leave Entitlement: 22 days per year, rising to 27 days after 5 years

Main Purpose

Managing the Town Council office and other buildings and facilities and working with other staff to provide effective administrative support to the Town Council.

Main Duties

The following is a list of essential duties although this is not a comprehensive list. These essential duties may be shared with other members of the team.

1. To provide general clerical and administrative support, photocopying, telephone and reception duties and act as PA to the Town Mayor (to include co-ordinating and arranging civic functions, meetings and social events).
2. To act as building and facilities manager in respect of Ringwood Gateway (in conjunction with officers at New Forest District Council and Hampshire County Council) and the Council's other buildings and facilities to include repairs, maintenance and health and safety compliance.
3. To assist the Town Clerk in managing Ringwood Cemetery by dealing with routine searches and enquiries, purchases of grave rights, interments and memorial approval applications (to include maintaining computerised and other records).
4. To deal with general enquiries in relation to Council functions.
5. To provide administrative support to the Grounds Foreman and the Clubhouse Manager (and their respective staffs) with regard to management and maintenance of the relevant facilities and the procurement of related goods and services.
6. To assist in the processing of purchase orders for equipment, materials and services as required, the processing of invoices for payment and the issuing of receipts for moneys received.

7. To manage/oversee bookings of the Council's amenities (including rooms at Ringwood Gateway, sports pitches and facilities, Gateway Square and the Bickerley but not rooms at Carvers Clubhouse).
8. To assist the Finance Manager to ensure that the Council's Inventory and Asset Register is kept up-to-date. To keep updated the Contractor Monitoring Records.
9. To be conversant with the office IT Systems. To take part in future recommendation for software and to undertake training where necessary.
10. To recommend and attend such training courses/events as the Council may reasonably require in connection with the duties of the post.
11. To keep a record of vandalism and report to Police and Councillors.
12. To maintain records of Grounds Staff time sheets in consultation with the Grounds Foreman.
13. To manage the duties and leave of the Information Officers and maintain record of all staff leave.
14. Manage the duties of the caretaker/cleaner ensuring that the building and its environs are maintained to the required standard of the specification.
15. To undertake such other duties as may be required from time to time commensurate with the level of the post, and in particular to provide cover for other office staff.
16. To support and assist in the planning and organisation of events and activities (including the holding of speciality markets) with particular reference to:
 - (a) the handling of applications for permits and licences required; and
 - (b) advertising and publicity.
17. To manage staff training bookings and maintain the records and certificates relating to these (but not the Town Clerk's Continuing Professional Development records).
18. Compiling and circulating the Council's weekly bulletin to councillors and staff.



Ringwood Town Council

Person Specification – Office Manager

CRITERIA	ESSENTIAL	DESIRABLE
<p>Skills, Knowledge and Experience</p>	<p>Appropriate level of education and experience, which demonstrates literacy and numeracy skills equal to the demands of the role, to include English Language and Maths GCSE or equivalent.</p> <p>Excellent communication skills with the ability to deal effectively with enquiries and correspondence, using own initiative.</p> <p>Experience of prioritising workloads in order to meet deadlines.</p>	<p>Prior experience of working in local government.</p> <p>Prior experience of buildings or facilities management and managing health and safety duties.</p> <p>Prior experience of managing a small team.</p> <p>Knowledge of and links to Ringwood and its surrounding area.</p>
<p>IT skills</p>	<p>Excellent typing and word processing skills, with a high degree of accuracy.</p> <p>Working knowledge of Microsoft Word, Excel and Outlook.</p> <p>Experience of working with office systems and procedures.</p> <p>Ability to learn use of specialist applications (with training).</p> <p>Ability to adapt to changing technology.</p>	<p>Knowledge of other Microsoft Office applications.</p>
<p>Personal Qualities</p>	<p>Ability to communicate with people in both formal and informal settings in a calm and professional manner.</p>	

<p>Personal Qualities (cont.)</p>	<p>Ability to manage own time and workload, meet deadlines and prioritise work.</p> <p>Ability to work quickly and accurately.</p> <p>Ability to work effectively with co-workers as part of a team.</p> <p>Flexible, proactive and where necessary a “hands on” approach to tasks.</p> <p>Willingness to contribute suggestions/ideas to improve overall efficiency and effectiveness of work procedures.</p>	
<p>Personal Style and Behaviour</p>	<p>Team worker.</p> <p>A caring and understanding manner.</p> <p>A ‘self-starter’ who takes the initiative and accepts responsibility within appropriate limits.</p> <p>Mature and diplomatic attitude and calm under pressure.</p> <p>Community focused with an ability to develop and maintain good relationships with external organisations, business contacts and the public.</p> <p>Willingness to undertake training to improve skill base or adapt to changing circumstances.</p>	