

Staffing and Appeals Committee: Minutes

Date: 24th August 2021

Time: 10.07 a.m. to 10.40 a.m.

Present: Councillors Batchelor, Count (substituting for Councillor Reynolds), Dew, Murphy (Chair), Nethsingha, Sanderson and Shailer (Vice-Chair)

7. Apologies and Declarations of Interest

Apologies were received from Councillors Reynolds.

There were no declarations of interest.

8. Minutes – 21st July 2021

The minutes of the meeting held on 21st July 2021 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

9. Appointment to the post of Chief Executive

The Monitoring Officer reminded the Committee that the current Chief Executive had been appointed to a shared role with Peterborough City Council in 2016. The sharing agreement signed by both councils at the time automatically ceased when the current incumbent left her role. Both councils had reviewed whether there was a desire to continue the sharing arrangement, and the Leaders had decided that a separate Chief Executive should now be appointed to each council. It was felt that both councils were facing significant challenges moving out of the pandemic with critical financial pressures on their services; each council would therefore need a dedicated resource to lead this work. There would also be a review and further discussion on the future of other shared roles and arrangements in order to deliver strong outcomes for residents and make each council more resilient. The financial impact for the Council of reverting to a dedicated Chief Executive would be an increase in cost of £105,466 if the appointment was made at the bottom of the scale.

Members were advised that subject to their approval the post would be advertised at the beginning of September using a search and selection agency with interviews taking place in late October. There would be preliminary technical interviews, an Assessment Centre with stakeholder panels including partners and Members, psychometric testing and the final interview with the Committee before the position was recommended to full Council for approval.

The Assistant Director: HR Services drew attention to the updated job description. The search and selection agency had reviewed it and suggested some changes. However, it had been marked as a draft to enable the Committee to suggest any further changes.

Subject to the Committee's approval, it was proposed to issue a survey to all Members to establish what councillors were looking for from a new Chief Executive. This would enable the search and selection agency to target its search. It was noted that the Council had moved away from a long job description and instead use a micro site in the job advert containing a welcome message, and detailed information. As part of this, the Council would be making clear its position regarding its equality and diversity statement. There would be a commitment to give a technical interview to any person from an under-represented group who met all the essential criteria.

Individual Members raised the following issues in relation to the report:

- expressed disappointment that the revised job description had only been circulated a day before the meeting. The Assistant Director: HR Services apologised for the tight timescale associated with this work but stressed there would be plenty of opportunity for the Committee to provide feedback into the job description.
- welcomed the proposal to engage all Members in the process in order to find the best Chief Executive.
- suggested that the last paragraph under item 2. Leadership and Partnerships should be changed from "European agencies" and "European policies" to international.
- highlighted the need for an addendum to the last section of the job description relating to "extensive and demonstrable knowledge and understanding of the management environment in large, complex local government organisations" to clarify the specific complexity of the local government landscape in Cambridgeshire such as the City Deal and the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority. It was suggested that the aforementioned section was an essential and not desirable characteristic. However, previous experience of working with a Combined Authority could be a desirable characteristic.
- queried whether experience of working with other organisations should be an essential criterion given the complexity of local government in Cambridgeshire. Whilst the importance of this proposal was acknowledged, it was suggested that the Council was unlikely to find anywhere in the country as complex as Cambridgeshire with a City Deal and a Devolution Deal. It was therefore more important that candidates were able to demonstrate some degree of complexity in their partnership working. The Chair acknowledged that this could be a candidate demonstrating they had the capability by illustrating a transferable experience. It was noted that it would be a key component of the assessment process where the partnership panels would be critical in identifying strong candidates. Another Member highlighted the importance of not putting people off from applying for the role particularly if they had experience in other fields which might be transferable. The Monitoring Officer drew attention to the fact that there was reference to partnership working in the essential as well as desirable criteria.
- requested information on the reason for going back to two separate Chief Executives given that this approach would cost more money. The Leader of the Council acknowledged the need to be open that appointing separate Chief Executives would cost more. The decision had been reinforced by the recent Local

Government Peer Review. It was noted that the landscape post Covid in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough was completely different to five years ago. It was not just Covid but also a very challenging financial position across both councils. It was acknowledged that the current incumbent had done a fantastic job but given the challenges both councils needed their own dedicated resource. It was likely over the coming five years that there would be other restructuring given the constant shifting of the local government landscape. It was expected that the new Chief Executive would review the shared arrangements deepening some of them and loosening others. The Committee was reminded that the Joint Agreement contained a proposal to localise much of the Council's decision making resulting in changes to structures. Whilst this would be an increase in cost at Chief Executive level, it was possible other funding could be identified from these changes.

- queried whether the decision for Cambridgeshire to seek its own Chief Executive had been forced on the Council by Peterborough. The Leader confirmed that it had been a joint decision by both Leaders. In response, one Member drew attention to the Joint Agreement which stated that there would be a moratorium placed on any new senior director level and above appointments made with Peterborough and all such future appointments would be made for Cambridgeshire. This document was published before any conversations with Peterborough City Council and the Peer Review. It was therefore suggested that Peterborough City Council had been influenced by this statement.
- commended the revised draft job description role profile. It was suggested that greater clarity as to what was desirable and essential criteria might be useful in the recruitment process. There needed to be a good balance between the two. However, there were certain key elements which were essential. Reassurance that the equality and diversity criteria would be met was welcomed as it was very important. However, it was proposed that at this level there should be an equality impact assessment in parallel to the job description to enable the Council to respond to any possible challenges in the future. The Assistant Director: HR Services confirmed that whilst the Council did not use assessments in this way, the job description and person specification had been reviewed to make sure it did not exclude any particular group from applying. The search and selection organisation had also confirmed that they were confident that there was no language which would preclude anyone who had the relevant experience. She confirmed that this information would be put in writing to provide some assurance.
- highlighted a motion to Council submitted by former Councillor Manning asking for a name blind application process. The Assistant Director: HR Services reported that the Council had started to look at a pilot. However, one of the challenges was the applicants submitted applications via their personal e-mail addresses which generally revealed their names. Applicants would therefore have to be encouraged to set up a separate e-mail address. Names were also on CVs and it was possible to find out who people were just from their CV. The Council had to replace its e-recruitment system so would be considering how names could be filtered out. One Member asked for a report back on this work to a future meeting. **Action Required** It was suggested that names should be redacted for the Chief Executive appointment process as much as possible.

It was resolved unanimously to:

- a) approve commencement of the process to recruit a new Chief Executive for Cambridgeshire County Council.
- b) approve the proposed job description for Head of Paid Services/Chief Executive, making any necessary proposals for changes and, if required, delegating authority to finally approve the job description to the Monitoring Officer in consultation with the Chair of Staffing and Appeals Committee.

[Councillor Billington who is a member of the committee was unable to attend the meeting in person. He contributed to the meeting virtually but did not vote]

Chair