

LYME REGIS TOWN COUNCIL

EXTRAORDINARY HUMAN RESOURCES COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 15 MARCH 2022

Present

Chairman: Cllr G. Stammers

Members: Cllr J. Broom, Cllr B. Larcombe, Cllr D. Sarson, Cllr G. Turner

Officers: A. Mullins (support services manager), J. Wright (town clerk)

Absent: Cllr C. Reynolds

21/73/HR Public Forum

There were no members of public present.

21/74/HR Apologies

Cllr M. Ellis – working

21/75/HR Disclosable Pecuniary Interests

There were none.

21/76/HR Dispensations

There were none.

21/77/HR Staffing and Recruitment

The support services manager explained the need to recruit quickly to the admin team as the front desk always required staffing, which meant other employees had to provide cover and were not focusing on their own jobs. She said officers had already spoken to the members about making changes to the admin team because the council had moved to more online services and the way the public interacted with the council had changed; this recruitment presented the council with an opportunity to introduce those changes. She emphasised that the level of work had not changed, just the way in which the work was carried out and perhaps the type of person that was required to carry it out.

The support services manager said the officers also felt it was an opportunity to incorporate into the role some community engagement type work and to merge this with the admin function. She said officers also felt having two part-time employees at three days a week each would provide better coverage and

flexibility for the front desk, which would help to cover for annual leave and sickness and create less disruption for the rest of the office.

Cllr G. Stammers asked the support services manager to explain more about the need to build up capacity and resilience within the team in creating the two proposed posts.

The support services manager said she was currently covering all the basic requirements but was struggling to achieve anything beyond this, although she had many ideas for community engagement which she would like to progress but didn't have the capacity to incorporate into her role. She said there were other elements of her role, such as managing the burial records, the website and social media, that no one else in the organisation was currently able to manage and this was a weakness that needed addressing. She added that the two posts could help build up resilience by covering these and other roles.

The town clerk said the job description reflected the role of the admin assistant job 15 years' ago when most of the council's engagement was over the front desk, but the job was moving away from this. He said the council no longer had a relationship with LymeForward, which meant the council had to be the vehicle for community engagement, so the aim was to change the job role to strengthen the council's engagement with the community.

The town clerk said these posts would be at no extra cost as it was already included in the budget, and there was an incidental saving to the council as it was no longer paying LymeForward a grant of £10,000 per year.

Cllr G. Turner asked why there was a need for two posts and why there couldn't be one post with more hours.

The support services manager said there was already a budget for a community engagement post for two days a week and the senior administrative assistant worked four days a week, which meant there were six days of labour available. However, officers were proposing two posts, each at three days a week.

Cllr J. Broom asked why the community engagement work couldn't be carried out by an external organisation.

The town clerk said it had been difficult to have a dialogue with LymeForward for some time and a considerable amount of officer time had been spent in trying to resolve this issue. He said contracting the work out to an external organisation meant the council had no control over it and most other councils carried out their own community engagement.

The town clerk said the only other organisation that was likely to be able to carry out community engagement was Lyme Regis Development Trust, but he felt the council should be given the chance to do this work itself.

Cllr J. Broom asked why the administrative role couldn't be increased to five days a week and the community engagement role an additional two days.

The support services manager said there was no reason why this couldn't happen, although this would mean increasing the staffing budget and officers felt merging the admin and community engagement roles would provide better flexibility and resilience.

Cllr B. Larcombe asked what would happen if LymeForward came back to the council and asked for the grant to be reinstated.

The town clerk said the council had spent a considerable amount of time debating LymeForward's grant and to withdraw and then reinstate it would not be the optimum decision. He said the 2022-23 staffing budget had been increased by £10,000 to undertake community engagement work and this had been informed by the issues that were emerging with LymeForward.

Cllr B. Larcombe asked what the community engagement work would entail as he didn't feel there was enough work to fill two days. He said in terms of public relations, a lot of the problems were to do with the behaviour of a small number of members and he felt no amount of community engagement work would change that.

The town clerk said the way in which the council engaged with the community was different, so the job could entail engaging through social media, Lyme Voice or organising and facilitating meetings, as well as meeting the requirements of GDPR, the Transparency Code and accessibility regulations.

Cllr B. Larcombe said given reports of less people going into the council office and more services being available online, he asked how much staff time had been saved and could therefore be transferred into doing the other online tasks which were being proposed in the new roles.

The town clerk said he couldn't give a definitive answer about how much staff time was saved but the purpose of creating the two proposed roles was also to build up resilience, create flexibility, as well as building in community engagement work, all within the agreed budget.

Cllr G. Stammers said the new members of staff would also pick up tasks which currently only the support services manager was able to do, which would also free her up to manage the team in terms of community engagement and the requirements which officers had already explained were not being met.

Cllr D. Sarson said it was important for members to make a quick decision on this recruitment, but this wasn't to suggest all the proper processes wouldn't be followed. He said not recruiting immediately would put extreme pressure on the existing admin team if they had to fill in for two months and members had a duty of care to staff.

Cllr B. Larcombe said as a council, it was required to sign off expenditure and recruitment was one of the biggest overheads, so it was entirely right that this committee had the opportunity to discuss and approve it. He felt the auditor would have a view if the council didn't sign off expenditure and said the process had to be followed, so the council could demonstrate the post was required.

The support services manager said recruitment had previously been within the remit of officers, other than for manager appointments, so when a vacancy arose, the recruitment would proceed without requiring authorisation from the council. She said this position had only changed during Covid when the council was in a difficult financial position and therefore felt it should scrutinise the need for every position before recruiting.

The town clerk said most organisations had an agreed establishment and if it was within the budget, the officers were authorised to proceed with recruitment, therefore he didn't think the auditor would have an issue. He said the auditor might have a view if the recruitment exceeded the agreed budget, but that wasn't the case here.

Cllr B. Larcombe said he didn't feel he knew enough about what the community engagement would involve and would aim to do.

The support services manager gave some examples of the types of community engagement the council could pursue. She said this was also the rationale for combining it with the admin function, as the two roles were closely linked and the ways in which the council may engage with the community were already part of the admin function.

The town clerk emphasised that this did not represent an overspend on budget, it was aiming to move with the times, it built in flexibility and resilience and all the disagreements seemed to be about the process. He said there appeared to be so much negativity about something that he felt was a common-sense proposal.

Cllr G. Stammers said by employing two people, one person could have a particular skill set and the other person could have a different skill set, so all the required skills would be met.

Cllr J. Broom asked if the posts would be advertised in Somerset.

The support services manager said the posts would be advertised in local newspapers, two of which were in the Archant and Newsquest groups which had websites where the jobs would also be advertised, expanding the reach.

Proposed by Cllr D. Sarson and seconded by Cllr B. Larcombe, members agreed to **RECOMMEND TO FULL COUNCIL** to approve changes to the staffing structure to replace the current senior administrative assistant post with two part-time posts at three days a week, to incorporate community engagement work and a re-focus on more IT-based skills, based on the amended job descriptions and person specifications.

The meeting closed at 8.18pm.