

Report to the Council

Committee: Committee for the Appointment of a Chief Executive

Date: 27 March 2012

Chairman: Councillor J M Whitehouse

1. CHIEF EXECUTIVE POST – PROGRESS REPORT ON RECRUITMENT

Recommending:

- (1) That the current position concerning the recruitment of a Chief Executive as set out in this report be noted;**
 - (2) That an Extraordinary Council meeting be held on 18 June 2012 in order to confirm an appointment to the position of Chief Executive; and**
 - (3) That, in order to provide continuity throughout the recruitment process and subject to the results of the May District Council elections, the Council agrees that the current Chairman, Vice Chairman and members of the Committee be re-appointed at the Annual Council meeting.**
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1. This report is designed to bring members up to date about the work we have undertaken since the last Council meeting.

HR Consultant

2. At our meeting on 19 January 2012, we authorised the Director of Corporate Support Services in consultation with the Chairman of the Committee, and the Leader and Deputy Leader of the Council, to appoint a recruitment consultant to assist the Council in securing an appointment. Those three members met on 23 February 2012 to consider the proposals which had come forward.
3. A project brief was circulated to the Essex County Council Framework and six separate bids were received, five through the Essex Framework and one from the East of England Local Government Association. Four of these proposals were ruled out primarily on value for money grounds. As we had included reference in our project brief to consideration of quality aspects of consultancy proposals, members looked carefully at the two lowest bids received and reached a view as to which of the two bids (which were comparable in price) showed the best record in Chief Executive level recruitment and the best level of service.
4. The three members informed the Director of Corporate Support Services that they favoured the appointment of the second lowest bidder, GatenbySanderson. This bid was approximately £2,000 more than the lowest bid. The recommendation was subject to a further informal meeting between Committee members and a representative of the company on 28 February 2012 so as to assess in person whether the Council could work comfortably with the company in question. The opportunity was also taken to have an informal discussion on a number of issues which needed to be clarified before the recruitment could be launched.

5. Following that meeting, Committee members endorsed the view that GatenbySanderson should be appointed.

Job Description and Person Specification

6. On 6 March 2012, we discussed with the consultant the essential attributes the Council wishes to find for its Chief Executive. We agreed the following broad features:
 - (a) a Chief Executive who would be capable of ensuring that the Council can achieve its major policy and strategic objectives in the short and medium terms;
 - (b) a Chief Executive who can articulate a vision for the Council within those objectives and commit others (both inside and outside the Council) to achieving those objectives;
 - (c) a Chief Executive who would be capable of delivering new ways of working where required; and
 - (d) a Chief Executive who would be an effective advocate for the Council's interests in a wide range of external forums.
7. Having agreed these principles, we re-examined the draft job description and person specification which we had previously considered and modified these on points of detail.

Salary

8. We are aware of the sensitivities around salaries paid to local authority Chief Executives at the present time. We therefore asked the consultant to report to us on current levels of salary in other councils. We asked for this information to be analysed by local authority area populations and budget data. We asked for a wide range of comparisons so that we could obtain a real understanding of the current market.
9. We listened to the advice of the consultant about the market place and considered in detail the comparative information circulated. We were advised by the consultant that the choice of salary would influence the kind of applicant that could be expected.10. After discussion we decided to advertise at a salary range of £95,000-£115,000. This, we felt, would attract a wide range of applicants including established figures and potentially aspirant candidates from larger local authorities.

Advertising

10. We have approved arrangements for advertising the vacancy. The approach is factual, not over-elaborate and balances information on the post and on the District generally. A microsite on the internet will provide additional information for potential candidates. We noted that the consultant had been able to negotiate an arrangement with the Municipal Journal which gives the vacancy high visibility in the market place and includes online advertising. We were advised by the consultant that a balanced approach needed to be taken in the recruitment process. This will include direct approaches to potentially suitable candidates (Executive Search) by the Council's Consultant.

Timetable

11. We are conscious that the Council directed that an appointment to the Chief

Executive position should be made by 31 August 2012 when the current contract of the Acting Chief Executive comes to an end.

12. We have decided that to meet the Council's wishes we should aim to make the appointment (which will have to be a decision of the full Council) in June 2012. Achieving this timetable will require the Committee to carry out some work between the District Council elections on 3 May 2012 and the Annual Council meeting on 22 May 2012. In order to facilitate this, we are recommending continuity of Committee membership throughout the recruitment process (paragraphs 17-19 below).

Selection Process

13. We have delegated the preparation of a long list of suitable candidates to our recruitment consultant. We will be formally short listing as a committee in May and then holding interviews in early June in time for a Council meeting on 18 June 2012. We will be receiving summary reports from the consultant during the process and have asked that all members and staff should be kept up to date with how things are progressing..
14. The consultant has advised on elements of the assessment process including psychometric testing, exercises designed to test key features of the person specification and formal interviews. We have agreed:
 - (a) a two day selection process;
 - (b) an external venue for the selection event;
 - (c) involvement of appropriate external partners; and
 - (d) technical advice from a peer Chief Executive of an equivalent size Council with a high performance rating between the long and short list stage.

Continuity of Membership

15. Our consultant has emphasised the importance for the Council of continuity of membership for the Committee during the entire recruitment process. We are well aware that both the May elections and the Annual Council meeting take place during this timetable. Four members of our Committee are due to stand for election in May 2012.
16. The Council cannot control whether all four are re-elected but we feel that, if they are, the same membership should be retained to see through the process.
17. We are therefore recommending that, if those four members are re-elected, they should continue to serve alongside the other three Councillors. If any of our members are not to serve as members this will mean that nominations for membership and Chairman/Vice Chairman should be made at the Annual Council meeting, assuming that there has not been a major change in the overall pro rata calculation.
18. We are still working on the detailed timetable for the recruitment but as soon as this is finalised it will be published in the Council Bulletin so that all members are aware of progress. We hope to be able to report to the 18 June Council meeting that we have completed the process with a recommendation for a Chief Executive. However, if unforeseen circumstances arise during the recruitment process we reserve our position to report on any further action the Council might need to take at that stage.

19. We recommend as set out at the commencement of this report.