

STRATFORD-UPON-AVON TOWN COUNCIL

PERSONNEL COMMITTEE

19 October, 2020

Town Clerk's Open Report

1) Staffing Levels (Terms of Reference 4.1)

- **To note the report**

Following the retirement of one of the Open Spaces Operatives, a new recruit was sought with a slightly different skill set to the other operatives. Due to the Council's green credentials and its determination to combat the climate change emergency by concentrating on biodiversity, it was felt necessary that the new operative should have horticultural experience as well as ground maintenance and grave digging abilities.

The Council is committed to planting trees and community orchards as well as planting wild flower areas on under-utilised green space within the town. Questions relating to how Council can successfully take such plans forward were asked during the interview process.

The new recruit, who started on 1 September, has vast horticultural experience, having previously worked for many years as a gardener at the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust. He understands that as part of his role, he will be expected to attend any appropriate committee or sub-group meeting of the Town Council if his expertise would be beneficial to members.

2) Review of the Job Descriptions of Cemetery & Town Hall Booking Co-ordinator, and the Council's Chaplain (Terms of Reference 4.2)

- **To receive and approve existing Job Specifications**

2.1 Town Hall and Cemetery Co-ordinator

The job descriptions of the Council's employees are used as the basis for discussion at the annual appraisal, when each individual's job is considered; their performance and targets are

assessed and agreed in accordance with the responsibilities identified in their job description.

The Town Clerk and the Town Hall and Cemetery Co-ordinator considers her job description, attached as **Appendix 'A'**, remains fit for purpose as this employee is not a general committee clerk and consequently has a different contract of employment and is unaffected by the change in the committee structure. Her work remains constant and the job description is, therefore, recommended for approval without amendment.

2.2 Council's Chaplain

Former Mayor's Chaplain, Dr Rev Roy Lodge MBE, being well versed in the role, put forward the proposed job description for a new Council's Chaplain, which the HR Committee considered in October 2019 in readiness for the change from Mayor's to Council's Chaplain, which took place in May, 2020.

The job description is attached as **Appendix 'B'** and it is considered that it remains fit for purpose.

2.3 Open Spaces Foreman

- **To receive and approve existing Job Specifications**

The Town Clerk and the Foreman consider that his job description, attached as **Appendix 'C'** adequately details his role and responsibilities and is therefore recommended for approval without amendment.

2.4 Open Spaces Operatives

The Open Spaces Foreman and Operatives considered their job descriptions remained fit for purpose. These employees have not been affected by the change in the committee structure, and the job description, attached as **Appendix 'D'** is recommended for approval without amendment.

It is recommended that the job description for newest recruit is considered in confidential session.

3) Performance Management (Terms of Reference 4.10)

- **To note the report**

August and September are the months in which staff appraisals are usually conducted although it has been far harder to conduct meaningful appraisals virtually, especially when so much of our usual workload and work practices have, by necessity, had to change very quickly.

Mental health and the wellbeing of the Council's dedicated workforce became the Town Clerk's first priority. Additionally, the new staffing structure which was being proposed early in the year, which has since been adopted at Town Council on 29 September, meant that the job descriptions of some of the employees would need to change.

The Town Clerk has therefore not finally completed the round of appraisals as she will need to work closely with some members of staff whose committee remit has changed in order to determine new job descriptions and the targets that will need to be understood and agreed under a new regime of responsibilities.

However, in terms of staff commitment during this current civic year, the Town Clerk would like to place on record her thanks and admiration to the whole workforce who quickly came to terms with having to work from home and effectively provided the support for Council to continue to operate, deliver services and care for the community during this exceedingly difficult period, which appears very much to be ongoing for the foreseeable future.

Generally, moral is high across the whole team, but without exception, all the staff want to properly return to work from the Town Hall as soon as possible.

4) Remuneration (Terms of Reference 4.3)

- **To note the report.**

Last year, the HR Committee considered it prudent to recommend to the Finance & Scrutiny Committee to budget for a 3.5% salary

increase across the board for 2020, although it was felt more likely that a settlement would be reached below this figure.

The National Joint Council for Local Government Services (NJC) has now reached agreement with the Government and a salary increase of 2.75% was awarded to all Town Council employees and the honorarium personnel in their September pay cheques, backdated to 1 April, 2020.

This was very gratifying, as many felt that a pay increase would not be forthcoming in light of the current situation.

5) 2021/2022 Budget Requirement and Agree its Recommended Designated Reserve Requirement (Terms of Reference 3.3)

- **To determine and recommend budget and reserve requirement**

Within the terms of the new Personnel Committee, members are charged, at their October meeting, to agree its recommended budget and its designated reserve requirement and advise the Finance & Audit Committee accordingly.

This is a new term which has been included across the entire standing committee structure. As this is new, it is difficult to predict what the requirement will be, but the Committee should take account of retaining a robust training budget for the staff and members, as well as funding for the annual pay award which will be due in April, 2021. At this stage, there is no indication from the SLCC or NALC what the likely pay increase would be.

6) Issues Relating to the Wellbeing of the Staff

6.1 **To Manage the Town Hall as an Office and Workspace**
(Terms of Reference 4.16)

In light of the government guidance on working from home as far as possible, it is understood that the District Council has advised its staff and members that home working arrangements will remain in force until March 2021 and that unnecessary face to face contact should be avoided.

The Town Clerk advised the staff that they should all be aware that none of them were obligated to work from the Town Hall, particularly if it made them feel uncomfortable, even in the slightest. However, all the staff considered it necessary and important to keep the Town Hall open, although working from the Town Hall is strictly limited to a rota basis.

The front door remains locked and there is no general access to the building either by visitors, contractors and even members, unless an appointment has been pre-arranged. The Town Hall is open for pre-arranged appointments from 10:00am until 4:00pm. This allows the staff to avoid S-u-A's streets at peak times but in reality, most arrive by 9:00am. Contractual hours are observed either from the office and picked up again from home and vice-versa.

Everyone has agreed that they feel very safe within the Town Hall itself, as long as these arrangements remain in force. There should be no access to the Magistrate's Room other than by those whose workstation is within. That includes the Town and Deputy Clerks, the Housekeeper/Event Supervisor and the Cemetery Foreman. If it is necessary to enter the office (i.e. to gain access to the photocopier, in-trays, or to clean), the aforementioned must wear their masks or visors. The same applies to those who wish access to the Housekeeper and the Town and Deputy Clerk's offices.

Conversations can be conducted from the Council Chamber through the open door into the office, or for longer conversations, the staff involved can go into the Council Chamber for their meeting where it is incredibly easy to socially distance.

The staff working from the Magistrate's Room understandably prefer to work with their doors open, particularly as good ventilation is now paramount in combatting the virus. However, an open door is an invitation to just come in, which is unacceptable at present.

The staff have been advised that when they see a visitor at the door, they should ascertain who s/he wants to see before buzzing them in, alert the staff member concerned, and then shut the door

into the Magistrates Room. The officer can exit into the Council Chamber and meet the visitor there, or in the hallway.

The kitchen is limited to single occupancy only and is not available to hirers (which are now few and far between). Wet-wipes are used to sanitise the kettle (although the water boiler has now been mended), fridge door etc. before and after use, although hand washing remains the preferred and safer option. All members of staff are responsible for their own washing up and mugs etc. are wiped and put away.

The Mayor continues to use his Parlour as and when necessary. If he needs to use it again in less than 72 hours, the room is 'fogged' which is a quick and successful means of sanitising the whole room and the furniture therein. This method is also used in the offices and on hire equipment such as tables and chairs and has proven to be a vital piece of equipment, sanitising, for example, large quantities of chairs in minutes rather than taking hours to sanitise each one by hand.

Because there will be many occasions when the staff will be lone working, the staff will adopt the practice which the Town Clerk and the Mayor adopted when she was the sole worker in the Town Hall during the earlier lockdown. A code 'EHETB' was text to the Mayor when the Town Clerk arrived and 'EHLTB' when she left. It was a precautionary measure and similar 'buddy' arrangements have been made amongst the staff should they find themselves in a similar position.

The Town Hall has been hired for one or two occasions in October (OOTS and Music Festival concerts), and there is pressure from the organiser of the tea dance to return. The Council's Health & Safety advisor has been working with the event staff and hirers, in order to ensure that we and they adhere to the COVID-19 measures we have put in place to keep safe. Any chamber used for such hire will be fogged after use, and the offices and loos are fogged on a regular basis.

6.2 Maintenance & Refurbishment of the Town Hall (Terms of Reference 4.16/17)

The sub-group continues to monitor progress of the maintenance and refurbishment of the Town Hall project.

It has been agreed to bring forward the internal decoration of the Hall which is scheduled to commence during the first week of January, 2020. This was felt to be a time which will cause the least disruption and will be finished (six to eight weeks) in time for when the Town Hall diary usually picks up, although from the Prime Minister's statement in October, the restrictions are anticipated to remain in place well into the New Year.