

**MINUTES of the PERSONNEL COMMITTEE meeting held
ONLINE on Wednesday 17 March 2021 at 6pm**

PRESENT: Cllr M Jepson (Chairman)
Cllr K Williams (Vice-Chairman) Cllr S Harkin
Cllr N Barber Cllr D Savage

OFFICERS: Mr A Tadjrishi (Town Clerk)

526. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

There were none.

527. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

None.

528. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Member(s)	Minute No.	Nature of Interest
Cllr M Jepson	All	Local Non-Pecuniary (as a Member of East Suffolk Council)

As no Pecuniary declarations were made, there were no requests for dispensation.

529. CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES

It was RESOLVED that the Minutes of the Personnel Committee Meeting held on 7th October 2020 be signed by the Chairman as a true record.

530. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC (STAFFING MATTERS)

Committee agreed that, in accord with the Public Bodies (Admissions to Meetings) Act 1960 s.1 (2), due the confidential nature of the business which was to be transacted, it was advisable that the press and public be temporarily excluded.

It was RESOLVED that the Press and Public be excluded and instructed to withdraw.

531. STAFFING MATTERS

Committee considered a report on staffing matters.

Apprenticeships:

Committee reviewed draft job descriptions and person specifications for the Grounds Maintenance and Communications apprenticeship posts which had been approved by Council within the salaries structure and budget from April

2021/22. It was agreed that the educational apprenticeship schemes to support the posts – a Level 2 Horticulture and Landscape Operative and a Level 3 Business Administration - should be delivered under the direction of Suffolk College.

The Clerk advised that the courses typically run for 18-24 months and cost £5,000. However, the Town Council would only be required to make a 5% contribution fee for those aged 19+, which would be £250 per apprentice. This cost could be met from the 2021/22 training budget.

Some minor adjustments to the job descriptions and person specifications were agreed – noting that the starting wage would be £9.50 per hour, in accordance with the Town Council's registration as a Real Living Wage employer – and the Clerk was instructed to commence the recruitment process and advertise the vacancies.

Staff Shielding:

Committee noted the current situation in respect of a staff member who was shielding due to being clinically extremely vulnerable. Due to the nature of their work, the staff member was not able to work from home. Following a discussion, Members agreed that, subject to confirmation of meeting the eligibility criteria for the scheme, the Council may offer the staff member the option of being furloughed until 30 September 2021, or beyond, depending on the Government scheme continuing.

It was noted that the furlough scheme paid up to 80% of the usual staff salary, with the Council able to 'top up' this amount to enable the staff member to receive full pay during the furloughing period. *[Note: to 30 June 2021, employers can claim 80% of wages, capped at £2,500 each month. From 1 July 2021: the government will pay 70% of wages, capped at £2,187.50 each month. From 1 August to 30 September 2021: the government will pay 60% of wages, capped at £1,875 each month.]* If the arrangement was acceptable to the staff member, the Clerk would maintain regular contact with them throughout the period of furlough. Committee would be kept updated and review the circumstances at a future meeting as appropriate.

Staff Wellbeing:

Committee commented on the excellent work of all staff since the disruption caused by the pandemic in March 2020. Members discussed ways in which Town Hall staff may be supported on a potential return to work in accordance with the easing of lockdown restrictions at the appropriate time.

It was agreed that a letter of thanks be issued by the Mayor and Town Clerk to acknowledge the way in which the team had adapted, responded, and continued to maintain Council's services throughout the pandemic. Members asked that this also signpost staff to the various resources available to support their mental and physical wellbeing; how the Council will support time off for vaccinations and regular testing; and, welcome feedback from staff on how the Council might

further support their safety, health and wellbeing. Members commented that staff may also wish to speak to persons other than the Town Clerk on personal matters and Cllr D Savage agreed that staff would be welcome to contact her on a confidential basis.

The Clerk agreed that appropriate risk assessments and Covid-secure measures would be put in to place to support working on site, with ongoing arrangements introduced to enable staff to work flexible from home when practicable.

It was agreed that Cllr K Williams should support the Clerk in drafting updates to the Staff Handbook for formal consideration by Committee at the next meeting.

Staffing capacity:

Members discussed the increasing demands on the grounds team in the forthcoming months, plus the need to support the induction of an apprentice when appointed, and the challenge this posed to Council's capacity to maintain its sites to a continued high standard. It was agreed that an appropriately qualified gardener/groundskeeper should be sought to join the team on a full-time, fixed-term, 12-month contract, paid at £11.30 per hour in line with the starting salary scale point for the Grounds Maintenance Assistants.

The Clerk advised that there was currently no budget available to the Committee to commit the expenditure required. However, it was noted that the Clerk had delegated authority, in the event of an emergency to incur expenditure to a maximum of £50,000 in consultation with the Town Mayor (*Minute #8 of 2020/21 refers*).

Committee considered that the need to shore up the grounds team to be urgent and the Clerk and Mayor agreed to use the delegated authority to release funding to support the recruitment of a fixed-term post as soon as practicably possible. All Councillors would be advised of the action to be taken, which would be reported to the next full Council meeting to approve the ongoing cost from the Staffing Earmarked Reserve.

It was RESOLVED that, in accordance with the above:

- i. the recruitment process for a Communications Apprentice and Ground Maintenance Apprentice to commence, with the job descriptions and person specification for the roles updated as discussed;**
- ii. a member of staff be offered the option of being furloughed until 30 September 2021, subject to eligibility and in consultation with the Vice-Chairman, Cllr K Williams;**
- iii. a letter from the Mayor and Town Clerk be issued to all Council staff to thank them for their efforts over the past year and throughout the pandemic, signposting advice and support available to them;**

- iv. the Town Clerk, in consultation with the Vice-Chairman, Cllr K Williams, be delegated the authority to review the staff handbook policies, bringing these to the next meeting for formal consideration;
- v. an appropriately qualified gardener/groundskeeper should be sought to join the team on a fixed-term, 12-month contract, paid at £11.30 per hour; and,
- vi. due to the urgency of need, the funding to commence item 531(v) above would be made under the Clerk's delegated authority to incur emergency expenditure; all Councillors to be advised of the action to be taken, which was to be reported to the next full Council meeting to seek approval for the ongoing cost from the Staffing Earmarked Reserve.

532. CLOSURE

The meeting was closed at 19.44pm. The next meeting was noted as being scheduled for Wednesday 7 April 2021 at 6pm.

Date: _____

Chairman: _____