

CABINET

Filling of Vacant Posts in Financial Services 21 November 2008

Report of the Head of Financial Services

PURPOSE OF REPORT			
To seek approval to fill the posts of Exchequer Officer and Exchequer Assistant as soon as possible.			
Key Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>	Non-Key Decision	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Date Included in Forward Plan			
This report is public.			

RECOMMENDATIONS

That authorisation be given to fill the posts of Exchequer Officer and Exchequer Assistant within Financial Services.

1 Background / Proposal Details

- 1.1 The post of Exchequer Officer (Payroll) will become vacant on 12 December following the early retirement of the current post holder. Financial Services were in the process of recruiting to the post when the current vacancy clearance process came into force.
- 1.2 The recruitment exercise attracted 26 applications of which 6 have already been shortlisted and are currently awaiting an interview date.
- 1.3 This is a key post within the Service as its main task is to process all employees' pay, Members allowances and associated pension, tax and National Insurance payments.
- 1.4 The post of Exchequer Assistant is also vacant, following internal promotion of the previous postholder. Primarily this post ensures that income received is posted to the correct accounts in an accurate and timely manner. This in turn facilitates budget monitoring, managerial action, accounts preparation, and the submission of returns such as those for VAT. The post also provides some support to other exchequer functions, such as payments to the Council's suppliers.
- 1.5 As further background, Exchequer Services has undergone a mini restructure recently, and its aims included the following:

- to provide adequate cover arrangements for exchequer functions, to improve internal checks and controls
- to reduce reliance on external contractors.

Recruitment to these two posts is essential if these aims are to be met. The section is made up of only nine staff, covering a wide range of responsibilities. These include payroll, allowances and expenses reimbursement, residual car leasing and other non-pay benefits, purchase ordering and payments to suppliers, income management and sundry debtor management. There is currently no capacity anywhere else within the service to cover the work of these two posts. Prior to the recruitment freeze coming into force, the section was still reliant on using external contractors, pending becoming fully staffed – and this is still the case now.

- 1.6 Given these points, a decision is required regarding the two vacant posts as soon as possible using the urgent business procedure.

2 Details of Consultation

No consultation has been undertaken.

3 Options and Options Analysis (including risk assessment)

- 3.1 Option 1 – Do not allow either (or both) of the posts to be filled. This would result in the employment of contract staff on a long term basis to ensure statutory and regulatory requirements were met. This would be an additional cost in the region of £100 - £250 per week for which there is currently no budget beyond December. Councils have a legal duty to “make arrangements for the proper administration of their financial affairs...” The s151 Officer is of the view that these two posts are needed to meet this legal duty and therefore if approval is not given to recruit, external contractor cover would be essential; there would be no viable option to avoid this. Furthermore, if approval to recruit is not given, the s151 Officer would report to the Audit Committee in the first instance, as in her view such actions would undermine her abilities to meet her statutory responsibilities. It should be noted that such a view is not formed lightly.
- 3.2 Option 2 – Allow the posts to be filled. This would minimise the use of contract staff and ensure the Council does not incur unnecessary additional costs. It would, however, support the Council's duty to have proper financial administration arrangements in place.

4 Officer Preferred Option and Comments

Option 2 is the officer preferred option, for the reasons outlined above.

5 Conclusion

The filling of these two posts is essential if the Council is to meet its legal requirements regarding proper financial administration.

RELATIONSHIP TO POLICY FRAMEWORK

Primarily these posts contribute to the Council meeting its statutory responsibilities, and the corporate objective of delivering cost effective services that provide value for money.

CONCLUSION OF IMPACT ASSESSMENT

(including Diversity, Human Rights, Community Safety, Sustainability etc)
No other impact directly arising.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

As referred to in the report. Both posts are currently budgeted for and therefore recruitment to them is within the budget framework, although clearly no savings will be generated if the posts are filled. Should recruitment not be approved, then additional costs would be incurred over and above the approved budget, for essential contractor cover. These costs would be within the delegations available to Cabinet but such a way forward would not represent value for money.

SECTION 151 OFFICER'S COMMENTS

The s151 Officer has prepared this report, as it could have direct implications for her meeting her statutory responsibilities. She would highlight also that this report demonstrates some of the difficulties and inefficiencies in administering the current vacancy approval process.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

The legal requirements regarding financial administration are referred to in this report and Legal Services have no further observations.

MONITORING OFFICER'S COMMENTS

The Monitoring Officer has been consulted and has no comments.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

None.

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