

Officer Structure

Background

The Officer structure at Clipstone Parish Council, like many Councils, has pre-dominantly been focused around the Clerk, serving as both the Proper Officer and the Responsible Financial Officer. There have also been occasional periods when an Administrative Assistant has assisted with the functioning of the Parish Council office.

At a time when Parish Councils have growing responsibilities and with lines of communication to other agencies mounting, the response is often that the Clerk will absorb these tasks into their post or the number of hours worked by the Clerk is increased. However, this is against a general backdrop of people looking for a more flexible working arrangement and a shortage of Clerks.

Every now and again an opportunity presents itself to naturally review an arrangement and the Parish Council finds itself at this juncture.

Present

The Parish Council has been seeking a new Clerk for 24 to 30 hours per week and has undertaken a series of advertising campaigns. The response to the advertisements has been low with no applications from Clerks, which would on the face of it be the preference. In the meantime, a locum Clerk has been temporarily employed and a new Administrative Assistant started work at the end of October. These new recruits will help in keeping the Parish Council functioning.

To build more resilience into the organisation and to tap into a wider market of people looking for part-time and family friendly hours, the suggestion in the immediate term is for Council is to split the roles, by employing a Clerk as the Proper Officer and a separate Responsible Financial Officer. There would need to be an element of fluidity in the arrangement so that the Officers employed establish a strong working relationship in playing to one another's skills. In the immediate term, once the Officers are place, this arrangement would be facilitated by the locum Clerk but on a reduced hours basis depending on the experience of each Officer. It is anticipated that the new Administrative Assistant may apply for one of the roles should the Parish Council resolve to progress this suggestion.

To further increase operational performance and organisational resilience, the Council should also seek to create an apprenticeship Administrative Assistant position.

Cost

These changes would increase the budget but there is an element of swings and roundabouts at play. It is difficult to estimate cost impact at this current time, as it will in part be determined by circumstance. However, additional provision will be included in the budget to be considered by the Parish Council when setting its budget and precept in January. To guide the Parish Council's decision this evening in relation to these changes, the additional cost will be circa £10,000. It does not automatically follow that the precept will increase by the corresponding amount.

Recommendations

The Parish Council is asked to resolve the following:

- To split the role of the Clerk
- To advertise and recruit for a Clerk as the Proper Officer for circa 15 hours per week
- To advertise and recruit for a Responsible Financial Officer for circa 15 hours per week
- To seek advice so that the Clerk and Responsible Financial Officer roles are advertised within a salary range rather than a fixed spinal column point
- To investigate, advertise and recruit for an apprentice Administrative Assistant at a time yet to be determined following the recruitment of the Clerk and Responsible Financial Officer
- To agree the short-listing and interview panel for the Proper Officer and Responsible Financial Officer

Should the above recommendations be resolved the locum Clerk will contact the applicants who applied for the most recent Clerk vacancy to explain the Parish Council's decision and to invite applications when the new positions become available.