

APPOINTMENT OF CHIEF EXECUTIVE

Executive Summary

The Executive was advised at its meeting on 16 July, when it considered the LGA Peer Challenge, that the contract with the existing Chief Executive was due to expire on 31 March 2021 and that recruitment for a new Chief Executive would be undertaken in the autumn of 2020.

This report, which is an update of the report published on 29 December 2020, sets out the process that has been followed and recommends the appointment of Julie Fisher as the Council's new Chief Executive with effect from 1 April 2021.

The Council received the first version of this report at its meeting on 7 January 2021 but resolved to defer the appointment to give Members the opportunity to meet Julie Fisher. As announced by the Leader, at the Council Meeting, an all Member private meeting with Julie Fisher is scheduled for one hour from 6.00pm on Thursday 14 January; the Executive has been rescheduled to start at 7.30pm on the same evening.

The Council is scheduled to meet again at 7.00pm on Tuesday, 19 January to make the appointment in accordance with the agreed process. The meeting of the Licensing Committee has been rescheduled to start at 8.00pm on the same evening.

Recommendations

The Council is requested to:

RESOLVE That Julie Fisher be appointed as the Council's Chief Executive with effect from 1 April 2021.

The Council has the authority to determine the recommendation set out above.
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Background Papers: Confidential Recruitment Files.

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Appointment of Chief Executive

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 This report sets out the process followed leading to the recommendation to appoint a new Chief Executive to take office on 1 April 2021.
- 1.2 It recognises that the Council at its meeting on 7 January 2021 deferred the decision to enable Members of the Council to meet Julie Fisher in private before determining the matter.

2.0 Selection of Recruitment Consultant

- 2.1 A number of specialist recruitment companies were interviewed by the Leader and Deputy Leader of the Council. Tile Hill was appointed to undertake the recruitment of the Chief Executive and the Director of Planning.

3.0 Interview Process

- 3.1 An advertisement was placed and the position closed for applications on 22 November 2020. The Council received 21 applications. Applications were matched against the person specification and ten candidates were longlisted for technical interviews.

30 November 2020

- 3.2 Individual technical interviews were undertaken by Tile Hill, the executive search consultancy appointed by the Council. This interview examined career history, motivation, ambition, technical ability and knowledge.
- 3.3 Following this exercise six candidates were shortlisted for the final stages of the process as outlined below.

14 December 2020

- 3.4 Candidates were asked to complete a personality questionnaire to provide a rounded view of their preferred style in the workplace. This questionnaire measures personality across three broad domains: people and relationships, tasks and projects, and drives and emotions. The questionnaire was completed on-line and then discussed in a 75-minute telephone feedback session with a trained assessor. This session was aimed at validating the profile, to test the outputs, and gather input from the candidate into the report.
- 3.5 Candidates completed a 30 minute media exercise. The objectives of the exercise was to assess the candidate ability to:
 - handle off-the-cuff and difficult questions.
 - interpret the interviewer's questions and shape responses.
 - craft and present suitable key messages for the public.
- 3.6 The scenario covered the following topic. The Marketing Communications Team has been contacted by BBC News which has requested a live interview on today's lunchtime TV bulletin.

"In light of the recent Croydon Council financial crisis, including the departure of its Chief Executive, the BBC has shown an interest in Woking Borough Council's financial situation and the appointment of its new Chief Executive. The BBC's interest stems from an investigation conducted by the Bureau of Investigative Journalism which highlights Woking Borough Council's large and ongoing investment in commercial properties, all financed by the Public Works Loan Board."

Appointment of Chief Executive

“Another angle it is pursuing is: the outlook looks particularly bleak for councils that have invested in retail. The sector was already struggling before the lockdowns that led to the closure of all but essential shops. Despite government support schemes, a recent study suggests a prolonged lockdown could wipe out half of the market.”

17 December 2020

- 3.7 Candidates rotated around three panels.
- 3.8 Candidates spent 30/45 minutes with the Leader for an informal discussion. This was an opportunity for candidates to gain a greater insight of Woking from the Leader’s perspective and it was the first test of the future working relationship.
- 3.9 Candidates spent 45 minutes with four members of CMG. This did not include the current Chief Executive or Deputy Chief Executive. This took the form of an informal question and answer session.
- 3.10 Candidates spent 45 minutes with a cross-party group of Members. The aim of this discussion group was to enable Elected Members to explore how the candidates would work with Councillors specifically. It was an opportunity to briefly explore areas of interest and get to know the candidates in a more relaxed setting.

18 December 2020

- 3.11 Candidates were interviewed formally and were asked to give a 10 minute presentation on the following topic

“How would you prioritise the growth agenda in Woking and how would our commitment to tackling the climate emergency feature in this?”
- 3.12 At the conclusion of the interviews, the Panel removed one candidate and agreed to consider the other three over the weekend and resume on 21 December.

21 December 2020

- 3.13 The interview panel reconvened to determine which candidate to go forward. It concluded that it would reject one further candidate. The remaining two candidates were both considered to be well suited to being Chief Executive and therefore the Leader agreed to put both forward for an interview by the Appointment Panel with all Members of the Council prior to the Formal Council meeting on 7 January 2021.
- 3.14 Tile Hill advised the Appointment Panel of the various scenarios that could play out as a result of the unusual step of taking more than one candidate forward from extending its meeting firstly across the weekend and then to all members. These included the possibility that one or both candidates could decide to exit the process. In particular, it was noted that both candidates could ask for – and would in that event receive – a summary of the panel’s discussions.
- 3.15 Tile Hill issued the invitation to both remaining candidates. Both candidates requested further information and a summary of the Appointment Panel’s discussions. Both received this information from Tile Hill. Tile Hill advice is that this is a normal part of their role during Executive recruitment, when significant career decisions are being made and openness with candidates is paramount.

29 December 2020

- 3.16 Tile Hill confirmed that one of the remaining two candidates had withdrawn.

Appointment of Chief Executive

3.17 Therefore, in accordance with the Appointment Panel procedure, the remaining candidate is being recommended directly to Council.

4.0 Council 7 January 2021

4.1 The Council received the earlier version of this report but recognised that any Members had not had an opportunity to engage in the process and because of Covid had not had the opportunity to meet Julie over the last year.

4.2 Accordingly, a private informal session has been schedule for one hour before the Executive due on 14 January 2021. The session will start at 6.00pm, include a presentation form Julie Fisher and an opportunity for Members to ask questions.

4.3 The Council will meet formally, in public, at 7.00pm on Tuesday 19 January 2021 to determine the appointment.

5.0 Implications

Financial

5.1 The approved establishment of the Council provides the necessary resources for the appointment of the Chief Executive.

Human Resource/Training and Development

5.2 The approved establishment of the Council provides for the post of Chief Executive.

Community Safety

5.3 There are no community safety issues raised by this report.

Risk Management

5.4 There are no risk management issues raised by this report.

Sustainability

5.5 The sustainability of the Council's business will be supported by a smooth transition in the appointment of a new Chief Executive.

Equalities

5.6 There are no equality issues raised by this report.

Safeguarding

5.7 There are no safeguarding issues raised by this report.

6.0 Conclusions

6.1 The recruitment process went well and the Council received a strong list of candidates with the successful candidate, Julie Fisher, having the required qualities for the post of Chief Executive.

REPORT ENDS