

Guidance Notes on Recruitment – Interview Skills

In a series of brief guidance notes, over the coming months we will take Councils through the processes of recruiting, inducting and appraising staff, as well as providing guidance notes to producing Contracts of Employment that are suitable for the individual needs and requirements of your Council

The latest instalment in this series concerns arranging and conducting interviews:

Shortlisting for Interviews

The starting point for any short listing exercise has to be the Person Specification. This provides a profile of what Education/Qualifications, Work Experience, Skills, Knowledge and other qualities are required for potential recruits.

In some cases it may be appropriate for the whole Council to be involved in the short listing exercise; however in most cases it would be appropriate for the Council to appoint an Interview Panel of 3-4 Members. This will help to keep the recruitment process focussed and efficient, and avoid having “too many Chefs”.

The first task faced by the Panel is to design a Selection Criteria based on the Person Specification. In deciding what criteria are important to the Council, Members also need to consider what type of person they want to fill the vacancy. For example if the position being filled is the Clerks post:

- Qualifications; does the Council need someone with the Certificate in Local Council Administration? If finance management is important to the post, does the recruit require an Accountancy qualification such as AAT?
- Past Work Experience. Is local government experience essential, or does the Council feel that it needs someone with a commercial background? Does the Council have specific features such as a large Community Centre or sports facility, and if so does it need to be managed by someone from a similar background and who has good customer care skills, and can manage a large workforce?
- Knowledge of the Post/Parish/Town. Does the Council need someone who is passionate about the Parish and its community, and can demonstrate that? Alternatively is it looking for someone who isn't tainted by local politics?

Once the Panel have a clear idea of the type of individual they are looking for a score can be allocated to each Criteria on the Person Specification. The completed application forms can then be assessed against these criteria. The Applications with the highest score are obviously those that would be invited for an interview.

The Panel also needs to decide how many Interviewees it wishes to see. Bear in mind that too many interviews can be very time consuming and overwhelming. However there is also a risk of having no one to interview if the small number of people who have been invited decide to drop out.

Interviews

Who does the interviews? For junior posts such as Grounds Operative or Litter Picker, the Clerk would probably conduct interviews.

For senior positions, such as Clerk, the Council would be responsible for this process. However as detailed above, it may be more practical and effective for the Council to select an interview panel of possibly three or five Members. A decision also needs to be made as to what decision making responsibility does the panel have? Can they make the appointment or do they need to refer back to Full Council for a final decision? It would be wise for a Council to have a formal resolution on these questions, to ensure that the process is not open to criticism.

Selecting who goes onto the panel can also be problematic if there are differences of opinion within the Council. Members should try to select interview panellists who are considered to be impartial, as well as professional and may have previous experience of doing interviews.

Interview Checklist

- Select a time that is within the normal working hours for the post.
- Make sure that the venue is free from interruptions, confidential and accessible for people with mobility problems.
- Use a venue that candidates can find, and is not at the end of a maze of corridors.
- Ensure that the venue is comfortable in terms of heat and light.
- If a small Council is struggling to find a suitable venue think about asking District or County if they have an interview room that can be used.

Questions

These need to be consistent for all Candidates and non-discriminatory. Ideal subject areas can include:

- What do they know about the Parish/Town and the Council?
- Education and Qualifications, do they have them, are they willing to train, what their experience of training is. What do they think their training needs are?
- What qualities can they bring from their previous jobs?
- What challenges have they faced in previous jobs?
- What skills do they have other than education/qualifications and work experience?
- Are they willing to take part in training, and achieve qualifications such as CiLCA or AAT?
- How do they see themselves in the role and what challenges would they face?
- What is their interest in the community?

As with the application form, these questions can be allocated a potential score, such as points out of 10 for each question. The Candidates can be allocated a score based on their answers and the scores totalled for each person. Ideally the highest scorer would be appointed. At the bottom of these notes we have provided a draft outline of an interview question and marking sheet, which can be adapted to meet the needs on an individual Council.

The Council should keep details of unsuccessful Candidates, including their interview sheets for up to three months to defend any claims of discrimination.

After three months sensitive personal data can be destroyed to ensure compliance with Data Protection legislation.

All candidates need to be informed of how their data will be managed during the recruitment process, as well as their right of access and erasure.

We are able to provide blank templates for:

- Job adverts
- Appointment letters
- Letters to unsuccessful candidates.

Please send your request for any of the above via the email address given below.

p.d.solutions@zen.co.uk

PROFILE

Chris Moses LLM Chartered FCIPD is Managing Director of Personnel Advice & Solutions Ltd. He is a Chartered Fellow of the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, and has a Master's Degree in Employment Law. If you have any questions regarding these issues please feel free to contact him on (01529) 305056 or email p.d.solutions@zen.co.uk
www.personneladviceandsolutions.co.uk

Interview Pro Forma and Marking Sheet

Opening Question:

What do you know about the Council?

What do you know about the job and why do you think you can do it?

Education:

What training or qualifications have you received to do this type of work?

Do you have any formal qualifications, or alternatively have you received any 'on the job' coaching and guidance from previous employers? If so, please give details.

Previous Work:

Where have you worked in the past, and how relevant is that to being able to do this job?

What have you enjoyed most in any of your previous jobs?

What do you think you will enjoy the least about the type of work you have applied to do?

Skills:

1. What do you think are the important skills needed to do this job?
2. What do you think you can offer to our other workers who you would be working with?
3. What do you think is your most impressive ability which would enable you to do this job?

Personal Qualities:

We need staff who can be flexible in their working hours, how do you feel about that?

Just to be completely clear, are you prepared to be flexible regarding both your working hours, and the jobs you would be asked to do here?

Would you be happy to work overtime and weekends if called upon at short notice?

What difficulties do you think you might have in doing this job?

Interviewer's Marking Sheet

Please mark the candidate's responses to the interview questions on the grid below. Scores are allocated between 0 and 5, with 0 being the lowest score and 5 the highest.

1 Opening Question

0	1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---	---

Score given for the following reasons –
(Please state what evidence or response was given that made you chose the score given).

2 Education

0	1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---	---

Score given for the following reasons –
(Please state what evidence or response was given that made you chose the score given).

3 Previous Work

0	1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---	---

Score given for the following reasons –
(Please state what evidence or response was given that made you chose the score given).

4 Skills

0	1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---	---

Score given for the following reasons –
(Please state what evidence or response was given that made you chose the score given).

5 Personal Qualities

0	1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---	---

Score given for the following reasons –
(Please state what evidence or response was given that made you chose the score given).

Final Question

0	1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---	---

Score given for the following reasons –
(Please state what evidence or response was given that made you chose the score given).

