

Section 151 Officer Arrangements

Executive Portfolio Holder: Cllr Peter Seib, Finance and Legal Services
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Purpose of the Report

The purpose of this report is to seek approval for the Council's arrangements for a Section 151 Officer/Chief Finance Officer going forward.

Public Interest

There is a legal requirement on the Council to designate three "Statutory Officers". These are the Head of Paid Service (Chief Executive), the Monitoring Officer (Director Support Services) and the Section 151 Officer/ Chief Finance Officer. The Section 151 Officer is responsible for the proper administration of the Council's financial affairs and is required by law to be a suitably qualified individual holding a recognised professional accountancy qualification.

Recommendations

- (1) That Council agrees that Paul Fitzgerald will be this Council's designated Section 151 Officer initially for a period of up to 6 months from 21st April 2017.
- (2) That it be noted that the Finance Manager, Catherine Hood, has already been nominated as Deputy Section 151 Officer and Deputy Chief Finance Officer authorised to act in the absence of the Section 151 Officer and it has been agreed that the shared Section 151 Officer would continue with this arrangement/endorse that nomination.

Background

- 1.1 As members will recall at their meeting held on 13th October 2016 they agreed a senior leadership restructure. This removed the Assistant Director roles and as a result, all existing Assistant Directors were put at risk of redundancy. They were invited to consider making an application for one of the new senior roles or apply for Voluntary Redundancy. The Section 151 Officer is a role that often sits within a wider remit. In SSDC's case, the existing Section 151 Officer, Donna Parham, was Assistant Director for Finance and Corporate Services, a role that no longer exists in the new structure. Donna did not secure a new role and made an application for redundancy and this was accepted by the Chief Executive. As members will be aware Donna has now left the employ of this Council.
- 1.2 In accordance with the Local Government Act 1972, there is a statutory requirement on the authority to designate three statutory officers; Head of Paid Service (Chief Executive), Monitoring Officer and Section 151 Officer/ Chief Finance Officer, who is required to be a suitably qualified individual, holding a recognised professional accountancy qualification.
- 1.3 Until longer-term arrangements can be made in relation to this important role, it was decided that in the interim to investigate the option of sharing a Section 151 Officer with another local authority. We have had detailed discussions with Taunton Deane Borough Council and West Somerset District Council and have reached agreement with them to share their Sections 151 Officer, Paul Fitzgerald, subject to council approval. He meets

the requirement to be “a suitably qualified individual”.

1.4 In broad terms Paul will be on site 2 days a week to cover the core s151 functions that include:-

- Support to decision making Member meetings (District Executive and Full Council).
- Support to the Senior Leadership Team Meetings as and when required. The Section 151 Officer will be entitled to attend all SLT meetings.
- Support to Audit Committee when required (approval of accounts, plus review of effectiveness of IA and AGS).
- Drive the MTFs within the Council and develop arrangements for 2018/19 budget setting.
- Sign-off of 16/17 Statement of Accounts and liaison with the External Auditors.
- Support to “commercialism” work – including business case sign-off and advice on strategy (treasury/capital approaches)

1.5 The preference will be for Paul to attend our offices for full days as this will make the best use of his time and occasionally he will need to be on site for more than the 2 days a week as the need requires. The cost for the provision of this service will be approximately £475 per day which means the overall cost for a 6 month term would be no more than £25,000. This cost can be met from existing budgets. The service being provided to SSDC will be kept under review to ensure that the proper administration of the Council’s financial affairs continues to be delivered under this new arrangement. Any changes that are required will be made to ensure this remains the case. In order to fully cover the work undertaken by the previous post holder, other officers in the Finance Team have kindly agreed to take on additional responsibilities.

1.6 As mentioned elsewhere in this report the designation of a Section 151 and Chief Finance Officer is a statutory requirement. The proposed arrangement ensures the Council will be complying with legislation. Although the person appointed is classed as an officer of the Council that does not mean it has to be an employee of that Council. It is this distinction which provides the opportunity for sharing the role with another authority.

Council Plan Implications

None associated with this report

Equality and Diversity Implications

None associated with this report

Privacy Impact Assessment

None associated with this report

Background Papers

None associated with this report