

COUNCIL

Section 151 Officer Arrangements

22 February 2010

Report of Chief Executive

PURPOSE OF REPORT

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

This report is public

Recommendations

- (1) Confirm that the Council is happy to pursue the principle of a shared Section 151 Officer and Chief Finance Officer with another local authority.
- (2) Delegate to the Chief Executive and the Leader of Council authority to negotiate and conclude an arrangement for sharing a Section 151 Officer and Chief Finance Officer with South Northamptonshire District Council and confirm that if such arrangements are successfully concluded that the shared officer will be this Council's designated Section 151 Officer until end 28th February 2011.
- (3) That Phillip O'Dell continue as the Council's Section 151 and Chief Finance Officer after 31st March 2010 until such time as alternative arrangements are approved.
- (4) That it be noted that Phillip O'Dell has nominated the Head of Finance, Karen Curtin, as Deputy Section 151 Officer and Deputy Chief Finance Officer authorised to act in his absence and it is anticipated that a shared 151 Officer would do the same.

Executive Summary

Introduction

- 1.1 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 CCAB recognised professional accountancy qualification.

- 1.2 In October 2009 following the departure of the Strategic Director, Customer Service and Resources, Phillip O'Dell was appointed as Section 151 Officer from 26th October 2009 to 31st March 2010. The Head of Finance is actively studying to gain the required CCAB qualification that is required for the position of 151 Officer. It is expected that she will complete her final exams in August 2010 and be qualified by October 2010.
- 1.3 In October Council agreed to consider the option of sharing a 151 Officer with another local authority after 31st March, up until the time that the Head of Finance gains her qualification. We have had detailed discussions with South Northamptonshire Council and are confident that we will be able to reach agreement with them to share their 151 Officer. However, in terms of the financial cycle, it makes most sense for the shared interim Section 151 Officer to hand on the role to the Head of Finance at the end of the budget-setting cycle for 2011/12 and therefore at the end of February.

Proposals

- 1.4 Subject to the successful conclusion of current discussions to share our 151 Officer with South Northamptonshire Council from 1st April 2010 to 28th February 2011.
- 1.5 To continue with Phillip O'Dell as a suitably qualified and experienced finance interim and designate him Section 151 Officer from 1st April (if required) until our arrangement with South Northamptonshire comes into effect.

Conclusion

- 1.6 From 1st April the Council should engage the 151 Officer at South Northamptonshire Council as this Council's 151 Officer and Chief Financial Officer.
- 1.7 If discussions cannot be successfully concluded by this date, the Council should re-engage Phillip O'Dell CIPFA, to act as the Council's Section 151 Officer and Chief Financial Officer.

Key Issues for Consideration/Reasons for Decision and Options

3.1 The designation of a Section 151 and Chief Finance Officer is a statutory requirement.

The following options have been identified. The approach in the recommendations is believed to be the best way forward

Option One Appoint an interim Section 151 Officer, shared with South Northamptonshire Council.

Option Two Continue with an the current interim Section 151 Officer arrangements.

Implications

Financial: The costs of sharing an interim section 151 officer with South Northamptonshire can be contained well within the costs of our current interim arrangements.

Comments checked by Karen Muir, Corporate System Accountant, 01295 221559. *[to be checked]*

Legal: The Council is required to have a designated section 151 officer under the Local Government Act 1972 who must be "suitably qualified". The proposed arrangements ensure the Council is complying with legislation.

Comments checked by Liz Howlett, Head of Legal and Democratic Services and Council Monitoring Officer, 01295 221688

Risk Management: The designation of a Section 151 and Chief Finance Officer is a statutory requirement.

Comments checked by Karen Muir, Corporate System Accountant, 01295 221559.

Wards Affected

All

Document Information

Appendix No	Title
Background Papers	

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