

Summary

This report informs Councillors of the difficulty in filling a vacancy in the Grounds Team and sets out a proposal trial (for one season in the first instance) of increasing the hours of the three current posts in order to achieve all necessary work between April and October.

1 Background

Until September 2020 the structure of the Grounds Team consisted of four FTE (full time equivalent) employees in three roles. The team was led by The Grounds Manager, a Deputy Head Groundsman and two Grounds and Maintenance Operatives. Following the departure of the Grounds Manager in September 2020, the team operated with the three remaining team members reporting directly to the Clerk with the Deputy Head Groundsman taking supervisory responsibility.

On the appointment of the Deputy Clerk in January 2021, line management responsibility of the Grounds Team moved under this post. The Deputy Clerk carried out a review of the tasks and time taken to complete all tasks around maintaining the open spaces within the Parish boundaries. This was carried out involving the team. This review was presented to the Full Council meeting in July 2021 as part of a proposal to increase the headcount in the team to three FTE from October 2021 when a temporary seasonal resource from Blue Sky ended. This proposal was accepted.

In November 2021, following a successful recruitment campaign the parish council increased the number of the team to four and in the process brought some gender diversity into the team. Regrettably, in January 2022 the additional individual resigned.

The vacant post has been advertised for the last six weeks and no suitable candidates have applied.

2 Current Team

The team is currently resourced by a committed, engaged and motivated team of three FTE who have all been employees for over five years. They have recognised the change in management style and general ways of working across the Council in the past 18 months.

Our team all have some kind of caring responsibilities outside of the workplace and the Parish Council through officers takes its duty of care responsibility to our employees and their families very seriously and this is recognised by this team particularly in the past four months.

Also, the team, like all of us, are feeling the effects of the current economic situation and high inflation. During Summer 2021 the Clerk and the Deputy Clerk did a local benchmarking exercise which resulted in the agreement of a salary increase for the team in August 2021 and at that time the salaries offered by the parish council were comparable with the marketplace

3 Grounds Team Resourcing Proposal

The review of tasks and time to complete them which justified four FTE's in the team was carried out and presented to Full council meeting in July 2021.

The exercise revealed at that time that the hours needed added up to 131 hours and four members of the team at FTE justified four FTE's. In addition, since that exercise an additional eight hours worth of tasks were added. Therefore currently we require workforce hours of 139 hours particularly in the summer where the amount of work required to keep grass and foliage under control is required.

Proposal

Having consulted informally with the team, and using their ideas, the Deputy Clerk presents the following proposal:

The Parish Council continues to employ three FTE's in the Grounds team. This totals 111 hours per week. In order to make up the shortfall in hours we offer 28 hours a week overtime at single time to the team (average of just over nine hours per team members) during the months of March to October (eight months – approx. 37 weeks of the year) with the winter (November – February) being at normal contracted hours where the workload is lighter, holidays, servicing and training takes place and the daylight hours are shorter.

This would mean on average the Grounds team hours of work a week for the summer months are approximately 47 hours, below the Working Hours Directive threshold of 48 hours.

All overtime will need to be agreed in advance with the Deputy Clerk otherwise it won't be paid. The Deputy Head Groundsman will also be involved in this process.

From informal consultation, the team are fully supportive of this and very willing through the summer months to do these additional hours on an overtime basis. Along with this, they are very willing to work over the weekend, Saturday in particular. The advantages of this is that it provides additional cover for the Caretaker to cover weekend play area inspections for planned or unplanned absence and also gives a good perception to the community that we are covering weekend's during the Summer months.

During summer 2021, with agreement of the team and the Clerk, the team changed their working hours to 6.30am – 2.30pm (M-T) and 6.30am – 2.00pm (F). This enabled the team to work in daylight hours during the morning where in extreme weather meant we got good productivity before the very hot midday sun. This fulfilled our duty of care towards the team. For the team it meant they were travelling to and from work outside of 'rush hour'.

This year we have adopted the same principle and from the start of March this year the team have done this successfully.

A further proposal concerning working hours is to introduce a flexible working approach as worked by the officers. This facilitates the opportunity to provide a flexible approach where caring responsibilities are needed.

This proposal suggests the normal core hours of work are 8am to 1pm daily. As with the office staff, the hours will be managed by way of a timesheet which will also double up as a means of maintaining and paying the overtime.

Further Considerations

Overtime / Holiday entitlement

There is a need to seek clarification from Worknest around overtime and holiday entitlement. There are three types of overtime:

- Voluntary: Where you're not obliged to offer any and an employee doesn't have to accept.
- Compulsory: It's required you offer your staff members and they have to accept it.
- Non-guaranteed: This is where you aren't obliged to offer overtime, but an employee must accept it when you do.

The Deputy Clerk will liaise with our Worknest advisor to ensure we determine the right category we are employing under and that we fully meet obligations. However, the additional holiday required across a holiday year will be less than the 21 days that we would incur from employing an FTE giving rise a slight increase in productivity.

Staff Consultation

It will be necessary to hold meaningful consultation to cover these changes including a change to terms and conditions if agreement is made to this proposal. The Deputy Clerk will work with Worknest to ensure our consultation process is correct.

Implementation

If agreed, implementation needs to happen as soon as possible to start covering the summer months. From this, a review of these arrangements should take place post October 2022.

Workforce Budget Implications

Employing three FTE's and offering overtime for eight months (34 weeks) of the year will give an approximate saving of between £7k-£9k pa.

Employee Wellbeing

It will be imperative that the Parish Council exercises its duty of care towards our employees and that adherence to time limits on use of tools is very strict. The Deputy Head Groundsman will assume responsibility for this alongside the Deputy Clerk. As important is making sure during the extreme hot weather their welfare is a priority. It is also vital that the Deputy Clerk continues to monitor the wellbeing of the team of the strong improvements the team has identified since the start of 2021.

4 Conclusions

The way people work has changed in the last ten years and significantly in the past two years during the pandemic. A flexible approach to working is becoming more common and improves productivity.

More and more employees are becoming carers either for elderly relatives or young families and in some cases both. We have examples of this in our team. Having a degree of flexibility takes some pressure off and maintains employee engagement and also commitment. It can also prevent last minute un-planned absence.

With the economic crisis worsening, employees generally are considering whether to move on from current roles for more money, benefits and flexibility. Many are considering part time / additional work which could have an impact on the productive and commitment they give to their main employer. Our workforce have indicated they are fully committed to the Parish Council and continue to be a loyal, long serving workforce with developed skills and knowledge of what they are doing gained by over five years' service with us and wish to continue doing so.

Offering a flexible working pattern harmonises ways of working across the whole Parish Council workforce and creates a more enhanced 'one team' approach. There has been a feeling of 'them and us' in the past but the Deputy Clerk has worked hard on this over the past 15 months.

The team have discussed this with Deputy Clerk in a very constructive manner and have been open and honest in their views particularly concerning workload. This proposal has been pulled together based on their ideas. Therefore, consulting on this will be a reasonably short exercise but should be meaningful.

This will have a very positive impact on their engagement and commitment to the Parish Council.

Jeremy Day
Deputy Clerk
April 2022