

Rutland County Council – Chief Executive Appointment – May 2020

1. Introduction

1.1 The purpose of this note is to provide an overview of the approach to the appointment of the Chief Executive, to summarise the current position and factors, and to provide a recommendation as to how the appointment may be successfully concluded in the current circumstances.

2. Approach to the Appointment

2.1 Berwick Partners, part of Odgers Berndtson, are supporting Rutland County Council with the recruitment of a successor chief executive to Helen Briggs. It is clearly recognised that the role of Chief Executive of Rutland County Council is unique, and a robust process was designed to attract, assess and secure high calibre individuals.

2.2 A search-led approach, underpinned by advertising, generated a response of 37 applications. The quantity and quality of the field was judged to be in line with expectations and comparable with other CEO appointments nationally. This response comprised existing and aspirant chief executives representing all tiers of Local Government, candidates from the wider public and commercial sectors and some internationally based individuals.

2.3 A longlist of six candidates was agreed, one subsequently withdrew since they decided that they were unable to relocate to Rutland, and five candidates were interviewed in Oakham in March.

2.4 The interview panel was made up of Rutland County Council's Leader and Deputy Leader, Jonathan Clark – a partner from Berwick Partners and Tony McArdle, the former Chief Executive of Lincolnshire County Council (and previously Wellingborough Borough Council). Jonathan Clark has advised local authorities and other public sector organisations across the United Kingdom with chief executive and director appointments since 2005. Tony McArdle is an experienced Chief Executive, is currently one of the Commissioners in Northamptonshire and an advisor to Government, leading the SEND review work.

3. Summary of Current Position

3.1 Following the longlist interviews in Oakham in March, three candidates were judged to have achieved the quality threshold and satisfied the Panel as to their technical and functional competence to discharge the role of chief executive effectively. They were all judged to be of equal standing.

3.2 With the restrictions now in force due to Covid-19 there is no prospect of completing the robust assessment phases of the process in the current circumstances. This was to have included a suite of assessments involving external partners and stakeholders, Elected Members and psychometric assessment. Despite some relaxation of the initial restrictions on movement and social distancing, it will be some months before there is any real prospect of assembling panels in the

manner originally envisaged.

4. Additional Factors

4.1 One of the constraints which has become increasingly evident is the reluctance on the part of candidates to relocate or undertake an extended commute in the current climate. We are seeing this across the market and whilst uncertainty in the housing market continues there is no indication that this will change in the medium term.

4.2 The remuneration available for this role has had a bearing on the response. As noted during the engagement throughout the search, several prospective candidates were already earning in excess of the salary here. We reported on single-district council chief executives earning above £140k and chief executives shared across two districts above £160k. More recently, we saw the Test Valley District Council Chief Executive role advertised at £126k. We know that the two new unitary chief executive roles in Northamptonshire are likely to attract salaries of between £150k and £175k. Whilst remuneration is not the only factor, it has shaped the available candidate field and a significant increase would be required to address a different level in the market.

4.3 The unique nature of Rutland and its scale has meant, for some, a lack of coherence in career path. Prospective candidates in larger organisations appear less likely to consider a move to lead a smaller organisation if they then want to revert to a larger one. This has been a shaping factor to the shortlist that we have.

4.4 Other courses of action were considered:

4.4.1 The appointment of an interim Chief Executive – there are two specific issues which compromise this as a feasible option:

- costs of an estimated daily rate of £1,000+ expenses would create a budget pressure for the Council,
- the potential disruption to the current senior management team
- a further time delay since in order to put in place an appropriate process and as already highlighted in para 3.2, and undertaking a robust and engaging process would be challenging

4.4.2 Ending the process and going back out to market – as para 4.2 this would require ‘something different’ added to the offer in order to engage and attract a different range of candidates. Furthermore, issues of timing and process are still prevalent but even more extended.

5. Recommended Course of Action

5.1 In the interests of expediency and continuity, RCC should consider that one of the shortlisted candidates, Mark Andrews be appointed to the Chief Executive role – initially on an acting basis for an agreed period of time subject to regular reviews. Berwick Partners will continue to support throughout this period to assist a successful transition.

Jonathan Clark
May 2020