

### **INTERVIEWING CANDIDATES**

Preparation is the key to successful interviewing. This ranges from basic requirements such as making sure you have booked time in your diary reasonably near to the closing date of your advertisement, to ensure that all members of the interview panel have been properly trained in interview and selection techniques, in accordance with the policy of the County Council.

It is Council policy that at least the chair of the panel has received Recruitment & Selection training. Please contact the Learning and Development team on 01267 246085 to find out more details of training in this area.

You and the other panel members should already have decided on a date for interviews, and stated this in the advertisement. When deciding how long an interview should be, it is often tempting to think it can be done in 20 minutes. It can't. Even the most junior of jobs in an organisation are important and need the right person doing them. Selecting the right person for your vacancy takes time. Some candidates talk more readily than others; some will ask more questions.

So when planning interviews, make sure you allow time for the interview itself; assessment of each of the candidates; some leeway if you overrun your planned schedule and time for you and the rest of the panel to have breaks. Interviewing can be tiring and it is important that you stay alert and listen carefully all the time. Having short breaks for coffee etc. after every two or three candidates is therefore sensible, and needs to be built into your interview timetable.

If you find you have time to spare in between interviews, use it constructively by completing your interview assessment forms, by reflecting on how things are going - or by resting.

Given below is a basic checklist to help with interview preparation.

#### **Dates and Times of Interviews**

- (a) Make sure you give interview candidates as much notice as possible of the date and time of interviews, and how long the interview process is likely to take (e.g. 1 hour; half a day, etc.) The Code of Practice stipulates candidates should be given not less than 10 working days notice.
- (b) Indicate clearly in your letter to candidates where the interviews will take place; where candidates should report to/whom they should ask for on arrival; whether there will be any assessments as well as the interview e.g. presentation, tests etc. Make sure you allow a reasonable amount of time for all parties to ask questions. Consider if the applicant has any need for reasonable adjustments e.g. if the applicant has dyslexia, they may require more time for assessment testing. Remember interviews are a two way process and the candidate has a right to an opportunity to ask questions.

## Shortlist Guidance

Give consideration to any special needs an interview candidate may have. For example, a candidate with a physical disability may not easily be able to reach the office where you plan to hold the interviews. Similarly, a disabled candidate (perhaps who is blind or deaf) may wish to be accompanied by a friend or interpreter, and you should indicate that this is perfectly acceptable. It may well be more appropriate to contact a blind or partially sighted candidate by telephone than by letter. For guidance on the suitability of venues please refer to corporate property's meeting room accommodation guidance. This is available on the [Intranet](#), or from Access Officer Andrew Russ.

The following are the types of questions you may like to ask yourself:

- Is the venue wheelchair accessible?
- Are translation facilities available?
- Do you need a loop system?
- Do you need an interpreter for people who are deaf?

*For further advice please contact your HR representative*

- (d) Make sure you have re-directed your telephone calls so that you are not interrupted whilst interviewing. The same thing applies to making sure you are not disturbed by visitors to your office. A notice on your door "Interviews in Progress" may seem obvious but is usually effective!

### 2. **Before the Interview**

- (a) Meet with the other panel members sometime before the interview to agree the format and style of the interview, and decide who is going to ask which questions.
- (b) It is essential to have a pre-agreed list of questions to ensure you ask all candidates the same basic 'core' questions. Clearly it will be necessary to ask some candidates to elaborate on their answers so it is inevitable that different supplementary questions will be asked of candidates.
- (c) It is a good idea to read through the job description, person specification and advertisement again to remind yourself of the specific requirements of the job, as well as the working hours and salary level. If your Departmental Human Resource Officer/Support Services Staff is not assisting you with the interviews, make sure you feel confident about any questions regarding Conditions of Service etc. you may be asked. In the event of you being asked a question to which you, as the interviewer, do not know the answer, say you do not know, but that you will find out. Giving wrong information about a matter relating to Conditions of Service may cause contractual difficulties later if the candidate becomes an employee believing he/she is entitled to a benefit, which is then not able to be granted (e.g. saying they will be offered essential user car allowance, when only casual user allowance applies to the post).
- (d) Decide how soon after the interviews you are going to let candidates know the outcome. The successful candidate should be informed as soon as possible. If a decision is likely to be delayed candidates must be advised accordingly.

### 3. Conduct of Interviews

Few of us like being interviewed and most of us are usually nervous to some degree. To help candidates settle into an interview, first help them feel at ease by:-

- Introducing yourself and other panel members, saying briefly the name, job title and reason for them being on the panel.
- Invite the candidate to make him/herself comfortable, for example, where appropriate, by inviting him/her to remove his/her jacket.
- Explain the plan for the interview; e.g. "We have allowed an hour for your interview. We will start by asking you some questions about your present (most recent) job and then we will move on to some questions relating to our vacancy. At the end of the interview there will be an opportunity for you to ask any questions you may have".
- Try to be relaxed yourself! Conducting interviews can seem stressful - it is after all, a very responsible task and should be undertaken thoroughly and properly.
- Discretely take some notes, as this will help you recall a candidate's answers to a particular question later so that you can fill the interview assessment sheet after the interview. Note taking can be distracting for the candidates, so explain the reason for this activity before the interview commences.
- At the end of your questions, make sure you allow the candidate the opportunity to ask questions as necessary, or to add anything else to what he/she has already said. It is possible you have overlooked something in your questions and this gives the candidate the chance to give you additional information, which may help you in your final selection.

### 4. After the Interview

The Chair of the panel should be responsible for collecting all copies of the application forms, assessment forms etc. and passing these to your Human Resource Officer. It is good practice that all interview papers are retained by HR Officers for a period of at least six months in case any candidate complains of unfair discrimination. A candidate must make a complaint within three months of being advised he/she was not selected for interview or not offered the post. However, a tribunal can extend the three-month period in particular circumstances at its discretion.

**Before** giving any indication to the successful candidate that he/she is to be offered the post, please speak to your Human Resource Officer to ensure everything is in order for the appointment to be made.

If a job applicant complains to an employment tribunal either because he/she was not invited to interview or was not appointed after being interviewed, it will be the responsibility of those people who formed the interview panel to be able to demonstrate to an Employment Tribunal, if necessary, that all the Council's procedures were complied with and that the decision to appoint the successful candidate was both fair and appropriate.