

# FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT 2000

## METHERINGHAM PARISH COUNCIL

Evaluation and Recommendations regarding the FOIA relating to the Clerk's salary differentials.

With regard to a request under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA) relating to the differential in the level of pay between the interim and previous Clerk/Proper Officer RFO (CPO) and how the salaries were set. The Temporary Clerk/Proper Officer (TC) was unable to fully resolve the question of how and why such a large salary was paid after engaging a CPO in November 2023 until he was in receipt of email traffic between the job applicants and the Chair of the Staffing Committee(CSC). In light of this information being made available to the requestor, the TC is confident the request is fully satisfied.

Whilst the information contained within the recovered emails did show the process, they did not demonstrate why it was necessary to award such a high rate of pay. A far lower salary was paid to the previous CPO, clearly shown in the Parish Council's cash ledger, albeit in the early stages of their employment, some of which was paid through an agency. From a cost point of view the method, or vehicle of employment, is irrelevant. Looking through the Parish Council's administration from February 2023 to June 2024 I would assess that Kirsty Sinclair (KS) appeared more qualified as a trained Responsible Financial Officer with greater knowledge than Angie Driver (AD) who appeared untrained for the accountancy system used by the Parish Council. Also, without any formal Clerk/Proper Officer training, she did not advise the Council on a number of issues when it was prudent to do so.

In an email from the prospective application to the Chair of the Staffing Committee it was suggested that NJC Level 41 would be the required remuneration for them to accept the post, even before it was offered.

I have read through email traffic from the then Chair of the Staffing Committee (CSC) shedding some light on the way the recruitment of the CPO took place. I have also seen an email from the CEO of the Lincolnshire Association of Local Councils (LALC) expressing deep concern over setting such a high salary and the likely repercussions. The FOIA request shows this fragility. The LALC also recommended the Parish Council should research the salaries of other CPO's employed in parishes of similar size to Metheringham. There is no evidence of this taking place. I have seen an email which shows the CSC emailing applicants without copying to the other appointment panel members, which is of extreme concern given the high level of salary agreed on the Chair's recommendation.

I have now had the opportunity to look into this and cannot find any parish the size of Metheringham paying their CPO at NJC Level 41. In my opinion, the correct level should be in the Band 29-32, which is currently being paid to the Council's

Temporary Clerk. It is suggested the remuneration is set within this range when the Parish Council give consideration to recruiting a Clerk/Proper Officer.

Apart from being an experienced CPO, I would expect to see from applicants some exceptional qualities with a background in business, commerce and possibly legal to expand the role beyond normal duties to justify offering such a high salary. Whilst the appointed CPO appeared to be experienced in the role, I could not discover them undertaking CILCA training or an equivalent formal course in local authority administration.

## **CONCLUSION**

The requester has intimated that paying such a high salary was a misappropriation of public funds, which of course is a criminal offence. However, I would not assess this has happened since misappropriation of public funds is usually for the gain of an individual, either being a council member or an employee. In my opinion this was not the case. I do believe the repercussions of paying such a high salary was not fully thought through. All the appropriate information is widely available in the public domain and in these times of financial restraints, value for money should be a major consideration. I am of the opinion that it was extremely careless, or even reckless, to pay such a high salary when there would have been other applicants who could have been employed at a far lower rate of pay.

I have made recommendations in the conclusion of the general staffing assessment which should be followed in the recruitment of future Clerks and other staff.

**Michael Credland BEM**  
14 February 2025