

**Newry and Mourne District Council**  
**Recruitment and Selection Guidance Manual**  
**August 2007**



# Recruitment and Selection Guidance Manual

## PART A: The R&S procedure

### 1 INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Commitment

Newry and Mourne District Council is committed to providing a flexible, efficient and developed workforce that meets the needs of its stakeholders. The Council is firmly committed to ensuring that our Recruitment and Selection (R&S) procedures are in keeping with our statutory requirement to promote equality of opportunity; our legal duty not to discriminate on the grounds of religious belief, political opinion, sex, marital status, race, sexual orientation, dependants gender reassignment or disability; affirmative / positive action targets; and that we appoint the best person for the job based on merit.

The Council's R&S guidance manual have been designed to comply with the requirements of legislation, codes of practice and best practice; so ensuring that R&S is fair; and that appointments are made based on merit.

#### 1.2 Good practice

The recruitment process is often the first experience an individual has of the Council and it is important that this experience is positive. These procedures are designed to:

- give a clear understanding of the Council and what it expects of its employees;
- reduce the risk of a bad selection decision;
- ensure that, in attracting applicants, we reach the widest pool of potential candidates;
- ensure that discrimination legislation is complied with, including where necessary affirmative / positive action measures;
- reflect that the Council is a good place to work.



### **1.3 Using the code of manual**

This code is a guidance document for anyone involved in an R&S campaign as a panellist, or indeed for anyone who is participating as an applicant. For the purposes of this document the sections are set out as follows:

**This section sets out:**

- Section 1:* Commitment to fair and thorough procedures
- Section 2:* Legislative framework
- Section 3:* Roles and responsibilities
- Section 4:* The recruitment process (i.e. attracting applicants)
- Section 5:* The selection process (i.e. selecting the right person for the job)
- Section 6:* Review arrangements
- Section 7:* Reference documents
- Section 8:* Appendices which include proforma and explanatory documents

## **2 LEGISLATIVE REQUIREMENTS**

### **2.1 Discrimination legislation**

- Equal Pay Act (Northern Ireland) 1970 (as amended)
- Sex Discrimination (Northern Ireland) Order 1976 (as amended).
- Race Relations (Northern Ireland) Order 1997 (as amended)
- Fair Employment and Treatment (Northern Ireland) Order 1998 (as amended)
- Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (as amended)
- Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2003.
- The Employment Equality (Age) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2006

### **2.2 Duty to promote equality of opportunity**



Under the Northern Ireland Act 1998, the Council, as a public body, has a statutory responsibility to promote equality of opportunity and good relations.

Codes of practice issued, for example, by the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland and the Local Government Staff Commission, which, while not legally binding in their own right, are recognised in law as setting out standards of good practice for R&S. People involved in R&S should ensure that they have read and keep up to date with relevant Codes of Practice.

The Council commits to a positive and pro-active approach to equal opportunities, which extends beyond these statutory obligations by meeting standards of good practice in its R&S procedures. We will work with all appropriate bodies, including the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland and trade unions, particularly when agreeing affirmative / positive action.

### **3 ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

#### **3.1 Role of Clerk and Chief Executive**

The overall responsibility for ensuring that R&S procedures are fair and in keeping with statutory obligations ultimately lies with the Clerk and Chief Executive and those to whom he / she has delegated the authority to make appointments, namely the Personnel representative who chairs Panels and the Panels themselves involved in appointments. Through the Director of Administration, the effective implementation of the R&S procedure will be monitored and regular reports provided to the Council's Management Team and appropriate Council committees.

#### **3.2 Role of management**

With the assistance, advice and support of Personnel, management will undertake reviews of staffing and make recommendations, supported with a business case, to the Management Team in the first instance, where staff increases/decreases or restructures are sought.



Where vacancies occur, the director of the relevant department will consider, with the appropriate managers and Personnel, if the vacancy should be filled and the capacity in which it should be filled, bearing in mind the current and future needs of the Council and budget considerations. All posts must be accounted for in the Council's rates estimates for that year.

### **3.3 Role of Personnel**

Personnel will provide advice, guidance and support to those involved in the R&S process through measures, including:

- provision of advice and practical assistance in relation to organisational development, job placement, job descriptions, employee specifications, job evaluations, assessment methods, relevant equality and legal issues, at all times ensuring staffing meets the needs of the Council and is non discriminatory;
- management and administration of the recruitment process ;
- monitoring applications and composition of the applicants for statutory reporting purposes and provision of appropriate management information on recruitment to aid equality proofing;
- provision of clear documentation and jargon free instruction, so that all involved in the R&S process understand what is expected from them;
- working with those involved in R&S campaigns to ensure that we attract applicants from the widest pool of potential candidates;
- ensuring that staff involved, or likely to be involved, in R&S have been trained and are aware of their role and responsibilities;
- be responsible for ensuring that all pre-employment checks (qualifications, criminal records, health and references) are obtained;
- consulting with stakeholders, including elected members, management and trade unions and staff in general, outside bodies and applicants, to ensure that the R&S process is fair and appropriate; and that positive / affirmative action targets are being achieved;



- promoting good practice in other organisations in relation to R&S.

### **3.4 Participating in the R&S process**

Those involved in the R&S process must attend any training associated with competency in the R&S process, comply with agreed timetables and work with Personnel in job analysis and throughout all aspects of the R&S procedure.

### **3.5 Training**

Only those who have participated in appropriate R&S training (which covers Equal Opportunities and Section 75 issues) will be able to participate in a recruitment exercise as a Panel member. Those who have completed the compulsory training will be required to attend refresher training every 3 years.

### **3.6 Confidentiality**

The members of the Panel and those involved in the R&S process at any point, including staff involved in administering the process, are required to maintain confidentiality at all times.



## **4 THE RECRUITMENT PROCESS**

### **4.1 Introduction**

Recruiting is the process of attracting applicants to the job and thereafter placing the right person in position. It requires a detailed analysis of the job, compilation of a job description and employee specifications, job evaluation if necessary and advertisement of the post. The recruitment process will be tailored to each recruitment campaign. Each element of the process will be monitored to ensure that good practice is adhered to.

### **4.2 Job analysis**

Job analysis is the process of gathering detailed objective information about a post so that a decision can be made on whether the requirement for the post exists, what the duties of the post involve, the future direction of the post, the position in the organisational structure, the hours of work and level of pay. Personnel will assist with this assessment.

It is vital that a thorough job analysis is carried out prior to embarking on a recruitment exercise. Care must be taken that no discriminatory elements are built into the criteria at this stage.

### **4.3 Approving a vacancy**

Approval must be obtained before recruitment for any post begins. The personnel requisition form will be required to be signed off by the appropriate line management and department director before recruitment will begin.



#### **4.3.1 Approval for an additional staff member**

An annual review of staffing should be undertaken, normally in autumn of each year before Council rates are set. Staffing analysis and recommendations should be presented to the Management Team for consideration.

Recommendations to appoint additional staff should be accompanied with a job description, employee specification, staff structure and the supporting business case for the proposed appointment.

Upon approval of additional staff, the R&S procedure should be followed.

#### **4.3.2 Approval for replacement of an existing member of staff leaving**

When an existing permanent post or part of a post becomes vacant, it should be examined by the line manager / section head / director to assess if there is an ongoing need for the post, the roles and responsibilities of the post, the tenure of the post and the employee specification. Personnel will assist in this assessment.

Approval to recruit a senior member of staff must be obtained from the Clerk and Chief Executive.

Upon approval of additional staff, the R&S procedure should be followed.

#### **4.3.3 Approval to cover a post on a temporary basis**

The need for cover for a post will occur from time to time where the post holder is off work, for example, due to sick leave, an acting up period, secondment, maternity leave or a career break. Such occurrences can provide developmental opportunities. These vacancies also enable the Council to provide work experience for students.

As far as possible, arrangements should be in place to provide cover. For lengthy periods of cover, management will consider how the vacancy may be filled. Factors



affecting the recruitment will be the likely duration of the post being vacant, and / or the disruption which may be caused. The assessment should be carried out in a timely way so that the service provided or role undertaken continues without undue interruption.

Approval of a temporary vacancy should come from the section head at a minimum.

#### **4.3.4 Length of temporary vacancies**

The process of filling the post will be built on the principles of promoting equality of opportunity. Posts which are anticipated to last no longer than 12 months may be internally trawled, although it is recognised that some posts will continue longer than the anticipated finish date. Vacancies for posts which are definitely expected to last longer than 12 months will normally be recruited for through public advert.

#### **4.3.5 Approved recruitment exercise**

Once a vacancy is approved and accompanied by an agreed job description and employee specification, the R&S procedure will be timetabled by Personnel and those involved in the process will be nominated.

Personnel will strive to ensure that all R&S campaigns should take no more than 8 weeks to complete from receipt of the approved personnel requisition to conditional offer of appointment. Formal offer of appointment cannot be made until all pre-employment checks have been completed. It must be remembered that some checks, particularly criminal records checks, can take up to 8 weeks in some instances.

#### **4.4 Job description**

The job description must be prepared by the employing section head / director using a standard format. Personnel will provide advice on producing job descriptions.



The job description:

- provides a 'snapshot' of the job at a given time
- defines the main duties and responsibilities of the job
- indicates where the job sits within the organisational structure
- outlines reporting relationships
- forms part of the contract of employment
- changes as the job develops and may require agreed adjustment.

Where there is an existing job description for the vacancy, this must be reviewed and updated where necessary. If the vacancy is for a new post, or the duties of the job have changed significantly over time, it may be necessary for the job to be (re)evaluated. Personnel will provide advice on this.

#### **4.5 Employee specification**

The employee specification is designed to identify the key qualifications, experience, knowledge, skills and personal attributes required of a post holder who will carry out a job. Competences may also be determined and included, stating how a person should successfully undertake the role.

The employee specification should make clear what is essential and what is desirable so that the post holder can carry out the role competently. All criteria must be objective, justifiable and non-discriminatory. Personnel will assist in developing the employee specification.

#### **4.6 Selection panel**

Once a post has been approved, the recruitment Panel should be constituted. A member of Personnel will chair all recruitment Panels. The Panel will consist of the Personnel representative along with the relevant line manager, both of whom will normally have been involved in the development of the job description and



employee specification, and another person trained to be a Panel member, usually, but not always from the recruiting department. A member of the Local Government Staff Commission will also be invited to participate as professional assessors (without voting rights) for appointments at SCP 49 and above.

The Panel will participate in the development of the shortlisting, the determination and / or the development of job assessment where appropriate and devising the interview questions and marking criteria.

Normally, the post will be advertised only after the members of the selection Panel have been agreed and their timetable is set. Personnel will determine who will constitute a Panel that reflects, where possible, a gender and religious balance. The constitution of a Panel may depend on the availability of trained staff.

#### **4.7 Advertising the vacancy**

The recruitment advertisement is designed to:

- give a 'snapshot' of the job
- attract only those applicants whose qualifications, experience, knowledge, skills and personal attributes match the stated requirements
- reflect a positive and professional image of the Council.

Personnel will draft adverts in line with the job description and employee specification. The employing department will be expected to contribute to suggestions as to how the recruitment campaign for the post can be targeted to reach the widest pool of potential candidates.

Closing dates should normally be at least 10 working days following the latest publication date of the newspaper in which the advertisement appears.



Shortlisting should take place within 10 working days of the closing date and assessments and / or interviews should be completed no later than 20 working days after the closing date.

#### **4.8 Public adverts / Internal trawls**

In recognising that it is the Council's statutory duty to promote equality of opportunity across the nine groups specified in Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act, vacancies will be advertised using appropriate media.

Attracting the widest possible pool of potential candidates may require targeted advertising in the media in order to reach one particular section of the community, for example, men, women or people with disabilities.

Council employees, including those off on maternity leave, career breaks or long term sick leave (more than 4 weeks), will receive a copy of the monthly publication of 'Personnel News' where all vacancies will be listed.

Vacancies will also be posted on the Council's website.

#### **4.9 Applications**

A standard application form will be adapted to each recruitment campaign so that applicants will be able to answer how they meet the criteria for the post.

Curriculum Vitae (CVs) will not be accepted. It is essential that the application form is filled in correctly and to this end, all applicants will receive an information pack, which includes instructions on completing applications. Application forms will be provided in alternative formats on request for applicants with disabilities

### **5 THE SELECTION PROCESS**

The selection procedure will follow the general guidelines and will be tailored to meet the needs of individual campaigns.



## 5.1 Selection panel

Shortlisting and interview Panels will be made up of the same people. Only in rare circumstances will the Panel's membership change due to unforeseen circumstances. This and the reason for the change will be noted by the Chairperson of the Panel and a replacement Panellist appointed. The shortlisting / interview Panel will normally meet at least once prior to the interview when they shall:

- agree the constitution of the Panel, the timetable, the shortlisting criteria, and the selection process (particularly where alternative selection methods are to be used.)
- shortlist, to agree the candidates who will go to the next stage of the process.

## 5.2 Shortlisting

The Panel will use the information provided on Part C of the application form to assess which candidates meet all of the essential criteria.

Increased essential or desirable criteria may be used to reduce a large number of applicants.

The Panel will only have Part C of the application form. Panel members will not have access to applicants' names when shortlisting.

When assessing whether a criteria has been achieved, only the information provided in each individual criterion will be considered. Extra pages will not be considered nor will references by candidates to answers given in other parts of the application form.

When shortlisting is complete, the Panel will use their time together to agree assessment and / or develop questions and scoring mechanism; and make any arrangements necessary for interview.



### **5.3 Specialist assessors / independent assessors**

Where appropriate, specialist assessors and independent assessors should be invited to participate in the selection process. Specialist assessors will be able to provide in-depth knowledge of the post being recruited for. The Local Government Staff Commission will be invited to participate as independent assessors in posts at SCP 49 and above.

### **5.4 Selection testing / assessment centres**

To increase the accuracy and validity of the selection process, it may be appropriate to use mechanisms in addition to the selection interview.

Selection testing / assessment centres will be used to complement the application form and selection interview where appropriate. Selection methods used will be job related and non-discriminatory. Selection testing / assessment can be an aid to shortlisting after initial shortlisting based on the application form.

In some cases selection testing / assessment will be not be used to shortlist but will be used as part of the selection process, where, for example, the outcome of the assessment is considered in the scoring procedure.

Where testing is used as shortlisting, the R&S Panel will decide the minimum level which a candidate must achieve to progress to the next stage of the selection process. Where candidates have a disability, alternative methods of testing may be considered.

### **5.5 Interviews**

The aim of the interview is to allow the Panel to investigate in some depth how a candidate meets the criteria for the job. It is a two-way process during which the details of the job can be discussed and the candidate's suitability assessed. The



candidate also has the opportunity to find out about the Council, the post and the R&S process itself.

The interview Panel will meet prior to the interview to agree questions, evidence sought in the answers, marking scheme and appointment scoring bar.

Whilst the interview may be a formal assessment, the Panel will make every effort to ensure that the process is understood and that it is in no way intimidating for candidates.

Each candidate should be asked the same questions during an interview. The Panel may also use probing, but not leading, questions.

All Panel members must have attended R&S training prior to participating in a selection / interview Panel.

At the end of each interview, panellists will mark each question independently. Once independent marking is complete, the Panel may discuss the responses which candidates made to questions. Further to clarification, panellists may wish to change marks. In such circumstances, the reasons for any change must be noted. Any changes must be made independently.

The Chairperson of the Panel is responsible for overseeing the work of the Panel and in collating the marks and all the paperwork used in the exercise, and of, finally, noting for appointment the successful candidate pending any further checks.

## **5.6 Marking scheme**

The selection Panel must decide on an appropriate marking scheme. Questions should be designed to measure how candidates meet specific criteria set out in the Employee Specification. Criteria may be weighted to reflect the importance of



some criteria. A minimum score will also be set below which an applicant will not be appointable.

The interview is an opportunity for the Selection Panel to investigate how the candidates meet particular criteria.

Questions should be set so that the Panel can achieve this. The Panel may consider some criteria more important than others and for this reason may weight the criteria.

Once criteria to be investigated have been established, questions should be set and weightings attached. The following marking system is applied. Any variation on this scheme must be approved by the Panel.

5	=	Very good/excellent
4	=	Good
3	=	Acceptable
2	=	Barely acceptable
1	=	Poor
0	=	No answer

**Half marks are not acceptable.**

When shortlisting, it is important to remember that certain criteria may have been labelled 'essential' and the decision to allow a candidate to proceed to the next stage of the Selection procedure is based on whether they meet this essential minimum criteria.

However at another stage of the selection process, for example the final stage, the interview, the essential criteria may be given further consideration.

For example the passing of academic qualifications may have been a one-off hurdle to get to interview stage. The significance of qualifications may be considered important by the Selection Panel and may award scores for these.



Scores will not always be attributed to higher qualifications. For example, if a post required candidates to have 5 GCSEs, then having a doctorate may not make the candidate any more meritorious.

Weightings can be allocated to certain criteria, which the Panel consider to be particular to the post. For example the Panel may consider experience to be of greater importance to the post and at interview may attribute a weighting of 2x to the score for a question, which explores experience. Therefore if a candidate scores 3 out of 5 for their answer, it is weighted by two and their score totals 6.

When scoring, each Panel member should score independently after each candidate has been interviewed, using the standardised Interview Record Form. The scores from each individual Panel member will be used to rank candidates when the interviews are complete. Discussion will be held to clarify how candidates answered questions.

Scores could be initialled and where appropriate a note provided in relation to the amendment.

## **5.7 Conditional offers of appointment**

Following interviews, Personnel will deal with the necessary correspondence associated with the outcome of the interview. Personnel will write to the successful candidate making a conditional offer of appointment, subject to the following, as appropriate:

- proof of identity
- satisfactory references
- medical clearance by the Council's Occupational Health provider
- evidence of essential qualifications
- criminal records check
- entitlement to work in Northern Ireland,



All checks noted above, including references, will normally be sought for appointees only and offers of employment will be made upon receipt of satisfactory checks. A standard format will be used to seek references. Applicants do not have the right to access references, except as part of discoverable evidence in relation to a claim at an Industrial Tribunal.

The successful candidate should be advised not to give notice to any existing employer, and must not be allowed to start work in advance of all the requirements being met. A proposed starting date should take account of the requirement for all conditions to be met and of any notice period which the successful candidate is required to give.

Personnel will inform unsuccessful applicants by letter, normally within 3 working days of the interview / final selection process.

Interview / assessment notes will not be provided to candidates, except under Data Protection Regulations, although we will be happy to provide verbal feedback. Normally feedback will be provided by the Personnel representative and another panel member. Feedback may only be provided upon written request.

## **5.8 Formal offer of appointment**

When all conditions of appointment have been met, and the Chairperson is satisfied that all pre-employment checks are satisfactory, the conditional offer of appointment will be made. Where any issues arise as a result of the checks, the Chair of the Panel will consider the matters in conjunction with the senior member of the Panel / director before a final offer of appointment is made.

## **6 REVIEW**

Personnel will regularly review these procedures in consultation with members of management, trade union representatives and staff in general; and with



statutory / advisory bodies, and assume they meet models of good practice and statutory codes of practice.

**A first review was undertaken in June - September 2007, with assistance from the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland. A second review will be undertaken in October 2009.**

## **7 REFERENCE DOCUMENTS**

This document must be read and applied in conjunction with the following policies, procedures and codes of practice:

- Equal Opportunities Policy
- Disability in Employment Policy
- Child Protection Policy
- Migrant Workers' Policy
- Bilingualism Policy
- Codes of practice issued by the Equal Opportunities Commission for NI
- Local Government Staff Commission and any other relevant body.

The list above is neither exhaustive nor exclusive and may be amended from time to time.



## **PART B**

### **Supporting Documentation to aid a R&S process**

1. Job description
2. Employee specification
3. Job and task analysis
4. Employee requisition form
5. Application form
6. Applicant information pack (includes Rehabilitation of Offenders and Working Legally policies)
7. Shortlisting form
8. Interview record form
9. Interview decision form
10. Pre employment checklist