

Recruitment

Preparing To Interview

Purpose

To guide managers in preparing for and conducting interviews to ensure an equal, fair, and inclusive candidate experience whilst ensuring an effective process to identify the best candidates for their teams.

Manager Responsibilities

In preparing to interview, managers should follow the tips below to create the best possible candidate experience, stick to our processes, and always interview with impartiality and fairness.

Understand the role you're recruiting

- Review the Job Description for the role.
- Take note of what grade the role is.
- Take note of whether or not it will have responsibility to line manage staff
- Identify the essential and desirable skills, knowledge, understanding, and responsibilities required.
- Take note of what qualifications, licenses, registrations or certificates the successful candidate would need to show you.

Determine the interview panel & structure

- We always recommend interviewing and selecting as part of a diverse panel to promote an equal, fair and inclusive candidate experience.
- Identify, ask and select panel members who bring diverse perspectives but are relevant to the role.
- Once your panel is confirmed, put placeholder slots in their calendars to make sure they hold the interview slots.
- Select panel members who bring diverse perspectives but are relevant to the role.
- Decide whether you would want candidates to deliver a presentation or task during their interview. Try to ensure the task is relevant to the role.
- Determine whether or not you will hold one round of interviews and look to appoint to the role, or whether you'll hold further rounds of interviews.

- If holding further rounds of interviews, determine who the panel will be for them and what you'll do differently in the additional interviews that you won't cover in the first round.
- You should also consider the length of time appropriate to interview your candidate. There's no typical length of time however we recommend at least 30 minutes, and ideally aiming for 60 to 90 minutes per candidate. Interviews for higher-grade roles with leadership responsibilities are likely to require longer time windows than interviews for lower-grade roles with no line management duties.

Understand the applicants you're interviewing

- Review application forms and any CVs or supporting documents of the shortlisted candidates.
- Determine whether there's anything on their application form or CV you might want to know more about.
- Check whether or not they've accepted your interview invite.
- Check whether you've received any reasonable adjustment requests and contact the Resourcing Team if you have.

Determine your interview flow & questions

- Think about how you'll open the interview. Try to introduce yourself and the hiring panel. Look to explain the structure and purpose of the interview. Try to provide an overview of the council, your department and the role you're recruiting.
- Set your own technical questions based on the skills and competencies required for the role.
- You can always open your interview with some general, rapport-building questions to help candidates feel at ease. This could be where you ask them to talk you through their application form/CV or career to date. Just remember to give all candidates the opportunity to do it.
- Try to ensure your questions are open-ended (looking for a longer, descriptive answer) rather than closed (somebody could answer yes/no).
- Include behavioural questions (e.g., "Tell me about a time when...") to assess understanding, knowledge and past experiences.
- Add situational questions (e.g., "How would you handle...") to gauge problem-solving and decision-making. These can also be a useful way to spin a behavioural question where the candidate may not have relevant past experience to see how they would react to the scenario in future.
- Choose the right amount of values-based questions based on the role's corporate grade.
- Select your values-based questions from the relevant question bank for the role – whether it will line manage staff or it won't.

- Determine what type of follow-up questions you might want to ask candidates to tease out further information should you need to. We recommend asking follow up questions where appropriate to all candidates.
- Allow your candidates the opportunity to ask the hiring panel questions.
- Remember you need to ask each candidate the same interview questions to ensure an equal, fair and inclusive process.
- Update your master Interview Scoring sheet with your script and final questions – we recommend doing this no later than 3 working days before your first interview.
- Once you've finalised your interview questions, it's worth putting them into generative AI tools (e.g., ChatGPT, Gemini etc) to gauge what the systems might tell you – this will help you determine if a candidate might do the same prior to their interview so you can spot any signs during the interview.

You can find out values-based questions and interview scoring sheets on our intranet page - <https://www.cumberland.gov.uk/hr-policies-and-procedures/recruitment-appointment-and-induction>

Share your interview questions with candidates

It's council protocol to email your final interview questions to candidates one working day prior to their interview.

- Stick diary reminders into your calendar to remind yourself to email out the final questions to each candidate.
- Use the template on the intranet to formulate your email.
- Decide whether to share any, some or all of your technical questions – remember you have discretion over this. We recommend sharing as much as you can to help candidates better prepare.
- Make sure to include all of your chosen values-based questions
- Send each candidate a separate, individual email with the questions one working day before their interview.

You can find the email template for sending interview questions on our intranet page - <https://www.cumberland.gov.uk/hr-policies-and-procedures/recruitment-appointment-and-induction>

Conducting the interviews

- Make sure the interview panel are well-prepared, and ready to start on time. Ideally be ready 10 to 15 minutes earlier where you can.
- Welcome the candidate warmly to create a comfortable environment. Don't forget the small things like offering them a tea or coffee or a glass of water if

interviewing in person, or checking whether they're ready if interviewing online.

- If interviewing in person, don't forget to ask the candidate for the copies of the documents you asked them to bring to their interview to check the status of their right to work in the UK, verify the qualifications they stated on their application form and confirm any other licenses, certifications and registrations required per the job description for the role.
- Avoid and limit any conscious or unconscious bias you may feel creeping into your decision-making.
- Outline the interview structure and timings. It can be useful to let the candidate know what stages there will be to the interview and what the approximate runtimes for them will be. Even with your questions, you can provide rough timings (e.g., five minutes) for each question to encourage the candidate to anchor their response around using that allotted amount of time and little more.
- Listen actively to what the candidate is saying rather than preparing your next question.
- Watch out for scripted answers that may have originated from AI and don't feel authentic. In this type of scenario, you would want to try and recall your own AI generated examples and ask the candidate follow-up questions to prompt them to share more.
- Take notes using your pre-prepared interview scoring forms and making sure to follow the structured scoring criteria you'll find on them.
- Avoid discriminatory or irrelevant questions (e.g., related to age, gender, religion, or family status).
- Ensure all candidates are given an equal opportunity to demonstrate their skills and qualifications.
- Remember to ask your follow-up questions should the opportunity arise
- Seek clarification if responses are vague or incomplete.
 - Example: "Could you elaborate on the outcome of that project?"
- Observe the candidate's body language, tone, and confidence.
- Don't be afraid to inform the candidate if they've run out of time on one part of the interview – provided you've already let them know how much time they'll have for it.
- Remember to explain the next steps, including when they can expect to hear back.
- Close the Interview by thanking the candidate for their time and interest.

Evaluating the interviews

- After interviews, as a panel you should reflect on your scores and individual appointment outcomes together.
- Be sure to openly discuss any biases that may have influenced your outcomes.
- Agree as a panel who the best candidate to appoint would be – based on the scoring and notes you each made during the interview.
- Assign responsibility to one panel member to handle all of the scoring forms and candidate document scans.

After the interviews

- Contact the candidate you would like to appoint first. Call them and offer them the job.
- If they accept – inform the other candidates they've been unsuccessful. Offer them the opportunity to receive feedback.
- Unsuccessful Candidates –
 - Dispose of their right to work and other documentation scans via confidential paper waste.
 - Scan all of the scoring forms and send to the Resourcing Team via attaching to your recruitment request.
- Successful Candidate(s) –
 - Complete an appointment form – if the candidate is joining from outside of the council.
 - Complete an internal transfer form – if the candidate is joining from another team within the council.
 - Raise a Recruitment & DBS request for 'offer & pre-employment checks' providing the following information/attachments:
 - The successful candidate's name (as a comment).
 - HR01 for the role.
 - Completed appointment form or internal transfer form.
 - Clear photos/scans of right to work documentation (also dated and signed by yourself) and any other documentation copied at the point of interview.
- Managers must not agree start dates with the candidate prior to pre-employment checks being complete.
- Managers must also not start anyone into the council without going through the relevant pre-employment checks, in particular the right to work in the UK and any DBS checks required for the role being appointed to.
- No staff member whose role requires a DBS check should be started in the role without the certificate having been returned by the Disclosure & Barring Service and either cleared by the Resourcing Team where no contents are included or reviewed by the hiring manager and a cause for concern risk assessment completed where it contains details of cautions or offences.