

MEMORANDUM

TO: His Worship, Mayor Peter Kelly
District Boundary Review Committee

FROM: Cathie Barrington, Manager Councillor Support

DATE: December 3, 2009

SUBJECT: Council Support

Background

At the Nov 21, 2009 meeting of the District Boundary review Committee, the following motion was passed:

MOVED BY Councillor Mosher, seconded by Councillor Dalrymple, that the District Boundary Review Committee direct staff to prepare a separate Councillors' support staff survey.

The Committee noted the Councillors' support staff survey should include the following questions:

***As a Council Constituency Co-Ordinator, what is your role?
How do different Councillors utilize your skills and knowledge?
Do you believe you are utilized appropriately?***

Councillors' support office staff have been surveyed and the results are summarized hereunder.

Council Support Structure

There are currently 6 full-time Council Constituency Coordinators (herein referred to as Coordinators), one part-time (20 hours/week) Coordinator for District 1, one Senior Coordinator, one Administrative Assistant and one Manager. While the Coordinators provide dedicated support to the Councillors, it should also be noted that the Administrative Assistant and the Manager also carry out a number of tasks currently listed in the Coordinator job description. In addition, the administrative assistant provides backup support to one Councillor - something unusual for that level of position but not unusual for the needs of this office.

All Coordinators provide dedicated support to a number of Councillors and back up support to others. The current support configuration is as follows:

Three Coordinators support four Councillors
Three Coordinators support three Councillors
the Senior Coordinator supports two Councillors and has a number of other Council wide duties such as coordinating advertising
the part-time Coordinator supports the Councillor for District 1. This Councillor also receives support, largely administrative, from the Councillor's support office.

Role of the Council Coordinator

The Coordinator's job description was recently updated and provides a detailed description of the role of the position. A copy is attached.

In short, the Council Constituency Coordinator's key role, as their title suggests, is liaison with residents, business, and community groups to identify and resolve areas of concern related to HRM and its services while promoting/fostering good relations on behalf of the Councillor. Using their knowledge of the districts and the Councillors that serve them, Coordinators triage district issues, ensuring that those that are potentially risky are brought forward to the Councillor while those of a routine nature are handled by staff.

Council Coordinators prepare a wide variety of correspondence including speaking notes, Councillor newsletters and other public information documents. They also undertake research on a wide variety of issues. This research often includes bench marking and best practice research on issues before Council.

The amount of time spent on any one set of duties changes depending on the day, time of year, on the Councillor and on the Coordinator themselves. What is done for each Councillor depends on a number of variables including needs, abilities and personalities. While one Councillor might depend on their Coordinator for the bulk of their newsletter, others depend very little. Some Councillors prefer to deal with most district issues, others only deal with those that have become problematic. Some Councillors delegate quite a lot of work while others very little.

Whether the number of Councillors increases or decreases, the population of HRM remains the same. Notwithstanding, if the number of Districts/Councillors decreases, each Councillor would be much busier with a higher population to support over a larger geographic area and district issues that they now have time to handle themselves, they would no longer have time for. This **could** result in a heavier workload for Council Coordinators. Although the time spent on each task is different from Coordinator to Coordinator, the one constant is that Coordinators spend the bulk of their time on district issues. If the districts are bigger, there would likely be more issues hence, more demands on staff. In terms of support, each district has its own 'personality' and proper support to the Councillor depends in part, on the Coordinators knowledge of the issues and demographics unique to that district. Any change in District size would present a steep learning curve for staff in the short term.

In addressing what effect a change in the number of districts would have on support staff, the UARB stated in its 2004 decision :

"[62] Apart from the important question of governance style, which is intimately related to the number of councillors, the Board has on the evidence before it no reason to believe that a reduction in councillors

CAO/COUNCIL SUPPORT OFFICE

Tel: 490-6355 Fax: 490-4122

E-mail: barrinc@halifax.ca Website: www.region.halifax.ns.ca

will save money, as was suggested by some. Fewer councillors would almost assuredly mean an increase in the resources used to support councillors - for example, an increase in the number of support staff, and even (as in some municipalities elsewhere in Canada) the establishment of constituency offices."

Utilization of Staff

Most staff surveyed believe they are utilized appropriately. Councillor's depend on their skills as well as their knowledge of HRM policies and practices. A number of Councillors have been with the same Council Coordinator for years, allowing a work relationship based on trust and mutual respect. In many cases, the longer a Councillor has been with a Coordinator, the more he/she depends on that Coordinator.

Some staff surveyed believe that they could provide more meaningful support if administrative tasks were delegated to another administrative position. For example, more time could be spent doing research if less time was spent filing, creating thank you cards, preparing district capital requests, entering hansens, making up binders, etc. While the administrative assistant performs a number of these tasks, there is only one administrative position for 23 Councillors.

If the role of Councillors changes, it would have a direct impact on the role of the Coordinators. The results of the district boundary review may provide the opportunity to re-structure Council support so that Councillors are provided with the full range of support required.

Should the Committee require further information or detailed information on possible support structures, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Respectfully,

Cathie Barrington
Manager Councillor Support

Attachment: Council Constituency Coordinator Job Description

JOB DESCRIPTION

POSITION TITLE: COUNCIL CONSTITUENCY COORDINATOR

POSITION

BUSINESS UNIT: CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE

DIVISION: COUNCIL SUPPORT

REPORTS: MANAGER, COUNCIL SUPPORT
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Approved:

Date: March, 2009

SUMMARY

Reporting to the Manager Council Support, the Council Constituency Coordinator is responsible for the delivery of high quality, confidential services to Councillors and their constituents including the coordination of detailed research, the collection and analysis of information, project management, report preparation and budget maintenance. This service is provided in a highly sensitive, political environment. Utilizing effective leadership and management skills, the Coordinator is responsible for fostering and maintaining productive relationships with internal departments, the media, the public and other levels of government. Using independent thinking and conflict management skills, the Coordinator is required to diffuse escalating situations and follow through on clients' issues, sometimes with unfavourable results. This requires the incumbent to balance assertiveness and sensitivity.

DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

researches citizen concerns/complaints, brings to resolution and briefs Councillors on the outcome

uses proactive problem solving to prevent issues from unnecessarily escalating by researching solutions and coordinating input from all stakeholders

manages constituency casework and provides regular status reports to Councillor

- researches agenda items and prepares briefs for Councillors, identifying the pros and cons of an action with internal and external clients
- researches and writes correspondence, media releases and newsletters to promote the work of the Councillor and HRM successes
- responds to written inquiries as directed by the Councillor
- builds and facilitates interdepartmental coordination in order to maximize stakeholder satisfaction
- collects and analyzes information and presents findings on complex issues for Councillors, making recommendations where appropriate
- plans and coordinates provincial and national events hosted by HRM such as UNSM and FCM
- researches and reviews a variety of public information, including Council and Community Council items, to monitor progress/identify trends

- briefs Councillors on the potential impact of emerging trends on their district
- organizes, supervises and manages special projects such as charity events; town hall meetings and special community meetings
- prepares orientation material for new Councillors
- coaches and mentors new Councillors to prepare them for their role
- monitors Councillors' email and correspondence for emerging issues and responds proactively
- manages, monitors, and reports on Councillors' discretionary and district capital accounts
- develops, designs and maintains Councillors' web pages, ensuring HRM content standards and guidelines are met
- develop and maintains Council Support Office intranet
- attends meetings on Councillors' behalf
- participates in the development and implementation of Council Support Office policies and procedures
- supports the Manager, Council Support, by providing information, researching issues and identifying opportunities for process improvement.

COMPETENCIES

Achievement Motivation - Focuses efforts on working well and/or competing against a standard of excellence while achieving high quality results.

Analytical Thinking - understanding a situation by breaking it apart into smaller pieces, or tracing the implications of a situation in a step-by-step way. This includes organizing the parts of a problem, situation, etc., in a systematic way; making systematic comparisons of different features or aspects; setting priorities on a rational basis.

Communication - effective, timely, and relevant exchange of information that is respectful of the diversity of people, and the geography and working environments of our employees. It includes receiving information, listening, understanding and responding openly and effectively in interactions with others. It also implies this information is processed into actions.

Conflict Management - facilitating the prevention, management and/or resolution of conflicts.

Customer Service - desire to help or serve others, to meet their needs. It means focusing one's efforts on discovering and meeting the customer or client's needs. "Customers" include internal colleagues, citizens, elected officials or anyone that the person is trying to help.

Decision Making - Making decisions involving varied levels of risk and ambiguity.

Flexibility - managing and adjusting own behaviors to work effectively in light of new information, changing situations and/or different environments and with various people. It entails understanding and appreciating difference and opposing perspectives on an issue, adapting one's approach as the requirements of a situation change. Easily accepting changes in one's own organization or job requirements.

Impact and Influence - implies an intention to persuade, convince, influence or impress others,

in order to get them to go along with or to support the speaker's agenda. It is based on the desire to have a specific impact or effect on others where the person has his or her own agenda, a specific type of impression to make, or a course of action that he or she wants the others to adopt.

Initiative - identifying and dealing with issues pro-actively and persistently, seizing opportunities that arise.

Innovation - Questioning conventional approaches and responding to challenges with innovative solutions or services, using intuition, experimentation and fresh perspectives. Improves performance by doing new things.

Networking/Relationship Building - seeking and maintaining working relationships and/or networks of contacts to further the organization's goals.

Organizational Awareness - ability to understand and learn the power relationships in one's own organization or in other organizations (customers, suppliers, etc). In municipal government this includes the understanding and adherence to the requirements of enabling legislation as well as understanding the political process and the role of elected officials. It also includes the ability to identify who are the real decision makers and the individuals who can influence them; and to predict how new events or situations will affect individuals and groups within the organization.

Organization and Planning- The ability to effectively plan and organize one's time to achieve goals, prioritize tasks and organize time accordingly, and to make use of resources available to assist in achieving these goals.

Risk Management - Identifying, assessing and managing risk while striving to attain objectives.

Stress Management - Maintaining concentration and effectiveness in the face of stress.

Teamwork and Cooperation - works cooperatively to be part of a team. Deals honestly and fairly with others, showing consideration and respect.

Values and Ethics - creating and supporting the principles and values of the organization and the Municipality as a whole.

Valuing Diversity - ability to understand and respect the practices, customs and values of other individuals and cultures. Diversity is beneficial to the organization and community. It applies the ability to work effectively with a wide cross-section of the community representing diverse backgrounds, cultures and socio-economic circumstances, and divergent goals.

QUALIFICATIONS

Education and experience:

- Undergraduate degree in a related discipline such as business administration, public administration or public relations
- Minimum of three years experience providing executive support, preferably in a municipal environment

- A combination of education and experience deemed to be equivalent may be considered.

Knowledge:

- Thorough demonstrated knowledge of municipal government structure and organization and the services provided;
- Excellent written and verbal communication skills
- Knowledge of research methods and ability to find and compile information;
- Ability to prioritize and coordinate multiple initiatives and activities;
- Must be able to deal effectively with elected officials and the public;
- Demonstrated organizational, problem solving, and analytical skills;
- Good working knowledge in applications such as GroupWise, Lotus 123, PowerPoint, WordPerfect, Microsoft Office, Hansen, Contribute or similar software applications.

HOURS: work hours are 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Monday to Friday; with occasional hours outside normal hours occasionally required to complete a task or meet deadlines.

RELATIONSHIPS/CONTACTS

- Reports to:** Manager, Council Support Office
Internal Contacts: Elected officials, EMT, SMT, Business Units and staff
External Contacts: Elected officials and staff of provincial and federal governments, of other organizations, general public, media, vendors/suppliers, boards and commissions.

WORKING CONDITIONS: Busy office setting with many distractions, requiring the need to constantly reorganize priorities. This position works daily in a high stress environment where there is pressure to meet service levels, deal directly with public, Councillors, often responding to difficult situations. Extended periods spent at a personal computer and telephone.

Approved by:
Incumbent:
Date:
Director:
Date: