

To Katie Church
From Jonathan Salter

6 November 2025

Subject Chief Executive Recruitment Process

Background

1. Queenstown Lakes-District Council (**Council**) must recruit a chief executive as the position will become vacant on 15 February 2026. You have sought advice regarding the form that a recruitment process compliant with the Local Government Act 2002 should take. This memo seeks to summarise best practice.

Best practice for appointing a Chief Executive

2. Local Government New Zealand (**LGNZ**) publishes *"The Good CE guide: Recruiting and managing Council CEs"* (**Guide**).¹ As part of this guide LGNZ details a process for appointing a new Chief Executive.
3. In our opinion, the Guide generally represents best practice. Accordingly, we have summarised the broad steps recommended below. Where appropriate we have expanded on the Guide based on our own experience and other relevant guidance which includes Office of the Auditor-General Guidance from 2002.
4. In summary, best practice usually involves the following steps:
 - (a) **Step one – appointing an advisor:** Before any formal decisions are made the Council should appoint an external advisor (**Recruitment Agency**) to assist.² The use of a Recruitment Agency is best practice because local authorities generally lack relevant internal experience (both because CEs are hired relatively infrequently, and many elected members have limited experience as an employer). There is also a need for independence and neutrality (especially if there are internal candidates).³ The procurement from the relatively small pool of specialist public sector recruitment agencies is a preliminary step which could be carried out by an in-house HR manager who is likely to have the relevant expertise and knowledge for this task, and familiarity with procurement processes.
 - (b) **Step two – reviewing the Council's position:** The Council should consider what its goals are. This does not involve any formal decisions, but rather broad discussion around the challenges facing the Council and the type of leader the Council is

1 Local Government New Zealand *The Good CE guide: Recruiting and managing Council CEs* (April 2023).

2 In the Guide, this is listed as step 2 but in our opinion the independence and specialist knowledge of an external adviser may improve the step 2 process of identifying the desired profile of the future CE.

3 Office of the Auditor-General *Managing the Relationship Between a Local Authority's Elected Members and its Chief Executive* (July 2002) at [5.17]–[5.23].

looking for given its position, strategy and priorities. This could be partially informed by the most recent review under clause 35 of Schedule 7 of the Local Government Act 2002 (**LGA**) which is required to focus on skills and attributes necessary for the future. This in turn will have been informed by the challenges identified in the most recent long-term plan. However, it is ultimately for the newly elected Council to determine what type of CE it is seeking.

- (c) **Step three – design the recruitment process:** Before beginning the actual recruitment process, it is important that the process is clearly designed with distinct stages, roles and responsibilities. It is recommended that this include establishing a small committee or subcommittee to liaise with the Recruitment Agency and manage the process. This step requires a decision by the whole Council and should include determining the remuneration range for the position (informed by recent independent market information).
- (d) **Step four – delegations:** If a committee or subcommittee is proposed, making formal delegations and determining terms of reference should flow naturally from and be part of step three. For practicality, efficiency, privacy, and candidate confidence reasons the use of a small committee/subcommittee is generally regarded as best practice. In the circumstances, a suggested number of members on such a committee is between 3 and 5. This should include the Mayor, given the importance of the relationship between a Mayor and Chief Executive.
- (e) **Step five – determining requirements and key competencies:** Before going to market, a set of requirements and key competencies should be developed. These outcomes should be clear and capable of guiding later stages in the process. The Council should utilise its Recruitment Agency to provide insight into how to develop these. However, the final decision on these should be made by the full Council.⁴
- (f) **Step six – advertising the role:** The statutory obligations include advertising the vacancy, an impartial selection process, and giving preference to the person best suited to the position. The main decision at this point is to ensure that the vacancy is advertised in a way that ensures that appropriately qualified candidates apply. The decision about range and content of advertising should be made on the advice of the Recruitment Agency.
- (g) **Step seven – longlisting and shortlisting:** Once applications are received a longlist, and subsequently a shortlist, of potentially suitable candidates should be created. This is primarily undertaken by the Recruitment Agency, in the exercise of their specialist expertise. This will of course be guided by the requirements and competencies determined earlier in the process.
- (h) **Step eight – interviewing:** The process might involve several stages of interviews, with different persons involved at different points (eg earlier interviews with the Recruitment Agency and later interviews by committee of elected members). This stage of the process will also likely involve associated assessment style tasks

⁴ Office of the Auditor-General *Managing the Relationship Between a Local Authority's Elected Members and its Chief Executive* (July 2002) at [5.14]–[5.16].

recommended by the Recruitment Agency. In our view, it is best practice to limit any elected member involvement to be by committee/subcommittee up to the point of identifying a preferred candidate or candidates. Multiple interviews involving the full Council are impractical, increase privacy concerns, and may negatively impact the candidate experience.

- (i) **Step nine – identifying preferred candidate(s):** At this stage candidates should be rated (and perhaps ranked) against the requirements and key competencies. This will normally be done at least initially by the Recruitment Agency but may also involve the Council committee. The outcome of this process should be a preferred candidate or two. Having more than one “preferred” candidate provides a clearer basis for a final assessment of relative attributes, and options in the event that the offer of employment is not accepted by a final candidate. The decision to make a conditional offer to the preferred candidate must then be made by the full Council.
 - (j) **Step ten – negotiating the contract:** A draft of the contract should have been prepared earlier in the process. However, there may still be a need for some redrafting following negotiations. Initial drafting, negotiation and any redrafting should be done with professional advice. This process will be managed by the Recruitment Agency and legal advisers and overseen by the committee. Any material changes to the indicative contract should be approved by full Council resolution.
 - (k) **Step eleven – announcement:** Finally, the appointment may be announced. How this is done may depend on the incoming CE’s previous/current employment situation. The appointment announcement should be made by the Mayor.
5. As noted above, the Council as a whole should ultimately determine the process it will follow. However, in doing so, the Council should consider various factors including:
- (a) the level of involvement desired by elected members;
 - (b) the need for a confidential process, and for candidates to feel confident this will be maintained;⁵
 - (c) the impression the process is likely to give candidates and potential candidates;
 - (d) efficiency and cost effectiveness; and
 - (e) how the process may provide the basis for a strong working relationship between the successful candidate and the Council, and in particular the Mayor.

5 Office of the Auditor-General *Managing the Relationship Between a Local Authority’s Elected Members and its Chief Executive* (July 2002) at [5.28].