

Minutes of the Meeting of the General Services Committee held on 29 July 2019 at 7.00 pm

Present: Councillors Robert Gledhill (Chair), Jane Potheary (Vice-Chair), Shane Hebb, Fraser Massey, Bukky Okunade, Jack Duffin (Substitute) (substitute for Luke Spillman) and James Halden (Substitute) (substitute for Mark Coxshall)

Apologies: Councillors Mark Coxshall and Luke Spillman

In attendance: Lyn Carpenter, Chief Executive
Jackie Hinchliffe, Director of HR, OD & Transformation
Matthew Boulter, Democratic Services Manager and Deputy Monitoring Officer

Before the start of the Meeting, all present were advised that the meeting may be filmed and was being recorded, with the audio recording to be made available on the Council's website.

1. Minutes

The minutes of the General Services Committee held on 8 October 2018 was agreed as a correct record.

2. Items of Urgent Business

The Chair informed the Committee that he had received an exempt item of urgent business for tonight relating to Tolerance Policy for Unauthorised Travellers. The Committee agreed to consider this item in exempt session at the end of the meeting.

3. Declarations of Interests

There were no declarations of interest.

4. To Consider Options for the Future of the Director of Children's Services Role

Officers introduced the report stating that its contents included the costings, timescales and relevant details relating to the current recruitment scenarios for the Director of Children's Services. Officers wished for an open discussion on the options available to the Council for permanently replacing the role of the Director of Children's Services.

Councillor Halden believed that a former attempt under a Labour administration to merge the Adult and Children's Directorate under People's Services had not been successful and wondered why the decision to merge had been taken now. The Director of HR, OD and Transformation explained that the merged People's Services Directorate had been in place for some time in previous years and was not perceived as a failure at the time. Children's Services had not deteriorated in that period and the merged services had not been abandoned because of poor performance or management.

Councillor Halden stated that the Conservatives had not been happy with the merged service at the time and recalled that children's services had 'required improvement' under OFSTED. The Chief Executive replied that in September 2015 Children's Services had been rated 'Good' and had only slipped into 'Required Improvement' when the assessment regime changed.

The Chief Executive stated that the current decision to merge roles was not based on financial savings but reflected the current state whereby Adult and Children Services were becoming more integrated in Thurrock. It was added that all money saved from merging the posts was being reinvested into the support network around the merged post to ensure proper discharge of business. There was the added consideration that the market for recruiting a director of children's services was very busy. As of today both Stoke on Trent and Trafford Councils had advertised for a similar position.

Councillor Halden highlighted a 2016 report relating to the temporary appointment of David Archibald as Director of Children's Services in which it was stated that an acting interim arrangement was not good for building capacity in light of a forthcoming OFSTED inspection. The Chief Executive responded that the current situation was not comparable because Mr Harris was a very experienced and capable officer and he was not acting up as he had demonstrable experience and capability.

Councillor Okunade felt there were too many directors being created and queried what their creation did to enhance the effectiveness of the directorates. The Chief Executive stated that the changes were not simply changing the job titles. Newly created directors had more expectations put upon them to participate and take responsibility for Scrutiny committees, work more strategically and have more accountability for other areas of work. It was added that the old job title of 'Head of' had been replaced with 'Assistant Director'. Councillor Okunade felt the structure did not look right with the merged Adult and Children's post and felt that given time the Council could find the right candidate for a Director of Children's Services.

The Chief Executive reminded the committee they had a freedom of choice in the recruitment process and could, if they wished, go out to recruit a Director of Children's Services. She added that the Council could not pay more than was detailed in the report as these levels of pay were tied to the overall pay structure for all staff and breaking that limit would go against equal pay rules. It was added that senior management turnover had been low in Thurrock and

of the recent three examples, one had resigned for a promotion and a further two due to retirement. If the committee were of a mind to recruit then the Chief Executive advised a candidate with a strong social care background would be desirable.

Councillor Potheary observed that of the 'twin hatters' mentioned in the report, many did not have responsibility for education and housing as well. She also noted that seven councils had disaggregated their merged posts, which she felt was evidence that the posts were not successful. Councillor Potheary pointed to the Monroe Report, which was the last to review social care in local government, and noted that this report had stated merged posts degraded social care outcomes. The Chief Executive stated in response that there was evidence of successfully delivered services under twin hatting arrangements. Many councils with merged posts had already been through OFSTED inspections and there had been no evidence from these that merged posts performed better or worse than those that were separated. Waltham Forest, which had a twin hatter, had recently won 'Council of the Year' at the MJ Awards. Likewise, most of the merged posts included health and education, although Housing was an addition in Thurrock. The Chief Executive added that Housing responsibility in the merged post was for housing management and not housing development, which sat in the Place Directorate.

Following a question from Councillor Hebb the Committee discussed the consultation process and the internal and external process was outlined. For internal consultation it was stated that staff and services affected were spoken to and their views sought. In terms of external consultation the Chief Executive had spoken to the OFSTED regional director who had not expressed a concern. Likewise, local health partners were contacted and did not express concern and a specialist barrister also undertook due diligence on the process.

The Committee continued to discuss the potential merged post in relation to the Risks and Opportunities Register. Members were assured that the number of direct reports to the post were within recommended limits and the risks were not increased by merging the post. Councillor Hebb highlighted the exemplar nature of Mr Harris's performance and record as an officer and questioned whether he would be fully supported in the role. Officers took the duty of care for staff very seriously and had discussed with Roger his capacity and what support he would need to undertake the role.

Councillor Duffin queried whether a merged role would be easier to recruit to in future years if Mr Harris decided to leave. The Chief Executive felt it was easier to recruit to a merged post because the pool of eligible candidates was wider and a recent recruitment exercise at Barking and Dagenham had returned a strong field of candidates.

Councillor Massey asked whether the option of Mr Harris undertaking the Director of Children's Services role only had been considered. Officers explained this had and the officer had not wished to do this.

The committee understood that a report would need to go to Council in September to either confirm the appointment of Mr Harris in post or to outline the timeline for a recruitment exercise. If the recommendation was the latter then the current interim arrangements would need to be extended to cover the recruitment period.

RESOLVED: That:

- 1. The Committee considered the options identified for the future of the Corporate Director of Children's Services.**
- 2. The extension of the current interim arrangements be made to allow for the recruitment of a Director of Children's Services.**

The meeting finished at 8.22 pm

Approved as a true and correct record

CHAIR

DATE

Any queries regarding these Minutes, please contact Democratic Services at Direct.Democracy@thurrock.gov.uk