

Minutes of the Meeting of the General Services Committee held on 7 February 2023 at 6.00 pm

Present: Councillors Mark Coxshall (Chair), Deborah Arnold (Vice-Chair), John Kent, Fraser Massey, James Thandi and Lynn Worrall

Apologies: Councillor Barry Johnson

In attendance: Ian Wake, Acting Chief Executive
Jackie Hinchliffe, Director of HR, OD & Transformation
John Jones, Director Law & Governance, and Monitoring Officer
Luke Tyson, Delivery and Strategy Manager
Jenny Shade, Senior Democratic Services 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.

44. Minutes

The minutes of the General Services Committee meeting on 16 January 2023 were approved as a correct record.

45. Items of Urgent Business

There were no items of urgent business.

46. Declarations of Interests

There were no items of urgent business.

47. Representations to Government Directions issued in January 2023

The report provided background and details asking the Committee to comment on Thurrock Council's representations to government on the proposed expansion of Directions. As part of the representation period ending on 7 February 2023, interest parties were able to comment on the Directions the Secretary of State was 'minded-to' implement following the receipt of the Commissioners' first report and the interim findings of the best value inspection.

Councillor Worrall referred to page 2 under other matters of the letter regarding "novel intervention" and questioned why we were not getting a conventional approach and why were we being treated as a novel intervention as this did not feel right for the council. Ian Wake stated novel was the word used by the commissioners and was novel in two ways in that we had a best value inspection at the same time as directions where normally the best value

inspection would come first then directions afterwards. Secondly, the decision to appoint Essex County Council as the corporate body as the commissioners, generally you would get a lead named commissioner, but Government had appointed Essex County Council as the name commissioner in this case. Councillor M Coxshall stated the intervention had to be undertaken quickly, done at speed, and had to be done with not just one commissioner. As the council moved to a more conventional intervention more conventional rules would be required to understand where the council was going. The letter had explained that and would be made more public for the residents of the borough to see what decisions were being made.

Councillor J Kent referred to page 2 under other matters of the letter and quoted "pose some challenges that had not been experienced by authorities in intervention ..." and asked for some examples of the challenges that had been posed by this model. Councillor M Coxshall stated a challenge of the model as Leader was that this was new to Essex County Council, new to Thurrock and a new approach had to be designed which had been different to that envisaged in the 1999 Act. This was an opportunity to make it clear and open, so everyone knew the decision structure going forward. Ian Wake stated as Interim Chief Executive one of the challenges when the best value inspection was ongoing was the capacity and the additional demand on the organisation when trying to undertake a financial diagnostic at the same time. There was an expectation of further interventions as part of the best value inspection and had been an element of second guessing exactly what these would be and responding to commissioner demands. The letter identified that the council had worked collaboratively and positively with commissioners, but the additional complexity had been challenging.

Councillor J Kent stated he was not convinced that having a different model from the 2 September would have resolved any of those issues. He agreed the letter had been very open at asking that Essex County Council take on the role of the commissioner and questioned to what extent would the appointment of a managing director commissioner have in resolving those issues. Councillor M Coxshall stated openness, which was why the letter was being discussed this evening to ensure that everyone could see how the intervention would work. Once the best value inspection had been published in late February this would not remain a novel intervention but for all members and members of the public to understand how these works.

Councillor J Kent questioned whether the managing director commissioner would be named as the lead commissioner to which Councillor M Coxshall stated this would be a Secretary of State decision.

Councillor J Kent questioned whether there was any value in adding to the letter that we would welcome the managing director commissioner being the lead commissioner, that having two roles would add complexity rather than capacity. That his preference would be for one named person to be the managing director commissioner, having two roles may add some complexity that the council did not need, and this would be the opportunity to tell government. Councillor M Coxshall stated a lead commissioner, and a

managing director may work better and add more capacity. This model had been used in other areas with Councillor M Coxshall stating he was trying to make this more traditional, moving away from novelty. He thanked Councillor J Kent for the helpful suggestion which would make it easier for the council but questioned whether this would be moving back to another novelty.

Councillor Massey questioned whether these would be two full time roles to which Councillor M Coxshall stated the lead commissioner would write the commissioning report. Ian Wake stated these were two separate roles, a commissioning role and the other, a delivery role, both named as commissioners that would provide a strong link and a better model.

Councillor D Arnold commented regarding scrutiny and transparency this would be about timing and hoped this would be a priority within the memorandum of understanding.

Councillor J Kent confirmed he was content with the letter and stated it had been important to discuss its content.

Councillor M Coxshall thanked Members for their comments and confirmed the letter would now be submitted.

RESOLVED

General Services Committee commented on the letter of representations at Appendix 2 for submission to the Department of Levelling-up, Housing and Communities.

At 6.15pm, Luke Tyson left the meeting.

At 6.17pm the committee agreed to enter into exempt session in order to undertake interviews

48. Employment Matter

The Committee interviewed candidates for the Interim Director of Legal and Governance role.

RESOLVED

That Council be recommended to appoint Asmat Hussain to the post of Interim Director of Legal and Governance.

The meeting finished at 8.41 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**