

LONDON BOROUGH OF HARROW

CABINET – 15 JANUARY 2014

REFERENCE FROM OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE (SPECIAL) – 8 JANUARY 2014

REVIEW FROM THE CHALLENGE PANEL CONSIDERING THE DELETION OF THE POST OF CHIEF EXECUTIVE

Members received a report of the Divisional Director of Strategic Commissioning which accompanied the report from the Challenge Panel which had considered the deletion of the post of Chief Executive to the Council.

The Chair reminded Members that it had been agreed at the previous meeting to hold a special meeting in order to consider the report from the Challenge Panel. Members therefore agreed to consider the report as a matter of urgency for the reasons set out on the supplemental agenda.

The Chair of the Challenge Panel introduced the report and thanked all those who had participated in the review, particularly in light of the time limitations. The Panel had limited their work to the post of Chief Executive and had tried to avoid contentious issues. It had been felt that any criticism of the action that had been taken was inappropriate and the aim had been to achieve a cross party report.

A Member of the Challenge Panel endorsed the sentiments outlined by the Chair of the Panel but indicated that he wished to suggest two amendments to the report, the first of which was to insert the words 'try to' at the end of the second line of paragraph 3 of 'The need for Change' after 'in order to'. The second amendment suggested was the inclusion of 'some' to the second sentence of paragraph 3 of 'Timing and Flexibility' prior to the words 'staff' and 'residents'.

The amendments were considered, debated and challenged by other Members of the Committee. In response to a Member's view that it was a matter for the party in control to make the decision as to the future of the post, the Chair of the Panel stated that it had been felt that as the Council was 'hung', for such a major decision, cross party support should have been sought. This was the Panel's advice for any future major decisions.

Members discussed whether there was evidence to support the view expressed in the report that staff and residents were affected by the deletion of the post. A Member stated that he received no comments from residents or staff about the deletion of the post. Another Member, in contrast, stated that a number of residents had raised the issue with her, questioning how the organisation would manage without the post of Chief Executive. Members questioned the weighting of the report if quantifying the numbers of staff and residents were omitted.

A co-opted member, in speaking about the position, expressed the opinion that officers would have views on the post of Chief Executive to the extent that they felt the person in the role was performing well. She added that she was concerned that staff had not been consulted. In response, a Member reminded the Committee that

any decision to change the senior management structure of the Council was entirely in the purview of the Leader of the Council.

The Chair of the Panel stated that the view of the Challenge Panel was that the process had been flawed and that in order to avoid such problems in the future it was suggested that scrutiny consider it to ensure that such issues did not occur again. Another Member disagreed in that it would mean that the roles and responsibilities of the Leader of the Council required changing. The role of the Leader was to run the organisation.

The co-opted member stated that the impact of not having a post of Chief Executive in other authorities did not appear to have been evaluated and perhaps that a lesson that could be learnt was to consider this before going down a particular route. In addition, she questioned, regardless of political party, what would happen in terms of fairness if there was no independent post of Chief Executive.

Having debated and subsequently amended the proposed amendments, which received cross party agreement, it was

RESOLVED: That (1) the report from the Challenge Panel be endorsed subject to the following underlined amendments:

The Need for Change – paragraph 3 first sentence

‘ We feel that change of this significance warrants cross party consideration and as a hung Council ultimately cross party consensus should have been sought in order to try to ensure that there is general support for the proposal and not to destabilise the organisation at what is a particularly difficult time.’

Timing and Flexibility – paragraph 3, second sentence

‘We also feel that it may be that staff and residents have been unsettled by the political upheavals of the last few months and that again, introducing the proposals when there has been a clear mandate for change might have been more constructive and given the changes greater resilience.’

(2) the report be referred to Cabinet.

FOR CONSIDERATION

Background Documents:

Draft minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Special) – 8 January 2014

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