



Consultation regarding Senior Management arrangements

Prepared for the
London Borough of Harrow

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1 Executive Summary

Facta Consult received a total of 384 responses to the consultation. All responses were received via e-mail.

Approximately two thirds of respondents expressed a preference for Option 1 (the-appointment of a Chief Executive) with about a third in favour of .Option 2 (Making permanent the current interim arrangement of a joint Head of Paid Service and Corporate Director). 21 individuals did not feel they had sufficient information to express a view (for example about the costs and the responsibilities each option involved), suggested an alternative (such as sharing a CEO with another council) or had no strong view.

The main reasons for favouring Option 1 (to appoint a Chief Executive) were the need for strong leadership, a clear direction, and the need to appoint someone with no bias towards a particular Directorate. There were also concerns about the size of a combined CE and Corporate Director role.

Those who supported Option 2 (to continue with the interim arrangement) were primarily driven by the need to save costs, or were happy with the current arrangement.

2 Methodology

Following the removal of the post of Chief Executive in November 2013 by the previous administration, Councillor David Perry, the Leader of Harrow Council, initiated a consultation exercise with all staff and Councillors in July 2014, requesting views on two permanent options for covering this role:

Option 1: Appointing a Chief Executive

Re-instating the post of Chief Executive, who would also be the Council's Head of Paid Service

Option 2: Making permanent the current interim arrangement of a joint Head of Paid service and Corporate Director

Appointing one of the Corporate Directors permanently to carry out the Head of Paid Service role in addition to their Corporate Director role

Facta Consult, an external and independent research organisation, was used to collect and analyse all responses to the Leader's consultation, thus ensuring anonymity and objectivity.

Views were collected by email to Facta, using an external server. Facta checked all responses for duplicates, and where these were identified, only one response has been considered in the report which follows.

Of the responses received by the closing date for the consultation (31 July 2014) six were 'out of office' replies, which were discarded, three individuals expressed views twice, and another three times. Only the first response in each case was considered.

The report which follows provides an overview of preferences plus an analysis of the themes emerging from the emails in which senders had chosen to give reasons for their preference.

3 Detailed results

Views favouring Option 1: Appointing a Chief Executive

Option 1 was the majority view for respondents,

The most widely expressed reasons for favouring the appointment of a Chief Executive position were the need to have an objective individual with no perceived bias towards a specific department, the need for a strong leader to take the Council through the difficult period ahead, and the need for a transparent governance structure.

The quotes that follow reflect the most frequently cited arguments:

“I also believe it ensures that all departments can be looked at objectively by the Chief Executive as they will have no connections to any directorate.”

“The Council faces its most challenging time ever over the coming four years, and to enter this with unclear governance at the senior levels in the organisation is a huge risk. Any decision must be looked at in the context of value, not cost...”

“A Head of Paid Service holds responsibility for an individual service in addition to the corporate leadership role. It is not just whether an individual can effectively ensure that they don't allow their service responsibilities to influence decisions made as the corporate Leader, but also that they are seen to be impartial.”

“I believe Harrow needs a chief executive to dedicate the time to leading this organisation both within the council and with external partners and stakeholders. Given the current financial challenges and the need to focus on resident engagement I believe this needs a chief executive full time in the role.”

“In these difficult circumstances that local government face we need strong direction and leadership. Many of the savings we need to make can be facilitated by working across directorates. Without a strong leader I fear that we will end up a divided council working in silos.”

“Just as we have a Leader of the Council who represents the Community, we need a Chief Executive who would represent the Organisation.”

“I would like to end this by saying - a leader is not defined by autocratic characteristics but by an innate ability to serve others. I do hope the post is reinstated even if it's to share between two different authorities/council.”

People were very concerned about the message that reinstating the CE position could give to the outside world, and were keen that the appointment should be paid for with subsequent cost savings.

“It is my opinion that a chief executive should be restored while at the same time losing 1 or 2 corporate directors' posts by sharing roles....”

“A key risk if the chief executive model were adopted would be cost and the perception of investment in senior management at a time of major savings in services. This could be mitigated if other savings in senior management accompanied the change or flowed directly from it.”

A number wanted reassurance that there would be no additional costs should the appointment not prove successful while some would prefer an internal appointment:

“My preference is for a CE post (Option 1) - a shared CE post (with a partner, such as the NHS, or another Council) would be less costly. Perhaps it is time we looked to sharing a CE with the private sector!”

“We need an external appointment ie someone new into the organisation in order to change the culture and "shake" the organisation into place to achieve the savings we need to achieve.”

“Harrow Council have £75m of savings to make in 4 years. This will not be achieved with Option 2. We need to make an EXTERNAL appointment. Preferably one in possession of a hatchet.”

The need for stability was another commonly expressed view, which was also prevalent in the supporters of Option 2.

Views favouring Option 2: joint Head of Paid Service and Corporate Director

The most common theme in the comments from those that favoured Option 2 was that it was likely to be the cheaper option.

“Whichever option saves us more money - which sounds like option 2.”

“There is no need to add yet another layer of Senior Management. Option 2 would work perfectly and also at a time when the authority has to save £75 million not incur an extra salary cost.”

There was also a view that it would be reputationally risky to re-introduce a highly paid role in a period when financial cuts were needed, and may be viewed as a backwards step.

“I believe that at a time when the Council is having to reduce its controllable spend by up to 75m over the next few years it would be damaging for the organisation to reintroduce a highly paid Chief Officer Position.”

Others believed that nothing was broken that needed fixing and that the money that had already been saved by deleting the post could be put to better use.

“If the current arrangements are working this is the preferred option as hopefully the savings made would help to protect frontline workers and services.”

“The money that was saved as a result of deleting the Chief Executive post could be found through restructuring at the next tier which I believe would benefit the Council further. There are many good people in the organisation at tier 2 or 3 and at that level there are better opportunities for merging responsibilities.”

“I have always been of the opinion that an expensive, separately employed, unelected Chief Executive is an expensive luxury, and that all these duties can be carried out by an elected Council Leader and his or her Directors.”

Finally, there were a number of comments recommending a review of the top management structure with a view to becoming more efficient as well as cost effective.

“Option 2 preferred... With proviso that the next 2 tiers are also reviewed for equity, and the number of meetings/Panels routinely operating are significantly reduced to free up strategic capacity.”

“If the shared model is selected it would be important that the post holder was allowed to review the number of direct reports and capacity was kept under review during periods of where performance issues or change were particularly acute.”

Other views

There were three main reasons why people did not express a preference. The first was that not enough information had been provided on either the costs of a new Chief Executive, or what the job role would entail, and how this compared with the current arrangement.

“Apologies for not being specific as to my preference, I just wanted to state that it was sad that we didn’t get all the information to be able to give an informed response/opinion to the consultation.”

“Difficult to give an opinion without understanding the difference between roles of Chief Executive and Head of Paid Services, other than the Head of Paid Services will have another job to do.”

Secondly, people could see risks and benefits to both options, and were unable to make up their minds.

“Both options have risks and benefits.”

“Arguably an extended period of interim arrangements is as important an issue as the model that is adopted.”

Thirdly, some people thought that either model could work, and that it was more important to look at the skills that a new individual might bring to Harrow, and the priorities for the Council.

“It is important that the model chosen can respond to what the organisation, partners, residents and members need from it over the next few years.”

“Ultimately, the fit of the person selected to the organisation and its agenda will be as important as the senior role which is decided upon.”

“A better option would be sharing the role with one of the neighbouring authorities.”

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