

COUNCIL
21st JULY 2015

PEER REVIEW OF NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES

Report Submitted by: Chief Executive

Report Written by: Chief Executive

1. Area Affected

1.1 All Torfaen

2. Purpose of Report

2.1 The purpose of this report is to:

- inform Council of the outcome of the peer review of Neighbourhood Services carried out in March 2015;
- seek Council's agreement to an outline action plan to implement the recommendations of the peer review
- seek Council's agreement to the establishment of and recruitment to a single Chief Officer post to lead both Neighbourhood Services and Planning & Public Protection Services.

3. Recommendation(s)

3.1 It is **recommended** that Council:

- (i) Notes the outcome of the peer review of Neighbourhood Services set out at Appendix 1 to this report;
- (ii) Agrees the outline action plan and timeline attached at Appendices 2 & 3 for the implementation of the recommendations of the peer review;
- (iii) Agrees to the creation of a single Chief Officer post with a strategic remit to lead both Neighbourhood Services and Planning & Public Protection, with a view to a further report being submitted to Council on a later date with regard to the merger of those two service areas;
- (iv) Authorises the Chief Executive to set up the necessary arrangements for recruitment to the newly created Chief Officer post.
- (v) Authorises the Chief Legal and Monitoring Officer in consultation with the Members Constitution Working Party to make any necessary changes to the Constitution in respect of the newly created Chief Officer post.

4. Background

4.1 On the 9th December 2014 Council agreed to the setting up of a Peer Review of the Council's current arrangements for the delivery and executive leadership of Neighbourhood Services and also noted the Chief Executive's proposals for interim arrangements to cover the role of Chief Officer Neighbourhood Services whilst the peer review took place.

Since that time the Chief Officer for Planning & Public Protection has covered both roles on an interim basis.

4.2 The terms of reference for the review set by the Council were to cover the following issues:

- Whether the current arrangements for the delivery of Neighbourhood Services provide the optimum level of efficiency and value for money to the residents of Torfaen within the constraints of the funding available to the service, and whether there are new ways of working that could be put in place;
- The interface between Neighbourhood services and other parts of the Council, and whether any change should be made in this respect;
- What opportunities there are for rationalisation of service delivery both within and across departmental boundaries;
- What are the most effective and appropriate arrangements for the executive leadership of Neighbourhood Service in the future.

4.3 The peer review team visited the Council during March 2015 and carried out a number of in depth interviews with members, officers and partner agencies.

4.4 The team was put together by the WLGA at the request of the Council, and was composed of a number of senior officers together with a Council Leader. The majority of the peer review team were from English authorities, giving access to a rich source of knowledge on how English councils have dealt with the very large cuts that Welsh local authorities are only now beginning to face.

The report of the peer review team was concluded in April 2015. A copy of the report is attached at Appendix 1.

5. Issues and Findings

5.1 The report identified many strong points in the current delivery of Neighbourhood Services but, as requested, focused on a number of areas where improvements could be made.

As a result of this a number of recommendations were made over four key areas, which were:

- executive and strategic leadership of Neighbourhood Services;
- the relationship between Neighbourhood Services, other departments and the corporate centre;
- efficiency and value for money of Neighbourhood Services;
- opportunities for rationalisation of service delivery

Their detailed recommendations with respect to each of these areas can be seen in the report at Appendix 1.

5.2 Since the report was received an action plan has been put together to address each of the recommendations. The plan is attached at Appendix 2; it sets out a timetable for implementation and lead members and officers for each recommendation.

It is proposed that all actions are completed by the end of this calendar year. This will tie in the Council's preparation both for a new Corporate Plan (as the current one expires in March 2016) and for the Wales Audit Office Corporate Assessment, which we anticipate will take place in the Spring of 2016.

For ease of reference a chart showing the proposed timeline is also attached at Appendix 3. Actions that it is anticipated will involve members in shaping policy and taking decisions are shown in red, and those which are administrative in nature and can be dealt with by officers are shown in green. (For those members using a black and white paper copy of the agenda, red is shown in bold and green in italic.)

5.3 A key recommendation of the peer review, both to improve efficiency and achieve savings, is that a single Chief Officer post with a strategic remit be established to lead both Neighbourhood Services and Planning Public Protection.

It is suggested that the best way forward to achieve this is that Council gives permission at this meeting for that post to be established and authorises the Chief Executive to put in place the necessary arrangements for recruitment at the earliest opportunity. This will then enable the new Chief Officer to begin creating a structure and costings for a merged service area, which can be put to Council for approval at its meeting on the 22nd of September 2015.

The recruitment process would require the deletion of two Chief Officer posts: namely Chief Officer Neighbourhood Services and Chief Officer, Planning and Public Protection. These posts would be replaced by the proposed new Chief Officer post.

In respect of the proposed new Chief Officer role, whilst Council may wish to consider a slotting process, the new role would not constitute 70% of any existing officers post which in line with existing Council practice would have enabled the post holder to be considered for automatic slotting in. The new role should be advertised and supported by a formal recruitment process. In the first instance,

this should be advertised internally with prior consideration given to staff under threat of redundancy in accordance with normal Council procedures which are designed to reduce the risk of unnecessary redundancies.

Applications would require assessment and officer interview prior to an elected member appointment panel being arranged. Failure to identify and appoint a suitable internal candidate would then require an external recruitment process.

This process would also need to be in accordance, and consistent with the principles of the Council's Chief Officer Job Evaluation scheme which recognizes levels of pay associated with appropriate levels of responsibility.

6. Consultation

- 6.1 A number of members, staff, trade unions and other stakeholders, as detailed in the report at Appendix 1, were involved in the interviews by the peer review team, and verbal feedback was given to a number of stakeholders at the conclusion of the visit.
- 6.2 The proposed action plan and timeline have been the subject of consultation with cabinet members, leadership team and trade unions.

7. Implications

- 7.1 *Financial implications* – There are no immediate financial implications arising out of this report and the recommendations. The funding for the combined Chief Officer post is already within our base budget. Members will recall that through the 2015/16 budget a proportion of the 'saving' from the post of Chief Officer Neighbourhood services has already been utilized to offset savings following scrutiny.

One of the reasons for instigating the peer review was to explore opportunities for service rationalisation, cost reduction and improvement in efficiency and value for money, given the urgent need for the council to identify all possible savings prior to the 2016/17 budget round and the following years. It is anticipated that these will be realised as the action plan progresses, and will dovetail with work that the Council is currently undertaking with Price Waterhouse Coopers to analyse its current operating model. Should additional one-off resource be required to deliver on the action plan requirements these will be subject to the appropriate approvals process

- 7.2 *Human resources* – The Peer Review report recognizes the importance of the staff, their contribution to the organization and by implication the impact of change on them during periods of cost reduction and/or rationalization. The report also identifies the need to take steps to free up corporate HR to undertake workforce planning. The recommendation to pursue the invest to save proposal to supplement HR support for the department does not detract from the recommendation to ensure line managers take on greater responsibility for managing their own staff. It is through releasing manager potential in this way that wider service efficiency and value for money can be achieved. These HR aspects of the report and contained within the action plan will prove important in enabling the wider service aspirations to be progressed.

7.3 *Legal* – The proposals within the report follow the procedure for Recruitment of Chief Officers set out in Appendix 20 of the Constitution which complies with the Local Authorities (Standing Orders) (Wales) Regulations 2006 as amended.

7.4 *Policy* – The peer review needs to be seen within the context of a larger range of issues that relate to the Council's ability to weather the current and increasing levels of austerity through clear strategic planning, good decision making and rigorous examination of value for money. As such it is integral to the preparations for Corporate Plan III, for the Wales Audit Office Corporate Assessment and for the 2016/17 budget.

8. Risks

8.1 Implementation of some of the recommendations of the peer review will result in considerable service change; all service change comes with a level of risk, however in the current financial climate the risks of doing nothing are far greater and will in time make the Council unsustainable.

8.2 There is a reputational risk to the Council in asking a respected team of experts to carry out a peer review and then not to follow up upon their recommendations.

9. Action to be taken following decision

9.1 If members agree the recommendations in this report the action plan at Appendix 2 will be implemented as per the timeline at Appendix 3.

The Chief Executive will also put matters in train to recruit a single Chief Officer to lead both Neighbourhood Services and Planning & Public Protection.

10. Monitoring and Evaluation

10.1 Further reports will be brought to Council concerning the progress of the action plan. It is anticipated that Cleaner Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee may wish to scrutinise the benefits resulting from implementation of the action plan, but that will be for members of the committee to decide.

11. Conclusion/summary

11.1 The peer review has presented Council with an opportunity to be provided with an expert overview of the functioning of Neighbourhood Services within the context of the wider corporate environment. This has provided us with a number of opportunities to reduce cost and improve performance and customer satisfaction, whilst giving objective assurance of the many positive things that the service already delivers.

In the current financial climate this is an extremely helpful resource for the council and one that should result in tangible benefits with a reasonably short timescale.

12. Recommendation(s)

It is **recommended** that Council:

- (i) Notes the outcome of the peer review of Neighbourhood Services set out at Appendix 1 to this report;
- (ii) Agrees the action plan and timeline attached at Appendices 2 & 3 for the implementation of the recommendations of the peer review;
- (iii) Agrees to the creation of a single Chief Officer post with a strategic remit to lead both Neighbourhood Services and Planning & Public Protection, with a view to a further report being submitted to Council on a later date with regard to the merger of those two service areas;
- (iv) Authorises the Chief Executive to set up the necessary arrangements for recruitment to the newly created Chief Officer post.
- (v) Authorises the Chief Legal and Monitoring Officer in consultation with the Members Constitution Working Party to make any necessary changes to the Constitution in respect of the newly created Chief Officer post.

Appendices	Appendix 1 – Peer Review final report Appendix 2 – Peer Review Action Plan Appendix 3 – Peer Review gant chart
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Background Papers	
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For a copy of the background papers or for further information about this report, please telephone:
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