

Draft Report

NORTH EAST DERBYSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

ADMINISTRATIVE ARRANGEMENTS AND JOINT OFFICERS

APRIL 2016

Contents

	Page
Chair's Foreword	1
1. Recommendations	2
2. Introduction	3
3. Scope of Review	3
4. Method of Review	3
5. Evidence and Research	4
6. Key Findings	4 - 9
7. Conclusions	9

Chairs Foreword

I am pleased to present this report on behalf of the Organisation Scrutiny Committee. It details the findings conclusions and recommendations of the Committee from its Administrative Arrangements and Joint Officers review.

Members of the Committee felt that it was timely to review this area as a number of administrative arrangements and joint officer posts had been created over the past three years and they wanted to look at how these arrangements were working.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Committee and the Director of Transformation and Human Resources Advisor for their participation and co-operation throughout the review process.

Review Panel

The Committee comprised the following members:

Councillor B Wright	(Labour) – Review Panel Chair
Councillor J Barry	(Labour)
Councillor A Dale	(Conservative)
Councillor B Lewis	(Conservative)
Councillor T Mansbridge	(Labour)
Councillor S Peters	(Labour)
Councillor B Ridgway	(Labour)
Councillor R Welton	(Conservative)
Councillor J Windle	(Labour)

1. Recommendations

- 1.1 That the Council considers the introduction of performance indicators to help it monitor and measure joint officer/ administrative arrangements within the Authority to ensure impact on staff and service delivery is properly managed
- 1.2 When considering the introduction of any further posts subject to these arrangements risk assessments, full communication and consultation with affected staff should be undertaken
- 1.3 That consideration be given to the levels of sickness within the group of officers working under these arrangements
- 1.4 That, where appropriate, harmonisation matters be progressed to deal with issues such as differences on pay parity
- 1.5 That the Council considers the issues raised on the online induction process
- 1.6 That the Council considers how it can maximise the opportunities to undertake exit interviews that support the identification of any trends or issues arising and that a combined exit form be used
- 1.7 That the Council introduce a forward plan for how it will manage its ageing workforce
- 1.8 That the Council consider the comments made on reputation, lost key skills and management of culture change
- 1.9 That the Council reviews staff facilities at Mill Lane

2. Introduction

- 2.1 At its meeting on 9th December, 2015 the Organisation Scrutiny Committee agreed to undertake a review of Administrative Arrangements and Joint Officers.
- 2.2 Following the formation of a Strategic Alliance a number of joint officer posts and posts covered by administrative arrangements had been created over the past three years The Committee thought it was timely to review this area to consider how the new arrangements were working.

3. Scope of Review

- 3.1 The review aimed to:
- Understand what arrangements are in place and why they were introduced
 - Consider how well they were working
 - Examine their impact on services and whether they provide Value for Money
 - Examine their impact on the workforce including health and wellbeing, recruitment and retention

4. Method of Review

- 4.1 The Committee met on five occasions to consider the scope of the review and key issues they wanted to discuss. A variety of statistical information was considered to help inform the review.
- 4.2 As this review commenced six months into the municipal year the Committee decided they would produce an interim report at the end of the year summarising their findings to date. This report focuses on findings following the review of data and discussions held with the Director of Transformation and the Human Resources Adviser. No interviews have been held with staff at this present time.

5. Evidence and Research

5.1 A number of documents and evidence were provided to the Committee for consideration. Details are provided below:

- Sickness Absence Monitoring Reports and percentages of sickness within the authority including targets for NEDDC and BDC
- Details of NEDDC Posts working across both Bolsover District Council and North East Derbyshire District Council and percentage of workforce at each Council
- Details of Employees who have left NEDDC and BDC
- Salaries Spinal Points – NEDDC
- Grading Structure – BDC
- Senior Management Grades (SOLACE)
- Details of grades and numbers of employees working under these arrangements at NEDDC and BDC
- Exit Interview Questionnaire – NEDDC
- Leavers Questionnaire – BDC
- Details of agency/consultants use within the Authority
- Recruitment and retention issues discussion
- Details of any overtime incurred as a result of these arrangements
- Discussions with the Director of Transformation and a representative from Human Resources.

6. Key Findings

6.1 Observations

6.1.1 The Committee discussed and acknowledged the changing environment of Local Government. They understood the rationale for the decision to undertake these arrangements. The financial resource issues within the Authority and Local Government generally had been well publicised. Evidence was provided to the Committee of the commitment and efforts being made by staff to make the arrangements work but the end result was often that many people were doing more with less resource. It was therefore felt that the Council needed to ensure that the impacts and risks were being proactively managed.

- 6.1.2 The Committee welcomed the arrival of the new Chief Executive and the Assistant Director – Human Resources and Payroll. It was felt that this presented a new opportunity for leadership and direction within the authority. In relation to this review the Committee had been advised of other issues that were pending and it was hoped the Chief Executive would continue to progress these matters.
- 6.1.3 The Committee heard that work had begun on harmonising services. Initially this had concentrated on policies and procedures regularly used. The Committee felt this was useful but needed to be developed further within a reasonable timescale.
- 6.1.4 The Committee discussed how the Alliance had developed and acknowledged the differences in culture at both Councils, which had been a learning process. Evidence was provided of how this was progressing now staff were working in a new environment. The Committee felt that the management of culture change and the changing environment that local government was now working in needed to be actively managed.
- 6.1.5 The Organisation Scrutiny Committee had been created in May, 2015 in order to align with the Strategic Objectives within the new Corporate Plan. The Committee had considered carefully the areas it wished to include within its work programme. This review had been one area highlighted and the Committee felt that this was an important topic for them to review, as they wished to be proactive in supporting the objectives of the Council.

6.2 Areas for Improvement/Concerns

- 6.2.1 The Committee looked at the Induction Process in place for new employees including officers working within the administrative arrangements and joint officers. They were advised that the Council was now introducing an online induction process which would replace the previous face to face arrangements. Concern was expressed at the Online Induction process as the Committee felt that the lack of personal contact, opportunity to meet colleagues or raise issues face to face was a backward step. This process was a key opportunity for the Council to welcome staff to the Council and ensure they are briefed on key policies and procedures at the Authority.

- 6.2.2 With regard to sickness, the levels of sickness suggested that this was an area that was not performing well. Data was provided that 29 of the officers working within these arrangements out of the 103 post holders at North East Derbyshire had exceeded the Council's sickness trigger. The Committee had been advised that North East Derbyshire hosted two large services for Environmental Health and ICT which may be distorting the figures. Sickness was higher than targets but this also had to be considered against the background of five years that were difficult as a result of the Council having to make savings. Added to this the Councils had an aging workforce which also has a knock on effect on sickness.
- 6.2.3 However, despite these contributing factors the Committee did feel they had not received sufficient evidence to convince them that support for people off sick was working as well as they would wish. However, it was acknowledged that the new arrangements had placed more demands on staff at all levels working under these arrangements. Staff were undertaking more duties and also travelling between sites which did increase the pressure on some staff. Service redesign in Environmental Health to some extent may have helped this concern, for instance by the new geographical areas that officers covered. It was also important to consider the potential knock on effect for some staff not within these arrangements if they had to pick up work from joint officers.
- 6.2.4 The Committee felt that several of the administrative arrangements had come into existence in what appeared to be an unmanaged way, with no proper risk assessment undertaken of impact on staff. Communication and consultation with staff on their proposed introduction was also limited. The Committee were advised that many of these arrangements had come in to existence quickly in response to the situation both authorities found themselves in with regard to finances when entering the Strategic Alliance. However, the Committee felt that five years into the Alliance the Authority should now have appropriate performance indicators in place, other than purely financial measures, for monitoring impacts on staff already in post and any future posts. This would help to reduce risks and maintain staff morale and retention.

- 6.2.5 The Director advised the Committee that people had been tested at interview for their suitability for the roles and there was an ongoing training program to help people carry out their jobs. Additionally staff had 1:1's and team meetings where they could raise issues. The Council also offered a Counselling Service, Occupation Health support, Health assessments and in Leisure Health and Safety assessments.
- 6.2.6 The Committee raised the differences on pay parity within the arrangements and felt these were unsatisfactory. The Director of Transformation advised the Committee that Human Resources were currently working on harmonising how both Councils work. The policies that were used on a more regular basis had been prioritised and would be harmonised first. Other areas would be looked at to ensure everyone was working to the same processes. Work had also commenced on other harmonisation areas.
- 6.2.7 From the evidence heard the Committee concluded that the use of exit interviews was not being consistently undertaken and at times appeared adhoc. It was felt that exit interviews could be a useful mechanism to identify reasons why people were leaving. It was accepted that some employees would leave for career advancement or personal reasons. A number of the Committee members had however, heard anecdotal evidence that some people had left due to these arrangements. This was difficult to measure as no evidence was provided to suggest that the authority was maximising the opportunities to identify any issues or trends by use of exit interviews or any other method. Additionally there were two separate forms in use by the two Councils. This would benefit from being combined into a standard form. In response the Director of Transformation advised the Committee that he was not aware of any employee that had left the Authority as a direct result of the joint services and there are a wide range of reasons and a combination of factors that can affect this. He felt appraisals and performance monitoring would spot any issues. The Committee were still concerned how we handle this process and thought this area needed to be revisited.
- 6.2.8 Concern was expressed that following the joining up of services such as the Planning Service and Environmental Health the

Council had lost key skills. The Committee was advised that this had not been a major issue and although staff had left as a result of the revised grades others had been recruited. With regard to ICT service the job market was good so staff could move more easily. This was the same situation within planning as a result of new legislation which was causing a spike in demand for skilled planners. The evidence provided on numbers of staff leaving the Strategic Alliance was significantly higher in North East Derbyshire.

- 6.2.9 The Committee discussed with the Director of Transformation the ageing workforce within the Authority, particularly in areas like street scene and refuse where jobs could be more manual and physically demanding. This had been raised as a possible reason for a proportion of the sickness increase. The Committee were advised that some measures were in place to redeploy staff where possible and it was an area that needed further consideration. The Committee heard what had been said but still felt that the Authority would benefit from a forward plan on managing its aging workforce.
- 6.2.10 The Committee posed the question of whether the Council had undertaken any stakeholder benchmarking to see how the Council is perceived as an employer and whether any impact has been caused as a result of the introduction of these arrangements.
- 6.2.11 Members commented on the facilities at Mill Lane and felt that moving staff to a new building took away the social elements of staff being located in the town centre. They believed this could be improved fairly easily. Suggestions included outdoor furniture in the courtyard so people can sit outside when the weather improves, improvement to the canteen area to make it more inviting, more health and wellbeing activities, like the Council previously provided and the holding of other activities like adult learning courses or one off events.
- 6.2.12 With regard to the move to Mill Lane and facilities available for staff the Committee were advised that a welcome pack had been provided identifying local shops and other facilities. Additionally staff had received an allowance for additional mileage costs incurred during the move which would last for four years to lessen

the financial impact. The Authority also has in place to help staff, a proactive staff suggestion scheme, child care benefits, the KARP reward package, free eye sight tests for staff using VDU's, a reward and recognition scheme and access to free leisure facilities at the Council's leisure centres. Other measures were in the pipeline

7 Conclusions

- 7.1 The Committee considered a variety of information provided on employees working under the administrative arrangements or employed as joint officers. The Director of Transformation and Human Resources Advisor attended the committee to answer questions on the data provided.
- 7.2 A number of areas for improvement had been identified around how the Council can manage these arrangements to ensure they work more effectively for both the Council and staff involved.