

# Cheshire East Council

## Staffing Committee

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<b>Date of Meeting:</b>	25 <sup>th</sup> January 2018
<b>Report of:</b>	Head of Strategic HR
<b>Subject/Title:</b>	Independent Culture Review - Notice of Motion Response
<b>Portfolio Holder:</b>	Cllr Paul Findlow

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### 1. Report Summary

- 1.1. The purpose of this report is to consider and respond to the following motion which had been moved by Councillor D Bailey and seconded by Councillor D Flude at the Council meeting on 19 October 2017 and referred to Staffing Committee for consideration:

#### Independent Cultural Review

“Cheshire East Council has been beset by numerous allegations of bullying and harassment from its staff.

This Council claims to be an organisation that puts ‘Residents First’. In order to carry out such an objective in an effective and efficient manner, we rely on our staff to deliver the services our residents rely on. Therefore, the welfare of the people we employ must be front and centre of everything we do as an organisation. Currently, there are concerns that we may be failing them and it is incumbent on us as elected representatives to tackle the issue head on.

We reference the recent independent cultural review that took place in Essex Fire & Rescue Service as a good model for this Council to adopt. Through a robust process of investigative work into the practices of the Service, Irene Lucas CBE of DCLG was able to explore the historical causes that fostered such a toxic culture of harassment and intimidation that besieged the organisation for many years. Such a root and branch review of our organisation would be an agent of positive and transformative change for this Council, if we are brave enough to embark on such a path.

It is recommended that:

- Cheshire East acknowledges we have deep-rooted cultural issues in respect to the treatment of our employees in certain quarters.

- Cheshire East Council writes to the Department of Communities & Local Government acknowledging our problem with the bullying and harassment of our staff requesting that they appoint an individual or group of local Government experts, as in the example cited above, to conduct an independent cultural review.
- Cheshire East Council actively cooperate with the actors asked to undertake such a task providing resources where appropriate, working on a cross-party basis to support the review in a collaborative, meaningful and positive manner.
- Cheshire East Council begins to extensively work with its recognised trade unions, taking advice and recommendations from them where appropriate to enhance the welfare of our employees in and out of the work place.
- Cheshire East Council reaffirms and strengthens its commitment to those staff who decide to ‘whistle-blow’ on malpractices within the organisation.”

## **2. Recommendation**

- 2.1 That for the reasons set out in this report, Staffing Committee notes and continues to fully support the Local Government Association (LGA) Independent Cultural Review and looks forward to receiving the review findings and recommendations at a meeting on 29<sup>th</sup> January 2018.

## **3. Reasons for Recommendation**

- 3.1 An external independent culture review was commissioned jointly by the Leader and the Acting Chief Executive in October 2017 and this was undertaken by the LGA during November and December 2017. The purpose of the review is to provide an objective assessment of the current culture of Cheshire East Council, aspects of this that are positive and should be built on and identified areas for change and improvement. The review has particular regard to an ongoing perception that there are significant issues relating to bullying and harassment.
- 3.2 The review brings together information and insight from a range of sources including:
- An initial desk top research into relevant policies, documents and other sources of information.
  - A series of focus groups with staff, trade union representatives, senior managers, and cross-party Members
  - A small number of one to one interviews in relation to policy, strategic and council wide arrangements.
  - A short survey which all staff have been invited to complete.

- Staff could also email the independent reviewer in confidence, if they felt they had not had the opportunity / or felt concern about sharing their views through other channels.
- 3.3 The findings and recommendations from the independent cultural review are expected in January 2018.
- 3.4 The Council has also appointed Public Concern at Work (PCaW) to deliver additional whistleblowing support to complement its current arrangements and undertake the review of current arrangements. Bespoke support arrangements delivered by PCaW are in place for one year and commenced on the 1<sup>st</sup> October 2017 and includes the provision of an independent Whistleblowing advice line, a desk based review of current policy and procedures, benchmarked against the Whistleblowing Commission's Code of practice, PCaW's model policy and best practice guide and the opportunity to attend expert whistleblowing training workshops.
- 3.6 The Council's Audit and Governance Committee will receive regular updates on the progress of the independent whistleblowing review and support service, along with the action plan for improvement.

#### **4. Background**

- 4.1 Following work already underway, the Leader announced at the opening of Council on 19<sup>th</sup> October "with regard to culture, that work was continuing and that following on from the staff survey, the Council had commissioned an independent review by the LGA into the culture of the Council and particularly regarding allegations in respect of bullying and harassment. Terms of Reference had been developed and were currently with the LGA for comment and would be shared with Leaders of the opposition groups and the Trade Unions. It was anticipated that the review would commence at the end of the month and would be completed in December 2017."
- 4.2 A copy of the agreed Terms of Reference with the LGA has been published on the Council's Centranet.

#### **5. Wards Affected and Local Ward Members**

- 5.1. All Ward Members.

#### **6. Implications of Recommendation**

##### **6.1. Policy Implications**

- 6.1.1. Policy implications will be determined once the results of the independent culture review are available.

## **6.2. Legal Implications**

6.2.1. Legal implications will be determined once the results of the independent culture review are available.

## **6.3. Financial Implications**

6.3.1. Financial implications will be determined once the results of the independent culture review are available.

## **6.4. Equality Implications**

6.4.1. Equality implications will be determined once the results of the independent culture review are available.

## **6.5. Rural Community Implications**

6.5.1. Not applicable

## **6.6. Human Resources Implications**

6.6.1. Human resource implications will be determined once the results of the independent culture review are available.

## **6.7. Health and Wellbeing Implications**

6.7.1. Health and Wellbeing implications will be determined once the results of the independent culture review are available.

## **6.8. Implications for Children and Young People**

Not directly applicable.

## **6.9. Overview and Scrutiny Committee Implications**

6.9.1. Overview and Scrutiny Committee implications will be determined once the results of the independent culture review are available

## **7. Risk Management**

7.1 Organisational culture is possibly the most critical factor determining the Council's capacity, effectiveness and longevity. Building a strong, positive, and supportive organisational culture is at the heart of employee wellbeing and significantly increases productivity, growth and retention.

7.2 In order to provide quality services to the residents and communities of Cheshire East it is imperative that the findings of the review provide an informed and balanced snapshot of how it feels to work for, and with, the Council, areas of strength that must be built upon and areas for improvement.

This will require officers, members, trade unions and partners to collaborate and actively work together, with a common goal of building a Council and culture we can all be proud of. Actions to mitigate any risks will be discussed and agreed as the findings of the review are shared.

## 8. Access to Information

- 8.1. [Independent Culture Review - LGA terms of reference.](#)

## 9. Contact Information

Contact details for this report are as follows:

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