



## John Harris - Children's Improvement Adviser

27th July 2015

Eleanor Kelly,  
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Dear Eleanor,

### SOUTHWARK CHILDREN'S AND ADULTS SERVICES: INDEPENDENT LOCAL TEST OF ASSURANCE 2015

1. On behalf of the Local Government Association (LGA) I am writing with the findings from the recent independent 'local test of assurance' that was completed in respect of the London Borough of Southwark's Children's and Adults' Services Directorate. I received a positive welcome and good engagement and support throughout the process. I was impressed by people's transparency and commitment to improving the quality of life and life chances of residents in Southwark.

#### Background

2. The London Borough of Southwark established a directorate of Children's and Adults' Services in October 2012. The proposal was part of a council-wide programme of transformation that was designed to achieve '**cultural change both within the organisation and in the way we engage with our residents and stakeholders**'. As part of this change, there would be a need to '**work in a more cross cutting and collegiate way across portfolios and departments to be more than the sum of our parts and achieve more with less**'. It was expected that the new structure would place the council '**in the best position to deal with the diversity of emerging challenges whilst releasing savings already earmarked**'.<sup>1</sup> The particular benefits of combining Children's and Adults' Services were identified as: joint working and commissioning around vulnerable families; common interest areas such as personalisation and transition of young people to adult services; efficiencies of back office functions; streamlining of key enablers such as needs assessment; workforce planning, equalities and community engagement; and a single point of contact for health and other agencies.

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<sup>1</sup> 'Amendment to Strategic Management Arrangements' – Report to Cabinet 15<sup>th</sup> May 2012

3. The roles of Director of Children's Services (DCS) and Lead Member for Children's Services (LMCS) are covered by statutory guidance from the Department for Education (DfE).<sup>2</sup> Local authorities must have regard to this guidance in relation to the appointment of the DCS and the designation of the LMCS. Consideration of this guidance is particularly important where a local authority is proposing to combine the DCS functions with other officer responsibilities. The guidance states that in such circumstances '***local authorities should undertake a local test of assurance so that the focus on outcomes for children and young people will not be weakened or diluted as a result of adding other such responsibilities***'. The test of local assurance is intended to assess the extent to which the local authority's organisational structure fulfils the following criteria:
  - a. Meeting statutory duties effectively (including that children, young people, and families receive effective help and benefit from high educational standards locally);
  - b. Transparency about accountabilities and responsibilities;
  - c. Support effective interagency and partnership working.
4. In accordance with statutory guidance the council undertook a local test of assurance in 2012 before establishing the role of Strategic Director of Children's and Adults' Services. It concluded that: '***sufficient safeguards are in place in order that outcomes for children and young people are not at risk of being weakened or diluted by the statutory Director of Children's Services acquiring additional responsibilities.***' A further conclusion was that the '***changes will enable statutory functions of Director of Adult Social Services (DASS) to be carried out effectively and the joining of departments has potential to add value to responsibilities of both roles.***'
5. As part of the Directorate's self-assessment of its leadership and governance arrangements, the current Strategic Director (appointed in October 2014) has commissioned an updated review of the council's local test of assurance. At the time of the fieldwork for this review, proposals for the realignment of functions between directorates and a senior management restructuring below chief officer level were under active consideration, with approval by Cabinet expected before the end of July.
6. The 2015 senior management restructure is intended to enable the council to deliver its 'fairer future' vision by building on the effective cross cutting and collegiate working that has been increasingly evident since 2012. At the same time, the rationalisation of functions across directorates and the reduction in senior management posts will make a significant contribution to the council's overall savings requirement. The table below provides a summary of the rationalisation of directorate functions and changes to senior management posts as they relate to the Children's and Adults' Services Directorate.

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<sup>2</sup> Statutory guidance on the roles and responsibilities of the Director of Children's Services and the Lead Member for Children's Services, DfE April 2013

<b>SENIOR OFFICER RESTRUCTURE 2015</b>
<b>Directorate Functions</b>
Transferred to Children's and Adults' Services:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Safeguarding Partnerships</li> <li>• Public Health</li> <li>• Adult Learning</li> </ul>
<b>Senior Management Changes</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Deletion of post of Director, Strategy and Commissioning</li> </ul>
<b>Other Changes (relevant to Local Test of Assurance)</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Modernise (encompassing IT, HR, Corporate Facilities Management and Modernise) to Housing and Modernisation</li> </ul>

7. The findings in this review take account of these proposals.

### **Independent Review Process**

8. The process has included consideration of key background documents and performance information, along with interviews on site. The review also draws on learning nationally from other local authorities that have established combined Children's and Adults' Services Directorates. The following themes were used as an evaluation framework for the local test of assurance:
- a. Governance and Accountability
  - b. Leadership and Management
  - c. Capacity
  - d. Performance Management and Quality Assurance
  - e. Workforce Development
  - f. Partnerships and Multi-Agency Working
  - g. Service User Engagement

These themes feature in the directorate's comprehensive self-assessment documentation, with clear identification of strengths and areas for development supported by a robust action plan. The detail of the work being undertaken in support of that action plan is not repeated in this letter, except where it relates directly to findings and recommendations in respect of the 'test of local assurance' in Southwark. It will be important to keep consideration of the 'test of local assurance' under review as part of the directorate's self-assessment of leadership and management.

## **Key Findings**

### **Overall Vision and ‘Direction of Travel’**

9. The Children’s and Adults’ Services Directorate continues to operate as part of a dynamic and coherent corporate leadership culture and organisational structure. *A Fairer Future for All* sets out an aspirational vision for the community. The directorate’s work is closely aligned with that vision. The directorate is playing a leading role in delivering on the ‘Fair Future’ promises, with a good level of impact.

### **Governance and Accountability**

10. Southwark Council has clear arrangements for the oversight of safeguarding at political, organisational and partnership levels. Corporate parenting arrangements are well-established. Statutory roles and responsibilities for safeguarding are well understood by the Leader of the Council, Lead Members for Children’s and Adults’ Services, Chief Executive, and the Strategic Director of Children’s and Adults’ Services. The Independent Chair of the Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB), who is also Chair of the Local Safeguarding Adults Board (LSAB) has good access to the Leader of the Council and the Chief Executive and is able to bring independent challenge on key safeguarding issues. The LSCB Annual Report is considered by the Health and Well-Being Board, Cabinet, and the Children’s Services Scrutiny Committee. The Cabinet has considered reports on key areas of safeguarding risk, notably relating to child sexual exploitation.
11. The Lead Member for Children’s Services has a good understanding of the strengths and areas for development across the full footprint of Children’s Services, including education. The Lead Member for Adult Services has only recently taken up the role but brings wide experience from other responsibilities in the council and work with the local community. Both Lead Members benefit from systematic working arrangements with the Strategic Director and senior managers. The council’s performance management arrangements provide a good framework in which the portfolio holders are able to assure themselves about the effectiveness of safeguarding. Opportunities are provided for the Lead Members to work together on key service and policy developments.
12. Safeguarding features appropriately in the programme of work for Scrutiny, which covers both policy development and performance.
13. The Health and Well-Being Board’s (HWB) work programme has a stronger focus on the priority issues affecting children and young people’s well-being in Southwark, with better alignment with the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment.

### **Leadership and Management**

14. The council managed the move to a combined Children’s and Adults’ Service effectively in 2012. Continuity of leadership by the Strategic Director and an appropriate range of senior manager posts and accountabilities ensured that core statutory responsibilities were met for both the DCS and the DASS functions.

15. The proposed changes in directorate functions have a clear rationale and should be beneficial to the further development of the Children's and Adults' Services directorate.

### **Capacity**

16. The capacity for the Strategic Director to fulfil the breadth of the portfolio and statutory responsibilities of the DCS is manageable with the proposed senior management posts in the directorate. The Chief Executive's intention to bring the same degree of collegiate and cross-cutting working as exists in the Chief Officer Team (COT) should be beneficial in promoting distributed leadership and sustainable leadership capacity.
17. **Children's Services** has a good understanding of its strengths, areas for development, and key risks. There is a good quality, evidence-based and evaluative self-assessment document that is being used well to drive a self-improving organisation that is 'inspection ready'.
18. Good progress has been made since the last inspection of safeguarding and looked after children in 2012, at which the council was assessed as good, with good capacity to improve.<sup>3</sup> The Achieving Excellence Development Plan is providing a strong framework for improving practice and responding to key safeguarding risks, including child sexual exploitation (CSE) and missing children. Likewise there are detailed plans to improve the services and outcomes for looked after children.
19. Educational attainment and progress, and the local authority's support for school improvement, are good. The council is responding well in its commissioning role to meet the challenge of increasing demand for school places.
20. A clear programme of improvement has been established for **Adult Services** with an ambitious programme to transform the provision of adult care through Local Care Networks. It is also planned to streamline assessment procedures to promote greater personalisation, reduce the complexity of the process, and eliminate waiting lists.
21. The Strategic Director has identified the need for a more effective commissioning approach to support service transformation and achieve substantial savings. The Strategic Director is seeking to establish a more coherent approach to commissioning across the directorate, including public health. There is a recognition that this will require a commissioning team with the skills and experience to support change in service design informed by service users, market making, and delivery through new forms of organisation and partnerships.
22. The council's medium term financial strategy includes a savings requirement of £30m in 2015/16, £38.5m in 2016/17 and £28.4m in 2017/18. There is a good track record of achieving savings over the past four years that gives senior

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<sup>3</sup> The 'capacity to improve' judgement was 'outstanding' for safeguarding and 'good' for services for looked after children. For the purposes of assessing capacity I have amalgamated the judgement to 'good' overall.

officers and members some confidence that the further savings requirement can be met. The council's budget process benefits from a clear set of budget principles that enable a good match between priorities and resources. Current savings plans within the directorate are designed to protect the children's services budget in response to on-going demand pressures, with the burden of savings to be made through a more efficient and effective approach to commissioning, particularly in respect of adult services.

### **Performance Management and Quality Assurance**

23. There are robust performance management arrangements within the directorate, by the COT, and through Performance Challenge meetings with the Leader of the Council. The directorate's reports are comprehensive in nature, providing a wide range of performance information (including finance) and analysis of performance. There is good evidence that the reports are used to identify and tackle key risks. There is a well-established and effective programme of quality assurance.
24. In addition to the current performance management arrangements, consideration should be given to establishing formal quarterly safeguarding review meetings with the Leader and Chief Executive for both children's and adults' safeguarding, with attendance (and challenge) from the Independent Chair.

### **Workforce Development**

25. Workforce development is a strong feature of the work in Children's Services. The council is making impressive use of the DfE Innovation Fund to support its 'Social Work Matters' initiative, which is providing a powerful model for social care practice improvement.
26. The Strategic Director is using workforce development as one of the ways to promote a 'one directorate' approach, with good joint-working evident between the respective Principal Social Workers. There is an opportunity now to create a single workforce development strategy, promoting core competences but also recognising and supporting areas of specialism. There is important learning from current developments in the Social Work Matters programme and from personalisation in adult services that should inform a more integrated workforce development strategy.

### **Partnerships and Multi-Agency Working**

27. The work of the Children's Adults' Service is characterised by effective partnership working within the council, with partner agencies, and key partnerships. The Strategic Director is able to play a full role in supporting effective partnership and inter-agency working.
28. Southwark LSCB is well-established and is meeting statutory duties. The Board has completed a comprehensive self-assessment that has informed specific and appropriate priorities linked with a SMART business plan. Southwark LSAB now has more purposeful priorities and working arrangements in line with statutory requirements. Both Boards are benefitting from the leadership of a single

experienced Independent Chair who is visible and influential and providing appropriate challenge.

29. The transfer of safeguarding partnerships to the Children's and Adults' directorate provides an opportunity to promote more coherent joint-working between the key partnerships; to streamline key processes (e.g. agencies' auditing of their safeguarding responsibilities; joint sub-group work on key areas of cross-cutting safeguarding risk); and to rationalise key business support for the Boards.

### **Service User Engagement**

30. The effective engagement with residents and service users is a core principle that underpins the council's 'Fair Future' vision and priorities. It is carried through into service development work. The budget principles include a commitment to transparency and engagement with specific groups or groups of service users about cuts or service changes.
31. There is extensive evidence of Children's Services 'hearing and acting on the voice of young people' both in casework practice and in activities that foster their participation and engagement.

### **Opportunities**

32. There is a secure foundation from which to promote a cohesive and unifying vision for the directorate, with commissioning as a key driver for change. The Strategic Director and his leadership team are promoting this approach through the multi-agency Families Matter programme, joint work on drug and alcohol misuse, a 'lifetime approach' to meet the needs of children and adults with autism, and wider consideration of an all-age disability service.

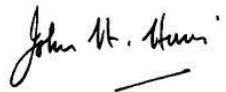
### **Conclusion**

33. On the basis of the above findings, I consider that requirements of the 'local test of assurance' are met.

<b>LOCAL TEST OF ASSURANCE - SUMMARY</b>		
Statutory Duties	Met	Senior management and service structure ensures statutory duties met in respect of Children's Services, Education, Adult Social Services and Public Health
Accountabilities and Responsibilities	Met	This criterion is met. The Chief Executive has appropriate arrangements in place for directly holding to account officers in key statutory roles. There are robust governance and performance management arrangements in place.
Effective partnership and inter-agency working	Met	The respective Safeguarding Boards meet statutory requirements and operate within a partnership protocol with the Health and Well-Being Board. The senior management structure allows for distributed leadership such that the Strategic Director is visible and influential in supporting effective partnership and inter-agency working.

I would be pleased to attend any meetings as required to discuss the findings and recommendations from this independent review. I wish the council and partner organisations well in taking forward this important development.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John M. Harris". A short horizontal line is drawn below the signature.

John Harris (Children's Improvement Adviser, Local Government Association)