



Mr Paul Rowsell  
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Via email:  
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10 April 2015

Dear Mr Rowsell,

I am responding to the Secretary of State in my capacity as the Executive Mayor of Tower Hamlets regarding the proposed draft direction set out in your letter to Mr Halsey dated 25th March 2015.

It is increasingly clear that, through some careful wording of the Direction, the Secretary of State is seeking to impose a Chief Executive on the people of Tower Hamlets whilst attempting to avoid the obvious contradictions of doing so – his recent stated position on this role being that it is an unnecessary, costly anachronism during times of austerity. A view I happen to agree with.

The requirement of the proposed direction that there be a 'new' post commits the council to additional expenditure and to a government imposed model rather than a negotiated one agreed across all local political stakeholders. However the proposed direction is one that, in practical terms, I will support.

I have already committed to the principle of executive delegations which went beyond the requirements of the original direction. To be clear I continue to agree to the delegation to the post holder of direct line management responsibility of the Corporate Management Team.

It will be up to Full Council to decide what parts of its constitutional authority it will want to delegate to the post beyond this through the work of the HR committee and as leader of the Tower Hamlets First group of Councillors I will work with the Commissioners to establish a negotiated position on this matter.

Given the demographic profile of the Borough I would expect the Direction to make it clear that recruitment should see to ensure that equalities issues are fully addressed in any recruitment exercise and that BME communities and people with disabilities who are heavily under represented at this level are specifically targeted. I would further expect the Commissioner to support this both in its inclusion in the direction and ensuring it is an integral part of the recruitment process.

I would advise the Secretary of State to take soundings through the Commissioners on the practical timetable for decision making specific to this appointment before setting out a timetable for recruitment in the Directions.

I note that you have concluded we are in breach of our best value duty for failing to appoint by April 1st target date for the appointment of a Head of Paid Service (HoPS) even though your explanatory memorandum states: 'With regard to the date by which appointments should be made, the Secretary of State believes that it is appropriate to set an aim for these appointment to be made by 1st April 2015 in order to encourage early appointment, but it should be noted that this is an aim rather than a fixed date. It is most important that the best possible candidates are appointed through transparent processes'.

Despite the April 1st target date being only a guide the Commissioners considered we had failed to comply with the Direction on 18th March a full 14 days before the guide date.

I further note from the Commissioners letter attached to your notification that they have rushed to a conclusion that there was an impasse in cross party political discussions on the HoPS appointment after only attending a single cross party meeting. This meeting, contrary to the impression given by your commissioners, was a productive one. This is not only my view but that of the LGA who were facilitating the meeting and who considered that real progress has been made towards a cross party negotiated position on the model for the HoPS role. Of course further discussions were necessary but to describe the position as an impasse is not accurate.

The Commissioners did not see fit to inform you that cross party negotiations were progressing under the independent auspices of the LGA or to include the view of the LGA as relevant to their (and your) deliberations.

The Commissioners also failed to mention that at the cross party meeting I agreed to the principle of providing executive delegations to the HoPS role to give authority to line manage staff. However I note the revised Draft Direction mentions such a delegation.

It is not clear to me how the writing of such a letter or the subsequent DCLG intervention is in any way consistent with supporting negotiated cross party solutions to local political disagreements or how it builds political trust. An agreed view was achievable and the proposed direction represents a failure of the commissioners' function. Nevertheless I, my Cabinet and council officers will continue to work with the Commissioners, the HR Committee and all cross party councillors to ensure an effective and expeditious recruitment process and appointment of a Head of Paid Service.

Yours sincerely,



Lutfur Rahman  
Mayor of Tower Hamlets