

Rotherham Council- preparations for Phase 3 Intervention

Context

Phase 1 of the intervention was executive control of all functions plus licensing and external appointments, beginning 27.2.15.

Phase 2 began when a third of the Council's executive functions were returned in February 2016.

Phase 3 will begin when the next batch of executive functions are returned.

This is assumed not to include Children's Social Care. Commissioners believe a return now is premature with work inspired by the Lincolnshire Improvement Partner still in delivery and Ofsted monitoring visits due..

This note sets out issues arising from Phase 3 working, covering:

- Revised roles for Commissioners
- Powers of Advice
- Office support
- Consequent costs for RMBC

Revised roles for Commissioners

Commissioners (but not the Children's Commissioner) would have revised roles to include:

- (a) Attending a regular Improvement Board meeting
- (b) Seeing all decision reports for Cabinet
- (c) Attending a regular private meeting with the Leader and CE
- (d) Keeping in touch as a team of Commissioners
- (e) Briefing DCLG and DFE colleagues
- (f) Holding a periodic meeting with a wider group of staff
- (g) Evaluating whether the statutory postholders are performing adequately.
- (h) Dealing with matters referred to them
- (i) Considering informal advice or formal Advice, and following up to see what impacts this Advice had.
- (j) Reporting to Government at agreed intervals
- (k) Hold a periodic public meeting to report progress
- (l) Maintain commissioning responsibility for public perception surveys.

It is anticipated that the current complement of days could be reduced for commissioners other than the children's commissioner.

Commissioners would no longer:

- (a) Make formal decisions on Returned Functions at public decision-making meetings
- (b) Attend all meetings between Cabinet Members and Chief officers.

Powers of Advice

The Revised Directions provide for a formal power of Advice and this has operated well. Informal advice has been given and been universally accepted and indeed welcomed.

One formal piece of Advice has yet been given-over the decision-making process for the future of a youth service outdoor pursuit centre. The Council complied with the required process.

It is recommended that similar Powers of Advice are maintained over this next batch of Returned Functions.

Office Support

Commissioners have an Office in Rotherham comprising now 2 FT posts and one part time. The part time and one of the fulltime are RMBC employees so there are opportunity costs only. Steve Nesbit is seconded from DCLG for two years from March 2015.

The working assumption is that if Phase 3 will start in February/March 2017 allowing Steve Nesbit to return to his home Department. The RMBC allocation could be reduced to one post dealing with diary management and liaison.

Costs to Rotherham

Since inception and excluding Stella Manzie who in effect was Acting CE and therefore covered by the RMBC budget allocation, the Commissioners costs (plus office costs plus expenses) have been running at c £42k per month (c£500k per annum).

The first model of revised Phase 3 costs might be nearer £12k per month. A reduction of c70% and a cost saving to the Authority of c £350k per annum. The Council currently faces a minimum of £13.5 budget gap next year plus any agreed extra funding for Children's Services- currently likely to be a further £6m.

Derek Myers, November 2016