



'There's a lot for our new Director to get their teeth into. The opportunity is tangible'

Paul Martin
Council Chief Executive

DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES: A unique opening in inner London's brighter borough

One of the most exciting jobs in local government working for one of the best local authorities in the UK has just become available to external candidates for the first time.

Following the planned retirement of the Director of Children's Services at the London Borough of Wandsworth, the council is now looking for a successor to take up this unique opportunity later in the year. What makes the job so attractive is the way children's services are embedded throughout the organisation and supported right up to the top of the political and managerial teams.

Cllr Ravi Govindia, Leader of Wandsworth since 2011, says: 'One of the greatest challenges of any local authority is meeting the future hopes and aspirations of its children. It's the core of everything we do.'

The council's Chief Executive Paul Martin, who has been in post since 2010, points out that this is an unusual opening. 'Vacancies at this level in Wandsworth are rare and it's the first time we've undertaken an open competition for the Director of Children's Services.' As Cllr Govindia says: 'We want to cast the net as widely as possible.'

The ideal candidate is described in the job spec as 'an individual with presence and influence both within and outside of the organisation, a trusted and respected leader with an ambitious and aspirational vision of delivering an outstanding social work service to the most vulnerable children and young people in Wandsworth.' Both Leader and Chief Executive have a clear idea of the type of skills they require but emphasise they don't want to be prescriptive. Paul Martin adds: 'The post will appeal to serving Directors and those who are close to achieving this role. For sure, candidates will already have a first rate track record of demonstrable achievement in the delivery of excellent children's services.'

Cllr Govindia stresses that children's services are embedded throughout the organisation. 'We don't work in silos here. We work as one team of politicians and managers. The needs of children are woven into our job offers.' He cites an example of how the current Director has influenced members over their spending priorities and agenda for early help. The council's culture is of clearly defined responsibilities

between the political and managerial roles. As Paul Martin says: 'Members value working with professional officers. It's a good environment for officers to work in because there is a clear understanding of our respective officer and member roles. There is a mutual culture of respect. Although the organisation is member-led, politicians greatly appreciate the contribution of senior officers and listen to their advice. Members here set high standards.'

The council has always given strong support to schools, children's social care services and early help. It has one of the youngest populations in the country with 60,000 out of its 324,000 residents being under 18 and as Cllr Govindia says, 'it's a good and popular place to raise a family.' A third of the population are BAME. Its schools perform well above average with 93% either good or outstanding of which 40% are outstanding, double the national average. The council embraced free schools and academies with enthusiasm, and has a mixed provision of academies, free and local authority schools. Wandsworth has both Further Education and Higher Education provision in the borough with London's largest teacher training college at Roehampton University, a highly successful campus university.

The council has a good track record of working with partners like police, NHS and private and voluntary sectors and the new Director will be expected to develop these relationships because, as Cllr Govindia says, 'it's vital we are all on the same page.' The Director also needs to maintain the motivation, engagement and welfare of the 450 staff in the department 'as a stable and committed workforce is at the heart of everything we do,' says Paul Martin.

That is not to say the borough lacks challenges. Like many authorities, the council's spending on children services has increased in recent years as the number of looked after children has grown and as an inner London borough it has inner city challenges like gangs and knife crime. The council has invested an extra £35m in child protection in the past two years in response. Paul Martin explains: 'We have a better understanding nowadays that children's services is one system, better understanding for example that there is a strong link between school exclusions and engagement in knife crime and youth offending. We're looking for someone



Paul Martin
Chief Executive Wandsworth Council



Cllr Ravi Govindia
Leader of Wandsworth Council

who can grasp that whole system approach.'

The borough also shares similar problems with its neighbours of stark divides between wealth and deprivation and high house prices. At the same time it has huge regeneration projects ongoing such as Battersea Power Station and Nine Elms, the latter to include 20,000 new homes and a primary school. The Battersea scheme is the largest regeneration project in Europe and Apple is set to move its HQ there in 2020. Paul Martin adds: 'A few months ago, we brought together our care leavers and some of our major employers at the iconic Battersea Power Station to see what more we can do to link young people to the excellent job opportunities out there. We have to make sure our young people benefit from our thriving local economy. We want a DCS who is inspired by these opportunities and has the vision and energy to lead their implementation'

The council, which retains 34,000 housing units, half of these remaining socially rented, is also refurbishing two of its major estates. Ensuring that community facilities are part of these developments is paramount and the Children's Services Director will be tasked with making sure the needs of children are met. As Cllr Govindia says: 'We have to ensure the voice of children is heard in all our regeneration projects and indeed in all that we do.'

WANDSWORTH'S CHILDREN LIVING IN CARE KOUNCIL (CLICK) IS STRONG AND VERY EFFECTIVE

Ofsted, 2018

LOUD AND CLEAR



To say looked after children and young people in Wandsworth have a voice is an understatement – they're integral to the way services are being improved

Whether it's the design of care homes, the way reviews are carried out or the interview process for the next director of children's services – CLICK has a role to play in supporting Councillors in being great corporate parents.

The Children Living In Care Council, to use its full name, ensures looked after children and young people in Wandsworth are at the heart of shaping the services that support them and their families.

Made up of young people in care aged 13-17, over the last decade it's developed to become a key consultative body for Wandsworth Council's children's services.

CLICK redesigned the Wandsworth Pledge for young people in care that sets out their rights and entitlements, it represents looked after children on the corporate parenting panel and members have redesigned services and revamped pathway plans to make them more engaging and effective.

Consultation forms aimed at giving children a greater voice at review meetings, 'welcome into care' guides, starter packs for care leavers – all have been designed by CLICK. Combined with Double CLICK – made up of children aged six to 12 – and a care leavers group, it ensures engagement from childhood to adulthood.

The level of involvement was picked up by Ofsted inspectors in 2016, leading them to declare 'young people play a positive role in developing and improving services.'

Two years later Ofsted had even warmer praise: 'User participation is strong, particularly for children in care and care leavers, through CLICK. They are effective advocates and are proud to represent children in care in Wandsworth.'

Mei Lai Lu, the council's participation officer for CLICK, says the secret of the initiative's success is a willingness to constantly evolve, reflect young people's concerns and find new ways for them to be involved.

"CLICK does everything other children in care councils do in terms of giving young people a voice. But I think the added value comes in the way we've created a family feel through social interaction, peer support and building a sense of belonging."

It nurtures a virtuous circle: young people gain valuable skills while



'Wandsworth's Children Living In Care Council (CLICK) is strong and very effective; it enables children to participate fully in a range of activities and support groups, and to influence policy development.'

Ofsted, 2018

shaping better support and the council is able to achieve better outcomes for them.

CLICK is now gaining national recognition. It recently took part in a presentation at the Department for Education and organisations outside Wandsworth are increasingly using CLICK's insight to design better services for looked after children.

The next director of children's services will find CLICK to be a powerful asset in the journey towards further improvement, says Mei Lai.

'Whoever comes in will hear the voice of children and young people loud and clear. That's because CLICK is embedded in the way we do things.'

'Our cared for children play a crucial role in shaping provision and helping Wandsworth to constantly strive to be a better corporate parent.'

Interview with, Mei Lai Lu
*Participation Officer & Independent Visitors Manager
(Wandsworth Council).*

We asked our young people what they want from the Director of Children's Services.

This is what they said...

Treat me like their own child

Provide me with a home

Act like a parent

Support me in university

Help me back to education

Look after us

Give my child a future

Keep me away from crime

Have you got what it takes?

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wandsworth.gov.uk



Director of Children's Services £148,584 - £190,800

Do you have what it takes?



It's no secret that Children's Services Directors have one of the toughest, most demanding jobs in local government but amongst the most rewarding.

Due to the retirement of the current post holder, we seek a new Director of Children's Services to take up this unique opportunity later this year. Wandsworth is determined to give our children and young people the best possible future – so you will need to be an inspirational leader who will help us to deliver our commitments to children, young people and their families.

We are particularly keen to encourage applications from women, disabled and black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) candidates, as these groups are underrepresented throughout Leadership roles in Children's Services nationally. Additionally, we are a Disability Confident employer and are committed to employing disabled people.

For an informal and confidential conversation with the Council Chief Executive, Paul Martin, please email your name and contact details with a suitable time to call to: paul.martin@richmondandwandsworth.gov.uk

Discover more and apply online: jobs.richmondandwandsworth.gov.uk
wandsworth.gov.uk

