

Health and social care boss resigns as questions raised over predecessor's payout

Edinburgh's struggling health and social care service is set to get its third boss in less than two years, as questions are raised over a payout made to a former chief executive who councillors were told had resigned.

Chief of Edinburgh's Health and Social Care Partnership (EHSCP) Pat Togher is leaving the £180k-a-year job after just 12 months to take up the same role in Glasgow where he has worked previously.

In his short tenure he presided over a £60m cut to vital services for the most vulnerable provided through the partnership between NHS Lothian and Edinburgh Council. Action taken to reduce the budget deficit has included slashing care packages and closing care homes.

Mr Togher was brought in on the back of a troubling spell for the organisation. His predecessor, Judith Proctor, stepped down just weeks after the Care Inspectorate gave its damning verdict on the quality of care services in the capital she was responsible for overseeing.

Announcing the sudden departure in May last year, ex-council CEO Andrew Kerr said Ms Proctor would be "leaving her role," leading councillors to understand she had resigned.

However it has now emerged there was an "arrangement done" which saw the outgoing boss handed a £22,500 payout from the council.

A councillor said there had been "no indication" there would be "anything other than a worked notice and a resignation".

The 'loss of office payment' was revealed in the council's audited accounts for 2023-24 presented to councillors on Thursday, September 26.

The LDRS previously requested details of any severance payment to Ms Proctor via a freedom of information request. However this was refused and the council said it could "neither confirm nor deny" if any money had changed hands, suggesting there was a confidentiality clause in her contract preventing the release of any details about a settlement.

Conservative group leader Iain Whyte said: "I'm not aware of that being directly discussed with group leaders or others.

"Does the council leader know anything about that, did he sign that off? When someone chooses to leave in other roles, they just leave, they resign. Can he explain why this payment was made?"

Council leader Cammy Day responded: "I am only aware from discussions with the former chief executive that there was an arrangement done.

"I think it is a staffing matter so it will be inappropriate for me to comment on that, but I'm happy to take that up with the executive director of corporate services and come back to Councillor Whyte."

Afterwards, Cllr Whyte told the Local Democracy Reporting Service as the salary and costs of the chief officer role were split 50/50 between the council and NHS Lothian it could be presumed a further £22,500 was paid to Ms Proctor by the health board.

He said: "Whilst the chief officer left following a poor inspection report of the services there was no indication from the then chief executive that there would be anything other than a worked notice and a resignation.

“Indeed elected members were just told she was ‘leaving her role’. I’m sure many members of the public would be surprised at what they would consider to be a pay off for failure when they would get nothing if they resigned from their job.”

In July Ms Proctor was appointed as the interim chief officer for Health and Social Care Moray.

EHSCP was engulfed in a separate pay-related controversy last year after an interim head of adult social care services was appointed with a £160k salary for six months of part-time work. Councillors described this as “indefensible” as the annual full time equivalent worked out at £403k – making it the highest-paid public sector role in Scotland. Others said the comparison was “inappropriate” as it was the “going rate” for senior officials hired externally

However, Alan Adams, who was given the job, left it after less than a month for “a number of both professional and personal reasons”.

Speaking at Thursday’s council meeting, SNP councillor Vicky Nicolson again criticised Mr Adam’s salary which she said “wasn’t even the chief officer role” and came “at a time when we’re attempting to cut our cloth while attempting to protect our most vulnerable citizens”.

She said: “With Pat Togher’s forthcoming resignation, can the council leader assure the people of Edinburgh that the process of recruiting and potentially temporarily filling the post of chief officer will be entirely transparent and provide good value for the residents of Edinburgh?”

Councillor Day said: “It’s unfortunate that Pat’s moving on, I think Pat has transformed the work of the EIJB and is hugely respected across all political parties.

“I have had a discussion with the chief executive who is meeting with the new chief executive of NHS Lothian to look at

the best way forward and whether there is somebody within the current ranks to step into that post or whether we should go to advert or look to an alternative.”

Commenting, Mr Togher said: “I want to extend my thanks to all my colleagues at the Edinburgh Health and Social Care Partnership for the considerable work they have undertaken in my time as chief officer to improve health and social care across the city.

“In my time as chief officer it has been my pleasure to visit and speak our nurses, carers, social workers, OTs and all colleagues who work on the frontline. I know that the partnership here has what it takes to continue to improve people’s lives and provide the vital services Edinburgh needs into the future.”

Welcoming Mr Togher to his new role, Councillor Chris Cunningham, chair of the Glasgow Integration Joint Board, said: “Pat’s experience, knowledge and adaptability means he is well placed to take on this demanding role.

“He is also very attuned to the many complex issues and budgetary constraints which health and social care partnerships are faced with.

“Pat’s heart belongs to Glasgow and we’re delighted to welcome him back.”

A council spokesperson said: “We cannot comment on matters relating to individual colleagues.”

By Donald Turvill Local Democracy Reporter