

STROUD DISTRICT COUNCIL

AGENDA
ITEM NO

COUNCIL

16 MAY 2019

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| Report Title | LGA CORPORATE PEER CHALLENGE REPORT |
| Purpose of Report | To inform members of the feedback from the LGA Corporate Peer Challenge team, which visited the Council between 26 th and 29 th March 2019. |
| Decision(s) | The Committee RESOLVES to: Note the LGA Corporate Peer Challenge feedback report. An action plan based on the recommendations will be considered by a future Strategy & Resources Committee. |
| Consultation and Feedback | The Peer Challenge process involved meetings with the Leader, Group Leaders, committee chairs, a number of other members, the CE, senior management and a cross-section of staff, as well as external partners and agencies, including those from the LEP, LSP, Health Service, County and neighbouring District Councils and the Police. |
| Financial implications and risk assessment | There are no financial implications arising directly from this report. Where decisions are taken as part of the action plan these will be subject to appropriate financial appraisal and included in the MTFP as required. Andrew Cummings, Head of Finance and Section 151 Officer, Tel: 01453 754115 Email: andrew.cummings@stroud.gov.uk |
| Legal Implications | There are no legal implications arising from this report. Patrick Arran, Head of Legal Services and Monitoring Officer Tel: 01453 754369 Email: patrick.arran@stroud.gov.uk |
| Report Authors | Kathy O'Leary, Chief Executive, Tel. 01453 754292 Email: kathy.oleary@stroud.gov.uk Tim Power, Head of Business Service Planning Tel: 01453 754155 Email: tim.power@stroud.gov.uk |
| Options | The Local Government Association encourages all local authorities to undergo a Corporate Peer Challenge every 4-5 years. Peer challenges are improvement-focussed and tailored to meet an individual council's needs. They are designed to complement and add value to a council's own performance and improvement focus. |
| Performance Management Follow Up | Members and officers will formulate an action plan from the findings and recommendations of the peer team. The LGA offer a follow-up visit within 2 years to assess our progress against their recommendations. |

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| Background Papers | <p>A copy of the LGA Corporate Peer Challenge team's feedback report is attached at Appendix 1.</p> <p>A copy of the slide presentation given by the Peer Challenge team on 29th March is available on the hub at: https://hub.stroud.gov.uk/resources/corporate-peer-challenge</p> <p>All participants and all Members were invited to the presentation on 29th March. Members and staff who were unable to attend have received an email inviting them to attend a screening in the council Chamber of the Peer Challenge team's presentation.</p> |
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1. INTRODUCTION / BACKGROUND

1.1. The Local Government Association (LGA) gives all local authorities the opportunity to participate in a Corporate Peer Challenge as part of its sector-led improvement programme. As the Council last undertook a Peer Challenge over 4 years ago, the new Chief Executive and Leader felt that this was the ideal time to take up this offer to review how as a council we are doing and how we can best tackle current and future challenges.

1.2. The review took place between 26 and 29 March 2019 and was conducted by a team of elected members and senior officers from other local authorities, together with advisors from the LGA. They were invited to give us the benefit of their experience of working with and leading similar organisations.

1.3. Every corporate peer challenge considers 5 core components:

- a) How well we understand our local place and priority: do we understand the local context and use this to inform a clear vision and set of priorities?
- b) Leadership of place: do we provide effective leadership through members and officers and form constructive partnerships with stakeholders?
- c) Organisational Leadership and Governance: how effective is this politically and managerially and is this supported by good governance and decision making in response to key challenges and allows the council to change and transform in response to these?
- d) Financial Planning and viability: do we have a plan in place which ensures our long term viability?
- e) Capacity to Deliver: is our resource capacity aligned with priorities?

We also asked the Peer Challenge team's view on:

- How well are we currently meeting customer needs?
- How might we make best use of technology in the delivery of efficient and excellent customer services?
- How well our structure supports our vision and delivery of corporate objectives and how we might improve this?

- How we can best achieve financial self-sufficiency – including making the most of commercial investment and treasury management (with an eye on the benefit to the residents and businesses)?

1.4. The team began the process by reviewing the information submitted in our self-assessment, including the council's key documents. They visited the council for 4 days and conducted site visits, interviews and workshops with a wide selection of staff, councillors, stakeholders and partners. During the time the team spent at Ebley Mill they met with 107 people and held 47 meetings including attending the Environment Committee.

2. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

2.1. The peer team presented their findings on the last day of their visit and have now submitted their feedback report, attached at Appendix 1. It is important to note that the team provide feedback as critical friends, not as assessors, consultants or inspectors.

2.2. The peer team's findings are clearly set out in the report and although the focus is on areas for development and improvement, they also point out 'there is much that SDC does that is of the highest order' (for example, recycling and joint working on health and wellbeing) and have invited the council to share these areas of good practice with other local authorities.

2.3. The headlines in the feedback report are:

- SDC is a good council, providing good services, in a distinctive place that staff are proud to be a part of.
- There is evidence of good partnership working on the ground.
- The unique political alliance is working well. The Leadership and members want to take the next steps towards promoting more effectively the consistent delivery of priorities and ambitions of Stroud District and the council.
- Notwithstanding a relatively strong financial position, there is a need, through clearer articulation of priorities to take difficult decisions where necessary to provide a sound basis for financing priorities into the medium and longer term.
- Governance needs to ensure better collaboration at an early stage in producing options and implications for decisions.
- Staff support the Chief Executive and are keen to be involved in shaping the improvement journey.
- The Chief Executive will need to move quickly to put appropriate senior management capacity in place to enable change.
- There is a groundswell of goodwill to the council from a range of external partners and as such a real opportunity for the council to influence strategic decisions within and outside its borders.
- **The council has the potential to be an exemplar** if we develop our strategic capacity, establish our next 12 months key deliverables (these are set out in the Corporate Delivery Plan and Key Actions for 2019/20 report at item 11 on this agenda), then focus on the key issues that have been identified and make them happen.

2.4. The key recommendations are set out in section 2 on pages 3 to 4 and are separated into short and medium term actions.

3. NEXT STEPS

3.1. Members and officers now have the opportunity to reflect on the Peer Challenge team's findings and determine how we wish to take things forward, with a view to developing a robust action plan. The LGA is available to offer advice and further information to support us through this process. The intention is to bring the action plan to a future meeting of the Strategy & Resources Committee.

3.2. In addition, the LGA offer to return for a 'light touch' follow up visit within the next 2 years to help assess how we have progressed against areas of improvement and development identified by the peer team.