

STROUD DISTRICT COUNCIL
STRATEGY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

**AGENDA
ITEM NO**

3 OCTOBER 2019

13

Report Title	LGA CORPORATE PEER CHALLENGE ACTION PLAN PROGRESS
Purpose of Report	To note the progress made in Q1 on delivering the Action Plan resulting from the LGA Corporate Peer Challenge Feedback Report received in May, which was agreed by this Committee on 11 July 2019.
Decision(s)	The Committee RESOLVES to note the progress made in Q1 on implementing the LGA Corporate Peer Challenge Action Plan.
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. The Action Plan was developed in consultation with managers and members of this Committee.
Financial Implications and Risk Assessment	There are no financial implications arising directly from the report. Actions taken will be subject to proper financial evaluation and reported to this Committee as appropriate. Andrew Cummings, Interim Director of Resources and Section 151 Officer, Tel: 01453 754115 Email: andrew.cummings@stroud.gov.uk
Legal Implications	There are no legal implications arising directly from the content of this report. Patrick Arran, Head of Legal Services and Monitoring Officer, Tel: 01453 754369 Email: patrick.arran@stroud.gov.uk
Report Author	Kathy O'Leary, Chief Executive Tel: 01453 754780 Email: kathy.oleary@stroud.gov.uk
Options	The Local Government Association encourages all local authorities to undergo a Corporate Peer Challenge every 4-5 years. These are designed to complement and add value to the Council's own performance and improvement focus. The preparation of an Action Plan to address the recommendations set out in the feedback report is optional. The Action Plan will help guide the Council's improvement over the next 18 months to 2 years.

Performance Management Follow Up	Progress against the Action Plan will continue to be regularly monitored and reported to this Committee. The LGA will follow up with a visit in the next 18 months to 2 years to assess progress against their recommendations.
Background Papers/ Appendices	LGA Corporate Peer Challenge feedback report, May 2019. Report to Council on LGA Corporate Peer Challenge feedback report 16 May 2019. Report to Strategy and Resources Committee on LGA Corporate Peer Challenge Action Plan 11 July 2019. Appendix 1 – Q1 update report

1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 The Local Government Association (LGA) offers all local authorities the opportunity to participate in a Corporate Peer Challenge every 4 years or so as part of its sector-led improvement programme.
- 1.2 The Council's Corporate Peer Challenge took place between 26 and 29 March 2019. It was conducted by a team of elected members and senior officers from other local authorities together with LGA advisors.
- 1.3 The Peer Challenge considered 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 aligned with our priorities?
- 1.4 The Peer Challenge team were also asked to give views on:
 - a) How well are we currently meeting customer needs?
 - b) How might we make the best use of technology in the delivery of efficient and excellent customer services?
 - c) How well our structure supports our vision and delivery of corporate objectives and how might we improve this?
 - d) 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 residents and businesses)?
- 1.5 The Peer Challenge team reviewed the Council's self-assessment, key documents and visited Ebley Mill for 4 days between 26 and 29 March 2019. They conducted site visits, interviews and workshops with a wide selection of staff, members, stakeholders and partners, meeting with 107 people and holding 47 meetings during their stay.

- 1.6 The Council received the Peer Challenge team's feedback report in May 2019 and reported it to Council on 16 May 2019. The report to Council identified the headlines in the feedback report, which included that Stroud District Council is a good council providing good services, does much that is of the highest order and has the potential to be an exemplar leader of place.
- 1.7 The Peer Challenge team set out eight recommendations in respect of areas for development and improvement on pages 3 and 4 of the feedback report. The first four recommendations were identified as needing more immediate action and the latter four as needing action in the medium term. To some extent progress on the medium term recommendations and actions relies on addressing initial recommendations and actions, particularly carrying out a senior officer restructure to ensure sufficient strategic capacity is in place at the top of the organisation. A report to this Committee on 11 July set out an Action Plan in respect of the 8 recommendations, including anticipated timescale and organisational leads, and a separate report to address the senior management restructure.
- 1.8 The actions and progress against them are recorded on the Excelsis monitoring system.

2. PROGRESS ON THE ACTION PLAN

- 2.1 Appendix 1 sets out the headline progress made on the 8 recommendations made by the LGA Peer Challenge team and the actions so far identified to address them.
- 2.2 In summary, the Q1 progress against the 8 recommendations is as follows:

REC 1 (CRD1) Commence senior officer restructure to ensure sufficient strategic capacity is in place at the top of the organisation.

- This Committee agreed a report on the senior management restructure on 11 July. Recruitment of the 4 Strategic Directors commenced on 29 July and applications closed on 6 September. Technical interviews take place in September and final interviews in October. The Interim Director of Resources took up post at the beginning of June to improve management capacity in the short term.

REC 2 (CRD2) Agree short-term priorities and actions for the period to May 2020.

- This action was completed with the adoption of the Corporate Delivery Plan Key Actions for 2019/20 at Council on 16 May 2019. Progress is being monitored quarterly (see report elsewhere on this agenda).

REC 3 (CRD3) Ensure the integrity of the current IT system. Review the progress and suitability of current plans, capability and capacity in respect of this, and beyond that to confirm the emerging plans in respect of ICT development and digital delivery fit with longer term transformational plans.

- Consultants are reviewing the Socitm work, infrastructure needs and priorities and preparing a costed action plan for implementation ahead of the appointment of a Strategic Director of Change & Transformation agreed by this Committee on 11 July.

REC 4 (CRD4) Work with all key stakeholders over the next year to develop a clear vision and priorities for the council aligned to our Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP), to be agreed in the next iteration of the Corporate Delivery Plan (CDP) and once approved ensure this is communicated effectively to residents, businesses and other partners.

- Annual budget consultations with residents and businesses are under way to provide baseline information on future priorities. A series of budget workshops are scheduled. A plan and timetable for CDP preparation and engagement over the year ahead is being drawn up.

REC 5 (CRD5) Create time, once the senior officer team is appointed, for the political and managerial leadership teams, both informally and formally, to have ‘strategic conversations’. This will help develop a strong leadership team and help them develop clear priorities and plans to be put in place focused on SDC’s improvement, for the district and wider county and sub region.

- Recruitment to the new senior management team is under way. In the meantime discussions have been held with the Leader to agree regular meetings with the staff and administration leadership teams to discuss the emerging CDP and other strategic matters.
- CDP and budget workshops involving senior staff and Members are scheduled for the Autumn.

REC 6 (CRD6) Establish effective workforce planning and performance management arrangements so that the Council has a committed and engaged staff group with clarity in terms of the expectations of them and sufficient capacity to deliver its plans. The Council should:

- Review is future staffing arrangements, ensuring strategic fit and the development of a ‘one council’ ethos
- Develop core transformation plans and ensure sufficient capacity to enable effective delivery and monitoring. This includes consideration of ICT provision.
- Establish appropriate pay and reward arrangements for staff
- Ensure consistent compliance with, and outcomes arising from, core HR policies are delivered eg appraisals
- Ensure consistent oversight, management and compliance with key performance management practices.
- Performance management arrangements across committees are being reviewed and refreshed and plans are being developed for a new Corporate Policy and Governance team which will monitor and review performance management across the organisation.
- Organisational values and behaviours workshops are planned for the Autumn, organisational skills audit and organisational development planning are under way.
- A ‘top down’ approach (starting with the recruitment of Strategic Directors) to the review of pay and reward is being taken.

REC 7 (CRD7) Building on its relatively strong financial position, review how its investment and commercial plans could be enhanced. A key focus of this will be to help deliver the Council's priorities as well as sustain its financial viability into the medium term.

- Revised investment criteria agreed and released to investment funds with Member treasury management panel engagement in appraisal process scheduled for the Autumn.
- Facilitated workshop planned on income generation, as part of the series of budget workshops planned for the Autumn.
- A fees and charges policy is being developed.

REC 8 (CRD8) Consider reviewing governance arrangements to ensure better decision making in order to deliver its revised priorities and plans. As part of this the Council should:

- **Look to develop better collaboration at an early stage in producing policy or service options, taking account of expertise available from members where appropriate, together with ensuring that operational, financial and legal implications of options are effectively understood**
- **Seek to build greater political consensus before decision making reports come to members, with greater opportunity for testing and rigour.**
- Plans to develop a Corporate Policy and Governance team to co-ordinate and manage governance arrangements across the organisation are being developed. A forward plan for the year ahead, based on CDP priorities and Key Actions for 2019/20 and committee 'business as usual' is being prepared.
- Focused training on good decision-making delivered, Code of Conduct training planned for October and workshops on member / officer roles and the preparation of a protocol planned for the Autumn.

2.3 As further work is carried out in respect of each recommendation and action, the Action Plan will be underpinned by further detail.

2.4 The Action Plan will be kept under continual review and progress regularly reported to this Committee. The intention is to make substantial progress on the Action Plan by the time the LGA are invited back within the next two years.

3. CONCLUSION

3.1 Members are asked to note the Q1 progress of the Action Plan set out at Appendix 1. Good progress is being made on both the first four shorter term recommendations as well as a good start on the latter four medium recommendations.