

CORPORATE PEER CHALLENGE PROGRESS QUARTER 1 2020/21

1. BACKGROUND AND FOREWORD

- 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 team reviewed the Council's self-assessment, key documents. 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.
- 1.4** The Council received the Peer Challenge team's feedback report in May 2019 and reported it to Council on 16 May 2019. The report set out eight recommendations in respect of areas for development and improvement.
- 1.5** An Action Plan was developed in respect of the 8 recommendations, including timescales and organisational leads. These are recorded on our performance management system – Excelsis.
- 1.6** Three of the recommendations were completed during 2019/20, namely the restructure of the senior leadership team (CRD1); adoption of the Corporate Delivery Plan to May 2020 (CRD2) and regular meetings are now held between Senior Officers and Members both on a formal and informal basis. Officers and members are also involved in strategic conversations with partners from other authorities (CRD5). The remaining actions have been rolled forward to 2020/21.

2. PROGRESS ON THE ACTION PLAN

- 2.1** A summary of progress made in Quarter 1 2020/21 is set out below.

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.

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- Excellent progress has been made on replacing and updating the Council's servers, storage and disaster recovery infrastructure in line with the costed delivery plan. Delivery was delayed slightly by the pandemic and the need to speed up the rollout of laptops to all staff to enable home working and the need to facilitate online meetings. Infrastructure work is largely due for completion in August 2020, providing a strong basis from which the Council can develop a new digital platform for service delivery, CRM and improve telephony.

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.

- As a result of the pandemic the Council has developed a substantial recovery plan highlighting the work area on which it must prioritise to help lead the District in strategic recovery. This will involve significant consultation with partners and others. This has recovery strategy, has become a significant addition to the Corporate Delivery Plan and represents the Council's key priorities at this time. The CDP revision timetable was for development and publication after the election in May 2020. With the timetable for the new administration being necessarily delayed until 2021 the CDP process will follow accordingly.

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.**
 - The Council has recently completed procurement of specialist organisational development support. This is to help the Council develop a number of key projects including

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- People Strategy
- Behaviours and Values
- Review of HR Policies
- Productivity Management
- Pay Review

SLT are due to consider an action plan for this work which will be provided to the support partners.

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.

- The Council continues to actively manage its investment portfolio and has achieved higher returns through the use of pooled investment funds. At Q1 2020/21 the average return on those funds was 2.5% as opposed to 0.4% in the traditional Treasury Management portfolio. The risk of capital loss has been mitigated through the creation of an investment risk reserve. Investment plans continue to be monitored to protect security, liquidity and yield. The ability to generate additional yield will be very limited in the current investment conditions.

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.**
- The Corporate Policy and Governance Team is now in place and recruitment is underway to fill all of the vacant posts. A structure chart with details of the new posts will be available on the Hub.
 - Following a motion to Council on 16 July, a report on proposed amendments to the Code of Conduct for members and the arrangements under which allegations can be investigated is to be reviewed by the Audit & Standards Committee in August, before recommendation at a future Council meeting.

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- The new report template has ensured that the operational, financial and legal implications are clearly set out and understood. Reports are considered at an early stage by members to ensure earlier input.

2.2 In summary, the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, particularly in having to postpone the local council election until May 2021, has delayed the implementation of some of the recommendations. It has also inevitably led to a reassessment of priorities, with the Council now working on a 1-year external Recovery Plan and a 2-year internal Modernisation Plan. These will gradually develop into a longer term renewal strategy which will form the basis for a new Corporate Plan in 2021.

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