

CORPORATE PEER CHALLENGE PROGRESS 3RD QUARTER 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 were rolled forward to 2020/21.

2. PROGRESS ON THE ACTION PLAN

- 2.1** A summary of progress made in the 3rd Quarter 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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- Despite some delays due to staffing and the pandemic, work has continued on the Infrastructure Refresh Program. A new Head of Technology and Infrastructure and Security Manager have been appointed, both of which have been vacant for 2 years. These new managers respectively started in January and start in February 2021, and their roles, alongside that of the existing Systems Development manager, will define the long term strategic goals of ICT alongside those of the organisation as a whole and the emerging modernisation agenda.

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.

- Alliance Member workshops focusing on the strategic priorities for the year ahead and beyond were held on 12 November, 1 December and 28 January and have informed the budget setting process. This will form the basis of the new Corporate Plan following delayed local elections.

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.**
 - An action plan has been agreed with our Organisational Development Consultants, Ascend. Initial sessions have been held with SLT and LMT. Member and staff 121s and focus groups were held in December 2020, and form the basis for the next stage of the process to develop Council-wide values and behaviours.

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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 has completed a further £1m investment in Multi-Asset funds. Capital performance in investments during the quarter has been stable.

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 CE and Leader hold and plan to hold regular meetings with the Group Leaders, Policy Committee Chairs and Vice Chairs and the Strategic Leadership Team at which proposals can be discussed at a formative stage. The Strategic Leadership Team meets at least weekly and promotes collaborative and strategic working across the Council. This is demonstrated by the rapid and ongoing response to the Coronavirus pandemic and the work being put into Recovery plans and relating them well to the budget-setting process.
 - The report preparation process has evolved and there are clear operational, financial and legal implications set out in reports which are discussed with the administration at draft stage. The CE and SLT engage with Group Leaders and Policy Committee Chairs, and in turn they engage with their political groups to help build political consensus.
 - Constitution Working Group has now re-convened and is considering its work plan. Any progress from here will be business as usual within the role of the Monitoring Officer.

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- 2.2** In summary, the impact of the second wave 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. Alliance Member workshops to help set strategic priorities and inform budget setting have been held. The Council's Organisational Development Programme is now under way with Member and staff focus groups and 121s held in December 2020 and feedback sessions in February 2021.

Much of the ongoing activity is captured in our emerging Modernisation Programme.

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