

Corporate Peer Challenge: Action Plan progress report

Report of the Leader

Recommended:

That the progress made following the Corporate Peer Challenge as detailed in the Annex to the report, be endorsed.

SUMMARY:

- This report summarises the progress made by the Council following the Corporate Peer Challenge in October 2018.
- Annex one sets out in detail how the Council has addressed each of the recommendations from the peer challenge team through the action plan that was approved by Cabinet in December 2018.

1 Introduction

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to update Cabinet on the progress made following the Corporate Peer Challenge in 2018. Following the peer team visit, an action plan was produced setting out how the Council would address each of the recommendations. This report provides Cabinet with a detailed update on the steps taken to address each of the recommendations identified by the peer team.

2 Background

- 2.1 The Council participated in an LGA Peer Challenge in October 2018. Peer Challenge is a core element of the Local Government Association's sector-led improvement offer to local authorities. Peer Challenges are managed and delivered by the sector for the sector. The scope of a Peer Challenge is agreed with the Council and tailored to reflect local needs and specific requirements. It is important to stress that the Peer Challenge was not an inspection. It is focused on improvement and tailored to the needs of the Council.
- 2.2 The make-up of the peer team reflected the Council's requirements and the focus of the Peer Challenge. The peers who delivered the Peer Challenge were:
- Jack Hegarty, Chief Executive, Malvern Hills District Council and Managing Director at Wychavon District Council
 - Cllr Peter Fleming OBE, Leader, Sevenoaks District Council

- Gemma Barron, Head of Sustainable Communities and Wellbeing, South Cambridgeshire District Council
- Jane Eaton, Director of Corporate Resources, Horsham District Council
- Helen Sheppard, Business Change Commissioning Manager, Leicester City Council
- Paul Thomas, Strategic Director – Growth, South Kesteven District Council
- Kevin Kewin, Programme Manager, Local Government Association

2.3 The focus of the Peer Challenge was based around five core questions:

- Understanding of the local place and priority setting: Does the Council understand its local context and place and use that to inform a clear vision and set of priorities?
- Leadership of Place: Does the Council provide effective leadership of place through its elected members, officers and constructive relationships and partnerships with external stakeholders?
- Organisational leadership and governance: Is there effective political and managerial leadership supported by good governance and decision-making arrangements that respond to key challenges and enable change and transformation to be implemented?
- Financial planning and viability: Does the Council have a financial plan in place to ensure long term viability and is there evidence that it is being implemented successfully?
- Capacity to deliver: Is organisational capacity aligned with priorities and does the council influence, enable and leverage external capacity to focus on agreed outcomes?

2.4 In addition to the five core questions, the Council asked the team to consider the Council's approach to inclusive growth and development, particularly within the principal towns of Romsey and Andover.

2.5 The team spent three days on site during which they:

- Spoke to more than 230 people including a range of council staff together with councillors, external partners and stakeholders.
- Gathered information and views from more than 40 meetings, and additional research and reading.
- Collectively spent more than 250 hours to determine their findings.

- 2.6 Following the on-site visit, the Peer Team produced a feedback report to summarise the findings resulting from the Peer Challenge. In response, the Council prepared an action plan which set out the actions the Council would take in addressing the recommendations of the peer team. Cabinet approved the action plan in December 2018 and agreed that a progress update (attached in annex one) would be reported after twelve months.

3 Progress update

- 3.1 Annex one sets out in detail how the Council has addressed each of the nine recommendations identified by the peer team.
- 3.2 During the period since the action plan was approved by Cabinet, significant work has been undertaken and progress made against key areas highlighted by the peer team. In particular this includes:
- (i) Improving the Council's approach to communications to be more pro-active and embedded across the whole organisation. Ensuring that the Council is able to demonstrate more clearly the impact it is having and the successes being delivered for residents.
 - (ii) Putting in place the mechanisms to support the Council in delivering on its ambitions for the future redevelopment of Andover town centre and Romsey south of town centre.
 - (iii) Building upon the existing strong partnerships with parish councils and working even more closely with them through peer learning and community planning initiatives.
 - (iv) Taking a lead on key issues at a sub-regional and national level on topics such as economic growth, homelessness, and environmental protection.
 - (v) Maintaining a focus on how the Council does business. Identifying opportunities for continuous improvement and efficient and effective working through its committees, the management of resources and the ongoing development of its workforce.

4 Corporate Objectives and Priorities

- 4.1 Peer Challenges are improvement focused and tailored to meet the needs of the Council; they form part of the LGA's Sector-Led Improvement programme and are voluntary processes. The Council is committed to continuous improvement which forms a core part of the Operating Model as set out in the Corporate Plan 2019-23.

5 Consultations/Communications

- 5.1 Throughout the Peer Challenge the team spoke to more than 230 people including a range of council staff together with councillors and external partners and stakeholders.

6 Options

- 6.1 Cabinet has the options to either endorse the progress made or not to endorse the progress made as set out in Annex one.

7 Risk Management

- 7.1 An evaluation of the risks indicates that the existing controls in place mean that no significant risks have been identified at this time.

8 Resource Implications

- 8.1 None

9 Legal Implications

- 9.1 None

10 Equality Issues

- 10.1 None

11 Other Issues

- 11.1 Wards/Communities Affected – All

12 Conclusion and reasons for recommendation

- 12.1 The Corporate Peer Challenge forms a key part of the Local Government Association's Sector-led improvement programme. Following the visit of the peer team the Council has worked to address each of the areas for improvement highlighted by the team through the action plan approved by Cabinet in December 2018. Annex one sets out in detail how the Council has made significant progress in addressing the outcomes of the peer challenge.

Background Papers (Local Government Act 1972 Section 100D)

None

Confidentiality

It is considered that this report does not contain exempt information within the meaning of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, as amended, and can be made public.

No of Annexes:	1	File Ref:	N/A
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(Portfolio: Leader) Councillor P North

Officer:	James Moody	Ext:	8130
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Report to:	Cabinet	Date:	12 February 2020
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