

COUNCIL
25 JULY 2019

Report of the Chief Executive

CORPORATE PEER CHALLENGE

PURPOSE OF REPORT

To seek Council endorsement for a Corporate Peer Challenge to be undertaken in partnership with the Local Government Association.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That Council agrees to participate in a Corporate Peer Challenge to be undertaken in partnership with the Local Government Association.
2. That authority be delegated to the Chief Executive to agree a programme of on-site activity with the Local Government Association Peer Challenge Manager.

WARDS AFFECTED

All

STRATEGIC LINK

The Corporate Plan sets out the District Council's priorities and areas for improvement, and identifies targets to be achieved. Service Plans, policies and strategies supplement the Corporate Plan. The Corporate Peer Challenge will assist the Council in the review of its Corporate Plan (2019-2023).

1 BACKGROUND

- 1.1 The context within which any Council is operating is becoming increasingly testing in terms of demands and expectations; particularly during an era where the resources available have reduced and continue to diminish.
- 1.2 In this context, the Local Government Association has for many years, supported various programmes to help councils further strengthen local accountability and explore how effectively they are delivering services. Peer challenges were first launched in 2011, and are offered free of charge to member councils. They provide a robust and effective improvement tool managed and delivered by the sector, for the sector. Peers are at the heart of the peer challenge process and provide a 'practitioner perspective' and 'critical friend' challenge.
- 1.3 It is important to emphasise that Corporate Peer Challenge is not an inspection, it is a tool for improvement and is aimed at improving, not judging councils. They are designed to complement and add value to a council's own performance and improvement priorities with peers using their own experience and knowledge of local government to reflect on the information presented from people they meet and from what they hear and read. Whilst there is no mandatory requirement for councils to participate in a Corporate Peer

Challenge, there is an expectation that councils will commission a Corporate Peer Challenge every 4-5 years. The last Corporate Peer Challenge of Derbyshire Dales District Council was in July 2013.

2 CORPORATE PEER CHALLENGE

2.1 The Corporate Peer Challenge will consider 5 core components and high level questions:

- Understanding of the local place and priority setting

How well does the Council understand its local context and place and how has that been used to inform a clear vision and set of priorities? How well is the Council achieving against those ambitions? For example, as it reaches the end of the 2015-2019 Corporate Plan has the Council got a clear idea of where to go from here?

- Leadership of Place

Does the Council provide effective leadership of the District within, but also beyond, the Council's boundaries and the wider place (such as Derbyshire, Sheffield City Region, D2N2, The East Midlands) through its elected members, officers and constructive relationships and partnerships with external stakeholders?

- Financial planning and viability

Does the Council have a financial plan in place to ensure long term sustainability and is there evidence that it is being implemented successfully? How aware is it of its costs compared to similar councils? Is the Council maximising appropriate sharing and "commercial" opportunities to enable reinvestment in services and to contribute further to self-sufficiency? Indeed are the Council's commercial aspirations reasonable and realistic given what it considers to be its limited cash and assets? Does the new "Commercial Board" provide, and allow, the focus and leadership needed?

- Organisational leadership and governance

Is there effective political and managerial leadership supported by good governance. Are decision-making arrangements fleet of foot, responsive to key challenges and opportunities and enable change and transformation to be successfully implemented? Are elected and officer roles clearly defined and relationships constructive? Is the way the Council operates its Committee system model fit for purpose?

- Capacity to deliver

Are resources aligned with priorities? Does the Council influence, enable and leverage external capacity to focus on agreed outcomes? Is the culture one where residents and other stakeholders feel fully engaged and involved in the decisions that are being made on their behalf? Is the strategic capacity within the Council sufficient for current and future challenges? Is the Council making the most of new technology, including artificial intelligence, to reduce demand, improve efficiency and to deliver outcomes. Is the Council making use of all possible opportunities and taking the right steps to deliver its affordable housing ambitions?

2.2 Exploring the core components above will help provide reassurance and an indication about the organisation's ability and capacity to deliver on its plans, proposals and ambitions, but will also allow the peer team where appropriate to comment on track record and achievements too, helping to demonstrate our journey of improvement.

3 PEER CHALLENGE TIMETABLE AND TEAM

- 3.1 Preliminary discussions have taken place with the LGA and (subject to Council approval) a provisional programme has been agreed for the corporate peer challenge to take place for 3 days on 22nd – 24th October 2019.
- 3.2 The peer challenge team will be assembled by the LGA Peer Challenge Manager in consultation with the Chief Executive and will comprise:
- Chief Executive
 - 2 x Member Peers
 - 2 x Senior Officer Peers
 - LGA Peer Challenge Manager
- 3.3 As part of the peer challenge, the Council will need to arrange a timetable of activity which will need to schedule meetings and discussion sessions over days 1 and 2 with a range of officers, members and other stakeholders (including citizens and partners if relevant) enabling the peer team to explore the issues relevant to the purpose, scope and suggested terms of reference for the peer challenge.
- 3.4 Feedback from the peer team will comprise of:
- A feedback session delivered by the peer team at the end of the onsite activity (Day 3 afternoon session) involving all members.
 - A short written feedback report (typically 12-14 pages) summarising the peer team's feedback, and providing signposting to places and practice to support the key findings and recommendations of the peer team

4 SUMMARY

- 4.1 With the election of a new Council and the development of a new Corporate Plan (2019-2023), there is a clear opportunity to consider our strategic direction having regard to our priorities, resources and capacity. If Council agrees to proceed, it is hoped that the feedback we receive from the Peer Challenge will help Members and Corporate Leadership Team work together on agreeing a clear and focussed strategic approach to the future which maximises our resources and capacity towards the delivery of the Council's priorities.

5 RISK ASSESSMENT

5.1 Legal

There is no legal obligation for the Council to undertake a peer review however a peer review is a useful tool to ensure that the Council is complying with all its legal duties in the most efficient manner.

5.2 Financial

The review of financial planning and viability, which forms part of the peer challenge, will provide a useful assessment of the Council's arrangements for financial management and financial sustainability.

The cost of the peer challenge (mainly officer time as the LGA cost is included in the Council's annual subscription) can be met from existing budgets. Therefore, the financial risk is assessed as low.

6 OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

In preparing this report, the relevance of the following factors has also been considered: prevention of crime and disorder, equalities, environmental, climate change, health, human rights, personnel and property.

7 CONTACT INFORMATION

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8 BACKGROUND PAPERS

None