

Cabinet

16 June 2022

Corporate Peer Challenge Outcome

Recommendations

That Cabinet:

1. Considers the LGA Peer Challenge report attached at Appendix 1.
2. Authorises the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Leader, to develop an action plan to address the themes identified by the Peer Challenge as set out at Appendix 2.

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 In March 2022 the Local Government Association (LGA) undertook a Peer Challenge of the County Council. A Peer Challenge sets out to support and offer a series of recommendations for the Council to consider in the context of its own culture, priorities and future vision designed to give us content for consideration. They are not mandatory but intended for our consideration.
- 1.2 The visit took place over three days and looked at our approaches across the following key themes:
 - local priorities and outcomes;
 - organisational leadership;
 - governance and culture;
 - financial planning and management; and
 - capacity for improvement.
- 1.3 Reflecting the timing of the review in terms of the status of the Pandemic and the approval of our Council Plan the month before, the Peer Team was also asked to provide observations and feedback on learning from the Pandemic, our transformation journey and our approach to place, partnerships and climate change.
- 1.4 The report in **Appendix 1** will be published on the LGA website in early June following this meeting.
- 1.5 This report shares the findings with Cabinet and details the work being undertaken to develop an action plan, based on key themes, which will embed the findings into the way we work.

2. Key Findings

- 2.1 During the onsite visit the Peer Team undertook a review of our key documents and evidence. They also held a range of interviews and workshops with a range of Staff, Members and Partners.
- 2.2 The full report, attached at **Appendix 1**, details finding against each of the lines of enquiry, providing a summary of our strength and suggestions for improvements.
- 2.3 The report is very positive, and the headline strengths noted by the Peer Team can be summarised as:
- We are a good council with a positive reputation;
 - Our Leader and CEO are held in high regard;
 - We have positive partner relationships, including, Integrated Care System (ICS) work and joint posts;
 - We have built an enabling and permissive culture;
 - We enjoy sound financial management; and
 - Our operating model is sound and enabled us to respond well during the Pandemic – we now need to refine it to address new challenges.
- 2.4 The key recommendations for the Council to consider are:
- Develop a cross-Warwickshire approach to Levelling Up to consider and respond to disparities in outcomes in the County;
 - Establish a 'Team Warwickshire' partnership approach for key statutory partners and umbrella voluntary and community sector organisations with key areas of focus. Examples might include addressing socio-economic disparities, tackling climate change and ensuring a strategic economic growth plan exists for the County;
 - Take the opportunity to consider a more distributed political leadership in the context of the changed political landscape (post 2021 elections);
 - Put in place an appropriate governance structure to oversee the multiple changes and challenges relating to the Education Service;
 - Establish a clear shared understanding of the approach to, and related expectations around, the 'return to the workplace';
 - Review and ensure clarity around the leadership development offer for managers at different levels of the Organisation;
 - Develop an approach and programme to aid cross-organisational working below Assistant Director level;
 - Continue to drive forward the use of data and insight to inform decision-making and service improvement; and
 - Take stock as an organisation post pandemic – consolidating and embedding the changes of recent years and the Transformation Journey to date.
- 2.5 Within each section of the report there is a rich level of feedback with additional recommendations. Some of these additional recommendations reflect the direction of travel we were already taking. We would want to consider how and whether we adopt other recommendations at this time. Any

actions will need to be owned by the relevant leads and service areas and incorporated into the way we work.

3. Developing a Peer Challenge Action Plan

- 3.1 Following receipt of the feedback report, we have looked at the LGA recommendations and built these into the next phase of our continuous improvement journey.
- 3.2 Crucial to this has been the need to align with the new Council Plan and support delivery of the outcomes identified in the new Integrated Delivery Plan (IDP) as approved by Cabinet in April 2022. The Peer Challenge looked at the Organisation at a “moment in time” before the Integrated Delivery plan was approved, but many areas have clear alignment and are addressed in the IDP. For example, our Levelling-Up plan to address inequalities (IDP section 1.1) links directly to the first key recommendation to develop a cross-Warwickshire approach.
- 3.3 The recommendations have been grouped into broad themes which map to the Council Plan’s seven areas of focus and the themes the LGA considered during their visit.
- 3.4 The key themes are:
 - Partnership working to collectively drive change and delivery of strategic priorities for Warwickshire;
 - Our Leadership Offer;
 - Member development;
 - Return to the workplace;
 - Key policy areas e.g., Climate Change, Levelling-Up, Community Power; and
 - People, culture and organisation including, financial management and use of data.
- 3.5 Many of the Peer Challenge recommendations have an “internal” focus on the Council as an organisation, rather than actions which directly impact on our communities and businesses, albeit there will be indirect connections.
- 3.6 On this basis, the attached themed action plan (see Appendix 2) has been developed to show how the LGA recommendations link to the themes above.
- 3.7 The recommendations, and associated actions, will be shared/allocated to the relevant Assistant Director leads to ensure they link across to existing activities.

4. Financial Implications

- 4.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from the Peer Challenge report or the emerging themed action plan. The Peer Challenge recommendations include some indirect links to financial management, namely the encouragement to take a robust approach to demand management across services, plus revisiting the Capital Strategy and ensuring return on investment is realised across all areas including Adult Social Care.
- 4.2 Implementation of our themed action plan in response to these recommendations could result in financial implications. These will be taken into account as part of developing the themed action plan and will be brought forward for consideration as part of future refreshes of the Medium Term Financial Strategy.

5. Environmental Implications

- 5.1 The LGA Peer Challenge recommends that the Council consider both the policy and resources needed to accompany our ambitions around Climate Change and Sustainability.
- 5.2 This links directly to our existing work on the emerging Sustainable Futures Strategy, which is under development, and accords with the Council Plan key focus area to Tackle Climate Change; promote biodiversity and deliver on our commitment to Net Zero.

6. Timescales associated with the decision and next steps

- 6.1 The Peer Team will undertake a check-in session with the Council in six months' time to look at progress against the recommendations and to see if any further support can be offered on implementation of the findings.
- 6.2 In line with the publication of this report a structured approach to sharing the messages from the Peer Challenge will begin. Findings will be communicated to Members, Partners and Staff who took part in the various interviews. Focus groups will be informed of the outcomes.
- 6.3 It is important for the outcomes of the Peer Challenge to be connected into the wider Council work via the new Integrated Delivery Plan and other areas of Council activity. For example, specific actions for the How We Work Programme, and learning to inform approaches to specific future inspections/assurance visits.

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Peer Challenge Report (May 2022)

Appendix 2 – Peer Challenge key themes for action plan

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The report was circulated to the following members prior to publication: Strategic Director has engaged with Leader of the Council prior to publication.