

**Cheltenham Borough Council
Cabinet – 11 November 2015
LGA Peer Challenge Review**

Accountable member	Councillor Steve Jordan, Leader
Accountable officer	Andrew North, Chief Executive
Ward(s) affected	None
Key Decision	No
Executive summary	<p>Between 16 and 19 September 2014 an LGA peer challenge review was undertaken. Peer challenges are improvement-focussed and tailored to meet individual council's needs. They are designed to complement and add value to a council's own performance and improvement focus.</p> <p>The peers used their experience and knowledge of local government to reflect on the information presented to them by people they met, things they saw and material that they read. The team provide feedback as critical friends, not as assessors, consultants or inspectors, and we have now received their final draft report which is attached at appendix 2. It is pleasing to note that they were very positive about the council saying that we have clear ambitions for place and driven by the needs of the customer and community. They recognised that there is a clear demonstration of community leadership by members and an empowered organisational culture with a dedicated, passionate, focused and motivated workforce.</p> <p>They did however make a number of suggestions as to how we could improve our performance particularly bearing in mind the pace of change and challenges that we face. The findings have been reviewed by the senior leadership team and an action plan has been prepared to address the issues which the peer team raised. The findings from the peer review team were also considered by overview and scrutiny committee at their meeting on 3 November and their views will be fed back verbally.</p> <p>We are grateful for the work of the review team, and were impressed with the way in which they managed the review. We would also like to thank all those individuals who gave up their time to meet with the peer review team.</p>
Recommendations	<p>To consider the draft report and to approve the draft action plan as set out in appendix 3</p> <p>To request the LGA to undertake a follow up review in six months' time</p> <p>To consider any views from the Overview and Scrutiny committee which can feed into the action plan and to request them to oversee the monitoring of the action plan.</p>

Financial implications	<p>There are no direct financial implications arising from the report.</p> <p>The recommendations in respect of risk and project management have the potential to improve the management of scarce resources which in turn, may assist in protecting public money.</p> <p>In view of the commentary and recommendations in respect of ICT, whilst there is an existing and fully funded ICT infrastructure upgrade strategy, this may need to be revisited in order to deliver better outcomes for staff and external customers which may result in the need for additional investment which would need to be approved by council.</p> <p>Contact officer: Mark sheldon, director resources mark.sheldon@cheltenham.gov.uk, 01242 264123</p>
Legal implications	<p>No legal implications arising from this report</p> <p>Contact officer: Sara Freckleton, borough solicitor and monitoring officer sara.freckleton@tewkesbury.gov.uk, 01684 272010</p>
HR implications (including learning and organisational development)	<p>It is important that additional work load demands on officers named in the action plan at appendix 3 is monitored and resourced appropriately</p> <p>Contact officer: Julie McCarthy, GOSS HR julie.mccarthy@cheltenham.gov.uk, 01242 2643551</p>
Key risks	<p>There are no significant risks associated with this decision which need to be included on the corporate risk register.</p> <p>Specific actions will be picked up by relevant service managers and any associated risks in ensuring that actions are progressed will be monitored through service risk registers</p>
Corporate and community plan Implications	<p>The suggested areas for improvement will assist the council in meeting its corporate and community plan objectives.</p>
Environmental and climate change implications	<p>None</p>
Property/Asset Implications	<p>None arising from the report</p> <p>Contact officer: David Roberts@cheltenham.gov.uk</p>

1. Background

- 1.1** The peer review team comprised Dr Pav Ramewal, Chief Executive, Sevenoaks District Council, Councillor Stuart Bray, Leader of Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council (Liberal Democrat), Councillor Tony Jackson, Leader of East Hertfordshire District Council (Conservative), Laura Taylor, Director of Commissioning and Governance, Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council and Paul Clarke, LGA Programme Manager.
- 1.2** The peers were on site between 16 and 19 September and reviewed a range of information to ensure that they were familiar with the council, the challenges it is facing and its plans for the future. During the 3.5 days they spoke to over 90 people including a range of council staff together with councillors and external stakeholders, they gathered information and views from more than 30 meetings, telephone calls, visits to key sites and additional research and reading.
- 1.3** They collectively spent more than 220 hours to determine their findings – the equivalent of one person spending over 6 weeks in Cheltenham. At the end of the onsite visit they provided some initial feedback which has been followed by a draft report which is attached at appendix 2.
- 1.4** A copy of the slides from the presentation given by the team at the end of the peer review visit was sent to all participants, all members and a copy placed on the intranet for employees, so that they could see the key messages and what issues the peer team had identified.

2. Reasons for recommendations

- 2.1** The peer review has been a positive experience and has provided the council with an opportunity to reflect on what it is doing. The recommendations within the report have been considered by cabinet and officers and a response to the recommendations along with proposed actions has been drawn up. This action plan is set out in appendix 3.
- 2.2** There are a number of positive observations which the peer team have identified which are set out below, and it is important that the council maintains these strengths whilst undergoing a period of change.
 - Clear ambitions for place and council
 - A council that is outcome focused and is recognised by partners in delivering big projects
 - Strong partnership focus - £2.9m pa
 - Collaborative working with communities
 - Clear political leadership from Leader and cabinet
 - Clear demonstration of community leadership by members
 - A determined focus on regeneration and growth
 - An empowered organisational culture
 - Sound financial planning
 - Ambition for an innovative Joint Core Strategy
 - Cheltenham Development Task Force – highly effective delivery model
 - A 2020 Vision that, if delivered enables the protection of services for local people
 - Driven by the needs of the customer and community
 - Scrutiny works-needs an effective work programme
- 2.3** The peer team identified a number of suggestions as to how we might improve which are set out below. The action plan at appendix 3 identifies either action which is already in place to address the issue or areas of activity which will need to be undertaken.
 - Align strategies and plans in line with your new corporate plan and then effectively communicate to all

- Consider longer term financial planning, greater level of sensitivity analysis and scenario planning
- Reflect how you utilise the considerable talents that members bring
- Consider how Scrutiny might reappraise its work programme with particular reference to the opportunity to play a part in scrutinising the progress of critical projects
- Clarify and communicate the purposes, accountabilities and key personnel for your range of 'delivery vehicles'
- Consider a fundamental review of project management, risk management and procurement
- Reassess how you effectively manage the interface between priorities and capacity
- Consider ways to engage and consult more widely the public and customer through consultation
- Consider a staff survey and keep focus on staff morale through change
- Keep your IT requirements and plans front and centre

2.4 The action plan at appendix 3 also includes the key messages which arose from the staff focus group and the proposed actions which executive board are to take to address these.

3. Alternative options considered

3.1 As the peer review is not a formal inspection process there is no requirement upon the council to take any action resulting from the report. However as a significant amount of time has been invested by the peer team on a voluntary basis and that the council is always prepared to learn from others it would be a wasted opportunity to not formally consider the findings and determine what action may need to be taken.

4. Consultation and feedback

4.1 The senior leadership team on 30 September considered the key findings which emerged from the initial feedback specifically so any urgent items could be addressed. The overview and scrutiny committee will be considering the report at their meeting on 3 November and any views will be fed back verbally to this meeting of cabinet.

5. Performance management –monitoring and review

5.1 It is important that having identified a course of action to address the suggested areas for improvement that action is taken and that it is monitored. The executive board will monitor the plan but it is proposed that it is reviewed periodically by the overview and scrutiny committee to ensure that issues are progressing as planned.

5.2 The peer review team have also proposed a follow up review and it is suggested that this is taken up and invite them back in six months to assess how we are progressing.

Report author	Contact officer: Andrew North, Chief Executive andrew.north@cheltenham.gov.uk, 01242 264100
Appendices	1. Risk Assessment 2. Corporate peer challenge 16 – 19 September 3. Action plan
Background information	None

The risk				Original risk score (impact x likelihood)			Managing risk					
Risk ref.	Risk description	Risk Owner	Date raised	Impact 1-5	Likelihood 1-6	Score	Control	Action	Deadline	Responsible officer	Transferred to risk register	
1.	If the council does not address the issues raised by the peer review team there is a risk that it is not addressing key issues which may impact on performance	Andrew North	October 2014	3	2	6	R	Action plan to be developed to address key issues Action plan to be monitored LGA to be requested to undertake follow up review	March 2015	Andrew North		

Explanatory notes

Impact – an assessment of the impact if the risk occurs on a scale of 1-5 (1 being least impact and 5 being major or critical)

Likelihood – how likely is it that the risk will occur on a scale of 1-6
(1 being almost impossible, 2 is very low, 3 is low, 4 significant, 5 high and 6 a very high probability)

Control - Either: Reduce / Accept / Transfer to 3rd party / Close

Guidance

Types of risks could include the following:

- Potential reputation risks from the decision in terms of bad publicity, impact on the community or on partners;
- Financial risks associated with the decision;
- Political risks that the decision might not have cross-party support;
- Environmental risks associated with the decision;
- Potential adverse equality impacts from the decision;
- Capacity risks in terms of the ability of the organisation to ensure the effective delivery of the decision
- Legal risks arising from the decision

Remember to highlight risks which may impact on the strategy and actions which are being followed to deliver the objectives, so that members can identify the need to review objectives, options and decisions on a timely basis should these risks arise.

Risk ref

If the risk is already recorded, note either the corporate risk register or TEN reference

Risk Description

Please use “If xx happens then xx will be the consequence” (cause and effect). For example “If the council’s business continuity planning does not deliver effective responses to the predicted flu pandemic then council services will be significantly impacted.”

Risk owner

Please identify the lead officer who has identified the risk and will be responsible for it.

Risk score

Impact on a scale from 1 to 5 multiplied by likelihood on a scale from 1 to 6. Please see risk [scorecard](#) for more information on how to score a risk

Control

Either: Reduce / Accept / Transfer to 3rd party / Close

Action

There are usually things the council can do to reduce either the likelihood or impact of the risk. Controls may already be in place, such as budget monitoring or new controls or actions may also be needed.

Responsible officer

Please identify the lead officer who will be responsible for the action to control the risk.

For further guidance, please refer to the [risk management policy](#)

Transferred to risk register

Please ensure that the risk is transferred to a live risk register. This could be a team, divisional or corporate risk register depending on the nature of the risk and what level of objective it is impacting on