

Information/Discussion Paper

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

12 January 2015

LGA Peer Review

1. Why has this come to scrutiny?

- 1.1 In September 2014 the council invited a peer challenge team led by LGA to visit the council for 3 days to provide an external 'health-check' of the organisation. The peer challenge team were asked specifically to look at the effectiveness of the council's governance arrangements and scrutiny.
- 1.2 In carrying out their review they spoke to members of the Cabinet, O&S, partners, service managers, the Executive Board and other officers so they got a cross section of views. They also examined documents relating to O&S such as the annual report and workplan.
- 1.3 The peer challenge team fed back their findings in a presentation to officers and members on 19 September 2014 at the end of their visit. They formally wrote to the council setting out their conclusions and officers produced a covering report and action plan to accompany the peer team letter. This went to the last meeting of O&S and Cabinet in November 2014 and the peer team feedback can be viewed via this link;
https://democracy.cheltenham.gov.uk/documents/s13860/2014_11_11_CAB_LGA_peer_reveiw_Appendix_2.pdf
- 1.4 Members of O&S wanted to consider the action plan in more detail at their next meeting and Cabinet resolved to request the O&S Committee to oversee the monitoring of the action plan which they had approved. Cabinet also resolved that the LGA be requested to undertake a follow up review in six months' time and LGA have already responded positively to this request.
- 1.5 The challenge team made a number of recommendations and although the council is not bound in any way to action them, they can provide a valuable external insight into how the workings of the council could be improved. The action plan sets out how the council plans to address the points raised. Good progress is already being made on progressing this action plan and an updated version is attached as Appendix 1.

2. Specific recommendations regarding the scrutiny process

- 2.1 Overall the peer group concluded that scrutiny was working well under the new arrangements and these were a good starting point for further improvements to the

scrutiny process.

- 2.2 They were impressed by the achievements to date by scrutiny task groups which were set out in the annual report.
- 2.3 They commended the arrangements whereby scrutiny was chaired by a member of the opposition. They also commented that the Cabinet Members seemed to have respect for the work of O&S.
- 2.4 One improvement area that they identified was in the area of the scrutiny workprogramme which they felt needed to be rationalised. They would encourage members to feed into the process and challenge themselves when devising the work programme as to whether scrutiny is the best route for resolving an issue. With limited resources they suggested there may be a need for scrutiny to focus on the high value areas.
- 2.5 Another improvement area was the involvement of overview and scrutiny on key projects and some proposals have been brought back to this meeting in a separate report.
- 2.6 One of the issues they picked up from officers was that scrutiny could be very demanding on officer time so the input needed from officers for any particular review needed to be taken note of at the workplanning stage.
- 2.7 They also recommended that the council needed to make more use of the skills of the members and engage a wider group of members into the scrutiny process. Democratic Services are in the process of drafting a Member Skills Audit and this is attached as Appendix 2 for comment.

3. Next Steps

- 3.1 The committee are asked to consider how they intend to monitor the action plan and at what frequency. They may also like to consider whether there are any actions or initiatives they want to take a closer look at where they may be able to bring about further improvements e.g. governance and decision making, project management etc.

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| Background Papers | Report to Cabinet 11 November 2014 and report to O&S 3 November 2014 |
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