
Meeting of the Cabinet – 13th December 2023

Report of the Chief Executive

Local Government Association (LGA) Corporate Peer Review Feedback

Purpose of report

1. The Council took part in a Corporate Peer Challenge (CPC), organised by the Local Government Association (LGA) from 19th to 22nd September 2023. This report provides Cabinet with a summary of the feedback from this peer review.

Recommendations

2. It is recommended that:
 - Members acknowledge the contents of the feedback report, endorse the recommendations contained within the report and support the Council's approach to implementation.

Background

3. Peer Challenges are a core element of the Local Government Association's sector-led improvement offer to local authorities.

It provides a tried and trusted method of improvement, providing councils with a robust and effective improvement tool which is owned and delivered by the sector, for the sector. Peer challenge is not an inspection, it is a tool for improvement.

Peers remain at the heart of the peer challenge process and provide a 'practitioner perspective' and 'critical friend' challenge.

4. Peer challenges are delivered by experienced elected Member and officer peers. The make-up of the peer team reflected the focus of the peer challenge and peers were selected on the basis of their relevant expertise.

The peer team group representatives included Jacqui Gedman (Chief Executive, Kirklees), Cllr Rob Waltham (Leader of the Council (Conservatives - North Lincolnshire Council), Hilary Morris (Commercial Director, London Borough of Barking and Dagenham), Mark Ladyman (Assistant Director Economic Development, Darlington Borough Council), Paul Clarke (Director of Finance, London Borough of Islington), Anthea Lowe (Director of Policy & Governance, and Monitoring Officer, Telford and Wrekin Council), James Millington (LGA Adviser and Peer Challenge Manager).

5. The peer team explored the core components (underpinning features of good performance) that all LGA CPCs cover:
 1. **Local priorities and outcomes:** Are the council's priorities clear and informed by the local context? Is the council delivering effectively on its priorities and achieving improved outcomes for all its communities?
 2. **Organisational and place leadership:** Does the council provide effective local leadership? Are there good relationships with partner organisations and local communities?
 3. **Governance and culture:** Are there clear and robust governance arrangements? Is there a culture of respect, challenge and scrutiny?
 4. **Financial planning and management:** Does the council have a clear understanding of its current financial position? Does the council have a strategy and a clear plan to address its financial challenges?
 5. **Capacity for improvement:** Is the organisation able to support delivery of local priorities? Does the council have the capacity to improve?

In addition to these questions, the Council asked the peer team to review our commercial approach, progress to date and strategic direction.

6. The team then spent four days onsite during which they gathered information and views from more than 60 meetings, spoke to more than 150 people including a range of Council staff together with Members and external stakeholders, in addition to further research and reading.

7. **Key recommendations**

There are a number of observations and suggestions made as part of the feedback report. A number of key recommendations were also provided around the themes of finance, governance, capacity, culture and vision. See appendix 1 for the full recommendations in the feedback report.

8. **Council Response**

The Council accepts the feedback in the report and thanks the LGA for carrying out this review.

In response to the recommendations the Chief Executive, in consultation with the LGA, has set up a voluntary Improvement & Assurance Board to drive the immediate improvements that are now needed across the Council.

This will enable the Council to take swift and concerted action to resolve the financial, governance and cultural issues that the peer challenge highlighted and provide elected members with assurance about remedial action on the financial position, and ensure the Council delivers on its best value duties.

9. A Council Improvement and Sustainability Programme is being developed to progress the recommendations from the peer review.

An Internal Delivery Group has been formed that will provide assurance that improvement activity across the Council is being effectively managed and will also review exemptions to spending controls.

10. **Next steps**

The LGA Corporate Peer Review process includes a six-month check-in session, which provides space for the council to update peers on its progress against the action plan and discuss next steps. This will be scheduled for Summer 2024.

Finance

11. There were limited costs to prepare for or incurred during the peer review. Any costs to develop the position statement and data pack were met by the Chief Executive's contingency fund.

The peer team met with the Section 151 Officer and Head of Financial Services as part of the interviews and focus groups.

Law

12. The peer team met with the Monitoring Officer as part of the interviews and focus groups.

The Improvement & Assurance Board will work closely with the existing Committees and Forums of the Council.

Section 112 Local Government Act 1972 provides that a Local Authority can appoint such officers as it thinks necessary for the proper discharge of its functions subject to Section 41 of the Localism Act 2011.

Risk Management

13. The peer team met with the Head of Audit and Risk Management as part of the interviews and focus groups.

The financial, governance and cultural issues are recognised, and the establishment of both the Improvement Delivery Group and Improvement & Assurance Board will help to mitigate these issues with clear and transparent remedial actions.

Equality Impact

14. There were no equality impacts expected during this review. The peer team met with members of the Corporate Equalities group as part of the interviews and focus groups.

Human Resources/Organisational Development

15. There were no HR/OD impacts expected during this review. The peer team met with the Assistant Director for People & Inclusion and Trade Union representatives as part of the interviews and focus groups.

Commercial/Procurement

16. There were no Commercial or Procurement impacts on this review. The peer team met with the Director of Digital, Customer & Commercial and Heads of Commercial and Procurement as part of the interviews and focus groups.

Environment/Climate Change

17. The LGA recognised the importance of sustainability and climate action, including the need to deliver zero net carbon by 2030. In planning and

delivering the peer challenge, the LGA sought to model best practice in how it conducts its own business. The LGA aimed to reduce its carbon footprint by using public transport where possible, reducing waste such as keeping printing to a minimum, conducting meetings online instead of in-person where suitable, and selected sustainable providers, such as hotels that are working to reduce their carbon footprint.

Council Priorities and Projects

18. The peer review provides an opportunity to consider whether the council's priorities are clear and informed by the local context, whether the council is delivering effectively on its priorities and achieving improved outcomes for all its communities.

It provided a robust challenge to our performance management framework, monitoring and reporting.



Kevin O'Keefe

Chief Executive

Report Author: Ajaib S. Paul
Telephone: 01384 814410
Email: ajaib.paul@dudley.gov.uk

List of appendices:

- Appendix 1 – LGA Corporate Peer Review Feedback Report (Final)