

WELWYN HATFIELD BOROUGH COUNCIL
COUNCIL – 22 JULY 2019
REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

WELWYN HATFIELD BOROUGH COUNCIL CORPORATE PEER CHALLENGE

1 Executive Summary

- 1.1 As part of the Local Government Association's (LGA) sector led improvement offer, councils can agree to undertake a 'Corporate Peer Challenge'. This consists of a team of councillors and senior officers from different councils spending a number of days gathering information, speaking to councillors, staff, stakeholders and customers, to form a view on how the council is performing.
- 1.2 The council agreed to undertake a 'Corporate Peer Challenge' following discussions between the Chief Executive, Leader (and previous Leader), and the LGA. This took place between the 21–24 January and initial findings were presented to political group leaders, Cabinet, ECMT and the project team. The feedback report was then published on 14 March.
- 1.3 The feedback report (Appendix 1) is a helpful and honest assessment of the council and includes seven recommendations for further improvement. It was recognised that the council has undergone significant change in the last two years at a senior level which has led to change and focused ambition and the council is very much now a partner of choice.
- 1.4 Following the report, an action plan has been developed (Appendix 2) which sets out the actions the council will now take to implement the recommendations. To assist with the delivery of the action plan, the Chief Executive is discussing support from the East of England Local Government Association (EELGA).
- 1.5 The council would like to acknowledge and thank the Peer Team for their hard work and focus during the four days of their visit.

2 Recommendation(s)

- 2.1 Council note the Corporate Peer Challenge feedback report and recommendations at Appendix 1.
- 2.2 Council note and agree the Corporate Peer Challenge action plan at Appendix 2.

3 Explanation

- 3.1 The LGA, as part of their sector led improvement offer, can provide 'Corporate Peer Challenges' which are managed and delivered by the sector, for the sector.
- 3.2 A 'Corporate Peer Challenge' consists of a team of councillors and senior officers from different councils spending a number of days at the council gathering

information, speaking to councillors, staff, stakeholders and customers, to form a view on how the council is performing.

- 3.3 The council agreed to undertake a 'Corporate Peer Challenge' following discussions between the Chief Executive, Leader and previous Leader, and the LGA. This took place between 21–24 January and initial findings were presented to political Group Leaders, Cabinet, ECMT and the project team. The feedback report was then published on 14 March.
- 3.4 The Peer Team consisted of:
- Lead Peer – Paul Shackley, Chief Executive, Rushmoor Borough Council
 - Member Peer – Cllr Duncan McGinty, Leader of Sedgemoor District Council
 - Officer Peer – Shirlene Adam, Strategic Director Operations and Deputy CEO, West Somerset and Taunton Deane Councils
 - Officer Peer – Hannah Thorpe, Head of Communications and Digital, Thanet District Council
 - Peer Challenge Manager – Kirsty Human, LGA
- 3.5 During the visit the team spoke to more than 125 people, including a range of council staff, together with councillors and external partners and stakeholders; gathered information and views from more than 45 meetings; and collectively spent more than 233 hours to determine their findings.
- 3.6 The feedback report can be seen at Appendix 1 and sets out seven recommendations, as follows:
- Develop a clear vision and narrative for the Borough, Welwyn Garden City, Hatfield and beyond.
 - Develop a modernisation programme with clear aims, objectives and targets around: Workforce; IT and Digital; Customer; Communications.
 - Align the structure to deliver the above (right people, right place doing the right thing).
 - Modernise governance and embrace external challenge and expertise.
 - Review your approach to underspends and reserves, develop and evolve the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) to reflect the council's direction and modernisation.
 - Ensure members are included in the #OneTeam approach.
 - There needs to be a coherent approach to communications and engagement developed through strategies linked back to your overall modernisation agenda.
- 3.7 Following the publication of the report, an action plan has been developed (Appendix 2) to take forward and implement the recommendations. For each recommendation there is a CMT sponsor and lead officers. For all of these

recommendations, updates on progress and delivery will be given to Cabinet and councillors through the normal reporting mechanisms.

- 3.8 The Chief Executive is also discussing with EELGA what support can be provided to the Council to deliver the action plan and modernisation programme.

4 Legal Implication(s)

- 4.1 None directly from this report.

5 Financial Implication(s)

- 5.1 There are no direct financial implications to deliver the action plan and any costs for support will be covered by existing budgets.

6 Risk Management Implications

- 6.1 Not delivering the action plan will impact the reputation of the council with stakeholders, communities, businesses and staff.

7 Security and Terrorism Implication(s)

- 7.1 None directly from this report.

8 Procurement Implication(s)

- 8.1 Any EELGA support will be provided through their Talent Bank which the council can access as an EELGA member.

9 Climate Change Implication(s)

- 9.1 None directly from this report.

10 Human Resources Implication(s)

- 10.1 No direct HR implications from this report.

11 Health and Wellbeing Implication(s)

- 11.1 None directly from this report.

12 Communication and Engagement Implication(s)

- 12.1 A number of the recommendations will require internal and external communications and engagement, and a plan will be developed for each project stream. Recommendation seven will also lead to a new Communication and Engagement Strategy and Internal Communications strategy.

13 Link to Corporate Priorities

- 13.1 The subject of this report is linked to all of the Council's Corporate Priorities.

14 **Equality and Diversity**

14.1 An EqIA was not completed because this report does not propose changes to existing service-related policies or the development of new service-related policies.

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Date	12 July 2019

Background papers to be listed (if applicable)

Appendices to be listed

Appendix 1 – LGA Corporate Peer Challenge Feedback report

Appendix 2 – WHBC 2019 Corporate Peer Challenge Action Plan