

WELWYN HATFIELD BOROUGH COUNCIL
CABINET 10 MARCH 2020
REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

PEER REVIEW UPDATE AND MODERNISATION PROGRAMME

1 Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report provides an update on work carried out following the Local Government Association Corporate Peer Challenge (“peer review”) in January 2019. It provides an update on the peer review action plan and introduces the council’s modernisation programme to councillors.

2 Recommendation(s)

- 2.1 For councillors to note the work to date and note the direction of travel regarding the Council’s modernisation plans.

3 Explanation

- 3.1 The report of the Chief Executive to Full Council on 22 July 2019 set out the findings of the peer review and the proposed action plan. It is now timely to update members on the work to date and to explain the proposed direction of travel for the council’s modernisation plan.
- 3.2 The peer review feedback report highlighted a number of examples of good practice and work carried out by the council and also presented seven suggested recommendations:
- 1) Deliver a clear vision and narrative for the borough, Welwyn Garden City, Hatfield and beyond.
 - 2) Develop a modernisation programme with clear aims, objectives and targets around: Workforce; IT and Digital; Customer and Communications.
 - 3) Align the structure to deliver the above (“right people, right place, doing the right thing”).
 - 4) Modernise governance and embrace external challenge and expertise.
 - 5) Review the approach to underspends and reserves, develop and evolve the medium term financial strategy to reflect the council’s direct and modernisation.

- 6) Ensure members are included in the #OneTeam approach.
- 7) There needs to be a coherent approach to communications and engagement developed through strategies linked back to the overall modernisation agenda.

3.3 At the council meeting of 22 July, Council accepted these recommendations together with a high-level action plan and asked officers to commence appropriate work. Updates on each recommendation are provided below.

Recommendation 1: Deliver a clear vision and narrative for the borough, Welwyn Garden City, Hatfield and beyond

The Corporate Regeneration Group has commenced work on this and it was deemed beneficial to hold a focussed workshop organised and facilitated by the New Local Government Network (NLGN) with relevant officers. This has now taken place with the aim of helping identify, explore and shape what the “borough narrative” could be.

Three broad goals for the borough narrative were identified during this workshop:

- “Put the borough on the map”
- “a healthy place”
- “employment and training through every stage of life”

In order to help work towards these goals, 4 key activities have been identified:

- Strengthening, understanding and building the evidence base
- Building and exploiting strategic partnerships
- Repurposing existing assets
- Improving messages, communications and branding

All of these underpinned by engagement with the community and other stakeholders, including Members. We are now developing a narrative to engage with and help the development of our next business plan.

Recommendation 2: Develop a modernisation programme with clear aims, objectives and targets around: Workforce; IT and digital; Customer and Communications

The #OurFuture modernisation programme has commenced over recent months and a Modernisation Board, Chaired by the Chief Executive and comprising the three Corporate Directors, modernisation officer lead and corporate support has been set up.

The overall aim of the modernisation programme is to:

“Modernise the Council to ensure we can deliver effective and efficient services that meet people’s needs and within a sustainable budget”

This aim is supported by several objectives and tasks. Delivery groups involving key staff for particular programmes are being prepared. Additionally, a “Corporate Leadership Network” comprising those officers who report to Heads of Service has been set up to help promote and champion the modernisation agenda across and throughout the organisation.

Key work programmes which are being prepared can be broadly categorised as relating to:

- Digitalisation and Customer service
- Modernisation reviews (review and challenge processes/systems within our services).

These are supported by cross cutting themes of:

- Information Communication Technology (ICT)
- Procurement and commissioning
- Workforce
- Stakeholder engagement
- Modern governance
- Culture

Expert assistance has been sought to assist with developing these programmes and the methods which could be useful. Additionally, work has taken place to help learn from other local authorities who are further along their modernisation journeys.

Councillors will be pleased to note that as part of this work certain modernisation “early impacts” have already been undertaken and some examples are shown in appendix A.

Additionally, work is underway to develop a full communications and engagement plan with staff, including Trade Unions, to explain and share the content of the modernisation programme in more detail.

Recommendation 3: Align the structure to deliver the above (right people, right place, doing the right thing)

As this recommendation suggests, it flows from the previous two recommendations, so it will be completed in turn; however high level work has already started including:

- A working draft of the workforce development strategy has been reviewed and now put on hold, pending the actions arising from the wider work in response to the peer review which will need to feed into it
- When vacancies arise they are carefully considered by the Corporate Directors and Chief Executive to test that recruitment on a like for like basis is actually necessary

- Revisions have taken place to our recruitment methods, including new ways of advertising and defining roles – rather than rigid cumbersome job descriptions
- Management reviews of the Estates and Development and Building Services teams have taken place
- Management reviews of the Legal team are underway
- Management reviews of the Democratic Services team are about to start
- The Business Excellence team, which previously was part of the housing service, are now working more corporately and reporting directly to the Chief Executive so that their skills can assist with the wider modernisation agenda
- A more corporate approach to staff training including harmonisation of budgets and access to training opportunities is being developed.

As the modernisation programme progresses, it will become apparent how the structure of the organisation may need to change to help deliver a sustainable modern council and this in turn will feed into the workforce development strategy which will set out the “journey” we need to undertake to help provide the workforce of the future.

Recommendation 4: Modernise governance and embrace external challenge and expertise

At the heart of the council’s governance is the council Constitution and Members will be aware that a cross party Constitution Review Group has been set up. This group, of which all Group Leaders are members, has set itself an ambitious work programme to modernise the constitution. Supported by officers, the review programme will include a review, discussion and update of all aspects of the constitution.

As part of this review, Full Council have already agreed revisions to:

- Council Procedure rules
- Rules for application at all committees and the petition scheme

At the March Full Council meeting Members will be asked to consider and agree revisions, changes and updates to:

- Cabinet procedure rules
- Cabinet Functions
- Access to information procedure rules
- Procedures for dealing with motions with financial implications
- Where Estate Management Scheme (EMS) policy development work should take place
- Code of Conduct for Members
- Member social media protocol

As well as a new format for the constitution

Members will also be asked to agree the introduction of “Executive Member Decision Notices” which aim to free up Cabinet Time by delegating certain decisions (with adequate scrutiny safeguards) to the relevant Executive Member.

Additional work on revising the scheme of delegation is underway, along with a review of the financial procedure rules and the contract procedure rules.

Furthermore, the Centre for Public Scrutiny have been engaged to help conduct a full and detailed review of our arrangements for scrutiny. This has included a review of the rules, a member research survey, and discussions around the approaches taken at other authorities. This has resulted in a report which was presented to Constitution Review Group who have now arranged for the Centre for Public Scrutiny to facilitate two member workshops to help formulate the final recommendations for Full Council to consider.

The council invests a lot of resources in projects, of all different levels, throughout the organisation and a #OneTeam task and finish group has been set up to review and develop a project management framework. Work has taken place to revise and streamline our approaches to project management and to instil greater clarity around the processes for identifying and reporting on business plan targets to ensure the business plan focuses on those things of particular strategic importance for the borough. This means Members, Senior Officers and the public can have confidence that council resources are being dedicated to projects that help deliver the agreed business plan targets.

Recommendation 5: Review the approach to underspends and reserves, develop and evolve the medium term financial strategy to reflect the council’s direct and modernisation

Members will note that as part of the 20/21 budget setting, a budget reset exercise had been undertaken on all cost centres using the past three years’ of financial outturn data. The exercise has proved very successful generating a total of £800k of savings, which has been included in the 20/21 budget. This is a great start and thanks needs to be recorded to staff and Managers who have worked hard to find these savings.

A review of the revenue reserves has also been carried out as part of the budget setting process, in particular, the Budget Priority and Transformation earmarked reserve has been renamed as Modernisation reserve to support the delivery of the Modernisation programme.

Recommendation 6: Ensure members are included in the #OneTeam approach

This work has been picked up through the cross party Constitution Review Group and the Member Development Steering group.

Through discussions with Members the essence of “#OneTeam” has been explored; however it is recognised that given the obvious political nature of Members’ work and the debates they need to engage in, some values may be less relevant to the member environment.

The member induction pack is being revised to include “#OneTeam approach” and the revised member code of conduct being prepared as part of the constitution review will include the #OneTeam values and behaviours. At a meeting of the Standards Committee, the revised code of conduct was considered and endorsed to send to full council for adoption.

As part of this work it is also important that members are aware of how officers work using the #OneTeam approach and this too will be incorporated into the member development sessions.

Recommendation 7: There needs to be a coherent approach to communications and engagement developed through strategies linked back to the overall modernisation agenda

Work has commenced on this recommendation and a workshop has been held with officers from all levels of the organisation to look at what internal communication requirements we have and what are needed. Additionally development of the new intranet is underway with the anticipation it will be used by all staff as an effective communications tool.

A recent workshop with Officers who form the customer services group has taken place to help identify all the key stakeholders and the methods of communication that would work best with them. This will help develop a Stakeholder and community engagement strategy which in turn will be supported by:

- An external communications strategy
- A Consultation protocol and toolkit
- A Digital communications strategy – covering online, websites, and social media
- An Internal communications strategy focussed on supporting the modernisation agenda

4 Legal Implication(s)

4.1 Whilst it is not a legal requirement to comply with the recommendations arising from the peer review, a number of the identified actions need to be carried out within a particular legal framework.

5 Financial Implication(s)

- 5.1 The activities comprising the modernisation programme can be met from existing service budgets and the corporate modernisation reserve. Delivering the modernisation programme will assist in helping to close the budget gap and in the longer term delivering the councils services within a sustainable budget.

6 Risk Management Implications

- 6.1 The risks related to this proposal mainly relate to reputation and failure to embrace the opportunity provided by change.
- 6.2 The council commissioned the Peer Review and the report has been made public. There is an expectation from Members that the action plan will be delivered and a follow up visit will take place where work undertaken since the peer review will be reviewed. Furthermore in undertaking the peer review and publishing the findings a commitment has been made to the community, staff and partners to implement the recommendations. Failure to do this presents a risk the council's reputation.
- 6.3 The aim of the *modernisation programme* is for the council to become a local authority which delivers effective and efficient services that meet people's needs and within a sustainable budget. The implementation of the peer review findings invites the council to find and embrace different ways of working, in a more modern way. As the council is striving to be an employer of choice, failure to embrace modernisation and change may lead to people not wishing to work at the authority, or not wishing to apply for jobs at the authority.

7 Security and Terrorism Implication(s)

- 7.1 There are no specific identified security and terrorism implications, however as part of the modernisation reviews, national policy drivers (including security and terrorism implications) will be factored in at the appropriate stages.

8 Procurement Implication(s)

- 8.1 Any procurement in association with the peer review action plan and modernisation programme will be carried out using the normal procurement rules.

9 Climate Change Implication(s)

- 9.1 As a result of this work it is anticipated that there will be a significant reduction in paper usage and staff travel. Additionally response to the recommendations invites the council to look more carefully at the use of the buildings within its

portfolio. All of these options could have a positive impact in terms of adapting to or mitigating the effects of climate change.

10 Human Resources Implication(s)

- 10.1 All staff will need to engage with the modernisation programme and there may be opportunities for staff to take part in particular project work linked to the modernisation programme.

11 Health and Wellbeing Implication(s)

- 11.1 There are no specific identified health and wellbeing implications, however as part of the modernisation reviews, national policy drivers (including health and wellbeing implications) will be factored in at the appropriate stages.

12 Communication and Engagement Implication(s)

- 12.1 Recommendation 7 specifically relates to communications, and as part of this work a comprehensive communications plan is being developed.

13 Link to Corporate Priorities

The subject of this report is linked all Corporate Priorities.

14. Equality and diversity

As part of the modernisation programme a series of equality and diversity impact assessments will be carried out in connection with each of the activities, as required.

Rob Bridge
Chief Executive
February 2020

Background papers

Peer review report

Report to Full Council 22 July 2019

APPENDIX A – Examples of #OURFUTURE modernisation “early impacts”

- Procure a digital platform with the ability of incorporating our customer relationship management (CRM) system and intranet
- Document management solution to support office efficiency and agile working across council services
- Roll out of Microsoft Teams/Office 365
- Optimise council IT systems to drive efficiency and processes
- Introducing new digital screens on our refuse vehicles
- HR/Payroll project: ‘Self-serve solutions for staff’
- More effective lone working solution for staff to support future agile working
- Replace all hard-wired Lifeline emergency equipment with digital connection
- Landcharges digitisation project
- Greater use of GIS and accessible GIS layers
- Revenue and Benefits process improvement for services
- Agresso/Business World finance system upgrade and efficiency improvements
- Customer journey mapping and process improvements across certain services; aligning systems, people and technology
- Text alerts and communications for certain services
- Increased online services for local residents
- Changes to Interactive Voice Response (IVR) set up, making it easier for our customers to get through to the right services.
- Launching a more customer friendly website for Campus West
- Introduce neighbourhood patch newsletters across the councils housing stock to promote local activities
- Introduce Digital Champions to promote a 'think digital culture'
- Agile working and hot desking for staff across services
- Webcasting and electronic voting at meetings
- Webcasting for DMC and Local Plan examination
- Upgraded to Objective system for Local Plan representations
- Modernisation of the constitution
- Use of e-cars
- Develop operational income strategy
- Budget reset - £800k saved in 2020/21

- Reviewing and modernising our project approach: alignment
- Planning and resourcing for projects
- New approach to project management and alignment of business plan and performance clinic targets within clearview system

