

WELWYN HATFIELD BOROUGH COUNCIL
CABINET – 1 FEBRUARY 2022
REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

LGA – 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 was last visited by the LGA peer team in January 2019. The global coronavirus pandemic prevented the peer team from revisiting during 2020 to review progress against the council’s action plan. The Council has changed substantially since the last review, including a new Chief Executive being in post since November 2020 and politically it had transitioned from no overall political control to a conservative majority. Following discussions with the Chief Executive, Leader and the LGA, it was agreed to undertake a second peer challenge. This took place between the 18-20 October and the initial findings were presented to political group leaders, Cabinet, Chief Executive, Extended Corporate Management Team and the project team.
- 1.3 The feedback report (Appendix 1) is a helpful and honest assessment of the council and includes six recommendations for further improvement. It recognises that Welwyn Hatfield is a good council with committed officer and political leadership. It also praises the council for continuing to deliver on its modernisation programme, corporate peer challenge action plan and capital projects throughout the pandemic. The peer team were also impressed with the progress made given the other competing priorities during this time.
- 1.4 Following the receipt of the report, an action plan has been developed (Appendix 2) which sets out the actions the council will now take to implement the recommendations.
- 1.5 The council would like to acknowledge and thank the Peer Team for their hard work and focus during the three days of their visit.

2 Recommendation(s)

- 2.1 Cabinet notes the Corporate Peer Challenge feedback report and recommendations at Appendix 1.
- 2.2 Cabinet agrees the Corporate Peer Challenge action plan at Appendix 2

3 Explanation

3.1 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 peers were:

- Paul Shackley - Chief Executive Peer, Rushmoor Borough Council
- Cllr Duncan McGinty - Member Peer, Leader, Sedgmoor District Council
- Cllr Steve Sankey – Member Peer (shadow), Cabinet member, East Staffordshire Borough Council
- Natalie Wigman - Officer Peer, Corporate Director Strategy, Eastleigh Borough Council
- Steve Capes - Officer Peer, Director of Regeneration and Policy, Derbyshire Dales District Council
- Tim Mills - Officer Peer (shadow), Head of Economy, Planning & Strategic Housing, Rushmoor Borough Council
- Kirsty Human - LGA Peer Challenge Manager
- Rachel Stevens - LGA Project Support Officer

3.2 The peer team considered the following five themes which form the core components of all Corporate Peer Challenges. These areas are critical to council's performance and improvement.

- Local priorities and outcomes
- Organisational and place leadership
- Governance and culture
- Financial planning and management
- Capacity for improvement

3.3 During the visit the team spoke to more than 130 people, including a range of council staff, together with councillors and external partners and stakeholders; gathered information and views from more than 40 meetings; in addition to further research and reading.

3.4 The feedback report can be seen at Appendix 1 and sets out six recommendations, as follows:

- Identify senior strategic capacity, clarify future structure and communicate widely
- Reset, resource and refocus the modernisation programme with a refreshed communications strategy
- Address recruitment and retention
- Adopt a Local Plan

- Develop an income and savings plan for the MTFS period
- Continued focus on housing compliance

3.5 Following the receipt of the report, an action plan has been developed (Appendix 2) to take forward and implement the recommendations. The Corporate Management Team will be monitoring the progress of the action plan and that updates will be provided to Cabinet members periodically.

Implications

4 Legal Implication(s)

4.1 None arising directly from the 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 Implication(s)

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

7 Security & Terrorism Implication(s)

7.1 None arising directly from this report.

8 Procurement Implication(s)

8.1 None arising directly from this report.

9 Climate Change Implication(s)

9.1 None arising directly from this report.

10 Human Resources Implication(s)

10.1 The Corporate Peer Challenge action plan contains an action to improve recruitment and retention.

11 Health and Wellbeing Implications

11.1 None arising directly from this report.

12 Communication and Engagement Implications

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.

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 EqlA 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	11 January 2022

Background papers to be listed (if applicable)

Appendices to be listed

Appendix 1 – LGA Corporate Peer Challenge Feedback report

Appendix 2 – WHBC 2022 Corporate Peer Challenge Action Plan