

WELWYN HATFIELD BOROUGH COUNCIL
CABINET – 6 DECEMBER 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 last Peer Challenge took place in October 2021 and the Peer team recognised 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 and capital projects throughout the pandemic. The peer team were also impressed with the progress made given the other competing priorities during this time.
- 1.3 Following the receipt of the Peer Challenge feedback report, which contains six key recommendations, Cabinet approved a Corporate Peer Challenge action plan in February 2022 (appendix 1), which sets out the activities that the council would take to implement the recommendations.
- 1.4 As part of the Corporate Peer Challenge process, a progress review usually takes place approximately six months after the publication of the action plan. Key members of the Peer Challenge team visited the Council in October 2022 and concluded that it was evident that the council had use the last Corporate Peer Challenge as a catalyst for change and improvement, moving the council forward. Overall, the Peer team concluded that there has been good progress made on the action plan, particularly there has been strong and decisive leadership to implement a full senior management restructure over the past 10 months. The senior management team is united, respected and full of enthusiasm.

2 Recommendation(s)

- 2.1 Cabinet notes the Corporate Peer Challenge progress review report 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 Peer Team that visited the council in October 2021 was made up of five officers and two councillors and the following Peer Team members took part in the October 2022 progress review:
 - Paul Shackley - Chief Executive Peer, Rushmoor Borough Council
 - Cllr Duncan McGinty - Member Peer, Leader, Sedgmoor District Council
 - Kirsty Human - Peer Challenge Manager, Local Government Association

- 3.2 The progress review took place on 19 October 2022, along with the Leader of the Council, the Senior Management Team also took part at the visit. The purpose of the review was to:
- Update peers on the early progress made and to receive feedback on this including how the action plan aligns to the CPC's recommendations
 - Consider peer's reflections on any new opportunities or challenges that may have arisen since the peer team were 'on-site' including any further support needs
 - Discuss any early impact or learning from the progress made to date
- 3.3 The progress report can be seen at appendix 2 and the Peer Team acknowledged that good progress has been made on the Corporate Challenge action plan that Cabinet agreed in February 2022. This is despite the emergency responses had been tested to their limits in the local government sector, enduring a pandemic, supporting refugees fleeing the war in Ukraine and implementing operation London Bridge. The current challenges have also included the cost-of-living crisis, rising inflation, instability within national government and the impact this could have on local elections in May 2023.
- 3.4 There has been notable progress made in the senior management restructure, together with a targeted and well-resourced recruitment campaign that saw a full page article in the national media attracting a high number of talented candidates. Working together with the HR manager, a lot of thoughts have also gone into assessments and interviews, involving behavioural insights and external assessors ensured the strongest candidates were recruited or promoted. The Peer Team felt the senior management team is united, respected and full of enthusiasm.
- 3.5 Going forward, the Peer Team recommended that the council is in a unique position, with a newly appointed top team, abundant energy and excitement from staff who have been waiting for this moment. Seize this opportunity to make staff part of the solution, feel empowered and engaged in the delivery of the council's new priorities.

Implications

4 Legal Implication(s)

4.1 None arising directly from the report.

5 Financial Implication(s)

5.1 None arising directly from this report.

6 Risk Management Implication(s)

6.1 None arising directly from this report.

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 None arising directly from this report.

11 Health and Wellbeing Implications

11.1 None arising directly from this report.

12 Communication and Engagement Implications

12.1 A communications plan is being implemented regarding the publication of the Corporate Peer Review progress report. A special version of staff newsletter has been published and that this was also featured in the recent all staff briefing.

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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Background papers to be listed (if applicable)

LGA Corporate Peer Challenge – Cabinet February 2022

Appendices to be listed

Appendix 1 – WHBC 2022 Corporate Peer Challenge Action Plan

Appendix 2 – LGA Corporate Peer Challenge progress review