

CORPORATE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – WEDNESDAY, 8 JANUARY 2020

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| Title of Report | LOCAL GOVERNMENT CORPORATE PEER REVIEW REPORT | |
| Presented by | Bev Smith Chief Executive | |
| Background Papers | | Public Report: Yes |
| | | Key Decision: No |
| Financial Implications | | |
| | Signed off by the Section 151 Officer: Yes | |
| Legal Implications | | |
| | Signed off by the Monitoring Officer: Yes | |
| Staffing and Corporate Implications | | |
| | Signed off by the Head of Paid Service: Yes | |
| Purpose of Report | To seek Community Scrutiny comments for inclusion in a report to Cabinet on 4 th February 2020 on the proposed action plan in response to the Corporate Peer Review Feedback report | |
| Recommendations | THAT MEMBERS NOTE THE PEER TEAM'S FEEDBACK AND KEY RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE COUNCIL AND PROVIDE COMMENT ON THE DRAFT ACTION PLAN. | |

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 All Councils are able to access a fully funded sector led Corporate Peer Challenge every four to five years. In June 2019, the Local Government Association (LGA) Peer Review provided the Council with an opportunity to test out and challenge a number of aspects relating to the overall performance and development of the Council. This process is designed to assist the continuous improvement approach adopted across local government and builds on the external Investors in People accreditation achieved in 2018.
- 1.2 The review process was a positive experience for both members, staff and key stakeholders and the outcome will help shape the councils journey of improvement which is part of the councils culture. A full copy of the peer review report is attached together with a proposed action plan which responds to the recommendations and areas for consideration. Many of the recommendations were already identified by the council as areas of further work such as the scrutiny changes implemented over the last few years.

2. PEER REVIEW PROCESS

2.1 Peer Challenges are delivered by experienced elected members and officer peers and the peers who delivered the peer challenge at North West Leicestershire were:

- Cllr Linda Robinson – former leader of Wychavon District Council
- Nick Tustian – Chief Executive Eastleigh Borough Council
- Ben Lockwood – Director of Finance and Economy Ashford Borough Council
- Karen Edwards Director (Programme and lace) Rushmoor Borough Council
- Daniel Gardner – Local Government Association Adviser

2.2 The peer team considered the following five questions which form the core components looked at by all Corporate Peer Challenges carried out by the LGA as areas they believe are critical to a councils' performance and improvement:

1. Understanding of the local place and priority setting: Does the council understand its local context and place and use that to inform a clear vision and set of priorities?
2. Leadership of Place: Does the council provide effective leadership of place through its elected members, officers and constructive relationships and partnerships with external stakeholders?
3. Organisational leadership and governance: Is there effective political and managerial leadership supported by good governance and decision-making arrangements that respond to key challenges and enable change and transformation to be implemented?
4. Financial planning and viability: Does the council have a financial plan in place to ensure long term viability and is there evidence that it is being implemented successfully?
5. Capacity to deliver: Is organisational capacity aligned with priorities and does the council influence, enable and leverage external capacity to focus on agreed outcomes?

2.3 In addition to these areas of focus the Council requested that the peer team consider/ review and provide feedback on the following questions;

- Do we have the capacity to deliver our big ticket items?
- How robust, realistic and ambitious are our plans to be self sufficient?
- What is your view on our approach to being more business like?
- Without a burning platform, how do we ensure we are financially robust to deal with future changes?
- How realistic and ambitious are our plans to improve customer experience?
- Are we on the right trajectory?

2.4 Ahead of the peer challenge the council provided the peer team with a self assessment of our current position which contained key facts, figures and background information. The process was very robust with the peer team carrying out 75 interviews, including a range of council staff, stakeholders, councillors and around 50 staff at the staff fair. The team gathered information and views from over 40 meetings and visited key sites within the district in addition to research and reading prior to their on site visit which lasted 3 days.

- 2.5 As Members are aware the feedback following the review was very positive, with the peer team highlighting number of recommendations for the Council to consider. By its nature, the Peer Challenge was a snapshot in time and it is recognised some of the feedback may be about things the Council had already recognised and was already addressing.

3. KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 The Peer review team recognised the positive feel to North West Leicestershire District Council and the enthusiastic staff and committed councillors who were striving to do their best for their communities. They also recognised the significant change in culture over the last two years with the new leadership team supported by the achievement of Investors in People accreditation in 2019. They understood the challenges that the District faces with the significant growth agenda, together with the opportunities this brings.

- 3.2 The team recognised

- the strong political commitment to Coalville,
- the robustness of the Corporate delivery plan in particular the commitment to actions over the next three years.
- the sound financial position of the authority
- the strong visible leadership team.
- positive motivated workforce who are keen to accept the challenges ahead
- strong sense of values which feel owned by staff and councillors
- NWL is seen as a trusted partner
- good progress on the commercial agenda and 'being more business like'

- 3.3 The Council was seen as heading on the right trajectory to continuously improve and achieve its strategic objectives but was still in a transition of change culturally.

- 3.4 The following are the Peer Team's key recommendations to the Council.

1. **Act on the opportunities that vacancies present.** When vacancies arise consider how the role could be redefined and developed to further promote the changed culture and strategic priorities. This could mean closer links across the council to reduce silo working and recognise that everyone contributes to placemaking.
2. **Continue to improve the scrutiny function.** Make it more robust and be seen to be more robust. Explore good practice regarding scrutiny, such as training and make better use of working groups, establishing a forward looking work programme and involve scrutiny early in the decision making progress.

This is an area where there has been significant improvement over the last two years with the development of two scrutiny committees with an enhanced number of meetings, however there is recognition that the council needs to support members in understanding their role and maximising the benefits effective scrutiny can bring to the council.

3. **Be prepared to address the capacity issues and align resources to priorities.** Capacity is stretched in some areas for example finance and digital transformation. Ensure the resources follow the priorities set to deliver what the council wants. Either put more resources in or reduce what you plan to deliver or adjust the timeframes.

4. **Clarify the councils risk appetite.** What is the amount and type of risk that the council is willing to take to meet its strategic objectives? Work is required to explore the tolerances and manage the agreed risk effectively.
 5. **Be confident and prepared to be more ambitious.** This recommendation also links to the appetite for risk and also the role the council could take in placemaking taking direct intervention to achieve the regeneration objectives. This recommendation also links to enhancing the amount of community engagement and involvement in developing the council objectives and building confidence.
- 3.5 In addition to the key recommendations, the peer team provided feedback and comment on how we meet the five core components and within the body of the report there are a number of areas for consideration based on best practice.
 - 3.6 In response to the peer review feedback report a draft action plan (Appendix A) has been developed for consideration and discussion at the Corporate Scrutiny Meeting prior to being presented to Cabinet.

4. PROPOSED WAY FORWARD

- 4.1 The Council will develop an action plan to respond to the comments and recommendations within the peer review report and is attached for members consideration. Once approved by cabinet the action plan will be publicised alongside the report. Quarterly reports on progress against the action plan will be provided the the Corporate Scrutiny Committee.
- 4.2 The LGA Corporate Peer Challenge process includes a follow up visit. The purpose of the visit is to help the Council assess the impact of the peer challenge and demonstrate the progress it has made against the areas of improvement and development identified by the peer team. It is a lighter-touch version of the original visit and does not necessarily involve all members of the original peer team. The timing of the visit is determined by the Council. Our expectation is that it will occur within the next 18 months.

| Policies and other considerations, as appropriate | |
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| Council Priorities: | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Supporting Coalville to be a more vibrant, family-friendly town - Support for businesses and helping people into local jobs - Developing a clean and green district - Local people live in high quality, affordable homes - Our communities are safe, healthy and connected |
| Policy Considerations: | <p>Treasury Management Strategy Medium Term Financial Plan Housing Revenue Account Asset Management Strategy Corporate Asset Management Strategy Customer Experience strategy</p> |

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| Safeguarding: | No matters arising out of the report |
| Equalities/Diversity: | No matters arising out of the report |
| Customer Impact: | No matters arising out of the report |
| Economic and Social Impact: | No matters arising out of the report |
| Environment and Climate Change: | No matters arising out of the report |
| Consultation/Community Engagement: | <p>The Peer review report will be published on the website and will form part of the quarterly staff roadshows.</p> <p>Any changes made as a result of the peer review recommendations that require more formal consultation or engagement, will be conducted in accordance with existing policies.</p> |
| Risks: | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. That the report is not adequately considered to assist in our continuous improvement activities <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Sufficient time needs to be provided to enable consideration of the recommendations and develop an action plan. 2. The process is not considered to have been worthwhile <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Follow up with all individuals that took part in the process and share the recommendations with them b. Public engagement through press release with key findings c. Ensure resulting action plan also made publically available 3. Insufficient resources to deliver action plan <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Prioritisation of resources through CLT |
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