



Report To: Leader and Cabinet
Lead Officer: Interim Chief Executive

19 January 2017

Corporate Peer Challenge: Feedback report

Purpose

1. To receive the Feedback report and recommendations from the Corporate Peer Challenge, undertaken between 15-18 November 2016, and agree priorities to form the basis of action plans to address the recommendations of the Peer Team and enable the Council to redefine its place-shaping role.
2. This is not a key decision; nevertheless, it proposes a series of actions which, once implemented, are likely to give rise to future key decisions in respect of service delivery and resources.

Recommendations

3. It is recommended that Cabinet:
 - (i) Receive the Feedback Report from the Corporate Peer Challenge, welcoming the independent external validation of the Council's strengths and achievements it has provided (**attached Appendix A**);
 - (ii) Agree the Key recommendations set out in Section 2 of the Feedback Report;
 - (iii) Agree priorities for the future leadership of place, as set out in paragraph 10 below, as the basis for the Council's response to the report; and
 - (iv) authorise the Interim Chief Executive to prepare action plans to address the priorities identified in recommendation (iii) above, in consultation with the Leader of the Council.

Reasons for Recommendations

4. In agreeing these recommendations, the Council can reflect positively upon the independent validation of the Council's strengths and achievements the Peer Challenge has provided. Looking forward, the identification of key priorities will enable the Council to respond to the 'pivotal moment' for its leadership of place, identified by the review team, thus ensuring maximum value can be derived from the challenge process.

Background

5. The Local Government Association (LGA) offers a free Corporate Peer Challenge to all of its members across England and Wales. The Challenge provides a robust external health check that can provide councils with confidence by validating their existing approaches as well as providing feedback and ideas for further improvement.

6. South Cambridgeshire District Council invited a LGA Corporate Peer Challenge team to visit us from the 15th to the 18th of November 2016. Given the significant changes to the organisation and the way that it works in recent years, we considered that this was a good time for us to take stock, to review progress and to look forward to the future.
7. A team of four local government officers and councillors led by a serving chief executive and supported by a LGA peer challenge manager spent four days at the Council, speaking to around 100 people, including a range of council staff together with councillors and external partners and stakeholders. At the end of the visit, the team provided initial feedback, followed by a full report and recommendations, **attached at Appendix A**. The LGA will carry out a follow-up visit to help the council assess the impact of the peer challenge, and the progress it has made against the areas of improvement and development identified. The timing of the visit is determined by the council, though it is expected that this will occur within the next 12-24 months.

Peer Challenge Feedback Report

8. The Review Team recognised SCDC's strong journey of improvement since 2007, during which time the Council has established itself as a well-respected and strong-performing organisation, with good ties to its communities, partners and government. The Council has strategic direction, as set out in its Corporate Plan, and is seen as a great place to work. Relations between officers and members were considered to be strong and effective.
9. The Review Team identified a number of strengths under each of the five core components of the review, including:

Leadership of Place

- Joint working with partners
- Joint planning committee and future joint Local Plan
- Partners very positive about working with the Council
- Significant investment leveraged into the area as a result of partnership working

Understanding of the Local Place and Priority Setting

- Clarity of, and strong evidence base for, Corporate Plan
- Excellent consultation and engagement arrangements on priorities for residents and businesses
- Strong internal and external communications
- Recognition of key importance of growth to the district

Financial Planning and viability

- Track record on savings
- Manageable medium-term funding pressures
- Strong approach on business improvement and efficiency to deliver future savings
- Increasingly commercial outlook

Organisational Leadership and Governance

- Strong and effective officer/member relations
- Open decision-making

- Positive organisational culture
- Effective performance and risk arrangements

Capacity to deliver

- Good talent development
- Systematic approach to project management
- Appetite for innovation
- Staff committed to organisation.

10. The team considered that the Council was at a pivotal moment in setting its future vision for the organisation and the place, and it is considered that this should provide the focus for our response. It is recommended that the following priorities for the Council's leadership of place, as specified within the feedback report, are agreed by Cabinet as the basis for this response which will enable us to seize the pivotal moment identified:

- Develop a clear strategy for steering and supporting growth and economic development
- Clarify future relationship and working arrangements with Cambridge City Council and other key partners
- Define what commercialisation means for the council and what future form it should take
- Clarify strategic vision for shared services
- Review approach to managing budget pressures while also committing to drive for efficiencies and savings, and identify any new resources needed to deliver Devolution successfully.
- Define the political and managerial leadership style required to manage the transition

Addressing these priorities will drive further improvement and clarify what type of organisation we wish SCDC to be in the future, and what this might look like in five years' time. This work can be informed by a stakeholder engagement exercise to build a blueprint for the future of the district – see paragraph 18 below.

11. Cabinet is further recommended to authorise the Interim Chief Executive to prepare detailed action plans to address these priorities. These will align with existing business planning mechanisms and strategic partnership governance arrangements as appropriate, and will take account of short and medium term Review Team recommendations set out in the feedback report.

Options

12. Cabinet is invited to consider the proposed corporate response to the Peer Challenge report and recommendations and to modify them as required.

Implications

13. In the writing of this report, taking into account financial, legal, staffing, risk management, equality and diversity, climate change, community safety and any other key issues, the following implications have been considered: -

Financial

14. There are no direct financial implications arising from this report and recommendations. Detailed implementation plans requiring additional resources will be subject to specific proposals, which would be brought to Cabinet for consideration in due course.

Staffing

15. It is considered that the recommendations within this report can be implemented from within existing resources, which can be supported by elements of the LGA's ongoing support offer – these can be explored as part of the preparation of detailed implementation plans.

Risk Management

16. A key focus of the Council's response will be to identify future strategic risks and opportunities, and to align these with corporate and business objectives through the Corporate Plan and Strategic Risk Register.

Consultation

17. The Peer Team found that the Council's Corporate Plan is 'underpinned by a sound evidence base of resident and business needs for South Cambridgeshire', informed by economic, employment, housing and demographic data and the results of consultation and dialogue with partners. It is therefore considered that the Council is in a position to clarify its future place-shaping role without further detailed consultation at this stage. Nevertheless, in order to ensure that our Vision and objectives continue to reflect the aspirations of our residents, businesses and partners, the Leader of the Council has requested a proposal for an engagement exercise, which can be developed as part of detailed action plans and carried as part of the corporate plan review cycle.

Effect on Strategic Aims

18. The Council's response to the LGA Peer Challenge comprises a reassessment of its leadership of place which will have implications for strategic aims as expressed in future Corporate Plans.

Background Papers: None

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