

Report to:	Scrutiny and Overview Committee	21 March 2024
Lead Cabinet Member:	Councillor John Williams – Lead Cabinet Member for Resources	
Lead Officer:	Jeff Membery – Head of Transformation, HR and Corporate Services	

Peer Review Action Plan

Executive Summary

1. The District Council has recently taken part in a Corporate Peer Challenge, which is run by the Local Government Association (LGA) and designed to provide robust, strategic and credible challenge and support to councils. Typically, every Council has a peer review every five years; the Council’s last peer review was on its Planning Committee in 2020.
2. The District Council invited the team of peers, made-up of councillors and officers from other councils, to visit us in late October / early November. They spoke with staff, councillors, and local partners, and their report has now been published which highlighted much good work by the Council and also made some recommendations.
3. This report – and the attached action plan at Appendix 1 – proposes how the Council will respond to the recommendations made by the peer challenge team recognising that there are always ways that we can do better and things that we can learn for the benefit of our residents and businesses.

Key Decision

4. No

Recommendations

5. A - It is recommended that Scrutiny and Overview Committee reviews and comments upon the action plan shown in Appendix 1 to this report and refers it on to be considered by the Cabinet.
 B- It is recommended that Scrutiny and Overview Committee agrees to consider progress against the action plan – once agreed by Cabinet – alongside the quarterly KPI reporting.

Reasons for Recommendations

6. The peer review process requires that the Council considers the recommendations of the peer challenge team and responds with an action plan to deliver improvements in line with those recommendations. The action plan needs to be published and the peer challenge team will re-visit again in September 2024 to consider the Council's progress against that plan.

Details

7. In November 2023 South Cambridgeshire District Council welcomed a peer challenge team from the Local Government Association (LGA) to support us on our journey of continuous improvement. The full report can be accessed on our website. [LGA Corporate Peer Challenge Final Report \(scambs.gov.uk\)](https://scambs.gov.uk)
8. It was very helpful to have a team of experienced and knowledgeable peers look at and assess our progress, acknowledging the many things we do well, and also highlighting opportunities for us to sharpen our focus or further improve performance.
9. The Council would like to extend our thanks to the peer review team for the work they undertook with us.
10. Examples of the things the Council does well highlighted by the Peer Challenge team included; - the Council's cost of living response which it called "comprehensive" and "innovative", the Council's leadership on the green agenda, and a team culture where colleagues feel supported, have opportunities for learning and feel valued and recognised.
11. The team's report noted the investment in transformation that was already delivering measurable improvements and commented that it was positive to see the range of activities that apprentices were undertaking in key teams across the Council.
12. The report also comments on the effectiveness of the committees in ensuring strong governance was in place and noted the benefits of pre-scrutiny in delivering timely decision making. It also praises recent work to examine how the Council can improve how it interacts with younger people.
13. The report particularly highlights the Council's strong financial position.
14. In line with their remit, the team made recommendations about where there were opportunities to further improve the way we work. The action plan at Appendix 1 has been prepared in response to these recommendations and it is recommended that progress against this plan should be reported alongside the quarterly performance reports to Scrutiny & Overview committee and Cabinet until September 2025 by which date the plan should be fully delivered.

Options

15. The recommended option is for Cabinet to adopt the action plan in Appendix 1 in its entirety. This will both meet the objectives of the LGA Peer Review process and deliver improvements to residents.
16. Cabinet could choose to reject the plan in its entirety. Although this would potentially reduce officer workload in the short term, it would also pass up opportunities for delivering improvements to residents and would potentially be contrary to the Council's Best Value duty.
17. Cabinet could adopt the plan in part accepting the proposed response to some recommendations and rejecting or amending the proposed response to others.

Implications

Equality and Diversity

18. Although this action plan does not have a direct impact on Equality and Diversity some of its elements – such as the production of the “People Strategy” potentially will have and Equality Impact Assessments will be undertaken separately for those elements.

Alignment with Council Priority Areas

19. By improving the delivery of a range of services – including those contained in the Corporate Business Plan – this action plan aligned with the Corporate Priority areas.

Background Papers

The Peer Review report which can be accessed online here [LGA Corporate Peer Challenge Final Report \(scams.gov.uk\)](https://www.scams.gov.uk/peer-review-report)

Appendices

Appendix A: Peer Review Action Plan

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