

Gloucester City Council

Meeting:	Cabinet briefing	Date:	14 March 2018
	Overview and Scrutiny Committee		26 March 2018
	Cabinet		11 April 2018
Subject:	LGA Corporate Peer challenge		
Report Of:	Leader of the Council		
Wards Affected:	All		
Key Decision:	No	Budget/Policy Framework:	No
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Appendices:	1. Corporate Peer Challenge, Feedback Report		
	2. Corporate Peer Challenge, Feedback presentation		
	3. Corporate Peer Challenge, Action Plan		

1.0 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To publish the feedback report and City Council response to the corporate peer challenge, undertaken by a team of Local Government Association (LGA) officer and member peers in November 2017.

2.0 Recommendations

- 2.1 Cabinet is asked to **RESOLVE** that

- (1) The feedback report of the Corporate Peer Challenge be welcomed
- (2) The feedback report be shared with members, officers and partners who were involved in the peer challenge and be made available to the public via the council's website
- (3) The Council's response to the recommendations in the feedback report be approved

- 2.2 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee is asked to **NOTE** the report and make such recommendations it considers appropriate.

3.0 Background and Key Issues

- 3.1 Since the abolition of the Audit Commission in 2009, the local government sector has assumed responsibility for continuous improvement. The LGA is managing a system of 'sector led improvement' on behalf of the local government sector in England. Key principles of sector led improvement are that:
- councils are responsible for their own performance
 - stronger local accountability leads to further improvement
 - councils have a sense of collective responsibility for performance in the sector as a whole.

Corporate Peer challenges are an important aspect of this.

3.2 Corporate peer challenges involve a team of senior officers and councillors from other councils who come together for a short period of time to review and challenge practice of the host authority. The process is not an inspection; rather it is about continuous improvement. Although not a requirement, councils are invited to share the feedback report widely to demonstrate openness and transparency about how they are led and managed.

3.3 Gloucester City Council invited a team of eight peers between 14-17 November 2017. Members of the team were:

- Karime Hassan, Chief Executive, Exeter City Council (lead peer)
- Councillor Linda Robinson, Leader of Wychavon District Council
- Lucie Breadman, Assistant Director Community Services, Colchester Borough Council
- Shirlene Adam, Strategic Director – Operations, Taunton Deane Borough Council and West Somerset Council
- Denise Edghill, Head of Economic Development and Skills, Southampton City Council
- Chris Bally, Assistant Chief Executive and Chief Information Officer, Suffolk County Council
- Amy Haldane, Local Government Association
- Andrew Winfield - Peer Challenge Manager, LGA.

3.4 The brief for the peer team included five core questions that are critical to council's improvement and performance:

1. How well do we understand the local context and how do we use this to inform a clear vision and priorities?
2. Do we provide effective leadership of place through our elected members and officers; and do we have constructive relationships and partnerships with external stakeholders?
3. Do we have 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. Do we have a financial plan in place to ensure long-term viability and is there evidence that it is being implemented successfully?
5. Is organisational capacity aligned with priorities and do we influence, enable and leverage external capacity to focus on agreed outcomes?

The brief also included a review of our progress since the last corporate peer challenge in 2013.

3.5 The team absorbed a significant amount of information and spoke with over 150 officers, members and partners over the course of the four days on site.

3.6 The feedback presentation and feedback report in the appendix give a detailed account of the findings, including strengths and areas for consideration, from the peer team.

3.7 The team compared Gloucester City Council in 2017 with the council peers visited back in 2013 and they said that it was like comparing 'chalk and cheese'. The improvement over that period is the result of sustained hard work from council officers and members with the support of the LGA.

The team identified the following as key strengths in its leadership and management:

- There is strong confidence in political and managerial leadership arrangements with effective working relationships between officers and cabinet members.
- The council has led a significant level of top quality regeneration over a sustained period that has now formed a critical mass to position the city as a desirable destination and described as "on the up".
- The council has moved from a financially 'precarious' position in 2012 to one that now provides a firm foundation to deliver on council priorities, with adequate reserves and a record of successfully making savings, effective financial monitoring and control and a robust five year Money Plan.
- The shared Managing Director post with the county council has been instrumental in developing strong relationships and the development of shared back-office functions between the City and the County council
- The council's strategic direction is clearly mapped out in the recently adopted Council Plan 2017-2020
- The council has attached significant emphasis to provide greater resilience in business continuity and the ability to respond to an emergency. It has invested to upgrade the IT hardware and software and has undertaken work to meet Public Service Network Standards.
- The council is regarded as a strong, credible and reliable partner with a focus and ability to deliver on shared projects.
- The council is to be congratulated on completing the first phase of the Together Gloucester council transformation to time and in meeting financial saving targets and is now well placed for the next phases. These will be based on developing an IT platform promoting new forms of customer access, customer self-service and 'channel shift'.

3.8 The team's recommendations to the council included:

- To produce a transformation programme to explain in clear terms the vision for Together Gloucester and how the design principles will shape the emerging operating model; and to allocate lead and supporting roles for the transformation programme.
- To develop a communication and engagement plan for the Together Gloucester programme that creates a shared understanding amongst officers, councillor and partners and also clarifies the part that Asset Based Community Development will play.

- Building on the strengths of collaborative partnership working, maximise opportunities to progress areas of common interest with a wide range of partners; in particular to develop Gloucester based solutions which have social impact and make use of the asset based community development approach.
- Identify and promote Gloucester's unique selling point (USP) and make sure it is used consistently by the council and partners for a range of purposes, including inward investment, tourism, marketing and promoting the City.
- Adopt and increasingly selective approach to development and inward investment.
- Continue to work with vision 2050 to be able to shape a strong future for Gloucester as a key player in Gloucestershire's prosperity.
- Consider how to best secure beneficial economic, community and social impact.
- Develop a housing strategy covering Gloucester, Cheltenham and Tewkesbury to build on the Joint Core Strategy work across the three councils.

4.0 Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) Considerations

The report the disproportionate spend by partners in Gloucester on children in need and wider vulnerable people support services and provides a helpful challenge to the council to develop opportunities for joint strategic commissioning with the county council (social care and public health) through piloting activities that build in an asset based approach to addressing economic, social and health objectives.

5.0 Alternative Options Considered

5.1 N/A

6.0 Reasons for Recommendations

6.1 The findings of the peer challenge team are very welcome. The highlight what we recognise as strengths and will help us to make further improvements. For reasons of openness and transparency we are keen to share the report and presentation.

7.0 Future Work and Conclusions

7.1 The feedback presentation and report will be shared with staff, members and partners who had direct involvement in the peer challenge. They will also be made available to the public via the council's website.

7.2 Our response to the recommendations of the peer team are attached at Appendix 3. We look forward to engaging with the LGA and drawing on their expertise in delivering the action plan. The delivery of the action plan will be monitored by SMT and Cabinet.

8.0 Financial Implications

8.1 None directly.

(Financial Services have been consulted in the preparation this report.)

9.0 Legal Implications

9.1 None

(One Legal have been consulted in the preparation this report.)

10.0 Risk & Opportunity Management Implications

10.1 Effective engagement with sector led improvement is an important part of good corporate governance. The findings of the peer challenge have provided us with assurance and its recommendations will enable further improvement of the council's processes, practice and service delivery.

11.0 People Impact Assessment (PIA) and Safeguarding:

N/A

12.0 Other Corporate Implications

N/A

Background Documents: None