

TITLE	Local Government Association Corporate Peer Challenge Update
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	The Executive on Wednesday, 15 December 2021
WARD	None Specific;
LEAD OFFICER	Chief Executive - Susan Parsonage
LEAD MEMBER	Leader of the Council - John Halsall

PURPOSE OF REPORT (INC STRATEGIC OUTCOMES)

The purpose of the report is to provide an update on the initial findings of the recent Local Government Association (LGA) Corporate Peer Challenge and seek approval for funding to expedite the Council's response to the review.

RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Executive:

- 1) note the initial high level findings from the LGA Corporate Peer Challenge that took place in November 2021;
- 2) agree a supplementary estimate of £150,000 to support the delivery of key actions arising from the review; and
- 3) note that the finalised LGA CPC report and associated action plan will be reported to the January 2022 meeting of the Executive.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The LGA Corporate Peer Challenge that took place in November 2021 highlighted the Council's strengths and much that we can be proud of. Feedback from the visit was provided verbally on 17 November and the LGA's final report is expected shortly, following which the report and detailed action plan will be presented to Executive in January 2022.

The Peer team confirmed that the Council delivers valued, well-performing services that produce good outcomes for its residents and that it should be particularly proud of its response to the COVID-29 pandemic. It does this in the context of being financially stable through sound financial management.

The feedback also set out opportunities for future development identifying areas for further focus. In order to expedite improvements with pace, Executive is asked to agree provisional one-off funding of £150,000 which will be utilised engaging with industry experts to further enhance the Council's promotion of its services, to develop media training and skills, and bolster digital communications.

The LGA Peer Team will return to the Council in late spring 2022 to assess progress in responding to the review and their recommendations.

BACKGROUND

The peer challenge approach involves a team of experienced officers and members from other local authorities spending time with the Council, staff, residents and partners as 'peers' to provide challenge and share learning. The approach is valuable in identifying and addressing issues and challenges across key themes including:-

- local priorities and outcomes,
- organisational and place leadership,
- governance and culture,
- financial planning and management and;
- capacity for improvement.

In addition, the Council asked the team to consider the following specific areas of interest:-

- How do we get our residents and communities to recognise the things we've achieved?
- How can we improve our horizon scanning capability?
- How can we further foster a data and insight driven organisation?
- How can we make our Overview & Scrutiny function more meaningful and effective?
- How will we ensure that our Change approach is sufficiently agile to meet our ambitions?

The Peer team comprised the Leader of Essex County Council, the Chief Executive of London Borough of Ealing, senior officers from London Borough of Barnet and City of York Council, and managers from the LGA.

The CPC at Wokingham took place between 9th and 17th November during which the Peer team met with over 100 people comprising approximately 200 hours.

INITIAL FEEDBACK

Headlines from the feedback session held on 17th November highlighted that the Council delivers valued, well-performing services that produce good outcomes for its residents and that it should be particularly proud of its response to the COVID-29 pandemic. It does this in the context of being financially stable through sound financial management.

Areas suggested for consideration included further enhancing the Council's communications and engagement activity to promote the positive outcomes the Council achieves for its residents.

NEXT STEPS

The LGA Peer Team is currently drafting its detailed report on receipt of which the Executive will consider the improvement action plan in January 2022.

Immediate priorities for action have been identified with regards to the Council restating and articulating the positive impact and outcomes being achieved for its residents. Therefore, in advance of the final report from the LGA, it is proposed that additional one-off funding of £150,000 be utilised engaging with industry experts to further enhance the Council's marketing and engagement activity, to develop media training and skills, and bolster digital communications.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

The Council faces severe funding pressures, particularly in the face of the COVID-19 crisis. It is therefore imperative that Council resources are focused on the vulnerable and on its highest priorities.

	How much will it Cost/ (Save)	Is there sufficient funding – if not quantify the Shortfall	Revenue or Capital?
Current Financial Year (Year 1)	£75,000	No	Revenue
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	£75,000	No	Revenue
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	£0	No	

Other Financial Information

The above funding is one-off investment.

Stakeholder Considerations and Consultation

The LGA report and associated action plan will be published and considered by Executive in January 2022.

Public Sector Equality Duty

This is an update report. An EiQ has not been completed at this stage.

Climate Emergency – *This Council has declared a climate emergency and is committed to playing as full a role as possible – leading by example as well as by exhortation – in achieving a carbon neutral Wokingham Borough by 2030*

Ensuring good governance is in place assists in achieving all the Council's strategic outcomes including those around climate emergency.

List of Background Papers

None

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