

<b>TITLE</b>	<b>Corporate Peer Challenge Report and Action Plan</b>
<b>FOR CONSIDERATION BY</b>	The Executive on Monday, 7 March 2022
<b>WARD</b>	None Specific;
<b>LEAD OFFICER</b>	Chief Executive - Susan Parsonage
<b>LEAD MEMBER</b>	Leader of the Council - John Halsall

## **PURPOSE OF REPORT (INC STRATEGIC OUTCOMES)**

This report presents the final report of the Local Government Association team that undertook a Corporate Peer Challenge for the Council in November 2021, together with a proposed action plan to address the recommendations set out in the Corporate Peer Challenge report.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

That the Executive:

- 1) notes the final report of the Local Government Association Corporate Peer Challenge in November 2021 attached at Appendix 1;
- 2) approves the Action Plan attached at Appendix 2 that addresses the recommendations set out in the Corporate Peer Challenge report;
- 3) notes that the Local Government Association will be undertaking a “six month check-in” later in 2022 to allow the Council’s senior leadership to update on the Council’s progress against the action plan.

## **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 published with this report along with a detailed action plan.

The Peer team confirmed that the Council delivers valued, well performing services that provide a high quality of life for residents. The Council achieves good outcomes for its residents, despite receiving no central government grant funding and notwithstanding the recent pressures of COVID is financially stable.

The feedback also set out a number of opportunities for future development identifying areas for further focus. An Action Plan is included (at Appendix 2) which will require careful ongoing management of capacity to ensure successful delivery.

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

1. One of the services that the Local Government Association (LGA) offers its member councils is a Corporate Peer Challenge (CPC). By bringing together political and managerial leadership, through the use of Elected Member and officer peers, a CPC aims to provide a robust, strategic and credible challenge as well as support to councils.
2. The LGA views the CPC process as one of its key tools to support improvement in the way councils operate nationally. The CPC process is designed to be forward-looking and problem-solving, is not a form of inspection and does not rank or score the Council.
3. Each CPC covers five core elements as detailed below as well any local needs or specific challenges requested by a council:
  - Local priorities and outcomes
  - Organisational and place leadership
  - Governance and culture
  - Financial planning and management
  - Capacity for improvement.
4. 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?
5. The on-site CPC process involved a leading Councillor and senior officers from other councils across the country visiting Wokingham Borough to meet a number of Councillors and a wide mix of staff, as well as partners and other organisations, that operate in the Borough to review processes, policies and practice to see what we do well and where we could improve.
6. Initial feedback was given by the LGA at the end of the on-site process on 17<sup>th</sup> November and this has now been followed up by the written report attached at Appendix 1.
7. The LGA CPC report highlights many positive aspects in the way the Council operates noting that the Council delivers valued, well performing services that provide a high quality of life for residents. The report concludes that the Council achieves good outcomes for its residents, despite receiving no central government grant funding and notwithstanding the recent pressures of COVID is financially stable.

8. Importantly the LGA CPC report also identify areas where the Council can improve and these are set out in the following five key recommendations in the report and are reproduced below:
- Restate and bring to life a narrative about the Council's ambitions for its residents to deliver the future vision for Wokingham - the place, the people, and the opportunities.
  - Recognise the role the council plays in community and place leadership – and sometimes that means taking criticism and tough decisions.
  - Ensure that there is adequate capacity in core corporate services to drive forward change where needed – HR, Finance, change...
  - Continue to embed Equality, Diversity and Inclusion for members and officers, and through the delivery of services.
  - Ensure there is a commitment to a long-term vision for the Borough co-designed and co-delivered with partners to become the focus for the entire community.
9. The Action Plan can be found at Appendix 2 which shows the Council's response to the key recommendations as well as further detailed recommendations across the lines of enquiry set out in paragraphs 3 and 4. The successful delivery of this plan will require careful management of capacity and will therefore be kept under close review.

#### **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)	£0	Yes	Revenue
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	£0	Yes	Revenue
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	£0	Yes	Revenue

<b>Other Financial Information</b>
None

<b>Stakeholder Considerations and Consultation</b>
The LGA report and associated action plan will be published on the Council's Website.

<b>Public Sector Equality Duty</b>
This is an update report. An EqIA has not been completed

<b>Climate Emergency – <i>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</i></b>
---

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

**List of Background Papers**

LGA Corporate Peer Challenge Report – February 2022

WBC Action Plan – February 2022

<b>Contact</b> Andrew Moulton	<b>Service</b> Governance
<b>Telephone</b> Tel: 07747 777298	<b>Email</b> andrew.moulton@wokingham.gov.uk