

TITLE	Corporate Peer Challenge - Follow Up Visit
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	The Executive on 26 January 2023
WARD	(All Wards);
LEAD OFFICER	Chief Executive - Susan Parsonage
LEAD MEMBER	Leader of the Council and Executive Member for Business and Economic Development- Clive Jones

PURPOSE OF REPORT (INC STRATEGIC OUTCOMES)

The report presents the findings and conclusions of the Corporate Peer Challenge follow-up visit that took place in October 2022 providing residents with an independent assurance of the Council's progress and improvements since November 2021.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Executive notes the progress report of the Corporate Peer Challenge at Appendix 1.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Local Government Association's (LGA) Corporate Peer Challenge (CPC) offer is effective and well regarded by the local government sector. By bringing together political and managerial leadership, through the use of member and officer peers, a peer challenge provides robust, strategic and credible challenge and support to councils. Peer challenge also enhances the capacity of the sector and helps to avoid insularity within councils.

Wokingham Borough Council received a CPC visit in November 2021, the results of which were reported to Executive on 7 March 2022 together with an improvement action plan.

In October 2022, the CPC team undertook a follow up visit to assess progress and ongoing challenges. The LGA's findings from the visit are reported at Appendix 1.

In summary, the CPC team reported "that there has been a palpable and positive change at Wokingham, in tone, style and purpose and felt that they were encountering a council that was very different to a year ago which is a credit to the work of both officers and members."

BACKGROUND TO THE CORPORATE PEER CHALLENGE

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. At its meeting of 7 March 2022, the Executive considered the findings of CPC review that took place in November 2021 and agreed an action plan to address the areas of improvement identified. It was also noted that the CPC team would undertake a follow-up visit to assess progress later in the year.

FOLLOW-UP VISIT

6. In October 2022, the CPC team met with members and officers to assess the progress made since their November 2021 visit.
7. Initial feedback was given by the LGA at the end of the follow up visit on 19th October and this has now been followed up by the written report attached at Appendix 1.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

The Council faces unprecedented financial pressures as a result of; the longer term impact of the COVID-19 crisis, Brexit, the war in Ukraine and the general economic climate of rising prices and the increasing cost of debt. It is therefore imperative that Council resources are optimised and 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

Other Financial Information

None.

Stakeholder Considerations and Consultation

The February 2022 LGA report and associated action plan is published on the Council's Website together with the December 2022 follow-up report.

Public Sector Equality Duty

This is an update report. An Equality Impact Assessment has not been completed.

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.

Reasons for considering the report in Part 2

Not applicable.

List of Background Papers

LGA Corporate Peer Challenge Report – February 2022

WBC Action Plan – February 2022

LGA Corporate Peer Challenge Follow Up Report – December 2022

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