

Title of Report:	Local Government Association Peer Challenge - West Berkshire
Report to be considered by:	Executive
Date of Meeting:	9 October 2014
Forward Plan Ref:	EX2893

Purpose of Report: To publish the results of the LGA Peer Challenge for West Berkshire Council.

Recommended Action: To note the report and the actions that are being taken to address the recommendations within it.

Reason for decision to be taken: To raise the visibility of the report and enable debate of the content and recommendations.

Other options considered: None.

Key background documentation: LGA Peer Challenge Final Letter - July 2014.

The proposals will help achieve the following Council Strategy principle: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> CSP8 - Doing what's important well
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Portfolio Member Details	
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Date Portfolio Member agreed report:	25 September 2014

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Implications

- Policy:** The LGA Peer Challenge has no policy implications for the Council although the recommendations do have implications for some of the Council's governance arrangements.
- Financial:** None.
- Personnel:** None.
- Legal/Procurement:** None.
- Property:** None.
- Risk Management:** The recommendations from the Peer Challenge do not pose major risks for the Council. They are all put forward to enhance the Council's overall efficiency and effectiveness, but will require resources to make it happen.

Is this item relevant to equality?	Please tick relevant boxes	Yes	No ✓
Does the policy affect service users, employees or the wider community and:			
• Is it likely to affect people with particular protected characteristics differently?		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
• Is it a major policy, significantly affecting how functions are delivered?		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
• Will the policy have a significant impact on how other organisations operate in terms of equality?		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
• Does the policy relate to functions that engagement has identified as being important to people with particular protected characteristics?		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
• Does the policy relate to an area with known inequalities?		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Outcome (Where one or more 'Yes' boxes are ticked, the item is relevant to equality)			
Relevant to equality - Complete an EIA available at www.westberks.gov.uk/eia			<input type="checkbox"/>
Not relevant to equality			<input type="checkbox"/>

Is this item subject to call-in?	Yes: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	No: <input type="checkbox"/>
If not subject to call-in please put a cross in the appropriate box:		
The item is due to be referred to Council for final approval		<input type="checkbox"/>
Delays in implementation could have serious financial implications for the Council		<input type="checkbox"/>
Delays in implementation could compromise the Council's position		<input type="checkbox"/>
Considered or reviewed by Overview and Scrutiny Management Commission or associated Task Groups within preceding six months		<input type="checkbox"/>
Item is Urgent Key Decision		<input type="checkbox"/>
Report is to note only		<input type="checkbox"/>

Executive Summary

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This paper sets out the results of the LGA Peer Challenge which was undertaken here in early July. The resulting letter from the LGA paints a positive picture with a small number of recommendations being made. The purpose of this paper is to set out these recommendations, facilitate debate and then set out how it is proposed to implement the recommendations.

2. Proposals

- 2.1 The report highlights the current strengths of the Council's current leadership, governance and financial planning arrangements and sets out a number of suggested areas for attention, namely;
- (1) the need for a consistent, shared narrative across the Member and officer Leadership;
 - (2) consider opportunities for joint 'top team' development for the political and managerial leadership of the Council and achieve a common understanding of the roles of Members and officers;
 - (3) create more time for strategic thinking and assess the value of formal and informal meeting structures;
 - (4) consider the creation of a single programme broad to direct all major transformational activity across the Council;
 - (5) review Overview and Scrutiny arrangements;
 - (6) create an environment which fosters more innovation and consider mechanisms to encourage staff to make suggestions;
 - (7) seek to strengthen relationships with health;
 - (8) consider opportunities for more income generation;
 - (9) demonstrate that you value staff.

3. Equalities Impact Assessment Outcomes

- 3.1 This item is not relevant to equality.

4. Conclusion

- 4.1 The LGA Peer Challenge highlights the Council as having some real strengths although it states it cannot afford to be complacent regarding the future challenges that lie ahead. Work has already begun on addressing some of the recommendations highlighted in the letter and all of the recommendations will be built into the new Council Plan 2015-2018 which is currently being written.

Executive Report

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Local Government Association (LGA) launched its offer of 'sector led improvement' in 2011. It reflected the Coalition's desire to abolish the Audit Commission and reduce the inspection burden that has been placed on local Government by previous Governments. The Peer Challenge has become the primary means for delivering sector led improvement. There are a number of different types offered but all local authorities are meant to have had a corporate Peer Challenge undertaken by 2015.
- 1.2 There are a number of core elements to a corporate peer challenge including leadership, governance, financial sustainability and capacity. There is also the opportunity to tailor the challenge to an individual authority's own needs and Members will note that these are set out on page 2 of the Peer Challenge letter which is set out in Appendix A.
- 1.3 The letter has been written as a self contained report and is attached at Appendix A for Members information. It is relatively brief and so has not been replicated here.
- 1.4 The report has been placed on the Executive agenda to formally recognise its existence and provide an opportunity for further debate. A copy has already been made available to all staff and Members and is available to the public via the Council's website.
- 1.5 The recommendations in the report which are set out below are already being acted upon and will be taken up as part of the new Council Plan 2015-2018 which is currently being prepared.

2. Findings

- 2.1 The Review highlights a number of the Council's strengths alongside recommendations which are set out below;
 - (1) develop a consistent, shared narrative across the Member and officer leadership of the Council to describe the future direction and priorities and reflect this in your Council Strategy 2015-19;
 - (2) consider opportunities for joint 'top team' development for the political and managerial leadership of the Council and achieve a common understanding of the roles of Members and officers;
 - (3) consider how to release more time for strategic thinking, and planning in particular for the Chief Executive and other senior officers, including assessing the value of different elements of your formal and informal meeting structures;
 - (4) consider the establishment of a single programme board to direct all major transformation activity across the Council. This could replace some of your current arrangements;

- (5) review for your Overview and Scrutiny arrangements, including opportunities for more pre-decision scrutiny and policy development aligned to Council priorities, the use of informal 'task and finish' groups and strengthening partnership scrutiny, including of health;
- (6) create an environment which fosters more innovation and consider mechanisms to encourage staff to make suggestions, support their implementation and showcase success. Be prepared to invest more time in learning from elsewhere;
- (7) continue to pay attention to strengthening your relationships with the health sector to support the integration of health and social care and ensure the effectiveness of your Health and Wellbeing Board;
- (8) consider opportunities for more income generation, including the structures and systems to support this;
- (9) demonstrate that you value staff - acknowledge their contribution and celebrate their successes and those of the Council more, in West Berkshire and with the sector more generally.

2.2 A copy of the Peer Challenge letter is set out in full at Appendix A.

Appendices

Appendix A – West Berkshire Council – Corporate Peer Challenge – Final Letter

Consultees

Local Stakeholders: None.

Officers Consulted: Corporate Board

Trade Union: None – a copy of the report has already been made widely available to staff and Members and has also been published on the website. The report is the work of the Peer Challenge Team and as such the Council has not sought to comment on it or amend it.