

Local Government Association Corporate Peer Challenge 2024 - West Berkshire

Committee considering report:	Executive
Date of Committee:	25 July 2024
Portfolio Member:	Councillor Jeff Brooks
Report Author:	Catalin Bogos - Performance, Research and Consultation Manager
Forward Plan Ref:	EX4568

1 Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 To publish the action plan in response to the recommendations from the Local Government Association (LGA) Corporate Peer Challenge for West Berkshire Council.

2 Recommendation

- 2.1 Approve the actions that are being taken to address the recommendations within the LGA Corporate Peer Challenge Report.

3 Implications and Impact Assessment

Implication	Commentary
Financial:	There are no direct financial implications as a result of this report. However, as part of the production of the Action Plan to address the report's recommendations, governance boards responsible for particular actions might identify such implications and manage accordingly.
Human Resource:	There are no direct HR implications as a result of this report.
Legal:	There are no direct Legal implications as a result of this report.
Risk Management:	There are no significant risk management issues as a result of this report.

Property:	N/A			
Policy:	There are no direct Policy implications as a result of this report. However, governance boards responsible for particular actions might identify such implications and manage accordingly.			
	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Commentary
Equalities Impact:				
A Are there any aspects of the proposed decision, including how it is delivered or accessed, that could impact on inequality?		x		N/A
B Will the proposed decision have an impact upon the lives of people with protected characteristics, including employees and service users?				N/A
Environmental Impact:				N/A
Health Impact:				N/A
ICT Impact:				N/A
Digital Services Impact:				N/A

Council Strategy Priorities:	x			The report highlights a number of actions in response to the Peer Challenge recommendations for the Council to consider in delivering the Council Strategy and core services.
Core Business:	x			The report highlights a number of actions in response to the Peer Challenge recommendations for the Council to consider in delivering the Council Strategy and core services.
Data Impact:				N/A
Consultation and Engagement:	Corporate Board, Portfolio Holders			

4 Executive Summary

4.1 This paper sets out the actions already progressed, and actions planned in response to the recommendations from the LGA Corporate Peer Challenge which took place in February 2024. Whilst the Council will continue the actions that ensures the delivery of the strengths identified by the Peer Challenge process, the action plan at Appendix A focuses on the initiatives detail the Council's response to each recommendation.

4.2 The recommendations that are the focus of the action plan are:

- Urgently address overspending in children's and adult services and build reserves, develop a clear plan that has buy-in from the whole organisation.
- Ensure that there is traction on the delivery of the Delivering Better Value SEND programme and have a plan to resolve the High Needs Block Deficit.
- Embed transformation across the organisation with strong leadership from the political leadership, Corporate Leadership Team (CLT), and an empowered central team. A bolder transformation programme to impact on finances (in children's and adult services, and home to school transport).
- Strengthen the CLT to provide effective leadership, clear and consistent direction and stewardship for the organisation. Create more space for the Executive and CLT to jointly develop as a 'Top Team' to reinforce close working relationships and trust. Urgently stabilise the leadership below executive director level.
- Stronger prioritisation and focus on what will make the most difference, delivered within the council's financial envelope and capacity.

- Executive members should continue the good work settling into their new roles, taking up opportunities to develop their skills, and owning and leading their portfolios to ensure effective political leadership for the council.
- Simplify the governance structure to increase pace and agility.
- Ensure that strategic legal, HR, communications and transformation expertise has a place at the 'top table' in a meaningful way and at the right point of policy development and delivery.
- Test the extent to which the behaviour framework has been embedded within the organisation (e.g. through staff survey/ pulse survey).
- Strengthen communications and engagement activity further, by using internal communications expertise earlier in project planning, closing the communications loop via consistent feedback on outcomes of consultations, and embedding approaches that engage wider groups of people earlier in the process and in more meaningful ways.
- Build on strong and positive operational relationships between the council and partners, including contractors, and develop strategic relationships that create opportunities to deliver activity that will support wider council and partner objectives (e.g. apprenticeships, social value). As part of this, develop a strategic Memorandum of Understanding with the Voluntary and Community Sector.

4.3 The Executive is asked to approve the action plan. In addition, the action plan will be added for consideration to a future agenda of the Scrutiny Commission (subject to agreement with the Chairman of Scrutiny).

5 Supporting Information

Introduction

5.1 At their meeting on the 23rd of May 2024, the Executive has published the report produced by the Local Government Association (LGA) following a Corporate Peer Challenge, where member and officer peers from other local authorities in the country have assessed West Berkshire Council's strengths and areas of improvement.

Background

5.2 The Corporate Peer Challenge took place in February 2024. The LGA Peer Review Team produced a self-contained report (attached at Appendix B). The report covers the findings, recommendations and details of the peer team (which was made up of senior Officers, and Councillors from other Local Authorities, with an LGA supporting officer).

5.3 The action plan in Appendix A lists the actions planned in response to the key recommendations highlighted for reporting at Executive.

5.4 The Action Plan captures work already started to address the recommendations, but the full set of actions are included in the Action Plan (Appendix A). These actions will be incorporated in the council performance framework for regular

monitoring of progress. The LGA will review our progress on the report late in 2024.

Proposals

The actions in response to the Peer Challenge's recommendations and the allocation of these actions to governing bodies responsible for their delivery are approved by the Executive.

6 Other options considered

6.1 The Council found the Corporate Peer Challenge (Feb 2024) very valuable as a sense check of where we are on our aim to continuously improve as a Council. Similar to 2019, the report reflects on the Council's strengths and areas for further improvement. A careful consideration of the feedback, which resulted in an Action Plan to address the recommendations, is the option that will achieve the maximum benefit from undertaking the corporate peer challenge. Not to consider plan the response to the recommendations of the LGA report would mean that the preparation and CPC time would have been wasted.

7 Conclusion

7.1 The Council will continue its approaches identified as strengths by the LGA Corporate Peer Challenge. The recommendations for improvement are valuable feedback from member and officer peers. An action plan was produced to list the activities planned in response to the eleven key recommendations. Work has already begun on addressing some of the recommendations highlighted in the report. All the actions in response to these recommendations will be monitored as part of the Council's performance management framework.

8 Appendices

8.1 Appendix A – Action Plan in Response to the LGA Corporate Peer Challenge Recommendations

8.2 Appendix B – LGA Corporate Peer Challenge Feedback report February 2024

Background Papers:

None

Subject to Call-In:

Yes: No:

The item is due to be referred to Council for final approval

Delays in implementation could have serious financial implications for the Council

-
- Delays in implementation could compromise the Council's position
- Considered or reviewed by Scrutiny Commission or associated Committees,
Task Groups within preceding six months
- Item is Urgent Key Decision
- Report is to note only

Wards affected: All

Officer details:

Name: Catalin Bogos
Job Title: Performance, Research and Consultation Manager
Tel No: (01635) 519102
E-mail: Catalin.Bogos@westberks.gov.uk

Document Control

DocumentRef:	LGA Peer Challenge Action Plan	Date Created:	31/05/2024
Version:	V1	Date Modified:	
Author:	Catalin Bogos		
Owning Service	Strategy and Governance		

Change History

Version	Date	Description	Change ID
1	31/05/2024	Produced the first version of the report.	