

Classification: Public
Key Decision: No

Gravesham Borough Council

Report to: Cabinet
Date: 22 February 2021
Reporting officer: Stuart Bobby, Chief Executive and Michelle Batstone, Corporate Change Manager
Subject: LGA Peer Challenge Action Plan Update and Follow-up Review

Purpose and summary of report:

To provide Members with an update against the recommendations made by the LGA as part of their review in October 2019 and to set out the arrangements for a follow-up review by the Peer Challenge Team in March 2021.

Recommendations:

Members are asked to note the progress made in respect of the agreed action plan and the arrangements for the follow-up review in March 2021.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 In October 2019, the council welcomed a Peer Challenge Team onsite in order for them to undertake a Corporate Peer Challenge of the council. The team were onsite for three days (between 15 October and 17 October) and undertook a number of interviews and focus groups with various officers, Members, residents and external partners of the organisation.
- 1.2 The purpose of the Peer Challenge was to focus on the five core areas of business that make up a Peer Challenge:
 - 1.2.1 understanding of the local place and priority setting
 - 1.2.2 leadership of place
 - 1.2.3 financial planning and viability
 - 1.2.4 organisational leadership and governance
 - 1.2.5 capacity to deliver
- 1.3 In addition, the team were also asked to consider additional areas of scope identified by the council, in the areas of housing and housing delivery and planning and the planning service.

- 1.4 Following the review, the LGA Peer Challenge Team presented their findings and made a number of recommendations which were developed into an action plan for the council. This was subsequently approved by the Cabinet at its meeting on 03 February 2020.
- 1.5 Since this date, despite the added pressures that have been brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, officers have continued to progress actions against the recommendations and an update on the action plan is provided at appendix two.
- 1.6 Progress against the recommendations can be summarised as follows:
 - 12 completed recommendations
 - 15 currently underway with actions for completion identified

2. LGA Peer Challenge Follow-up Review

- 2.1 In presenting the final report to the council, the LGA confirmed that the Peer Challenge process includes a follow-up review. The purpose of the follow-up review is to assess the progress the Council has made against the areas of improvement and development identified by the Peer team.
- 2.2 As a result of the COVID pandemic, the LGA are not undertaking onsite follow-up reviews. They are however piloting 'virtual follow-up reviews' and Gravesham will be one of the first authorities to go through the virtual follow-up process.
- 2.3 The review will take place on 09 March 2021 for one day and will be a lighter-touch version of the original visit. There will be an initial briefing with the Leader and Chief Executive on the morning of the review and all interviews and meetings will take place over the course of the day.
- 2.4 The Peer Challenge Team will consist of the same Member and Chief Executive Peer. Unfortunately, the same Officer Peer is not available, but an alternative has been identified by the LGA. As such, the Peer Review Team will be:
 - Neil Taylor, Chief Executive, Bassetlaw District Council
 - Cllr Michael Payne, Deputy Leader of Gedling Borough Council
 - Patsy Dell, Director, Hertfordshire Growth - Hertfordshire County Council
 - Angela Kawa, Peer Challenge Manager and Programme Manager for LGA London & South East
- 2.5 The preparation for the review is a lot more light-touch than the full review. There is no requirement for a self-assessment. Documents required will include:
 - Latest update against the recommendations/action plan.
 - Any supporting documents or policies that have been developed as a result of the actions identified.
 - Copy of the Budget

3. Next Steps

- 3.1 A schedule of interviews is in the process of being developed and will be finalised ahead of the virtual review on 09 March 2021.
- 3.2 Following the completion of the review, a formal feedback session will be held two weeks after the virtual review has been completed. This will give the Peer Challenge Team time to digest their findings and formulate their conclusions. A formal feedback session will be held with the Council on 23 March 2021.
- 3.3 A short report will be produced by the LGA; there is an expectation from the LGA that the Council will publish this on its website.

4. Background Papers

- 4.1 Background papers pertaining to this report are as follows:
 - Cabinet – 03 February 2020 - *LGA Peer Challenge Report and Action Plan*

IMPLICATIONS	APPENDIX 1
Legal	There is no legal requirement to undertake a Peer Challenge.
Finance and Value for Money	There is no specific financial cost associated with the Peer Challenge follow-up process. There may be a need for additional resources in order to complete specific actions resulting from the follow-up process and these will be addressed at the appropriate time as necessary.
Risk Assessment	There are no risks associated with the Peer Challenge follow-up process. The follow-up review will assess the progress the council has made in addressing the recommendations previously identified and provide additional support/suggestions as necessary.
Data Protection Impact Assessment	<i>A data protection impact assessment (DPIA) should be carried out at the start of any major project involving the use of personal data or if you are making a significant change to an existing process.</i>
	a. Does the project/change being recommended through this paper involve the processing of personal data or special category data or criminal offence data ? No
	b. If yes to question a, have you completed and attached a DPIA including Data Protection Officer advice? N/A
Equality Impact Assessment	c. If no to question b, please seek advice from your nominated DPIA assessor or the Information Governance Team at gdpr@medway.gov.uk . N/A
	a. Does the decision being made or recommended through this paper have potential to cause adverse impact or discriminate against different groups in the community? If yes, please explain answer. No
	b. Does the decision being made or recommended through this paper make a positive contribution to promoting equality? If yes, please explain answer. Yes – the agreed action plan made specific reference to expanding the way in which the council promotes its job vacancies with a view to ensuring these are visible for all community groups within the borough <i>In submitting this report, the Chief Officer doing so is confirming that they have given due regard to the equality impacts of the decision being considered, as noted in the table above</i>
Corporate Plan	The Peer Challenge was a review of the council in its entirety and as such, has the potential to impact on the delivery of all objectives as set out in the council's Corporate Plan.
Climate Change	There are no climate change implications resulting from this report.

IMPLICATIONS		APPENDIX 1
Crime and Disorder	There are no crime and disorder implications resulting from this report.	
Digital and website implications	There are no specific digital and website implications resulting from the report. The council will however, be required to publish the findings from the follow-up review on its website.	
Safeguarding children and vulnerable adults	There are no safeguarding children and vulnerable adults implications resulting from this report.	