

**Classification:** Public  
**Key Decision:** No

## Gravesham Borough Council

**Report to:** Cabinet  
**Date:** 03 February 2020  
**Reporting officer:** Director (Corporate Services)  
**Subject:** LGA Peer Challenge Report and Action Plan

### **Purpose and summary of report:**

To provide Members with a copy of Local Government Association's (LGA) Corporate Peer Challenge report following their onsite visit and to present the Council's action plan for approval.

### **Recommendations:**

Cabinet Members are asked to:

1. Note the content of the LGA Peer Challenge report at appendix two.
2. Review the detailed action plan at appendix three and, subject to any agreed amendments, approve the action plan for implementation.
3. Approve the process for publishing the report, reporting back and providing updates to the Cabinet as set out in section three.

## **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 four 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.

## **2. Findings from the Peer Challenge Team**

- 2.1 The Peer Challenge team have prepared a report setting out their findings; the report is attached at appendix two.
- 2.2 The key recommendations resulting from the report are as follows:
  - 2.2.1 Embed regular Cabinet and Management Team joint working by creating time and space for discussion on strategy, expectations and key issues. For example, more joint meetings and away days.
  - 2.2.2 Introduce a clear improvement plan for Planning, which is jointly developed and owned by Cabinet and Management Team, to establish clear targets and deadlines for improvement. This should include member training about their role in planning, inviting in the Planning Advisory Service (PAS) and improving processes and procedures.
  - 2.2.3 Develop greater partnership working. Gravesham has been very self-sufficient, but to tackle some of the bigger issues it needs to develop greater partnership working to deliver on key priorities such as housing.
  - 2.2.4 Seize on the cross-party consensus on the need for the Council to be proactive in relation to housing delivery in Gravesham, including putting its argument strongly to government.
  - 2.2.5 Be a spokesperson for the area. The Council should put itself at the forefront of telling the story of Gravesham's proud history, vibrant and varied heritage – creating a local 'brand' to unlock development opportunities and investments.
  - 2.2.6 Develop an induction programme for the new Chief Executive, which includes joint sessions delivered by the Leader and Chief Executive to cascade key information and expectations from the Corporate Plan to staff.
  - 2.2.7 Review council policy for flexible working arrangements and ensure consistency of implementation. A synchronisation of the policies with the investment in the equipment to make this happen.
  - 2.2.8 A more diverse workforce. The Council has a strong programme of engagement initiatives with its diverse community but there is a need for the Council to reflect that diversity within its workforce.
  - 2.2.9 Communicate success more effectively. Utilise expertise of new Communications Team to develop a corporate approach to communications that enables the Council to sell its success to the public, partners and staff more effectively.
  - 2.2.10 Review risk management. Risk management should be reviewed to include issues such as property investment strategy and non-delivery of key developments.
- 2.3 In addressing each of these key recommendations, a detailed action plan has been developed and is attached at appendix three for Member review and approval.

- 2.4 It is also recognised that, throughout the Peer Challenge report, there are a number of more subtle, secondary recommendations which will be managed at a Directorate level.

### **3. Next steps**

- 3.1 Subject to Cabinet approval, the LGA Peer Challenge Report and action plan will be published on the council's website to ensure it is publicly available (deemed best practice by the LGA).
- 3.2 Findings from the report have been communicated internally to staff through a series of staff talks which took place at the end of January 2020.
- 3.3 It is proposed that a report will be brought back to Cabinet in 12 months' time (February 2021) to provide an update to Members on progress against the action plan.
- 3.4 In addition, as set out in the LGA's report at appendix two, the LGA Peer Challenge process includes a follow-up visit from the LGA. The purpose of this visit is to assess the impact of the peer challenge and to review the progress that has been made in delivering the action plan. It is suggested that this will be in two years' time, therefore in February 2022.

### **4. Background Papers**

- 4.1 There are no background papers pertaining to this report.

IMPLICATIONS	APPENDIX 1
<b>Legal</b>	There is no legal requirement to undertake a Peer Challenge.
<b>Finance and Value for Money</b>	There is no specific financial cost associated with the Peer challenge, there may be a need for additional resources in order to complete specific actions as detailed in the action plan and these will be addressed at the appropriate time.
<b>Risk Assessment</b>	There are no risks associated with the Peer Challenge. The findings from the challenge have identified a need for the council to review its overall approach to risk management which has been addressed through the action plan.
<b>Data Protection Impact Assessment</b>	<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>
	<p>a. Does the project/change being recommended through this paper involve the processing of <a href="#">personal data</a> or <a href="#">special category data</a> or <a href="#">criminal offence data</a>?</p> <p>No</p>
	<p>b. If yes to question a, have you completed and attached a DPIA including Data Protection Officer advice?</p> <p>N/A</p>
<b>Equality Impact Assessment</b>	<p>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.</p> <p>No</p>
	<p>b. Does the decision being made or recommended through this paper make a positive contribution to promoting equality? If yes, please explain answer.</p> <p>Yes – the action plan has 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.</p>
	<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>
<b>Corporate Plan</b>	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.
<b>Crime and Disorder</b>	There are no crime and disorder implications resulting from this report.
<b>Digital and website</b>	Should Cabinet be supportive, the Peer Challenge report and action plan will be

<b>IMPLICATIONS</b>		<b>APPENDIX 1</b>
<b>implications</b>	published on the council's website to ensure it is publicly available.	
<b>Safeguarding children and vulnerable adults</b>	There are no safeguarding children and vulnerable adults' implications resulting from this report.	