



**Learning from Local Government Interventions**

**- DLUHC guidance for addressing cultural and governance failings in local authorities**

**ACTION PLAN**

	<b>Indicators of cultural or governance issues</b>	<b>Action Required</b>	<b>Lead Officer</b>	<b>Update – May 2024</b>
1.	Is there a lack of effective political and/or corporate leadership, including an overreliance on interim statutory officers?	Whilst the intention was to implement Cabinet Away Days on a six-month basis, this has not been fulfilled and therefore, there is a need to revisit this and re-commence the Away Day process.	Chief Executive	Six-monthly Cabinet Awaydays are now fully reinstated in the diary, with the most recent taking place in January 2024 and the next scheduled for July 2024. These awaydays comprise a run-through of past Directorate/Portfolio achievements together with an opportunity for the Cabinet to consider initiatives and objectives across all Directorates/Portfolios for the coming 6-12 months, in line with the Council's adopted Corporate Plan. These sessions have also seen some spin-off field trips, such as a recent trip to Cambridge City Council, comprising both senior officers and Cabinet Members to witness firsthand the work carried out by Cambridge City Council under their Investment Partnership with The Hill Group.



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2.	Is there a lack of corporate capacity, resulting in a lack of strategic vision and direction, and inadequate internal processes?	There is a need to keep the recruitment and retention tools utilised by the council under review and to ensure there is recognition where external support and assistance is required in supporting decision-making.	HR Manager	Turnover at the Council is monitored on a quarterly basis and remains stable and significantly lower than the average for Local Government. The recruitment function at the Council is being returned in house following withdrawal from a HR Shared Service. As a result, the Council will have more control over this process to fit the needs of the organisation more effectively. A review is also being undertaken of the benefits offered to support staff retention and recognition and we are currently exploring the potential to develop an employer brand for the Council with an external organisation who specialise in this field.



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3.	Is there poor and inappropriate councillor conduct?	The council will continue to review Member training programmes and meeting attendance and monitor Member conduct complaints.	Committee Services Manager	<p>The Council produces a yearly Member training programme which is approved by Members. The programme for 2024/25 was recently considered by the Overview Scrutiny Committee on 4 January 2024 and approved by the Cabinet on 29 January 2024.</p> <p>A post-training evaluation exercise is undertaken of each training programme to provide opportunity to adapt future programmes in response to feedback from Members and Officers, best practice of other local authorities/organisations etc.</p> <p>Members are also provided with details on the Local Government Association's (LGA) E-learning and Distance Learning Workbooks together with the LGA's online training and development tools.</p> <p>The Committee Services Team inform Members of other online training and development tools offered by other organisations and/or provide ad hoc training/briefing sessions when necessary.</p> <p>The Council's Performance Management Framework includes the reporting of Member attendance at both committee meetings and training sessions. The statistics are monitored regularly and reported to Members and the Council's Management Team.</p> <p>Member conduct complaints are considered by the Council's Monitoring Officer (together with an Independent Person and/or the Standards Committee where appropriate).</p>



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4.	Is there conflict and distrust among and between councillors and senior officers?	The council will continue to monitor councillor and senior officer relationships.	Chief Executive	Ongoing monitoring has continued, and no significant issues have arisen. The Chief Executive and Leader meet twice-weekly and discuss any matters pertaining to Member-Officer relationships, intervening where necessary to maintain healthy working relationships between the two cores. The Chief Executive also meets with the Leader of the Opposition Group on a regular basis and has similar conversations. All Directors meet with their respective Portfolio Holder/s and Shadow Portfolio Holder/s on a regular basis, and the aforementioned Cabinet Awaydays are a useful forum for making sure that all senior officers and Councillors are aligned in delivery of Council objectives.



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5.	Is there an absence of effective scrutiny, transparency, and public consultation, including inadequate protections for whistle-blowers?	a) The council will implement the planned public consultation programme.	Head of Town & Cultural Services	The management team took the decision to co-ordinate consultation and engagement across the authority to better align activity where it makes sense to do, to avoid 'over-engagement' and to bring about a more structured approach. A new branding 'Big Conversation' has been developed and has been rolled out for engagement activity taking place from summer 2024. The Big Conversation model enhances reach of traditional engagement by focussing on three approaches: 1) in person within a set locality; 2) outreach to directly engage with specific groups or stakeholders; 3) digital to extend the reach and opportunity for people to engage. Over the next few months an engagement platform will be introduced which will enable all consultations and engagement activity to be publicly visible, enabling residents and stakeholders to stay up to date with proposals, changes, and feedback. This system will enable greater transparency, wider involvement, and accessibility, as well as a central location for council-wide engagement activity.



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		<p>b) The council will investigate opportunities to provide support and training to all Members on the role of Scrutiny, with a view to providing specific scrutiny training for Overview Scrutiny Committee members to ensure they have the skills and independent mindset to hold the Cabinet to account.</p>	<p>Committee Services Manager</p>	<p>As part of the Council's Member Induction Training Programme, which is delivered following a Borough Election, support and training is provided to all Members on the role of Scrutiny; the training is specifically aimed at Members of the Overview Scrutiny Committee. The most recent sessions were delivered on Monday 17 July 2023 (organised by the Council) and 19 January 2024 (webinar organised by the Local Government Association).</p> <p>Further support/training will be provided to Members when necessary.</p> <p>The Committee Services Team will also present Members with any further online training and development tools offered by other organisations in relation to the role of Scrutiny.</p>
		<p>c) The council will complete its review of the Constitution.</p>	<p>Head of Legal Services</p>	<p>With the support of the Corporate Change Manager a full review of the Constitution has taken place utilising a three-phase approach; the final phase was approved at Full Council on the 16 April 2024.</p>



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		<p>d) The council will continue to monitor complaints and use these to identify trends or patterns in complaints for further investigation and action.</p>	<p>Chief Executive, supported by Management Team</p>	<p>Complaints are a standing agenda item on a quarterly basis as part of the regular Customer Services updates to Management Team, with detailed statistics regarding complaints handling, the nature of the complaints and resolutions/escalations of each complaint. The Council's Management Team take the time to investigate and explore patterns and take corrective action as necessary. Outstanding Stage Two complaints are also a standing agenda item on the 1-2-1s between the Chief Executive and Directors, providing the opportunity to learn from the feedback provided. On an annual basis the authority presents the Local Government &amp; Social Care Ombudsman report to the Finance &amp; Audit Committee for their scrutiny and will soon adopt a similar process for the newly formed Housing Ombudsman.</p>



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6.	Is there a lack of awareness and acceptance of the need for improvement; and insufficient capacity to achieve the change required?	Continuation of the council's active engagement in the Peer Review process.	Chief Executive	The Council has approached the LGA given that the Council's periodic five-yearly Peer Inspection is due at the end of 2024. The LGA have confirmed that they will be engaging with the Council in the near future to set this Peer Challenge up. In the meantime, the Chief Executive, Head of Service for Community Support, and the Director (Communities & Inclusive Growth) are all trained Peer Assessors and carry out Peer Assessments at other Local Authorities, bringing that learning regarding best practice and opportunities to improve services/governance back to Gravesham accordingly. The Leader of the Council, Director (Corporate Services) and Director (Housing) are also in the process of applying to become Peer Assessors.