

Title: Local Government Association Corporate Peer Challenge
Lead Officer: Andrew Jones (andrew.jones@warwickdc.gov.uk)
Portfolio Holder: Councillor Andrew Day
Wards of the District directly affected: All
Previous Relevant Reports: N/A

Approvals required	Date	Name
Portfolio Holder	20 th February 2023	Andrew Day
Chief Executive	14 th February 2023	Chris Elliott
Section 151 Officer	14 th February 2023	Andrew Rollins
Monitoring Officer	14 th February 2023	Andrew Jones
Leadership Co-ordination Group	20 th February 2023	Cabinet & Group Leaders
Final decision by this Committee or rec to another Cttee / Council?	Yes	
Contrary to Policy / Budget framework?	No	
Does this report contain exempt info/Confidential? If so, which paragraph(s)?	No	
Does this report relate to a key decision (referred to in the Cabinet Forward Plan)?	Yes Ref 1,350	
Accessibility Checked?	Yes	

Summary

The report recommends that Cabinet agrees to undertake a Local Government Association (LGA) Corporate Peer Challenge (CPC) to help inform the Council's Change Management Programme through independent and external improvement support and challenge.

Recommendations

- (1) That Cabinet agrees to a LGA CPC to be undertaken during July (likely w/c 10th) 2023.**

(2) The Cabinet agrees that the discretionary element of the CPC should focus on the Council’s approach to Recruitment, Retention & Remuneration.

1 Reasons for the Recommendations

- 1.1 The CPC is an improvement tool for Councils that has been in existence for well over a decade with every local authority in England having had at least one assessment. It is a tried and trusted method of improvement, which is owned and delivered by local government, for local government. This Council has previously undertaken two CPCs and two follow-up assessments. Peers are at the heart of the peer challenge process and provide a ‘practitioner perspective’ and ‘critical friend’ challenge. The Peer cohort consists of Councillors and senior Council officers.
- 1.2 The exercise will cover the 5 core elements of a CPC (detailed below) as well as a locally identified need. It is proposed that Recruitment, Retention & Remuneration is selected for this Council as this is an area where a lot of work has been undertaken to try and address the issues faced.

Core elements

- 1. Local priorities and outcomes - Are the Council’s priorities clear and informed by the local context? Is the Council delivering effectively on its priorities and achieving improved outcomes for all its communities?
- 2. Organisational and place leadership - Does the Council provide effective local leadership? Are there good relationships with partner organisations and local communities?
- 3. Governance and culture - Are there clear and robust governance arrangements? Is there a culture of respect, challenge and scrutiny?
- 4. Financial planning and management - Does the Council have a clear understanding of its current financial position? Does the Council have a strategy and a clear plan to address its financial challenges?
- 5. Capacity for improvement - Is the organisation able to support delivery of local priorities? Does the Council have the capacity to improve?

- 1.3 The approach to the CPC typically follows the stages below:



- 1.4 The Chief Executive and Deputy Chief Executive have already met with the LGA and the preparation & engagement stage has been scoped in readiness for a decision on participation by this Cabinet.

- 1.5 If Cabinet agrees to the proposal, then the LGA will source a team of Councillor and officer member peers informed by the skills and experience required. The LGA is committed to diversity and inclusion to ensure that peer teams reflect the diversity of local Councils and the communities they serve. These peers will be discussed and agreed with the Leader and Chief Executive.
- 1.6 It is important that the peer team has an in-depth understanding of the local issues before their onsite activity. This will primarily be provided through an Information & Data Pack, which includes background documentation provided by officers and LGA. Once the peer team has received the Information & Data Pack, a short programme of remote engagement will be undertaken before the onsite activity. This will include introductory conversations between some of the peers (typically the Chief Executive and Leader) and their respective counterparts at the Council as well as a full peer team remote meeting.
- 1.7 In addition, the peer team may observe normal business meetings (e.g., Cabinet/Committee or senior management meetings) to better understand the Council and provide valued insights as part of the peer challenge process. For example, the peer team may seek to observe member meetings remotely prior to the onsite activity.
- 1.8 The LGA may also seek to undertake some pre-CPC engagement with citizens, staff groups and/or stakeholders, such as web-based surveys. Any preparatory work or engagement will be agreed with officers in advance.
- 1.9 The peer team will spend 2.5-3 days onsite meeting Councillors, staff, partners and stakeholders. Officers will arrange a timetable of activity organised for the peer team in advance. Where face to face sessions are not possible, remote meetings will be arranged.
- 1.10 The activities will provide an opportunity for discussion which explores issues and ideas as much as evidence gathering. The peer team will split into pairs to facilitate the meetings/discussion sessions so there can be two or sometimes three streams of activity running at the same time. Some of the meetings will be undertaken as workshop/focus group activities rather than only one-to-one discussions.
- 1.11 On the final day the peer team will deliver verbal feedback to a selected audience which should include as a minimum the corporate leadership team, Cabinet members and opposition lead members as appropriate. During this feedback there is opportunity for clarification and questions. This will be followed by a report detailing the strengths of the Council, the issues considered, areas for further improvement and key recommendations. The Council will receive the draft report within 3 weeks of the CPC. Comments on the draft report are welcomed and the final report will be agreed with the Leader and Chief Executive for publication. Officers will then develop a detailed action plan that responds to the report's findings.
- 1.12 The CPC report will be published on the Council's website within six weeks of finalisation. The LGA will also publish the report via its website.

It is expected that the Council's action plan will be published within eight weeks of the CPC report's publication.

- 1.13 Six months after the CPC, the LGA will organise a check-in meeting. This will be a short-facilitated session which creates space for the Council's senior leadership to update peers on its progress against the action plan and discuss next steps. The LGA will produce a short note which reflects the Council's progress, provides examples of good practice and highlights the initial impact and outcomes. As part of ensuring an open and transparent process, there is an expectation that this note will be published.

2 Alternative Options

- 2.1 The only alternative is not to undertake the CPC. This has been discounted as it misses the opportunity for the Council to identify areas for improvement and development at no cost. Furthermore, given the proximity to the local elections, the CPC should aid the new administration and senior leadership team with the development of a new Business Strategy.

3 Legal Implications

- 3.1 There are no legal implications in undertaking a CPC.

4 Financial

- 4.1 There is no financial impact involved in the Challenge as the only resource requirement is Councillor and officer time.

5 Business Strategy

- 5.1 The Council has a Business Strategy that covers the period 2020-2023. There is therefore an ideal opportunity to use the findings of the CPC to help inform a new Business Strategy for the new administration.

6 Environmental/ Climate Change Implications

- 6.1 There are no Environmental/ Climate Change implications in undertaking a CPC although it is expected that the peer team will want to consider the Council's initiatives following the declaration of a climate emergency and more recently an ecological emergency.

7 Analysis of the effects on Equality

- 7.1 There are no Equality implications in undertaking a CPC.

8 Data Protection

- 8.1 Officers will ensure that any information shared with the peer team is in accordance with prevailing Data Protection legislation and guidance.

9 Health & Wellbeing

- 9.1 There are no Health & Wellbeing implications in undertaking a CPC although the discretionary element of the Challenge may well cover this area.

10 Risk Assessment

10.1 The risk to the Council is that the peer team identify areas where the Council requires significant development, and this could be reputationally damaging. However, the purpose of the CPC is not to find fault but to help Councils improve. Therefore, whilst public exposure of its operation may be difficult, transparency should be welcomed.