

Warwick District Council

Corporate Peer Challenge –
follow-up visit

3 July 2014



The team

- Andrew North, Chief Executive, Cheltenham Borough Council
 - Cllr Neil Clarke, Leader, Rushcliffe Borough Council
 - Cate Hall, LGA Associate, and previously Executive Director, Watford Borough Council
 - Anne Brinkhoff, Review Manager, Local Government Association
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Introduction

- Thank you for inviting us back
 - Eight conversations – over 50 people
 - Very brief engagement – these are our impressions from what we have heard today
 - We recognise that strong progress has been made
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Our brief

1. How well is the organisational climate and culture, behaviours and relationships enabling the internal transformation (aka FFF programme) and delivering the Council's priorities (in particular economic prosperity). Is the organisational climate shifting to becoming more risk taking and allowing for creativity and innovation?
 2. How good is progress in delivering on economic prosperity which is a key objective for the Council. Is the council doing enough to meet this strategic objective? How is this perceived by partners and stakeholders?
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What we heard ...

Managed risk is encouraged and we are not afraid to make mistakes

'let's have a conversation' – as a way of appraising people

The planning committee has improved but is very fragile

Can we make the 'student £' go further?

The leadership style is friendly and approachable. CMT seem to know everybody's name

'Can do' – 'can't do'? More like 'don't need to'

Key messages

- New Leader is visible and exercises strong leadership – this is recognised and welcomed
 - CMT is more visible and approachable
 - The Council is in a good financial position but is there is a danger of complacency?
 - Year on year underspend highlights effective budget management but could it detract from the financial pressures ahead?
 - Carry through strategic positions into action on economic growth issues?
 - Strong focus on staff welfare and effectiveness
 - Making tough decisions require members to be knowledgeable and well briefed
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Organisational Culture

- Considerable progress since our first visit, eg:
 - people strand in FFF make it more accessible to staff
 - More pro-active, lively and interactive communication, eg Core Brief
 - Staff feel that they are more listened to
 - Little evidence of silo working
 - Staff report that ‘this is a great place to work’
 - Appraisal system now accessible and engaging for staff, and designed around the values of the organisation
 - Great examples of what has been achieved through staff empowerment, eg:
 - ‘the space’
 - Freedom of the District for the Fusiliers
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Organisational Culture (2)

- We are aware of some issues of poor behaviour by members which affect CMT but appear not to have had an impact on other officers we spoke with
 - More work to do to ensure clarity of responsibility as between CMT and SMT on corporate issues
 - Concerns about capacity at Head of Service level, particularly in areas where current resilience is low
 - There is a clear intention that the office move will be very beneficial in the move to agile working and preparation is being put in now
 - Given the financial and prosperity challenges, it is now even more important that all members understand when to wear the corporate versus the ward 'hat'
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Economic Prosperity

- The councils strategic focus on prosperity is well understood by council staff but not all understand how they can contribute to it
 - You need to convince external partners that it is more than 'talking a good game'
 - Everyone acknowledges strong and personal leadership of CMT in key development schemes
 - Your private sector partners have concerns about:
 - 'Anti-growth' mindset, and decision making at Planning Committee
 - Strong focus on meeting target times for major planning applications at the expense of the 'right decision'
 - Capacity and experience of staff in the planning department
 - Outdated planning policies (eg town centre)
 - Lack of engagement of local expertise in formulating evidence base
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Economic Prosperity (2)

- Impressive array of growth initiatives (eg gaming) and some tough decisions (eg Gateway application)
 - Some call for a 'framework for action' to provide a more tangible delivery plan that all services can input into
 - Don't forget the importance of 'designing out crime'
 - Acknowledgement that investment in council capacity has been maintained, eg:
 - Town Centre Officers
 - Major sites monitoring officer
 - Special projects officers
 - Is there too much a focus on large employers at the expense of SMEs?
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Recommendations

- Create clear and visible leadership of the economic prosperity brief
 - Continue to support and develop Planning Committee
 - Explore whether you are striking the right balance between meeting target times and making the right decision for major applications
 - Improve engagement with the business community
 - Group Leaders need to apply appropriate group discipline with regards to behaviours, standards and uptake of training
 - Review and revamp member induction and training in time for the next election
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And finally

Comments and questions

For more information please contact

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