

Wiltshire Council

Cabinet

21 January 2014

Subject: Corporate Peer Challenge feedback and action plan

Cabinet member: Councillor Jane Scott OBE, Leader of the Council

Key Decision: No

Executive Summary

The purpose of the report is to provide cabinet with a summary of the feedback received from the Local Government Association following the Peer Challenge that took place in September 2013, and the action plan which has been developed to reflect this feedback and recommendations made.

The review was very positive. The peer challenge team concluded that the council is in a strong position since becoming a unitary in April 2009. A strong vision to ensure the transition from five to one council was easy and seamless for customers was delivered and the new unitary council presented an opportunity to re-think how the council works with its communities and partners, which has resulted in active and vibrant engagement in local decisions and service delivery and ground breaking partnership working.

The council's transformation programme to reduce from 95 inherited buildings to 3 main hubs including County Hall was viewed as forward thinking and impressive; demonstrating how public buildings can be transformed to create modern, fit-for-purpose community space that delivers significant annual savings.

The council's key strengths were identified;

- A very strong respect and high regard for the council leader. Her clarity and strength of vision, commitment and hard work was recognised. A strong sense of loyalty among officers and partners and the leader is an effective ambassador for the council and Wiltshire.
- A strong and trusted relationship between officers and elected members with a clear appreciation that the council is strongly member led.
- The council has a good reputation in the community. Its vision 'to create stronger and more resilient communities' has resonance locally. Parish and town councils, volunteers and voluntary sector organisations speak positively about the purposeful intent of the council to delegate responsibilities and enable local people and groups to do more for themselves.

- A highly engaged workforce with a real sense of pride in the organisation. Staff consistent that they are proud to work for the council.

In September 2013, the council invited the Local Government Association to undertake a Peer Challenge. It is important to stress that this was not an inspection. Peer Challenges are improvement-focused and the peers use their experience and knowledge to reflect on the information presented to them in making any recommendations.

The letter (Appendix A) sets out the key findings and challenges, together with the recommendations to Wiltshire Council. In this context an action plan (appendix B) has been developed to address the recommendations.

The feedback and action plan recognises the achievements in the first 4 years of Wiltshire Council and assists with areas for improvement.

Proposal(s)

1. Cabinet is asked to:
 - Note the feedback and recommendations from the corporate peer challenge
 - Endorse the action plan

Reason for Proposal

The feedback and action plan recognises the achievements in the first 4 years of Wiltshire Council and assists with areas for improvement.

Dr Carlton Brand
Corporate Director

Carolyn Godfrey
Corporate Director

Maggie Rae
Corporate Director

Wiltshire Council

Cabinet

21 January 2014

Subject: Corporate Peer Challenge feedback and action plan

Cabinet member: Councillor Jane Scott OBE, Leader of the Council

Key Decision: No

Purpose of Report

2. The purpose of the report is to provide cabinet with a summary of the feedback received from the Local Government Association following the Peer Challenge that took place in September 2013, and the action plan which has been developed to reflect this feedback and recommendations made.
3. Cabinet is asked to:
 - Note the feedback and recommendations from the corporate peer challenge
 - Endorse the action plan

Background

4. Following elections in May and the development of the new Business Plan for 2013-17, the council invited a review team, consisting of six local authority peers to carry out a corporate peer challenge between 23-27 September 2013 (with an initial familiarisation visit on 10 September).
5. Corporate peer challenges are a form of sector-led improvement arranged by the Local Government Association. They are designed to highlight strengths and identify areas for further improvement and learning. Peer challenges are not inspections and do not provide a detailed diagnosis or scored assessment.
6. All peer challenges cover five core components: understanding of the local context and priority setting, political and managerial leadership, financial planning and viability, governance and decision making and organisational capacity.
7. In addition, the peer team was asked to focus on how the council is transforming Wiltshire through innovation, including:
 - how well we empower local communities to do more for themselves
 - how we can do more, together with partners, to transform services and deliver quality outcomes

- how we can respond to the key challenges we face and manage changes and transformation
8. During the week long review, the six peers met a wide range of elected members, partners and staff and observed a number of council and partnership meetings.

Main considerations for Cabinet

9. The review team published their report as a letter to the leader of the council, Cllr Jane Scott (appendix 1).
10. Overall the feedback is extremely positive. The peer team found that the council has;
- had a very successful first four years
 - a highly regarded and respected leader with a strong sense of loyalty from officers and partners
 - a clear vision and strong leadership
 - strong and trusted relationships between officers and councillors with a clear appreciation that the council is member led
 - a good reputation in the community
 - been successful in engaging local communities and councillors through area boards
 - very strong relationships with the police, MoD, town/parish councils and the voluntary sector – partners understand and buy into our vision of creating more joined up public services
 - a positive and community focused culture across the organisation
 - a highly engaged workforce with a real sense of pride in the organisation
 - systematic programme management arrangements and an emerging single view of change across the organisation which reduce the risk of failure
11. The feedback letter provides seven key recommendations focused on how the council can build on its success to deliver improvements. The peer team recommended that the council:
- addresses the budget gap for 2015/16 and beyond – this is already being addressed through the development of the Medium Term Financial Strategy
 - clarifies the outcomes it wants area boards to achieve and their relationship with the centre –this will be addressed through the current area boards review
 - prioritises work with the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) to ensure shared vision and plans – this will be achieved through the Health and Wellbeing Board and the transformation programme
 - works with Local Enterprise Partnership partners to develop a stronger vision and delivery mechanism for the future
 - strengthens performance management arrangements and aligns them with organisational priorities and outcomes – the council is currently developing new performance and risk management arrangements for delivery against the new Business Plan 2013-17

- realigns overview and scrutiny to focus on outcomes rather than processes
- continuously reviews its corporate capacity to deliver major transformation programmes – this will be addressed through the development of a succession plan for senior and high risk posts

12. The letter also outlines a number of additional suggestions which apply to specific services or areas of work. Details of these are provided throughout the letter.
13. The council's proposed method of addressing each recommendation is outlined in the peer challenge action plan (appendix 2)

Environmental and climate change considerations

14. None in the context of this report any specific issues will be considered in the context of individual actions

Public health implications

15. None in the context of this report any specific issues will be considered in the context of individual actions

Safeguarding implications

16. None in the context of this report any specific issues will be considered in the context of individual actions

Equalities Impact of the Proposal

17. None in the context of this report any specific issues will be considered in the context of individual actions

Risk Assessment

18. The peer challenge team found that the council has a clear vision, strong leadership and an emerging single view of change across the organisation which reduces the risk of failure.

Financial Implications

19. None in the context of this report any specific issues will be considered in the context of individual actions

Legal Implications

20. None in the context of this report any specific issues will be considered in the context of individual actions

Conclusion

21. The peer challenge provided an opportunity for the council to reflect on its achievements since becoming a unitary council and to focus on the challenges ahead and how it can continue to develop and improve.

Dr Carlton Brand
Corporate Director

Carolyn Godfrey
Corporate Director

Maggie Rae
Corporate Director

Report Authors:

Robin Townsend, Interim Associate Director Corporate Services -

robin.townsend@wiltshire.gov.uk

Alissa Davies, Senior Corporate Support Officer – alissa.davies@wiltshire.gov.uk

Date of report: 21 January 2013

Background Papers

Transforming Wiltshire Through Innovation – the position statement for the council's Corporate Peer Challenge

Corporate Peer Challenge Timetable for 23-27 September

Appendices

Appendix 1: Corporate Peer Challenge feedback letter

Appendix 2: Corporate Peer Challenge action plan

Appendix 3: Corporate Peer Challenge timetable for 23-27 September