

Wiltshire Council

Cabinet

28 March 2023

Subject: Corporate Peer Challenge – Action Plan (Spring 2023)

Cabinet Member: Cllr Richard Clewer, Leader of Wiltshire Council and Cabinet Member for Economic Development, MCI, Heritage, Arts, Tourism, Health and Wellbeing

Key Decision: Non-Key

Executive Summary

Following Full Council's receipt of the final report from the highly successful Corporate Peer Challenge in November 2022, a draft action plan reflecting the feedback and recommendations has been developed.

Proposal

Cabinet is asked to:

- Approve the draft action plan.
- Agree to a follow up visit in Autumn 2023 to help the Council assess the impact of the peer challenge and demonstrate the progress it has made against the areas of improvement and development identified.

Reason for Proposal

Corporate Peer Challenges (CPCs) are a form of sector-led improvement arranged by the Local Government Association (LGA).

Responding to their feedback, via an action plan and agreeing to host a follow up visit to further reflect on learnings and actions, is the agreed approach undertaken by all councils.

Terence Herbert
Chief Executive

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Purpose of Report

1. To provide Cabinet with the draft action plan, reflecting the feedback and recommendations from the Local Government Association's (LGA) Corporate Peer Challenge that took place in November 2022.

Relevance to the Council's Business Plan

2. Wiltshire Council aims to be the highest performing council in the country, but it cannot do this alone and working well with local communities, local businesses and partners in the NHS, fire, police, justice, military, schools, voluntary sector and central government is critical to this success.
3. As outlined in the Business Plan, the Council seeks common cause with partners to achieve the right outcomes in the right place and at the right time; a successful peer challenge and action plan can propel the achievement of this.

Background

4. Corporate Peer Challenges (CPCs) are a form of sector-led improvement arranged by the LGA.
5. They are improvement-focused and tailored to meet individual councils' needs, designed to complement and add value to a council's own performance and improvement.
6. They are not inspections and do not provide a detailed diagnosis or scored assessment.
7. All CPCs cover five core components: Local priorities and outcomes; Organisational and place leadership; Governance and culture; Financial planning and management; Capacity for improvement.

8. In advance of their visit, the peer team prepared by reviewing a range of documents and information provided by the council and independently sourced to ensure they were familiar with Wiltshire Council and the challenges it is facing.
9. The team then spent 4 days onsite at Wiltshire Council between the 7-10 November 2022, during which they spoke to more than 180 people, including a range of council staff together with elected member and external partners and stakeholders.
10. Collectively, they spent over 200 hours to determine their findings – the equivalent of one person spending more than 5 weeks in Wiltshire – and in order to triangulate what they had read or heard from sources, consequently ensuring all conclusions and recommendations were evidence-based.

Main Considerations

11. The team published their report (Appendix 1) and this was shared with Full Council at its meeting in February.
12. The report noted that:
 - Wiltshire Council is clearly, and proudly, a values-led organisation with senior members and officers committed to delivering the best possible outcomes for residents.
 - A collaborative, open and transparent organisational culture has developed under the stewardship of the current senior leadership team, where challenge is genuinely welcomed between both officers and members.
 - The recently agreed Business Plan is visibly providing organisational direction and is quite clearly owned by members.
 - There are many improvement success stories within the council, not least within Children's Services – a service which has embraced a wide-ranging improvement journey resulting in the team be the first to be rated as 'Good' in the South West. The learning from this improvement journey is now informing transformation in Adults Services and the wider performance management approach across the council.
 - The Council has developed a visible corporate approach to transformation, with a strong narrative that the purpose of this activity is to drive service improvement over delivering financial savings.
 - There is impressive and strong internal governance with clarity around process and function which contributes to the overall internal improvements that have been delivered at the Council in terms of organisational culture and governance.
13. There were also a range of suggestions and observations within the main section of the report that will inform some 'quick wins' and practical actions.

14. The proposed method of addressing the recommendations is outlined in the draft action plan (Appendix 2).

15. Once approved, timeframes for completion will be agreed with Cabinet and CLT.

Overview & Scrutiny Engagement

16. The Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee (OSMC) has received the report, albeit at short notice due to the tight production and publishing timeframes.

17. OSMC has been invited to consider both the Corporate Peer Challenge report and draft action plan, and to monitor progress on a periodic basis as required.

Safeguarding Implications

18. Not applicable as no decision is required.

Public Health Implications

19. Not applicable as no decision is required.

Procurement Implications

20. Not applicable as no decision is required.

Environmental and Climate Change Considerations

21. Not applicable as no decision is required, although it must be recognised that this is an area of notable achievement.

Workforce Implications

22. It was recognised that, in common with the rest of the sector, the Council is experiencing recruitment issues in some areas but a proactive approach to Organisational Development, including refreshing the Workforce Strategy, is part of a planned approach to address this.

23. The peer team also noted that the fact that staff rate the council so highly as an employer means the Council is better placed than some to face these challenges.

24. With this considered, when developing service-level plans, further assessments may be required to understand workforce implications.

Equalities Impact of the Proposal

25. Not applicable at this point as no decision is required. However, when developing service-level plans further assessments may be required.

Risk Assessment

26. Not applicable as no decision is required.

Financial Implications

27. The CPC report noted that the Council overall has worked hard to ensure that there is a corporate approach to financial management and planning, with a collaborative approach taken, which needs to continue to ensure the council continues to strengthen its financial resilience in the context of sectoral financial pressures and increased demand.

28. When developing service-level plans further assessments may be required on other financial implications.

Legal Implications

29. The findings concluded that the Council has impressive and strong internal governance, with clarity around process and function, which contributes to the overall internal improvements that have been delivered at the council in terms of organisational culture and governance.

Conclusions

30. The final report provides a summary of the peer team's findings. It builds on the feedback presentation provided at the end of their visit, noting that, when presenting feedback, they have done so as fellow local government officers and members, not consultants or inspectors.

31. By its nature, the peer challenge is a snapshot in time and, reflecting on the findings and suggestions, a draft action plan has been developed to advance these recommendations where appropriate.

Terence Herbert
Chief Executive

Appendices

- Appendix 1: Corporate Peer Challenge November 2022 – Final Report
- Appendix 2: Draft Action Plan

Background reading: None
