

Peer Challenge Report and Action Plan

To: Strategy and Resources Committee

Meeting Date: 21st September 2021

From: Gillian Beasley, Chief Executive and the Joint Management Team

Electoral division(s): All

Key decision: No

Forward Plan ref: Not applicable

Outcome: The Peer Challenge is an improvement approach for Local Government. Therefore, the outcome from successfully following through on the recommendations of the report will be improved corporate performance.

Recommendation: That the committee notes and comments on the Peer Challenge Report and draft Action Plan and agrees to:

- a) discuss, develop and agree actions with the relevant committees and officer leads.
- b) monitor progress against the Peer Challenge Action Plan at each meeting of this committee for this municipal year.

Officer contact:

Name: Amanda Askham
Post: Director Business Improvement and Development
Email: Amanda.askham@cambridgeshire.gov.uk
Tel: 01223 703565

Member contacts:

Names: Councillors Nethsingha and Meschini
Post: Chair/Vice-Chair
Email: Lucy.Nethsingha@cambridgeshire.gov.uk
Elisa.Meschini@cambridgeshire.gov.uk
Tel: 01223 706398

1. Background

- 1.1 In July 2021, the Council invited a team of Peers from the Local Government Association (LGA) to undertake a Corporate Peer Challenge. Peer challenge is a proven improvement approach for Local Government, delivered by a team of experienced councillors and officers selected to reflect CCC's requirements and focus.
- 1.2 In addition to the five themes which form the core components of all LGA Corporate Peer Challenges, CCC asked the Peer Team to focus on four additional areas, which the new Administration had identified as priorities:
 - Current financial position and future financial sustainability
 - Key risks and their management
 - Impact of changes to the committee system
 - Shared Services with Peterborough City Council
- 1.3 In completing the Corporate Peer Challenge the Peer Team spoke with over 250 people, including members, officers and many of our partners. The peer team also reviewed a range of documents and information to ensure they understood the Council's context, challenges, and opportunities.
- 1.4 The Council has found the process valuable and challenging and welcome the peer team's feedback and recommendations for improvement. We would like to thank the peer team for their time and thoughtful approach and to everyone who contributed to their review.

2. Peer Challenge Feedback

- 2.1 The full report from the LGA Peer Team is available [at this link](#). As well as recommending areas for improvement the report highlights a number of areas of strength and challenge.
- 2.2 Strengths:
 - The new administration is working collaboratively and has signalled a commitment to form strong and positive partnerships across the Cambridgeshire system.
 - Partners have expressed confidence in the council and a willingness to work closely with us to help shape Cambridgeshire's future direction, strategy, and plans.
 - The Council's positive response to the pandemic demonstrates an ability to be agile and deliver at pace.
 - The local context is comprehensively understood and is supported by established sources of data and insight.
 - The Chief Executive has established positive and valued relationships across partnerships with trust and respect from both staff and partners.
 - Staff feel supported in the organisation, welcome the proactive approach taken to wellbeing, value the opportunities they have for professional development and feel empowered to lead and shape services.
- 2.3 Challenges:
 - Partners highlight the need for the Council, with the Combined Authority, to play a

stronger and significant leadership role in economic development and there is an urgent need to focus more on place shaping.

- There is a need for speed in getting to grips with a looming challenge of a £64m gap over the next five years.
- Historic decisions not to increase council tax to the maximum allowed has resulted in significant lost income.
- There are significant annual overspends on the SEND High Needs Block resulting in an accumulated deficit which requires a contingency plan should Government not provide the anticipated support.
- Action is needed to recalibrate member roles, behaviours and conduct. The new opposition should be supported to ensure that their role and function is conducted in line with the Code of Conduct.

2.4 Shared services:

- In the main, the Council's shared arrangements with Peterborough City Council have evolved organically and opportunistically, with sharing of posts and services supported by a clear cost-sharing agreement, which ensures that neither council subsidises the other.
- There are more benefits which could accrue from shared services arrangements – but this needs further review, and a system which gives better oversight.
- Sharing a well-respected joint CEX has previously worked well, but the landscape has changed, and the challenges ahead are more complex. Given the changing context and need for a strong place shaping leadership role, the Council would now benefit from sustainable, increased capacity in the Chief Executive role.

3. Action Plan

- 3.1 The Corporate Peer Challenge report presented 11 key recommendations and 5 further shared services recommendations. From these recommendations, Members and Officers have developed the following draft action plan.
- 3.2 A number of the LGA Peer Team's recommendations had already been identified as areas for improvement by the new Administration and included in the Joint Agreement Action Plan and Tracker. Progress has been made on several of these actions before, during and since the Peer Challenge. The Joint Agreement Tracker is reviewed at every meeting of the Strategy and Resources committee and it is proposed that this Peer Challenge Action Plan is subject to the same monitoring and scrutiny.
- 3.3 Where actions are included in the Joint Agreement Action Plan and Tracker they will not be duplicated and monitored separately in the Peer Challenge Action Plan.

Table 1: Corporate Peer Challenge Key Recommendations

	Recommendation	Action	Milestone	Committee	Lead Officer(s)
1.1	<p>Devise a strategic approach to financial strategic planning for Cambridgeshire as a place.</p> <p>Ensure the budget planning process for 2022/23 addresses the medium-term budget gap and incorporates contingency planning.</p> <p>The use of short-term additional capacity should be considered to ensure that there is the necessary capability to both develop and deliver the savings programme and strategic financial plan</p>	<p>The strategic approach to medium term financial planning and performance is now managed through a series of officer and member forums, established since the new Administration took over leadership of the Council.</p> <p><u>Officer Governance</u> The Senior Management Team (SMT) has implemented a series of financial management controls designed to manage in year pressures, minimise non-essential expenditure and keep a tight grip on savings plans and delivery.</p> <p>A key element of this work is the Rapid Improvement team (RIT) who meet fortnightly to manage in year pressures, keep a tight grip on savings plans and delivery and develop ideas into business cases.</p> <p>The RIT reports into the Executive Budget SMT group to develop budget strategy, ensure initiatives are aligned to corporate priorities and sign off day to day decisions.</p> <p>SMT is the officer decision making forum for strategic financial decisions and holds operational and strategic overview of performance against budget actions. SMT works closely with Members in accordance with the constitutional framework.</p>	Jul '21	S&R	SMT/ Amanda Askham/ Tom Kelly

		<p><u>Member Governance</u></p> <p>Monthly Chairs, Vice Chairs and SMT meetings have been established so that Chairs and Vice Chairs (from all service committees as well as Chairs of Audit and Accounts, Pension Fund and Planning Committees) have an informal forum to discuss council priorities, medium term budget planning and corporate performance.</p> <p>Proposal from the Chairs and Vice Chairs group are considered in accordance with the Council's budget and policy framework which allows all members to discuss challenge and scrutinise proposals through the Committee structure, involving all committee members in cross party discussion on key budget decisions.</p> <p>The Strategy and Resources Committee holds overall accountability for proposing the budget to Full Council and will develop the budget over the autumn period through a series of cross-party workshops and formal committee meetings.</p>			
1.2	Develop a member/officer strategic forum to consider the overarching picture of progress and outcomes across the organisation.	<p>A strategic forum of the Chairs and Vice Chairs (from all service committees as well as Chairs of Audit and Accounts, Pension Fund and Planning Committees) meet with the officers from the Senior Management Team on a monthly basis to drive the objectives and outcomes of the Joint Administration and consider the progress against the objectives.</p> <p>The outcomes from this forum are fed into the</p>	Jul '21	All	SMT
			Sep '21		Amanda

		relevant committees through workshops/committee reports, through the Council's updated performance management framework and through the Joint Administration Action Plan Tracker which is presented to Strategy and Resources Committee for scrutiny and challenge at every meeting.			Askham
1.3	Take action to recalibrate member roles, behaviours and conduct.	Member training, development and ongoing support will be arranged with support from the LGA.	Oct '21	S&R	SMT
1.4	Sustainable capacity in the Chief Executive role needs to be established for Cambridgeshire	Recruitment to a CCC only Chief Executive was recommended and approved by the Staffing and Appeals committee on 24 th August. Recruitment will commence 6 th September.	Sep '21	S&A	Janet Atkin
1.5	<p>Embrace the opportunity to reset, clarify and rebuild the different roles for the CA, the GCP, CCC and District and Town & Parish Councils in place shaping and place delivery, and take the lead where appropriate.</p> <p>Clarify the Council's role and ambitions in creating the conditions for sustainable and inclusive economic growth and allocate resource and leadership to this work.</p>	<p>Partnerships across the Cambridgeshire system are deepening already, with improved relationships and a clearer route to delivery of shared objectives.</p> <p>The Council has been working with partners across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough to produce a series of data and information sets which describe the impacts of the pandemic. We will add this information to what we already know about the needs and strengths of our population and work with partners, through the leadership of the Joint Administration, to agree the priorities for our place.</p> <p>We will do this through workshops and discussions with a range of partners, including</p>	Oct '21	S&R	Gillian Beasley/ SMT

		<p>politicians, the Combined Authority, the Greater Cambridge Partnership, all tiers of local government and partners in the Health system.</p> <p>There is already agreement from all partners that we should build on the success of support and services being provided at the most local level by the most appropriate person or organisation throughout the pandemic. Taking this approach, we will work with partners to review and reset roles and responsibilities across the system in order to deliver the outcomes identified from the needs assessment.</p> <p>This will include a review of governance and board arrangements across the system for Leaders to consider at a planned Leaders' Summit in October.</p>			
1.6	Review 'This Land'	<p>Avison Young, a major multi-disciplinary property consultancy, has been appointed as the specialist reviewer of This Land and the work has begun. The remit for the review is to consider: a) Are the assumptions that This Land has made in its latest business plan reasonable and deliverable? b) Is there a clear understanding about the exposure to risk, particularly in the medium term? c) How could This Land adapt its plans to adjust its risk appetite or strategy? d) How could the firm quicken the pace of housing delivery, are there examples from other local authority related housing companies? e) Does This Land have the right skills, capabilities and expertise compared to a typical housing</p>	Dec '21	S&R	Tom Kelly

		development company of this type? The review is scheduled to take 8 weeks.			
1.7	Review the effectiveness of the new Committee system arrangements, including the role of scrutiny, in six months.	Review in six months	Mar '22	S&R	SMT
1.8	Further develop the current organisational resource to better support wider transformation and innovation.	<p>The Council's priorities are being finalised, taking into consideration the Administration's Joint Agreement, the priorities of each committee, the challenging financial position and impacts of COVID, Brexit and the Climate Emergency.</p> <p>There will be a robust review of the organisational capacity and skills needed to deliver these priorities with a focus on an outward looking, open minded and innovative culture.</p> <p>Members and officers will be encouraged to take up training opportunities with the LGA and other organisations to gain a wide perspective on the role of Local Government and the opportunities for innovation.</p> <p>As action plans under each priority are developed, capacity, investment and skills to deliver will be identified.</p>	Dec '21	S&R	SMT
1.9	Internal and external communications would benefit from greater alignment to the new administration and managerial approaches and priorities.	<p>The Council's Media Protocol has been updated and will go to Constitution and Ethics Committee for approval.</p> <p>A new relationship has been established between the Communications team and the Administration, with a communications business partner identified for each</p>	Sep '21	S&R/ C&E	Christine Birchall

		committee. Communications work plan has been revised in line with new priorities and shared with all Chairs and Vice Chairs and additional resource requirements identified.			
1.11	Further work is needed to embed EDI practices within individuals, teams and services.	A corporate objective focused on EDI is now included in everyone's objectives. A Joint Management team lead has been identified and investment has been allocated to establishing a central EDI resource.	Sep '21	S&R	Sue Grace/ JMT

Table 2: Corporate Peer Challenge Shared Services Recommendations

2.1	Organise an independently facilitated workshop for both sets of politicians and senior management to explore: a) All the options for shared arrangements and their relative pros and cons both for the councils and for their respective roles in the emerging ICS and in opportunities for Place shaping. b)The implications of decoupling existing joint management posts. c) The balance of shared management against the requirement for sufficient strategic capacity for each council.	Chairs and senior officers are working together to understand the current arrangements and the business cases underpinning these arrangements. A facilitated workshop for politicians and senior managers is being set up to explore the issues laid out in a, b and c of this recommendation and will be supported by the LGA From this workshop, plans for the development of shared arrangements will be agreed, taking into account the additional recommendations below.	Sep '21 Oct '21 Oct – Dec '21	ALL S&R ALL	SMT Gillian Beasley/ SMT SMT
2.2	Develop a vision and roadmap for shared services which includes a	To follow Member/Officer facilitated workshop			

	strategic plan with clear oversight and clear benefits realisation.				
2.3	Ensure that the strategic map respects the strategic directions of both councils and is able to deliver different policies across each council.	To follow Member/Officer facilitated workshop			
2.4	Consider developing the internal transformation team to own and drive the work in a consistent manner.	To follow Member/Officer facilitated workshop			
2.5	Develop some shared services to deliver greater efficiencies through shared data and client record systems and a shared service Target Operating Model where appropriate.	To follow Member/Officer facilitated workshop			
2.6	Enable senior political engagement with key health partners to improve understanding and drive joint work around the emerging ICS/ICPs	<p>The Chair and Vice Chair of the Adult and Health Committee now represents CCC on the shadow Integrated Care System Board.</p> <p>The Vice Chair of the Adults and Health committee jointly chairs the Health and Wellbeing Board.</p> <p>A system workshop on Health and Wellbeing/Health and Care Partnership boards and value of bringing these together has been arranged.</p> <p>Six weekly meetings of chair /vice chair of Adult and Health committee with officers and ICS Accountable Officer and Chair have been established.</p>	<p>Aug '21</p> <p>Oct '21</p> <p>Aug '21</p>	A&H	Wendi Ogle Welbourn/ Jyoti Atri

4. Alignment with corporate priorities

- 4.1 The Peer Challenge Action Plan will inform priorities in the Corporate Strategic Framework will be reviewed as part of the annual planning cycle, starting in September '21.

5. Significant Implications

- 5.1 Delivery of the Peer Challenge Action Plan will have implications for all areas of the Council. The Action Plan will be monitored and managed through the Strategy and Resources Committee and will feed into the annual review of Council strategy.

6. Source Documents

- 6.1 The full report from the LGA Peer Team is available [at this link](#)