



REPORT OF:	LEADER
TO:	COUNCIL FORUM
DATE:	23 MARCH 2023

CORPORATE PEER CHALLENGE

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- To update members on plans to invite the Local Government Association (LGA) to undertake a corporate peer challenge

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

That Council Forum:

- Note the date of the corporate peer challenge (July 11-14)
- Note the scope of the corporate peer challenge

3. BACKGROUND

Blackburn with Darwen Council last held a corporate peer challenge (CPC) in 2018 and it is recommended by the LGA, and expected by government, that a CPC is undertaken every five years.

CPC is a tried and trusted method of improvement; it provides councils with a robust and effective improvement tool which is owned and delivered by the sector, for the sector. Peers remain at the heart of the peer challenge process and provide a 'practitioner perspective' and 'critical friend' challenge. The final report is always published together with the Council's response in an action plan.

The CPC will take place on July 11 to July 14.

3. SCOPE, FOCUS AND PROCESS

The LGA has adopted five high-level themes which provide the framework for the CPC.

They are:

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?

The LGA will source and agree a team of officer and member peers informed by the skills and experience required. The LGA is committed to diversity and inclusion, and it is important that peer teams reflect the diversity of local councils and the communities they serve.

The LGA has suggested the following peer team make-up:

- A Leader peer, ideally a Leader from a council with a similar context to your council (although not from the vicinity). We will work with you and the relevant political group to identify a potential councillor peer.
- A Member Peer – an opposition councillor to reflect the political make-up of the council (TBC).
- A Chief Executive Officer peer, from a council of the same tier and ideally reflecting an area with a similar context.
- A senior officer peer, with a strong track record in relation to governance and culture (reflecting theme 3 of the agreed scope).
- A senior officer peer with a strong track record on transformation. In particular, an officer with experience of leading and developing new ways of working to build and harness the capacity of core functions (reflecting theme 5 of the agreed scope).

Council officers will need to prepare a timetable of meetings and focus groups for the peer team. This will enable the peer team to meet with a range of officers and members

over the course of the peer challenge, as well as a range of external stakeholders.

On the final day the peer team will deliver headline feedback and recommendations to a selected audience which should include as a minimum: the corporate officer leadership team, the Leader and Executive Members and, as appropriate, opposition members.

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. The LGA will then agree the final report with the Council for publication. The Council should then develop and publish an action plan that responds to the report's findings

Approximately six months after the CPC action plan has been published, the LGA will organise a CPC progress review. 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.

Following this, the LGA will produce a short note which reflects the Council's progress and provides examples of any good or innovative practice.

4. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

There are no direct policy implications from this report but the Council should develop and publish a detailed action plan that responds to the report's findings. The policy implications will depend on the findings and the Council's response.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

6. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no legal implications arising from this report.

7. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

Any resource implications of the corporate peer challenge will be managed within existing budgets.

8. EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

The pre-equality impact assessment has been undertaken and is not required.

9. CONSULTATIONS

N/A

Chief Officer

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Date: 23/03/23