



REPORT OF:	LEADER
TO:	COUNCIL FORUM
DATE:	5 OCTOBER 2023

CORPORATE PEER CHALLENGE

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

To update members on the outcome of the recent Corporate Peer Challenge and to agree the Council's response and action plan in response to the recommendations

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

That Council Forum:

- Note the LGA's final Corporate Peer Challenge report
- Agree the Council's response and action plan
- Note the timetable for the progress review

3. BACKGROUND

Blackburn with Darwen Council invited the Local Government Association (LGA) to undertake a corporate peer challenge (CPC) during the week of Tuesday 11th – Friday 14th July 2023, to provide an external perspective on the performance of the Council and its capacity to deliver on the new corporate plan and priorities. During the peer review a series of meetings and focus groups took place with a range of people from across the organisation which included elected members, senior officers, managers, supervisors, front line staff and with key partners.

As with all corporate peer challenges, this was an exercise in self-improvement, and to gain an external perspective on performance and areas for further development. It was not a form of inspection that delivers a scored or detailed service assessment, it was also not driven by external requirements or reported to Government. It is recommended best practice that Councils undertake a Corporate Peer Challenge every five years with the previous one in Blackburn with Darwen being in 2018.

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 Council is required to publish the full report alongside a response and action plan.

3. KEY THEMES, RECOMMENDATIONS AND NEXT STEPS

Members of the peer review team were very impressed with both the organisation and support they received through their four day stay in the borough.

The report highlights the Council as having:

- Strong, visible and well respected political and managerial leadership with senior leaders having a clear understanding of Blackburn with Darwen as a place, its opportunities and challenges.
- High levels of ambition and determination to think big and unlock the borough's potential including a £1billion vision for the future for investment and commitment to growing the cultural offer with a well-crafted Corporate Plan with missions for both the council and wider borough
- An impressive track record of managing significant challenges including the ongoing reductions in spending power since 2010 with robust financial monitoring arrangements in place.
- Many examples of projects which are testing new ways of working and which have been recognised on a national scale with an impressive entrepreneurial spirit in the borough
- Clear commitments to tackling inequalities and strengthening equality, diversity and inclusion across the council and borough
- A working culture that is very supportive with opportunities for staff to participate in learning and development

The final report makes 11 recommendations. We have responded to each recommendation in the action plan.

Following publication of the final report and action plan, a progress review with the LGA peer team has to take place no later than May 2024. The progress review report will be expected to be published by July 2024.

4. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Any policy implications are outlined in our response and in the action plan.

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: 05/10/23