



REPORT OF:	LEADER
TO:	COUNCIL FORUM
ON:	28TH MARCH 2019

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ASSOCIATION CORPORATE PEER CHALLENGE

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

The purpose of this report is to outline the Council's response to the recommendations from the Local Government Association's (LGA) Corporate Peer Challenge which was undertaken at the Council in December 2018.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that:

- a) The contents of this report be noted
- b) The Council's response to the LGA's recommendations be endorsed

3. BACKGROUND

The LGA undertook a Peer Review at Blackburn with Darwen Council from 3-6 December 2018 providing an external perspective on how well the council is performing and on its future plans. The LGA undertake these challenges at all councils every five or six years.

Each corporate peer challenge focuses on five core components, which in the LGA's experience are features of effective councils. The peer team considered these within a local context and priorities of Blackburn with Darwen. The core components of the challenge are:

1. Understanding of the local place and priority setting
2. Leadership of Place
3. Financial planning and viability
4. Organisational leadership and governance
5. Capacity to deliver

In addition to the above, the Council asked the team to consider the following:

- Community engagement
- Digital transformation

As part of the challenge process, the Peer Team held a series of meetings and focus groups with a range of people from across the council and its partners – including elected members, senior officers, managers, supervisors, apprentices and front line staff. Their key recommendations are outlined below:

- a) Engage members, staff, partners and residents in developing a compelling vision for the Borough's future
- b) Develop an agreed set of outcomes for people, place and the Council and reflect these in the refreshed Corporate Plan and with partners in the LSP 2030 vision
- c) Establish a dashboard of a limited number of key performance indicators (KPIs) to demonstrate progress towards outcomes and more effectively communicate performance to members, partners and residents.
- d) Strengthen the marketing and promotion of Blackburn with Darwen to potential visitors and investors, emphasising the opportunities presented by the Borough's young and diverse communities
- e) Take a whole council approach to the budget process across different service and portfolio areas to ensure resources align to key priorities and desired outcomes
- f) Consider how to create more strategic capacity at an appropriate level and place in the organisation through the proposed senior management review
- g) Ensure a whole council approach to transformation and public service reform, integrated with the digital agenda, with a clear road map for delivery and pursue this at pace
- h) Develop an organisational development (OD) and workforce development strategy to ensure that the Council can meet the challenges of the future
- i) Consider area based budgeting with partners to deepen community engagement and influence wider spending
- j) Consider ways of empowering ward members, including through allocation of funding for local initiatives
- k) Identify gaps in community volunteer arrangements and develop a plan to address these and continue to support community volunteers

4. KEY ISSUES

The feedback report from the LGA, following their Corporate Peer Challenge, was reported to Executive Board on 14th February and outlined 11 key recommendations. In addition to these, there are other highlights from the final report which are outlined below for the Council to consider as part of the wider feedback.

The Peer Team's comments and observations are positive with particular reference to our deep understanding of place and the challenges and opportunities presented, the widely respected political and managerial leadership at the council, our partners having a real confidence in the council as well as passionate staff who are committed to the area.

The report also highlights that the Council has helped to bring significant improvements in infrastructure attracting inward investment and indicates that the Council should now give more attention to how it can help local people to access more and better jobs through the development of a more inclusive approach.

The report recognised the success of Your Call and other volunteering programmes and encouraged the Council to engage with the wider voluntary and community sectors to make best use of resources available. In particular the Peer Team reported that our partners are willing to explore further neighbourhood place based working and the scope for alignment/pooling of budgets.

The Council's member training offer is recognised as being of value with good take-up, and the Council has been encouraged to draw on the experience of other organisations such as the LGA in enhancing the member development programme. The Peer Team highlighted that members from all parties feel able to challenge the Executive through scrutiny without a detrimental impact on relationships and use of call-in seems appropriate. They also highlighted that resources to support scrutiny has been reduced and suggested that the Council should ensure that best use is made of these limited resources, in particular through effective pre-decision and policy development work linked to council priorities. They also suggested that that task and finish groups may be an effective approach for some aspects of scrutiny.

The report outlines the need for a clearer vision and plan around the next stages of whole council transformation, and recognises that the Council is currently refreshing the Corporate Plan. To support this, the Peer Team suggested that there needs to be more investment in staff and leadership development and opportunities for more cross service working and development.

The Council's good understanding of financial challenges it is facing was noted by the Peer Team, in particular the detailed savings programme developed with Portfolio holders and the implementation of Civica Financials which provides real time financial information. The Peer Team have suggested that the Council should consider if more regular financial reporting to all members would increase their engagement with the budget challenges the Council faces, with both elected members and staff able to contribute to identifying savings and developing budget proposals.

In terms of capacity the Council's positive use of the apprenticeship levy to help with the development of staff was recognised along with increasing capacity through effective partnerships. The Peer Team also highlighted that a rewards and recognition scheme for staff should be considered.

The Peer Team were very positive about Your Call and our wider volunteering activities recognising the strength of our volunteers individually and as groups. They have suggested providing a mechanism to regularly meet with a selection of volunteers to discuss their suggestions and provide further guidance and support where necessary.

The creation of the new digital and business change department was highlighted as providing valuable additional capacity at a senior level to drive forward the digital agenda. The Peer Team suggested that an IT strategy and roadmap for delivery would be helpful, alongside the digital direction of the authority being integrated into the OD strategy and workforce planning.

5. NEXT STEPS

The LGA have asked the Council to reflect on their findings and suggestions. Appended to this report is a table which outlines the key recommendations from the Peer Review and how the Council is responding. The Leader, Executive Members and Management Board will oversee actions and Policy Council in December 2019 will be asked to review the recommendations of the Peer Review and how these have informed our work programme.

The recommendations from the Peer Review which the Council wish to take forward will be measured through council performance reporting and business planning mechanisms. The LGA also intend to undertake a follow up 'light touch' visit in the next 12 – 24 months to help the Council assess the impact of the peer challenge and the progress it has made against the areas of improvement and development identified by the Peer Team.

6. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

There are no policy implications related to this report at this stage.

7. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Any financial implications of the response to the Corporate Peer Challenge recommendations will be managed within existing budgets.

8. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no legal implications related to this report.

9. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

Any resource implications of the response to the Corporate Peer Challenge recommendations will be managed within existing budgets.

10. EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

An Equality Impact Assessment has been completed. No issues have been identified which negatively affect one or more to the different equality groups.

11. CONSULTATIONS

There have been no formal consultations undertaken.

Chief Officer/Member

Contact Officer: Denise Park, Deputy Chief Executive.
Date: 15th March 2019

LGA RECOMMENDATIONS	RESPONSE/ACTION
<p>1. Engage members, staff, partners and residents in developing a compelling vision for the Borough's future.</p>	<p>The Council's new Corporate Plan 2019-2023 has been developed and subject to agreement at Council Forum in March, is due to be launched after Annual Council in May 2019. This will include a vision for the Council and will align with the refresh of the LSP Plan for Prosperity 2030 which will outline a vision for the Borough.</p> <p>Members, staff, partners and residents have been involved in developing the Corporate Plan throughout the process.</p>
<p>2. Develop an agreed set of outcomes for people, place and the Council and reflect these in the refreshed Corporate Plan and with partners in the LSP 2030 vision.</p>	<p>The Council Corporate Plan for 2019-23 is being developed and reflects four strategic themes – People; Place; Economy; Council and eight corporate priorities (web link to doc). These strategic themes and priorities have been informed by a range of activity including the LSP Summit (October 2018), Residents Survey (November 2018), JSNA summary review (November 2018), State of the Borough independent economic analysis (September 2018) and the LGA Corporate Peer Challenge (December 2019).</p> <p>When the Corporate Plan has been agreed work will start on developing the LSP 2030 vision which will sit alongside the Corporate Plan and set out a borough vision with partners.</p>
<p>3. Establish a dashboard of a limited number of key performance indicators (KPIs) to demonstrate progress towards outcomes and more effectively communicate performance to members, partners and residents.</p>	<p>The Council's performance management framework is being refreshed to reflect the new Corporate Plan 2019-23 which will be launched after Annual Council in May 2019. The Council has already streamlined its KPIs and performance monitoring arrangements in the last few years and will strengthen this further by reviewing the frequency and format of reporting and ensuring that the KPIs accurately reflect the outcomes set out in the Corporate Plan. The Council is keen to ensure these are measurable stretch targets.</p>
<p>4. Strengthen the marketing and promotion of Blackburn with Darwen to potential visitors and investors, emphasising the opportunities presented by the Borough's young and diverse communities.</p>	<p>Work is underway to enhance our strategic marketing, visitor and investor engagement programme and activities.</p> <p>The Chief Executive chairs a Project Board which will set out a refreshed framework with a costed programme of activity by April 2019. This work builds on our current place-marketing approach and enables partners to better align their activities and resources within a new overarching framework.</p> <p>We will continue to develop and leverage our cultural and visitor assets. The National Festival of Making</p>

	<p>provides an authentic opportunity to deliver an event of truly national significance that is capable of lifting local ambition and linking local programming. Other established Festivals of quality will complement this approach. We will exploit the various dimensions of “making” as a unifying theme.</p> <p>Our youthful, culturally rich and entrepreneurial communities are providing further opportunities to raise the profile and aspirations of residents and businesses alike. These need to be better co-ordinated and promoted. A renewed Blackburn Town Centre BID mandate also creates the opportunity to pool resources to deliver joint activity. New investment plans for Darwen will help enhance pride of place.</p> <p>We will continue to engage with the LEP and Marketing Lancashire to position the Borough within Northern and national contexts. For example, we will work to ensure that we are a central focus of the emerging national County of Culture Lancashire bid.</p> <p>To maintain and underpin progress, we will also need to ensure a strong pipeline of strategic development opportunities to capture new economic and financial benefits, and to engage new investors, occupiers and visitors.</p>
<p>5. Take a whole council approach to the budget process across different service and portfolio areas to ensure resources align to key priorities and desired outcomes.</p>	<p>The Council has developed and implemented various savings programmes over the last nine years to meet the financial challenges of the government’s austerity policy. Whilst developed collectively, the individual savings have been identified on a portfolio by portfolio basis which has given Members the opportunity to make differential savings requirements across each area. In doing so statutory services have been protected, along with those services provided to our most vulnerable residents; it is suggested that this approach will be retained for future budgetary planning purposes.</p> <p>However in agreeing the new Corporate Plan 2019-2023, a more focused approach can be taken in the budget setting process in respect of referencing budget allocations, investment and the development of supporting savings programmes, to the key priorities and delivery of outcomes that are set out within the Plan.</p> <p>Across the four strategic themes, and the eight key priorities that sit beneath these, we can set out how the budget of the individual portfolios contribute to each, to confirm and ensure that resources align to their delivery.</p>
<p>6. Consider how to create more strategic capacity at an appropriate</p>	<p>Over the previous eight months there have been a number of organisational changes at senior management level bringing three new Directors into the organisation, the most recent starting in post in January 2019 and</p>

<p>level and place in the organisation through the proposed senior management review.</p>	<p>completing the Chief Officer team. There has also been additional capacity created through a Growth Programme Director.</p> <p>On December 6, 2018 Policy Council approved a restructure of the senior management team incorporating the deletion of the Deputy Chief Executive Post and appointing Denise Park, the existing post-holder as the new Chief Executive from 1st May 2019. The Council considers that its new Chief Officer team provides sufficient strategic capacity with the right skills and expertise to deliver Council priorities.</p> <p>Communication across the organisation and within departments is crucial. We will therefore look to strengthen the flow of information and enhance engagement across the organisation to free up strategic capacity, planning and delivery.</p> <p>Through our OD and workforce strategies (see further detail on section 8) we will also review leadership skills, development and succession planning across all levels of the organisation.</p>
<p>7. Ensure a whole council approach to transformation and public service reform, integrated with the digital agenda, with a clear road map for delivery and pursue this at pace.</p>	<p>The council has been consulting with stakeholders and a newly formed digital board, to develop a revised digital strategy for 2019. This strategy will be closely aligned to the council's corporate plan and priorities. It will bring together redesigned technology and systems, with the skills and capabilities to transform services for our citizens and teams. A head of service for digital transformation will also be recruited (planned Q1 2019/20) to oversee implementation of the strategy.</p> <p>We will work closely with Organisational Development to ensure the right transformational skills, digital skills and capabilities are embedded throughout the organisation over the next 2 years. A pilot of Lean Process training for 70 digital and business change staff was completed at the end of 2018 which will help to inform our approaches going forwards.</p> <p>The council has recently signed up to the Local Government Digital Declaration and has started to develop new partnerships across local government and national digital teams. We are also working with the wider market, both larger suppliers and small to medium sized enterprises to realise our digital ambitions. Signing up to the digital declaration will also add pace to our plans to develop skills around digital and agile approaches.</p> <p>Plans and funding are in place to support digital integration and interventions with the NHS in 2019/20. The council is leading the local digital health and care group overseeing the changes as part of the Integrated Care Partnership (ICP) and wider System (ICS). We are also building new networks across digital social care teams</p>

	<p>across Lancashire and South Cumbria local authorities, to share lessons and coordinate delivery.</p>
<p>8. Develop an organisational development (OD) and workforce development strategy to ensure that the Council can meet the challenges of the future.</p>	<p>A new OD strategy is already being developed and will link to the wider Digital and Accommodation Strategy as well as the budget strategy going forward. The OD Strategy will include leadership and management development, leadership culture, employee and member engagement with change, their training and development needs and set out how the Council will grow and develop in all aspects of delivering services in the 2020's.</p> <p>It will also incorporate the development and delivery of a revised workforce strategy which will include revisions and updates to our recruitment strategy, culture organisational values and behaviours, introduction of updated pay and reward strategy and (digital) employee handbook and enhanced health and welfare/support programme.</p> <p>The new Workforce Strategy will set out how workforce planning will reflect the marketplace and, coupled with new arrangements and approaches to recruitment and retention, will address any lessons from the Equality Watch report. It will also enhance our reputation for delivering effective services with a workforce skilled and experienced reflective of our community.</p> <p>The workforce strategy will also consider the Council's commitment to the Borough wide Employment and Skills Strategy developing stronger links with schools and colleges and the provision of apprenticeships, work experience and volunteering. The workforce strategy will consider how we are able to attract and retain high calibre employees giving consideration to succession planning.</p>
<p>9. Consider area-based budgeting with partners to deepen community engagement and influence wider spending.</p>	<p>The council is committed to working as close to its communities as possible. We believe the most effective way to do this is through bringing our public sector partners together at a local level sharing resources, expertise and experience to deliver improved outcomes for our neighbourhoods.</p> <p>We recognise the engagement opportunities that can help support and influence best use of assets. Since Unitary status this has evolved and developed in response to both the national and local Policy drivers. We have been at the forefront of development through shared neighbourhood teams, neighbourhood boards and more formal transfer of assets and management to community, voluntary and faith based organisations. The council has also promoted Place based leadership and collaborative working to bring about place shaping through taking a total place approach both in service delivery and budgeting. Increasingly this has been about joining up agendas, outcomes and resources of allied organisations and community assets.</p> <p>We launched our local Integrated Care Partnership in August 2018. We are leading on the health and social integration with</p>

	<p>all our Adult Social Care teams being co-located in the community with primary health services. This infrastructure with the Transforming Lives and Community Connector Neighbourhood functions is already bringing significant Partnerships and resources together to increasingly deliver PLACE based services.</p> <p>Volunteering is a major part of our strategy and we have seen year on year increase in active participation. Working with the Lancashire Volunteer Partnership we have a good infrastructure and a strong foundation to build on to further develop this area. Using a strength based approach we aim to have the ability to co-ordinate and accurately support social prescription. In terms of driving this work we have Primary Care Neighbourhood Partnerships that are jointly lead by the council and Primary Care networks. All key health, social care and community partners are represented. This includes a patient voice and the opportunity for local community groups to help influence, shape and participate in delivery of services. We are already seeing participation at new levels in supporting loneliness, isolation, local environment through litter picking, food and fuel poverty, organ donation, diabetes and obesity. In addition, key programmes such as Sport England and Social Integration will help us to drive the active participation in getting our communities to take ownership and help develop the future borough.</p> <p>Our ambition would be to promote a Total Place approach and increasingly work closer with whole communities for and with whom we deliver services to engage them in shaping services and actively participating in making the right choices to improve their quality of life, health and wellbeing.</p>
<p>10. Consider ways of empowering ward members, including through allocation of funding for local initiatives.</p>	<p>All members have access to good quality and appropriate training to develop their talents and abilities to fulfil their democratic roles. These training opportunities ensure they are empowered with the right knowledge and skills to make informed choices and decisions.</p> <p>Ward Members through the leadership have been fully supportive and engaged in the 'Your Call, Your Community' campaign that has helped find solutions to many problems. The growth of volunteer and community participation has been directly related to the way in which this council has empowered its elected Members. There is an expectation beyond Ward issues and case work to promote active citizenship.</p> <p>In each Ward elected Members are the conduit towards unlocking local community resources and matching them where possible with resources from commissioning of services. Through the Voluntary, Faith and Community Sector we deliver significant levels of service to help advise and guide communities. Together this infrastructure supported by the council and our Partners provides a strong opportunity to develop local initiatives.</p> <p>The new Sport England and Social Integration programmes will enable allocation of resources to neighbourhoods as described above. Elected Members are a key part of the engagement and problem solving infrastructure through which the council can improve the quality of life for our communities.</p>

<p>11. Identify gaps in community volunteer arrangements and develop a plan to address these and continue to support community volunteers.</p>	<p>The council has a strong approach to recruiting and developing volunteers. This work is led by the Neighbourhood Managers and Community Connectors as part of the Lancashire Volunteer Partnership.</p> <p>In recent years we have seen a year on year increase in participation. We have secured funding support through ESIF programme under the strengthening communities theme. This in turn has given us the opportunity to work in Partnership with other sectors, particularly the community, voluntary and faith sectors.</p> <p>Volunteering is central to a number of strategies and is seen as a way of engaging our communities back into intermediate and longer term employment. A way of helping to reduce social isolation and to promote wellbeing. A fantastic way in which to help personal development at any age by building key skills and experience. We know that volunteering is not free and therefore needs investment in the support infrastructure, equipment, training and supervision. It is also right that the council rewards, recognises and celebrates the valuable contribution volunteers make to the borough.</p> <p>In the next phase of our strategy we will be looking to further strengthen volunteer co-ordination, to better organise and identify opportunities, to work collaboratively with Partners to jointly promote and host volunteers. As part of progression pathway we want to see volunteering play a role in all aspects of community life, be available and accessible to people of all ages and abilities.</p> <p>Many of the council’s employees volunteer and play an active role in our borough outside of their day job. As part of the council’s organisational development strategy we want to ensure that their contribution is recognised and captured. That there are opportunities for them to participate further. As a council we actively encourage volunteering and will be developing a strategy to identify a programme of opportunities to further enable participation</p> <p>As outlined in the Peer Challenge final report, the Peer Team acknowledged the remarkable success of Your Call in encouraging people to volunteer on behalf of their local communities. To strengthen this further we will continue to work with volunteers providing them with tools, equipment, advice and guidance on an ongoing basis, including the initial clean up kit, of which we have provided 625 to date.</p> <p>In addition a significant number of ‘Environment’ volunteers have signed up via the Lancashire Volunteer Portal. We also provide a quarterly newsletter to volunteers on the environment and provide an annual celebration event in recognition of their efforts. The Environment department also has 81 volunteers who form the Winter Grit squad and undertake gritting in communities across the borough. The Council keeps in contact with these</p>
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	volunteers via social media and provides regular feedback on impending weather conditions and ensures that there are adequate levels of salt in salt bins located across the Borough
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