

ITEM:

REPORT TO CABINET

17 OCTOBER 2019

**REPORT OF CORPORATE
MANAGEMENT TEAM**

CABINET DECISION

Leader of Council – Lead Cabinet Member – Councillor Bob Cook

CORPORATE PEER REVIEW

SUMMARY

The purpose of the report is to update Cabinet on the outcome of the recent LGA Corporate Peer Challenge.

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION(S) / DECISION(S)

The report seeks approval of the recommendations resulting from the recent LGA Corporate Peer Challenge.

RECOMMENDATION

That Cabinet approve the recommendations resulting from the recent LGA Corporate Peer Challenge and the development of an action plan in response.

DETAIL

1. Councils are increasingly looking for good practice, support and challenge to help them improve services for users. The Corporate Peer Challenge (CPC) provided by the LGA is improvement-focussed and tailored to meet the council's individual needs. CPC's are designed to complement and add value to a council's own performance and improvement focus through challenge and shared learning.
2. The CPC for Stockton was conducted by a team of elected members and senior officers from other local authorities, together with advisors from the LGA between 3rd and 6th September 2019.
3. Corporate peer reviews cover five core themes, all of which are underpinning features of good performance. The core themes are as follows;
 - a) Understanding of the local place and priority setting - Does the council understand its local context and place and use that to inform a clear vision and set of priorities.
 - b) Leadership of Place - Does the council provide effective leadership of place through its elected members, officers and constructive relationships and partnerships with external stakeholders.
 - c) Financial planning and viability - Does the council have a financial plan in place to ensure long term viability and is there evidence that it is being implemented successfully.

- d) Organisational leadership and governance - Is there effective political and managerial leadership supported by good governance and decision- making arrangements that respond to key challenges and enable change and transformation to be implemented.
 - e) Capacity to deliver - Is organisational capacity aligned with priorities and does the council influence, enable and leverage external capacity to focus on agreed outcomes.
4. It is important to note that the CPC process is designed to be proportionate and flexible, furthermore the Council can agree one / two additional areas to include in the review that reflect local needs and requirements. Therefore in addition to the core themes Stockton requested the Peer Challenge team's views on:
- How well are we currently addressing health inequality
 - How open we are to inclusive growth
 - How can we address our recycling performance
5. The Peer team began the process by reviewing the information submitted in our self-assessment, including a number of the council's key documents. They visited the council for 4 days and conducted site visits, interviews and workshops. During the time the Peer team spent at Stockton they met with a wide selection of staff, councillors, stakeholders and partners, 195 people in total.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

6. The Peer team presented their findings on the last day of their visit, feedback is provided on the basis of critical friends, not as assessors, consultants or inspectors.
7. The peer team's findings although focused on areas recommended for improvement, they also acknowledged that there is so much for us to be proud of. The headlines in the feedback were as follows:
- The pride, passion and commitment of staff and elected members has absolutely shone through in our discussions
 - The customer service ethos and focus on the residents that sit at the heart of this – reflected in customer satisfaction levels and awards
 - The way in which the organisation values, respects and invests in its people
 - The strength of leadership that has been shown in relation to a number of projects focused on deriving a range of benefits – place-shaping and regeneration, social, economic, commercial
 - The highly valued arts and events programme including the Stockton International Riverside Festival
 - The way the authority has successfully managed the financial challenges to date – being both prudent and creative
 - Being highly valued and very well respected as a partner
 - Demonstrating pragmatism and an 'open mind' in relation to approaches to service delivery – a 'mixed economy'
8. The following were the Peer team's key recommendations to the council. They were suggested in the context of a high performing council:
- Develop a shared narrative of 'place' that is politically led
 - Review what the Locality Forums are achieving and whether something different is required
 - Build on the process that we have been involved in so as to generate dialogue, forge links between people and organisations and stimulate thinking

- Continue to work to understand and address the causes of demand pressures being experienced repeatedly in-year and leading to projected overspends
- Ensure the process to recruit a Managing Director is seen to be open, transparent and competitive
- Build on the introduction of 'Informal Cabinet' and the work that has started to enable the Corporate Management Team to have a greater strategic focus
- Determine whether to take the opportunity we have outlined to move the council to the next level
- Create a shared narrative about the council and its role that is politically led
- Seize the chance to fulfil a real place leadership role around health inequalities and accelerate and enhance partnership working
- Establish a shared understanding of inclusive growth across the council and partners and enable greater dialogue both between them and within the authority
- Show political leadership on the issue of recycling and use the courage of your convictions to secure longer-term benefit
- Create a shared narrative about the council and its role that is politically led

NEXT STEPS

9. Members and officers now have the opportunity to reflect on the Peer Challenge team's findings and to determine how we wish to take things forward, with a view to agreeing a robust action plan in response to these findings.
10. The Council will publish the findings from the Corporate Peer Challenge process, and will commit to a follow up visit, which would be light touch no sooner than two years on from the original challenge. This will enable us to demonstrate the impact of the peer challenge and the progress made against the areas of improvement identified.

COMMUNITY IMPACT IMPLICATIONS

All residents and business will benefit from the improvements identified.

CORPORATE PARENTING IMPLICATIONS

Not applicable

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

All improvements identified are to be met from existing budgets.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no legal implications directly arising from this report.

RISK ASSESSMENT

Low risk. Existing management systems are sufficient to control and reduce risk.

WARDS AFFECTED AND CONSULTATION WITH WARD/COUNCILLORS

Not applicable

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Not applicable

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