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Cabinet  
Council

08 January 2019  
15 January 2019

**Name of Cabinet Member:**

Cabinet Member for Policy and Leadership – Councillor G Duggins

**Director Approving Submission of the report:**

Deputy Chief Executive (People)

**Ward(s) affected:**

All

**Title:**

LGA Corporate Peer Challenge – Outcome of Peer Challenge

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**Is this a key decision?**

No – Although this report affects all Wards, the impact is not expected to be significant

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**Executive Summary:**

The Local Government Association (LGA) is the national voice of local government, working with Councils to support, promote and improve local government. A major part of the LGA support is the offer to each Council to have a Corporate Peer Challenge every four or five years.

In 2018 it was agreed that Coventry City Council would host an LGA Corporate Peer Challenge. The Peer Challenge took place from 9th to 12th October 2018. The visit focused on how we understand our place and set our priorities, our leadership and governance, financial planning, and our capacity to deliver on what we set out to achieve. These areas are considered by the LGA in all Local Authorities that they visit to conduct a Peer Challenge.

We also asked the Peer Team to look at our approach to housing and homelessness, our readiness for UK City of Culture 2021, how we make the most of social value in our capital projects and our One Coventry approach. These areas were specifically chosen on the basis that they would benefit from some external challenge and feedback on both current and future delivery plans.

A high-level feedback session was held on the final day, in advance of the feedback report being produced.

In summary, during the course of the Peer Challenge week, the Peer Team found that:

- pride and passion of employees and partners for their work and the city really stood out
- Coventry City Council is seen as a good partner and a key player within a wider cultural and economic geography
- this is now a 'point of step change' for the city and the Council
- there are some areas where further work is needed. These areas are described in the 'Key recommendations' section of the LGA's feedback report (Appendix A).

Following the Peer Challenge visit, the Council has reflected on the Team's findings and suggestions in order to determine its response to the recommendations that have been made. It is the responsibility of the Extended and Corporate Leadership Teams to have oversight of, and accountability for, delivery of this work.

The full Peer Challenge Feedback Report is provided as an appendix to this report (Appendix A).

### **Recommendations:**

Cabinet is requested to:

- 1) Support the work of the Extended and Corporate Leadership Teams to evidence delivery of actions outlined in Appendix B, in response to recommendations made by the Peer Challenge Team
- 2) Consider any comments of the Chair of Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee in relation to the outcome of the Peer Challenge

Council is requested to:

- 3) Note the contents of the Peer Challenge Team's Feedback Report, associated Council Response document and support the work of the Extended and Corporate Leadership Teams response to recommendations made by the Peer Challenge Team

### **List of Appendices included:**

#### Appendix A:

LGA Corporate Peer Challenge – Feedback Report

#### Appendix B:

Council Response to Peer Team Recommendations

### **Background papers:**

None

### **Other useful documents**

None

**Has it been or will it be considered by Scrutiny?**

No

**Has it been or will it be considered by any other Council Committee, Advisory Panel or other body?**

No

**Will this report go to Council?**

Yes – 15<sup>th</sup> January 2019

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## Report title: LGA Corporate Peer Challenge – Outcome of Peer Challenge

### 1. Context (or background)

- 1.1 Peer Challenge is a core element of the LGA's sector-led improvement offer to local authorities. The activity is improvement focused, with the scope being agreed by the Council and tailored to reflect local needs and specific requirements.
- 1.2 In early 2018, the Council held an initial scoping meeting with the Local Government Association to determine the main focus (in addition to the core areas) of the challenge. Discussion focused on when it would be best to undertake the onsite activities, the nature and composition of the Peer Team and the results the Council was seeking to achieve. It was subsequently agreed that a Corporate Peer Challenge would take place in October 2018.
- 1.3 The core components of each Corporate Peer Challenge relate to leadership, governance, corporate capacity and financial resilience. These elements help Councils to check they have the capacity to continue to deliver their local priorities. The core components are described below:
  - 1) 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?*
  - 2) Leadership of place  
*Does the Council provide effective leadership of place through its elected members, officers and constructive relationships and partnerships with external stakeholders?*
  - 3) 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?*
  - 4) 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?*
  - 5) Capacity to deliver  
*Is organisational capacity aligned with priorities and does the Council influence, enable and leverage external capacity to focus on agreed outcomes?*
- 1.4 In addition, Coventry City Council asked the LGA to provide further input into the following areas that would benefit from some external challenge and feedback on both current and future delivery plans by:
  - 1) Considering the potential for the One Coventry approach to enable the delivery of the Council Plan, the Cultural Strategy and other major Council projects and programmes

- 2) Testing how well the One Coventry approach is shared and owned by Council officers and Elected Members
  - 3) Challenging the social value of the Council's capital works programme
  - 4) Reflecting on the readiness of the City Council, with partners, to deliver the City of Culture
  - 5) Using best practice from elsewhere to inform the development of Coventry in addressing housing and homelessness issues
- 1.5 There is an expectation that the outcomes and resulting action plan, is owned and delivered by the City Council, whilst recognising that the Council neither can, nor should, seek to do everything itself.
- 1.6 In respect of the co-ordination of the Peer Challenge, the LGA and the Council worked together to agree the timetable of activities and ensure the input of partners. The Corporate Peer Challenge took place from 9th to 12th October 2018. The Peer Team spoke to more than 150 people during their time in Coventry, including a range of Council staff, Councillors, external partners and stakeholders, across 35 interviews and workshops. The Team collectively spent more than 225 hours determining their findings – the equivalent of 1 person spending more than 6 weeks in Coventry.
- 1.7 A 'Position Statement' was required to be submitted to the LGA, in advance of the onsite activities. This document provided a narrative on the Council's ambitions, progress and challenges at the time of writing.
- 1.8 The Peer Challenge concluded on 12th October 2018 with a roundtable high-level feedback discussion where the Peer Team shared their findings with Senior Officers and Elected Members. The LGA's draft feedback report was shared with the Council in November 2018 (Appendix A), providing a detailed response regarding these findings and including recommendations for the Council to consider.
- 1.9 The Peer Challenge did not provide an overall performance rating but it did highlight what is working well and where there are opportunities for improving. It is now a matter for the Council, with the support of its partners, to decide how the areas for improvement identified during the Peer Challenge are taken forward.
- 1.10 In summary, the Peer Team found that pride and passion of employees and partners for their work and the city really stood out across the week. They also found that the workforce was responding positively to changing ways of working. In addition, they acknowledged that there is a recognised need for a shared vision for working in partnership across the Council and the city. Positively, the Peer Team identified that the Council is integral to what is being achieved in the city and is held in high regard by those it works with, the Council being a key player within a wider cultural and economic geography.
- 1.11 The Peer Team also reported that the extent and pace of transformation in Coventry is notable, acknowledging that the Council had recently submitted proposals for, and won, a number of external awards and bids. The Peer Team felt that the approach to winning UK City of Culture 2021 bid was impressive, along with other accolades such as European City of Sport 2019 and being a

Commonwealth Games host city in 2022. Since hosting the Peer Challenge, the Council has also been shortlisted for the prestigious Local Government Chronicle (LGC) Council of the Year 2019 award, in addition to being shortlisted in the Driving Growth category, where Councils have to evidence their impact on the economy and show their success in building partnerships with employers and investors.

- 1.12 The Peer Team also, importantly, highlighted that this was now a 'point of step change' for the city and the Council and outlined some areas where further work is needed and areas where we could learn from others. The Peer Team highlighted the importance of providing further clarity on where to focus resources and what to concentrate on in the short-term relative to what can follow over subsequent months and years. This will help us make a difference to the city and lives of local people with the resources we have available.
- 1.13 The Council has begun to reflect on these findings and suggestions in order to determine its response to the recommendations identified by the Peer Team during their time in Coventry (Appendix B).
- 1.14 The LGA feedback report highlights 10 main recommendations, specifying areas for improvement, arising from the Peer Challenge. The recommendations are as follows:
  - a) Prioritising action to tackle homelessness by:
    - Replacing expensive bed and breakfast with cheaper temporary accommodation options
    - Increasing the supply of social rented and affordable private rented accommodation so it exceeds projected temporary accommodation demand
    - Making greater use of peer or external challenge to continue to develop our response
  - b) Ensuring the work to deliver against the projected balanced budget position for 2019/20 is successfully concluded
  - c) Learning from other public sector best practice on industrial relations, pay and reward models and HR policy and practice
  - d) Taking the opportunity to enhance the way the council communicates with residents and delivers customer service
  - e) Driving the digital agenda harder and faster
  - f) Being very mindful of those staff who have not yet benefited from the changes to ways of working and accommodation and responding to the thirst amongst staff for knowledge and input
  - g) Hard-wiring the legacy and inclusive growth potential of the City of Culture and the cultural strategy
  - h) Determining what 'One Coventry' is and the role it can play in helping the city and the council respond to the challenges being faced
  - i) Taking forward the recognised need for a shared vision for working in partnership across the council and the city
  - j) Strengthening delivery of the change programme to support the transformation agenda

- 1.15 The Council's response (Appendix B) describes the work that is being undertaken to address each recommendation. Much of this is already in progress. The Council's response has been developed in a manner that is intended to give clarity and focus to the existing programmes of work that are already in place rather than creating a standalone set of activities. For example, work is already underway to develop a Housing and Homelessness strategy and action plan.
- 1.16 Some of the work to address the Peer Team recommendations is complex, requiring input from a range of stakeholders and consideration of resource requirements but this will only become clear as the work progresses.
- 1.17 There is an expectation that each Council will commit to a follow-up visit within 2 years of their Peer Challenge. The purpose of this is to help the Council assess the impact of the Peer Challenge and demonstrate the progress it has made against the areas of improvement and development identified by the Peer Team. The timing of this visit is to be determined by the Council.
- 1.18 The current LGA sector-led improvement support offer includes an expectation that all Councils will have a Corporate Peer Challenge or Finance Peer Review every 4 to 5 years. It is therefore anticipated that Coventry will commission its next Peer Challenge by 2023.

## **2. Options considered and recommended proposal**

- 2.1 Participation in the process was optional however all Councils are encouraged to take up the Peer Challenge offer, at a time of their choosing, as an effective tool for improvement. More than three quarters of Councils have now commissioned a Corporate Peer Challenge. Independent evaluations of the LGA's Corporate Peer Challenge programme have concluded that there is a positive impact and a range of benefits from the Council receiving a Peer Challenge.
- 2.2 Cabinet is recommended to support the Council in delivering the work to address the recommendations identified in the LGA's feedback report.

## **3. Results of consultation undertaken**

- 3.1 There was no specific consultation undertaken, however a range of partner organisations and stakeholders were engaged in the Peer Challenge. Trade Unions were also briefed on the review and its outcomes.

## **4. Timetable for implementing this decision**

- 4.1 The improvement plan associated with the Peer Challenge will be monitored through the One Coventry Change Board and Strategic Management Board with implementation responsibility as identified in the action plan.
- 4.2 As outlined above, there is an expectation that the Council will commit to a follow-up visit within 2 years of the Peer Challenge. This will provide some assurances on progress following the Peer Team's initial visit.

## **5. Comments from Director of Finance and Corporate Services**

### **5.1 Financial implications**

There are no specific financial implications associated with this report. Should it transpire that the delivery of any of the specific actions require, additional resources, these will be managed across the total available system resources, ensuring appropriate organisational governance is in place.

### **5.2 Legal implications**

There are no specific legal implications associated with this report.

## **6. Other implications**

### **6.1 How will this contribute to the Council Plan**

Progressing the areas identified during the Peer Challenge will make a positive contribution to the delivery of the Council's priorities, particularly in relation to promoting the growth of a sustainable Coventry economy and improving the quality of life for Coventry people.

### **6.2 How is risk being managed?**

The Council's Strategic Management Board will be responsible for oversight of delivery of Peer Challenge recommendations. Where recommendations are associated with other change or improvement programmes, risk will be managed through individual programme governance arrangements.

### **6.3 What is the impact on the organisation?**

There are no direct implications at this stage.

### **6.4 Equalities / EIA**

No specific analysis of equality impacts was completed in the course of the Peer Challenge.

### **6.5 Implications for (or impact on) the environment**

None

### **6.6 Implications for partner organisations?**

Although led by the City Council the Peer Challenge included a number of partner organisations as well as representatives from various partnership boards across the city and wider geographical area. Progressing the improvements identified will require input and leadership from everyone.

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