
To: Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee

Date: 5th February 2020

Subject: Local Government Association (LGA) Corporate Peer Challenge – Progress Report

1 Purpose of the Note

- 1.1 This briefing note outlines progress made against the recommendations arising from the Council's Corporate Peer Challenge that took place in October 2018.
- 1.2 At the time of the Corporate Peer Challenge, the Chair of Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee recommended that delivery of actions in response to recommendations made by the Peer Team be monitored by Scrutiny, as well as being monitored through the One Coventry Change Board and Strategic Management Board.

2 Recommendations

- 2.1 Scrutiny Coordination Committee is requested to:
 - 1) Note the progress made and areas still to be addressed in response to recommendations included in the Corporate Peer Challenge feedback report;
 - 2) Provide any feedback on content for consideration in the progression of improvement activity.

3 Information/Background

- 3.1 In 2018 it was agreed that Coventry City Council would host a Local Government Association (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.
- 3.2 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.
- 3.3 During the Peer Challenge week, the Peer Team found that there were some areas where further work was needed. These areas were described in the 'Key recommendations' section of the LGA's feedback report (**see Appendix One**) and are also detailed below.
- 3.4 Following the Peer Challenge visit, the Council reflected on the Peer Team's findings and developed an action plan in response to the recommendations which were made.

- 3.5 Progress against the action plan is monitored by the Peer Challenge Delivery Group at regular intervals. This group involves a range of officers from across the Council.
- 3.6 An updated position statement was produced, in January 2020, as a self-assessment of progress that has been made since the Corporate Peer Challenge in October 2018, on areas that the Peer Challenge Team originally reviewed. This document also provides an overview of next steps including key future challenges (**see Appendix Two**).
- 3.7 A brief summary of progress against each of the 10 high-level recommendations is also provided here:

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***

- Housing Strategy Board established, chaired by the Chief Executive
- Head of Housing in post (April 2019)
- A new housing team established with a significant increase in capacity and capability
- New Housing and Homelessness strategy has been implemented
- Recommissioning of Homelessness Support Services is also underway
- Also increasing the housing supply through working with the social and private sector (Caradoc Hall, Frank Walsh House etc.)
- Increased resource and positive outcomes for rough sleepers

b) *Ensuring the work to deliver against the projected balanced budget position for 2019/20 is successfully concluded*

- 2019/20 Budget was balanced successfully
- Work underway to prepare for 2020/21 and future years
- Spending Round announcement – stronger position to balance the 2020/21 budget and close the gap for future years

c) *Learning from other public sector best practice on industrial relations, pay and reward models and HR policy and practice*

- Director of HR in post (July 2019) and a number of HR priorities identified, with actions in progress to address these
- A ‘whole team’ approach being taken to developing a new HR strategy
- Visit to Nottingham Council took place to gain insight into how they engage with their Trade Unions and how they had implemented new Terms and Conditions

- Local Government Association also visited Coventry to share best practice
- Regular information sharing with other local authorities within the region and attendance at HRD and 'hot topic' sessions on sharing learning

d) *Taking the opportunity to enhance the way the Council communicates with residents and delivers customer service*

- New engagement platform called Let's Talk Coventry – meaning more efficient online engagement with residents, community organisations etc.
- Customer Services Centre – receives significant number of service requests (phone, face to face and website) – now introduced feedback options across all channels for customers to offer their views. Also exploring opportunities to further automate this process

e) *Driving the digital agenda harder and faster*

- Digital First programme has been established – the programme will ensure our services are efficient, innovative and customer focused
- Launched 'DigiKnow', a digital adoption scheme to help people master the technology and embrace ongoing digital change – 100 'DigiKnow' agents
- Re-written corporate ICT strategy
- A new communications infrastructure, which has delivered a much improved and effective customer and workforce experience

f) *Being mindful of those staff who have not yet benefitted from changes to ways of working and accommodation and responding to the thirst amongst staff for knowledge and input*

- More Council buildings are benefitting from better accommodation – Broadgate House has now been refurbished
- Technology refreshes continue to be rolled out with relevant training
- Internal communication channels have been reviewed to ensure we reach different parts of the organisation – especially to those who do not have access to emails/Intranet e.g. hosting Let's Talk Sessions at Whitley Depot

g) *Hard-wiring the legacy and inclusive growth potential of the City of Culture and the cultural strategy*

- Work underway to help build capacity so that the cultural scene in the city is financially and environmentally sustainable – a wide range of partners will be working together to deliver the programme
- In the process of reviewing the cultural strategy through the Culture Compact process funded by Arts Council England

h) Determining what 'One Coventry' is and the role it can play helping the city and the Council respond to the challenges being faced

- One Coventry Working Group chaired by the Deputy Chief Executive
- Photos and videos compiled – employees sharing how they work in a One Coventry way
- Employee workshop held in June 2019, Trade Union workshop held in August 2019
- Work underway to develop One Coventry Values – by March 2020
- Roadshow developed to engage employees outside of city centre
- Partners have embraced this approach and are working on the wider development through the One Coventry Partnership

i) Taking forward the recognised need for a shared vision for working in partnership across the Council and the city

- One Coventry Partnership leading on the community element of refreshed Health and Wellbeing strategy and championing increased connectivity with community and voluntary sector
- The Partnership will continue to develop connectivity with community and voluntary sector, as well as exploring how it connects better with businesses in the city

j) Strengthening delivery of the change programme to support the transformation agenda

- Work underway to refresh the Council's programme of change and to progress actions to scope the emerging transformation themes
- Transformation governance arrangements have been refreshed to ensure proportionate but rigorous oversight of delivery of change and savings initiatives – determining the level of resources required is key

4 Key risks

- 4.1 Although good progress has been made in some areas, it is important that the completion of the action plan continues, to enable as much progress to be made as possible before the Peer Team conduct their follow-up visit. This visit is currently expected to take place in autumn 2020, within 2 years of the original Corporate Peer Challenge. This will provide some assurances on progress following the Peer Team's initial visit.

5 Next steps

- 5.1 In line with the expectation (from the LGA) that each Council will commit to a follow-up visit within 2 years of their initial Peer Challenge, a further visit from the Peer Challenge Team will be arranged. The purpose of this is to help the Council assess

the impact of the Peer Challenge recommendations 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.

- 5.2 The Council will also need to decide where the Peer Team will focus their efforts. This could be on areas that we know have made significant progress and where we might want affirmation of that, or where progress hasn't been made as anticipated and where we might benefit from some constructive challenge and external insight. The focus of this follow-up visit will be agreed through the Senior Management Board.

Appendices:

**Appendix One:
LGA Corporate Peer Challenge – Feedback Report**

**Appendix Two:
A Self-Assessment Document (One Year On From LGA Corporate Peer Challenge)**

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