

A SELF-ASSESSMENT DOCUMENT

Local Government Association (LGA) Corporate Peer Challenge one year on



A self-assessment document

One year on from LGA Corporate Peer Challenge

Context:

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. 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.

Peer Challenge recommendations:

During their visit, the Peer Challenge Team identified key areas for further improvement and subsequently made the following 10 high-level recommendations:

1

One Coventry

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

5

Budget

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

2

Transformation Agenda

Strengthening delivery of the change programme to support the transformation agenda

6

Our employees

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

3

Partnerships

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

7

Employee engagement

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

4

Housing and Homelessness

Prioritising action to tackle homelessness by:

- a. Replacing expensive bed and breakfast that delivers poor outcomes with a less expensive and improved temporary accommodation option
- b. Increasing the supply of social rented and affordable private rented accommodation so it exceeds projected temporary accommodation demand
- c. Making greater use of peer or external challenge to continue to develop our response

8

Communicating with residents

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

9

Digital First

Establishing a programme to drive the digital agenda across the Council as opposed to a piecemeal approach

10

City of Culture

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

One Coventry – a new operating approach

RECOMMENDATION

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 is the organisational approach that helps shape the way the council works with its partners to improve the city and improve people's lives. It includes the council's vision and priorities, new ways of working, and core areas of activity to deliver the One Coventry (corporate) Plan objectives, key strategies and approaches. One Coventry will enable better use of resources to deliver better outcomes for people, and help the Council meet the challenges of increasing demand and reduction in funding.

One Coventry underpins all of the work that we do. Actions undertaken in response to Peer Challenge recommendations have been carried out within this important context.

At the time of the Corporate Peer Challenge it was recognised that the One Coventry approach was very much in its infancy. There was still considerable work to do in determining what 'One Coventry' was and the role it could play helping the city and the Council respond to the challenges being faced. The initial phase has been to focus on building a more collaborative way of working both internally and with partners to understand how we can work differently to benefit residents.

Considerable progress in this area has been made on this over the last 12 months which has been overseen by a One Coventry Working Group. The cross-directorate group, consisting of members of varying grades throughout the organisation, is in place to ensure that the One Coventry approach becomes embedded

across the Council and beyond. One of its main areas of focus has been overseeing the progress of an action plan that has been informed not just by the recommendations of the Peer Challenge, but employee feedback from One Coventry workshops and employee engagement Let's Talk sessions.

A simple set of working principles was created to help the workforce understand expectations in relation to the One Coventry approach. This has received positive feedback and is seen as supporting the existing behaviour standards. Work to create a One Coventry set of values – to set expectations, hold each other to account and assess performance during appraisals is currently underway. This piece of work has involved almost 500 members of the workforce so far and is expected to be completed in March 2020.

As part of employee involvement and to explain what One Coventry means for those who are not sure, a series of more than 50 short videos have been compiled by colleagues explaining what One Coventry means to them and how they use this approach in their everyday work. This has naturally progressed into how teams work in a One Coventry way and proved to be popular with those people with access to the Intranet.

Employee ownership is essential if One Coventry is to be successful. To that end people are encouraged to submit their feedback and ideas for working in a One Coventry way through a shared mailbox, while there is considerable Intranet/digital screen presence highlighting how we are using it and the difference it is making.

More than 50 employees right across the organisation are in the process of becoming One Coventry champions. They have been

supported to ensure they are able to talk to colleagues about what the One Coventry approach is and why it is important and are also helping to develop the Values work and gather feedback on what others might need in terms of understanding the approach better. A One Coventry roadshow is being developed to engage employees outside of the city centre which it is hoped will be supported by the champions.

Although considerable progress continues to be made, there is still much to do. Awareness, understanding and the input of the workforce has increased dramatically overall but there

remain groups of employees that are harder to reach, who do not yet understand either the need for the approach or the relevance it has to the work they do. Although the roadshow – which has been tested with waste management employees from Whitley Depot in January 2020 – will hopefully go some way to addressing this issue, there is an ongoing reliance on managers to consistently educate their teams and work in a One Coventry way. The adoption of values that are used throughout the Council’s appraisal process will help but, again, this will be reliant on managers carrying out this process properly and effectively.

Transformation Agenda

RECOMMENDATION

Strengthening delivery of the change programme to support the transformation agenda

During the latter part of 2019, four medium-term Transformation Programme themes have emerged, and are broadly defined as follows:

Theme	Definition
Commercialisation	Optimising income, its collection, maximising the use of our assets, reducing operational costs and exploring new delivery structures.
Digital First	Providing support to accelerate digital change projects to deliver our Digital Strategy. Maximising efficiencies and opportunities and ensuring our Digital offer is an enabler to realising the objectives of our One Coventry Council Plan and medium-term Transformation Programme.
Place Based Outcomes	Working with partners to explore opportunities to deliver efficient and effective integrated local community services in the city, for the benefit of local people.
People Plan	An enabling programme of work to further establish and embed the One Coventry approach and to support effective and efficient ways of working.

These transformation themes embrace the One Coventry approach and aim to radically change the way that the Council operates and interacts with local communities and partners, ultimately fundamentally shifting the way that we do things in the city.

Delivery of this overarching programme of transformation work will also actively contribute to balancing the Council budget over the course of the next three years. However, it is anticipated that financial investment may be required on an 'invest to save' basis, in order for the Council to achieve the longer-term level of change that is needed. It is not possible to quantify this potential ask at this time, but it is anticipated that this will become clearer as programmes are scoped and defined.

To a large extent, the transformation themes that have been identified are aspirational in their ambition, at this stage.

It is well recognised though that an intense period of work is required to define the ambitions, precise scope (including further options), impact, deliverables, costs, benefits, and timeframe of the initiatives that will be delivered within each theme.

Programme definition work for each transformation theme is progressing well. Activity is focusing on concept and scope but with a commitment to enabling a clear understanding of how each theme will contribute to a reduction in the Council's budget deficit, across separate financial years, while maintaining effective delivery of core services and operations.

Critically, the activity is taking an approach that is focused on the needs of the communities that we serve and how we best respond to them in collaboration with others.

Partnerships

RECOMMENDATION

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

The One Coventry Partnership (formerly named the People Partnership Board) is chaired by the Council's Deputy Chief Executive (People) and includes senior leaders from key partner organisations across the city including Coventry and Warwick universities, West Midlands Police, City of Culture Trust, Coventry and Warwickshire Local Enterprise Partnership (CWLEP), local NHS organisations, and Citizen Housing. The aim of the group is to facilitate and grow cross-organisational working to achieve a wider One Coventry approach for the city. The One Coventry approach has been warmly welcomed by partners and is enabling closer working on key shared priorities. The group is leading on the community element

of the refreshed Health and Wellbeing strategy, in which public sector organisations have committed to working differently with communities and residents to improve wellbeing.

One element of this work is developing increased connectivity with the community and voluntary sector and a commitment to do this in line with the One Coventry approach. This work has commenced, with partners facilitating an event to listen to the voluntary and community sector and understand how we can work together more effectively. In order to further develop relationships a virtual network has been set up to continue these conversations, as well as a commitment to support voluntary and community-sector led face-to-face conversations. The Partnership has noted it is equally important to develop a relationship between public and private sector organisations in Coventry, this will be a priority for the Partnership in 2020.

Housing and Homelessness

RECOMMENDATION

Prioritising action to tackle homelessness by:

- a. Replacing expensive bed and breakfast that delivers poor outcomes with a less expensive and improved temporary accommodation option
- b. Increasing the supply of social rented and affordable private rented accommodation so it exceeds projected temporary accommodation demand
- c. Making greater use of peer or external challenge to continue to develop our response

Significant strides have been made in Coventry on the nationwide issue of housing and homelessness led by the Director of Housing and Transformation and the new Head of Housing and Homelessness and overseen by a Strategic Housing Board chaired by our Chief Executive. Other refreshed governance included a rejuvenated city-wide Homelessness Forum, which is regularly attended by over 40 members of partner organisations. A new team structure has been implemented focusing on the frontline prevention service, accommodation and rough sleeping.

The recommissioning of Homelessness Support Services is also underway, with contracts having been awarded and the new services commencing in April 2020. These services have been significantly rethought and will be delivered in a way that better meets the changing needs of homeless people. There will be a focus on delivering these commissioned services in partnership with voluntary and community groups in the city who offer so much to help homeless people.

At the same time, we have been successful in securing external funding, primarily from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government and the Local Government Association, to support projects such as increasing the number of people living in Private Rented Accommodation. This funding will be used to bolster the Rough Sleeping outreach services in 2020 and develop ways of stimulating more truly affordable, permanent homes for homeless households. An approved Rough Sleeping Strategy has been agreed by Cabinet, following consultation, setting out our ambition to end Rough Sleeping in 2022.

An Accommodation Team has been established which has effectively created the 'in-house placement function' referred to by the Peer Challenge Team. This team currently places all families but will also be responsible for the placement of single homeless people by April 2020. By better managing accommodation rates and utilisation the Housing Team has saved the equivalent of over £1m (if continued over a full year). The Team has made excellent progress in moving away from placing families into expensive bed and breakfast accommodation. Since September 2019 no families have been placed in bed and breakfast accommodation by the Housing Team except for a few nights in emergency situations.

A number of temporary accommodation projects are now being delivered after months of work behind the scenes, most notably Caradoc Hall in Henley Green. These projects could realise millions of pounds of further savings, although they may take over 12 months to deliver.

Underlying much of this is an improvement in our understanding of the data we hold, and, therefore, the accommodation and support requirements for homeless people. Unlike

12 months ago, we are now in the position where we have a much better understanding of the number of people currently in temporary accommodation, and the number of rooms they need. With a better understanding of their specific needs relating to risk, wellbeing support and tenancy requirements we can design services for the future.

Despite steps being taken to make a real difference in Coventry, there remain considerable challenges that need to be overcome. A budget pressure of approximately £3m remains. This is primarily due to continued increase in demand for the service, leading to greater case activity and customers in temporary accommodation.

There have also been delays to several property-related mitigation projects that are expected to deliver significant savings. As a result, too many households are still being placed in more expensive temporary accommodation paid on a nightly rate. Whilst these projects are expected to become live during the course of late 2019 through to spring 2020, there is always a risk of further delays. If they are delivered by the end of the financial year, there is a positive financial effect of circa £1.5m over 2020/21.

We have a number of policy areas to review and improve. We are continuing to work with Registered Providers to increase the supply of social housing and are improving the fairness and efficiency of the allocation of social housing through the Homefinder Review. Other policy reviews include the introduction of a Temporary Accommodation Charging Policy (which will charge a fair and affordable rate to those staying in temporary accommodation in line with national practice) and an upcoming review of the Tenancy Strategy. Shortly the Council will also be able to discharge the main housing duty (an ongoing

duty to secure accommodation for eligible clients in priority need) into the private rented sector. This will be significant and allow us to find people permanent homes in the private sector, addressing the second Peer Challenge recommendation, and is essential as the supply of social rented homes on Coventry Homefinder no longer meets demand.

A key area of focus is improving the process and outcomes of customers receiving homelessness prevention services, with the goal of increasing homelessness preventions in 2020. A Customer Journey project was initiated in November 2019 and will review process and practice. This work will also be supported by the procurement of a new ICT system in 2020 to unify existing systems and enable much more efficient case work.

However there is more to do, both to bring the processes for single homeless people up to the new standards we have introduced for homeless families, and to respond to further changes regarding referrals and support needs now the new contracts have been awarded. We also want to work more closely with Children's Services to improve and simplify outcomes for Homeless families and Care Leavers.

On the data front we've started to link baseline information to future accommodation requirements through modelling of future demand and likely service performance. This work is in the early stages but should provide a firm evidence base for additional property projects and improving service delivery into the future.

Budget

RECOMMENDATION

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

Although the Peer Challenge recommendation to deliver on a balanced budget for 2019/20 was successfully achieved, the work in this area continues. Uncertainty over future finance and funding remains the driver of this work along with the fact that further work is required to identify and realise savings to achieve a balanced budget over the medium term.

The Pre-Budget Report for 2020/21 has been prepared and was presented at the 19th November Cabinet. This includes a revised resourcing position for the Council for 2020/21 and includes a range of spending and savings proposals that provide a near balanced financial position for the next financial year. This position has been supported by short term grants such as the Social Care support grant which is for 2020/21 only. The final

Budget report due to be taken will include final proposals to balance the budget which will not require any further service savings. The existing position includes individual proposals that fit within the Council's One Coventry themes of Digital First and Commercialisation.

Subject to Member approval, the Council's budget position for 2020/21 is secure. The focus now must switch swiftly to future financial years within the context that the Council faces future budget deficits (although the scale of these will remain highly sensitive to the future landscape of public policy and future local government funding settlements). The existing assumption is that the Council will need to identify significant savings within the One Coventry themes (Commercialisation, Digital First, Place Based Services and 'People Plan', previously known as Workforce Strategy). This will require strong programme management to take forward each theme and, crucially, benefits realisation to ensure that each theme is able to deliver financial savings to help manage the Council's budget position going forward.

Our employees

RECOMMENDATION

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

Following the Peer Challenge, the Council has made progress across a number of areas regarding its workforce, including employee relations, pay and reward models and HR policy and practice. A 'People Plan' has been

drafted and is supported through a strategy and action plans for each area of the service, to ensure there is a 'golden thread' and better focus on priority areas.

Learning from public sector best practice

Fact-finding missions to identify and learn good practice have taken place, with a number of senior officers and elected members visiting Nottingham City Council – a

local authority similar to Coventry in terms of size and challenges. The visit was undertaken in order to gain a better insight into the way in which they engaged with their Trade Unions and also how they had been able to implement new terms and conditions across their organisation. Coventry also hosted a visit from the Local Government Association (LGA) as part of a process to highlight 'best practice' in employee relations across the public sector. This visit enabled the Council to contact other Councils to discuss their approaches to employee relations, pay and reward and HR policy and practice.

All of this work is taking place alongside the development of an outward looking approach to developing policies and learning from others. For example, HR are working with the unions and Public Health to develop an employee health and wellbeing plan to develop creative support/interventions to address underlying absence reasons/issues and increase engagement.

Employee relations

During the year we have jointly undertaken with the trade unions and APSE (Association for Public Service Excellence), to facilitate a fundamental review of our employee relations. This involved elected members, senior managers and the trade unions and resulted in an agreed commitment to building a positive working relationship and to review existing policies and procedures. The latter is being managed through a Project Board to oversee the change agenda.

Tangible progress so far has resulted in progress on the joint consultation and negotiation 'infrastructure', including the restoration of regular meetings at senior management team and elected member level, agreement on prioritisation of policies to be reviewed and a 'whole team' approach (including trade unions) to the development of

a new HR Strategy (People Plan). In addition, the trade unions have also agreed the top five employment policies which they see as a priority for review. A review with APSE will take place in February 2020.

Pay and reward models

A conscious effort has been made to expand current knowledge of pay and reward models and best practice within other local authorities, wider public sector organisations and the private sector. A professional pay modeller is working with HR to progress this area of work. There has been regular contact with local authorities within the region such as Birmingham City Council, Solihull, Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent.

Understanding best practice has also become part of our standard ways of working by sharing knowledge and learnings with other local authorities from within the region and further afield such as Nottingham City, Leicester City and Oxfordshire County Councils, as well as other organisations including Public Health England.

The Director of HR attends the monthly regional HR meeting and there is active encouragement for the HR function to attend the regional 'hot topic' sessions.

One Coventry Values

A set of organisational values is also in the process of being developed, as mentioned earlier, which will influence both the recruitment and appraisal process as well as being the vehicle for wider cultural change. The process has been a large workforce engagement piece using an infoscrite to develop a visual response to focus group discussions, using 'values' bingo and will lead to an employee vote to select the final organisational values.

Employee engagement

RECOMMENDATION

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

Employee engagement has been a focus since the Peer Challenge with the offer the Council provides to its workforce improved. Internal communication channels have also been reviewed to look at how we ensure they reach different parts of the organisation and help provide them with the information they need and opportunities to influence our future work.

Since the opening of Friargate, more Council buildings are benefiting from better accommodation and improved ways of working. Since the Peer Challenge, Broadgate House has been refurbished and there are plans to rebuild Whitley Depot as part of wider plans to reduce and consolidate the number of buildings used by Coventry City Council. Technology refreshes continue to be rolled-out across the Council and training

continues to be provided to help people update their skills and get the most from new ways of working.

A particular focus has been placed on how we ensure we engage the small but significant number of employees who do not have access to emails or the Intranet.

A Coventry City Council app for employees with a smartphone is currently being developed. Face-to-face Let's Talk sessions are held in venues outside of the city centre and we continue to look at ways we can build on the success of these sessions. Some directors run 'Let's Talk' sessions for their own areas which build on the corporate sessions and give an opportunity for a more service-related perspective. We have a monthly news update that is distributed to managers of employees without Intranet access to issue or talk through in team meetings. Old-school ballot boxes are also in place in areas where employees have no email access to give ideas, vote and nominate when the same opportunity is given to employees who have email access.

Communicating with residents

RECOMMENDATION

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

In keeping with our Digital First programme, the Council is exploring the greater use of digital technology to engage with our citizens and to work closely with our partners to address complex issues.

As a Council we are committed to improving our engagement with residents. Effective engagement will help us to shape services and influence the decisions we take. The Council is also viewed by partners as having the expertise to undertake the type of engagement which results in meaningful service change.

Within the last year we have launched Let's Talk Coventry, a digital engagement platform

which provides an easy and coordinated way to facilitate engagement and consultation throughout the Council. From surveys to forums, and with sophisticated methods of feeding back to stakeholders and the general public, Let's Talk Coventry is helping to grow and nurture an online community of good relationships and understanding between the Council and members of the public.

The platform is also helping to inform the sensitive delivery of projects where the Council and communities work together to enrich and transform our shared life in Coventry.

Corporate Leadership Team have agreed that early engagement will be built into the four Transformation Programmes and that this engagement will be used to shape development of these programmes.

The Household Survey is being commissioned to take place in spring 2020, supported by funding from Coventry City of Culture Trust in recognition of the importance of the survey to measure impact of UK City of Culture, 2021. This partnership arrangement is also facilitating access to specialist support from both

Coventry and Warwick Universities to analyse results of the survey.

The Council has a statutory duty to produce a Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) for Coventry. The JSNA brings together both Council and partner data to identify needs within the city and inform service commissioning, design and delivery. The current JSNA was updated in 2019 and this iteration included the residents' voice collected via conversations with communities in addition to the data.

This residents' voice provides extra meaning to what the data is telling us and we have had positive feedback from NHS colleagues on the usefulness of taking this approach. In addition to a city-wide JSNA, eight locality-based profiles are currently being produced around the eight family-hub areas in Coventry. Again, these profiles will include both data and the voices of residents and communities living in each of these areas in order to provide a more detailed understanding of local needs in specific parts of the city and how we need to tailor services to meet these needs.

Digital First

RECOMMENDATION

Establishing a programme to drive the digital agenda across the Council as opposed to a piecemeal approach

Coventry continues to work towards a 'digital first' culture and although we are confident that we are making progress, the digital world does not stand still and there is clearly more to do.

In August 2019 an independent Digital Maturity Assessment was carried out by Socitm – the Society for Innovation, Technology and Modernisation. It found that although we are well placed and our digital offer, particularly to our employees, which is better than many other local authorities, there is much to do if we are to achieve the aim of promoting and instilling a 'digital first' culture across the organisation and with residents, customers and partners.

A dedicated Digital Maturity Assessment session was held with Elected Members. This helped to identify areas of activity where Members believe there are Digital strengths across the organisation, and within communities, and where there are areas for improvement. These outcomes are being used to help shape work to be undertaken through the Digital First programme. Digital inclusion is one area Elected Members have identified as a priority. As a consequence the Digital First programme is exploring the opportunity for providing communities with support to increase digital access, skills and knowledge.

Over the last few months an approach has been adopted to pull together all our digital work to fully realise the benefits that digital technology can bring. It is helping the Council to not only focus on the work of the organisation but also to align with the work of our partners to the benefit of Coventry as a place to live, learn, work, innovate and do business.

The establishment of the Digital First programme, as part of our Medium-Term Financial Strategy improvement programme, will now accelerate delivery of our digital ambitions and will operate across five thematic areas: Engage (workforce and customer collaboration and skills development); Insight (data to drive decisions and improve outcomes); Innovate (a creative space to explore digital opportunities and capabilities); Design (user led design with scalability potential); and Solve (solutions to specific problems).

The programme aims to contribute towards service area savings targets whilst also identifying opportunities for innovation and development of digital capabilities across local authorities and within our communities.

The Council has acknowledged that if we are to realise our ambitions there is a need to grow our capacity and capability to deliver, at pace, the positive change through digital and service design. This is being addressed by the project steering group and appropriate resources will be secured. This includes looking at options for using external capacity to start to develop the service design methodology within the local authority. The use of internal resources will then be sought to embed the service design approach throughout the organisation.

Additionally, cultural issues, such as printing documents for meetings that are readily available digitally and digital skills competencies, need to be addressed. These changes will form part of the 'Engage' workstream and will be driven by Workforce Development colleagues, as part of the Digital First agenda.

City of Culture

RECOMMENDATION

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

With a year to go until Coventry's year in the spotlight as UK City of Culture 2021, a huge amount of work continues to take place to ensure we are ready as a city. However, as well as trying to ensure Coventry is able to host the best year possible, a considerable amount of work has focused on the legacy opportunities that 2021 can provide.

To date, circa £90m of direct investment has been secured for the city through being awarded the title of UK City of Culture 2021. Of this funding, £45m is being invested in the city's infrastructure (improving public realm and highways) and £19m is to be invested in the city's cultural assets (performance spaces, heritage venues and creative hubs). Work on both these investment programmes has commenced, with the Box at FarGo and Belgrade Theatre Phase 1 works already completed. These investments will leave a legacy for Coventry beyond 2021 itself, alongside significant (partially attributable) investment in areas such as hotels, retail and the city's food and beverage sectors.

A significant amount of work is also underway to help build capacity and increase sustainability in the cultural sector in the city. The Coventry City of Culture Trust (the Trust) has supported 38 local projects through Road to 2021 and Get Ready funds, and the Trust's programme team has engaged with communities, artists and charities in over 200 locations across the city.

In the year to go to 2021, the Trust will be working with partners to support cultural businesses in managing demand and has

commissioned programmes to support skills development in the cultural and hospitality sectors. The City Council is further leading partnership work to review the city's cultural strategy through the Cultural Compact process – bringing together the Council, BID, universities and Trust to work collaboratively to examine new sustainable models of investment for the city's cultural and creative sectors.

With one year to go, there is recognition of the scale and demands of hosting the UK City of Culture title. Work to firm up the final programme for 2021 is underway and the city will host a large test event in the summer of 2020. Work will continue to secure further programme and legacy investment from private and public sector sponsors and partners, alongside the strengthening of connections between 2021 and the Commonwealth Games in 2022. The work of the Destination Management Partnership and Trust will give the city national and international profile, and work will continue on city messaging and improving the visitor experience. The range and quality of visitor accommodation available in the city is being improved, including through new hotel developments in the city. Finally, alongside large-scale event planning for 2021, the profile of work in and across the city with Coventry's communities, cultural organisations and businesses will increase as 2021 campaigns and volunteering programmes are launched and as the build-up programme is delivered in preparation for delivering a successful City of Culture 2021 and securing a lasting legacy for the city in the years beyond.

Other notable progress:

Economic Growth

The Council's economic development activities cut across many of the Peer Challenge recommendations, and this section summarises some key pieces of work which are forming part of the Council's response to the recommendations.

As part of the preparations for City of Culture 2021, a £20m Cultural Capital Investment Fund has been established, combining several different grant streams including Department of Culture Media and Sport, Coventry and Warwickshire Local Enterprise Partnership (CWLEP) and Coventry City Council funding into a single programme to contribute to City of Culture and its legacy. This programme includes the following projects which will all contribute to hosting events in 2021 and strengthen the cultural infrastructure in the city – Drapers Hall, Belgrade, The Box at Fargo, Coventry Cathedral, amongst others. We've also worked closely with the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) to secure £4m towards the overall £36m revenue programme for delivery of City of Culture events.

Our work in this area is not just about securing money from the region for investment in the city – although we are rightly proud of our record in doing that – we are also committed to working in partnership with our regional contacts in order to get the best for the region. Coventry City Council is committing considerable officer time to contribute to the technical assessments which support the decision-making process for the WMCA Investment Fund.

The Council's approach to economic development and related activities by its very nature requires us to take a One Coventry

approach to helping the city's businesses to grow. This type of work must happen in partnership in order to be successful, and we are very proud of partnerships with the two universities, CWLEP, the Chamber of Commerce – as well as with the hundreds of businesses we work with every year.

One such example, which opened in 2019, is the Duplex Investment Fund. A joint initiative between the CWLEP, Coventry City Council, Warwickshire County Council and Coventry and Warwickshire Reinvestment Trust. The fund, which is a combined grant and loan, is a new financial product with potential to support large numbers of businesses in Coventry & Warwickshire in a variety of sectors. Importantly, the fund will recycle the loan element of its funding to re-lend in future years which will allow funding from our investment to have a much longer lasting impact than traditional grant funds.

We are currently negotiating an extension to our EU funded business support programmes, all of which are delivered through partnerships, which will bring in an additional £25.5m in extra support and grants for our small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). We will be offering almost 600 businesses grant funding, which will help to create more than 500 jobs, bring 25 innovative new products to market, support over 280 entrepreneurs and will save over 1,600 tonnes of carbon.

We're working to make the most of EU funds before the country departs from the European Union. We are also working hard with our partners, particularly the Growth Hub and the Chamber of Commerce to provide technical information about the implications of Brexit for businesses, and to help them plan for a future outside the EU. This includes actively monitoring and responding to plans for the UK

Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) and how this is delivered in the regions.

As we prepare for life after European Funding, we're working to find innovative new ways to support businesses. As well as challenges there are key opportunities; City of Culture shines a spotlight on Coventry and the opportunity to create a legacy that goes far beyond 2021. In addition, the devolution agenda has given the Midlands a clear remit to deliver more services on a local level, and we will work with WMCA and other colleagues to make the most of this opportunity. We will also seek wider sources of central government funding linked to opportunities and strengths such as City of Culture, the Industrial Strategy and Local Industrial Strategy.

Social Value

Although not a key recommendation from the Peer Challenge, our aim is to maximise the social value impact from the work we carry out. In Coventry we want to achieve a consistent approach to the application of Social Value across the city and this is being taken forward through the One Coventry Partnership. Our Social Value Working Group is working on a revision to the current Social Value Policy, and it has been agreed that the Policy will be extended and renamed to give increased focus on the environment and sustainability.

Proposed changes to the Social Value & Sustainability Policy will be taken to Cabinet and Council for approval in Q1/Q2 2020.

We are now working with the Social Value portal, which is a national social enterprise that supports social value nationally and regionally. We have also started to apply a Social Value measurement tool, TOMS (themes, outcomes and measures), that will give an objective and measurable outcome to Social Value. Contractors attending the workshop (outlined

below) were supportive of the approach, and of our understanding and recognition that application needs to be proportional to what is being commissioned.

At the previous Peer Challenge workshop for external contractors, the contractors indicated that they wanted more sessions. We have recently met with this cohort to discuss our potential changes to Social Value Policy and operational approach. Once again, feedback from the session was positive from the five external contractors present. Contractors were keen to engage and it was agreed that there would be further workshops.

We need to do more in terms of highlighting the successes being achieved and the sustained impact being delivered, and contractors were keen to support work in this area. Contractors particularly liked the Council's proposed approach; by adopting an approach to measurement that would see a more objective overview, the case studies that bring alive Social Value and the impact it can have on individuals and communities are welcomed. Our case studies are generally economic-based, and we particularly need to do more on the social and environmental themes. Due to a lack of resource and substantial changes in personnel, the case studies available online all pre-date the Peer Challenge.

In terms of considering links between corporate social responsibilities and community needs, going beyond social value, the Social Value policy update has articulated this ambition. Data on community needs can be used to implement policy and monitor effectiveness.

The Community Resilience Team (CRT) has initiated relationships with 12 local developers in the city to identify what support they would like to offer to the community and in what capacity in order to direct their social value inputs into the voluntary and community sector. Work has been gathering pace to link the

developers to local groups and organisations that the team works alongside, giving them a wider variety to choose from to support. Examples of support might include contributing to the cost of funding for the projects, buying materials for the groups/organisations or providing materials such as paint for the building they host in and can also offer their time to support these groups.

Developers have now contributed to the local community, e.g. Buckingham who sponsored a volunteers' celebration event earlier this year and RG Group, who recently supplied Peggies Park Community Centre with volunteers and supplies to paint their building, IR Development (currently redeveloping Riley Square) supplied Christmas food hampers to local organisations and will continue to offer support to as many groups as possible throughout their development.

Member Development

Training and development opportunities are provided to elected members and an induction day is held for newly elected councillors. All councillors are required to undertake training in key areas such as the Code of Conduct and Interests, while training is provided for those with specific responsibilities such as Planning and Licensing. A digital skills survey identified priority areas for raising awareness about how technology can assist elected members, and this is being used to inform further development activities. However, the approach has not been as well structured as it could have been and work with members and officers during the year has identified the need for a Member Training Strategy. This is being developed for the 2020/2021 municipal year.

The Centre for Public Scrutiny (CfPS) has been engaged by the Council to conduct a review of its scrutiny function. The CfPS is the leading

national body promoting and supporting excellence in governance and scrutiny in the UK. The scope of the review focuses on organisational commitment and clarity of purpose; members leading and fostering good relationships; prioritising work and using evidence well; and having an impact.

During October 2019, the CfPS conducted interviews with a number of members and officers. During November 2019, they have been observing selected scrutiny meetings. The outcome of the review will be a report identifying suggested areas for improvement which will form the basis for the CfPS and Council to co-design a deliverable action plan. This will be developed early this year.

Additional Key Future Challenges

The Corporate Peer Challenge was carried out more than 12 months ago and while it is important to review progress to address challenges from that time, it is as important to be clear on our priorities for the next 12 months.

Some of our key areas of focus include:

- further developing our One Coventry approach and working with partners and our communities to ensure that our residents get the very best that the city can offer. We envisage ourselves widening our One Coventry conversations to communities, partners and voluntary, community and business sectors as well as our frontline workforce
- working towards City of Culture 2021 in order to ensure that Coventry is able to host the best year possible, in addition to exploring the legacy opportunities that 2021 can provide
- implementing key strategic leadership changes as the Deputy Chief Executive (Place) takes early retirement at the end of March 2020
- continuing the redevelopment work in the city centre and our efforts to create a greener, more environmentally friendly Coventry
- continuing our work to protect the most vulnerable, the elderly and the young and to give people of Coventry the services they deserve

One Coventry is the approach that will support us to achieve all of this and ensure that we work in a more effective way in order to improve the city and improve people's lives.

Conclusion

There can be little doubt that significant progress has been made since the LGA Corporate Peer Challenge in October 2018. Some areas, such as housing and homelessness for example, have made some notable achievements over the last 12 months which is a tribute to the hard work of officers as well as partners across the city.

It is right that we should recognise the hard work and progress that has been made, but it is equally clear that more needs to be done. Although there is a positive narrative to explain what we have achieved since the Peer Challenge Team visited Coventry, we also recognise that the job is not yet done. Almost every recommendation has an area within it where we have more to do.

However, the reason for this not being completed should not be confused with a lack of effort. Some of the issues are long-standing, 'wicked' ones that Coventry City Council cannot tackle alone and where nearly every local authority in the country is struggling. Others are the result of a range of challenges including time, resource, capacity and other competing pressures.

It is for all of these reasons that the One Coventry approach continues to be prioritised and developed. We should not underestimate what we have achieved so far but we need to build on the best of what we have done, share the learning and make it a part of what we all do across the city.

Clearly it is only through working together, involving the right people, being proud of what we do, looking for new ideas, remaining open and honest about why we do things and why we can't, and making the most of what we have that we will make a real difference. All of these things are the principles of One Coventry.

In short, we are in a better place than we were 12 months ago, but we are not complacent and know we still have more to do.