

Report to Cabinet

Subject: Corporate Peer Challenge – Findings and Follow-up

Date: 24 April 2014

Author: Chief Executive

Wards Affected

All

Purpose

To summarise the findings of the Peer Challenge and agree follow up actions.

Key Decision

This is not a key decision

Background

- 1.1 In November 2013, a team of elected members, senior officers and Local Government Association advisors undertook a Peer Challenge of the Council.
- 1.2 The Peer Challenge was something that was commissioned by the Council, designed to complement and add value to the Council's own performance and improvement focus.
- 1.3 The challenge addressed a number of questions common to all Peer Challenges, along with some areas of focus specific to Gedling, namely:-
 - Does the Council have clear ambitions?
 - Do systems and procedures contribute effectively to this agenda?
 - Member and Officer roles, responsibilities and relationships
 - The impact of recent political and managerial change
 - How the organisation's resources, capacity and services are being focussed on achieving priorities
 - The extent to which the Council has realistic strategies and actions to meet future challenges

- How well placed is the Council to deliver its future ambitions?

1.4 A copy of the Peer Challenge report has been circulated to all members and highlights areas of strength as well as potential areas for improvement. This report concentrates on the “challenges” that were identified, given that the primary reason for commissioning the challenge was to aid our development.

Proposal

2.1 It is proposed that Appendix 1 forms the basis of the Council’s response to the Peer Challenge and that the proposed actions are embedded in the 2014/15 Council Plan.

Alternative Options

3.1 Not to respond to the findings of the Peer Challenge, which would represent a waste of their time and our time.

Financial Implications

4.1 It is envisaged that all of the actions outlined in Appendix 1 can be funded from existing budgets

Background Papers

5.1 Corporate Peer Challenge report produced by the Local Government Association

Recommendations

That Cabinet agree the proposed actions set out at Appendix 1 and that these actions be incorporated into the current year’s Council Plan.

Reasons for Recommendations

To ensure that the Council learns from and responds to external feedback.

Peer challenge – Proposed responses		
Challenge	Response	Responsibility for action
Ensure that staff and members are engaged more actively in the direction and development of the Council	It is acknowledged that there has been a huge amount of change in recent years and a rapid pace of change, some of which has been unsettling for staff in particular. While considerable effort is made to communicate with staff and involve them in organisational change, the risk of some people being “left behind” is real. Internal communications are to be reviewed and a new programme of organisational development introduced in conjunction with staff. The challenge of engaging elected members more effectively is one of a number of items proposed to be considered at the next meeting of Overview and Scrutiny Committee.	Chief Executive
There’s potential for more constructive challenge of performance and a need for greater member ownership of the risk register	Again, this is something that is probably best pursued with Overview and Scrutiny. There is always scope to delve deeper into performance and management of risk and the current arrangements allow for this. For example, establishment of task and finish groups to focus on specific areas of concern or interest.	Stephen Bray and Mark Kimberley, Corporate Directors
Maximise the role of the Gedling Leaders’ Forum; develop a strategy of place/strategic plan to generate collective responsibility for agreed outcomes	The Gedling Leaders’ Forum was established as a more informal, less bureaucratic network of organisations to replace the Gedling Local Strategic Partnership. Whilst it is not considered appropriate to reinvent the LSP model, it is accepted that there is scope to ‘get more’ from the Leaders’ Forum. The suggestion to develop a strategy of place is welcomed and the transition from our ‘Council Plan’ to a ‘Gedling Plan’ is a step in that direction.	Chief Executive

<p>Develop closer/improved relationships with parishes</p>	<p>The challenge team found that Parish Councils were generally positive about improved communication and welcomed the new Parish Liaison meetings. However, there was still further to go to strengthen Borough:Parish relationships. This is to be included as the main item for consideration at the next Parish Liaison meeting.</p>	<p>Paula Darlington, Corporate Director</p>
<p>There is a need for greater engagement of members in financial planning and the ongoing scrutiny of the budget</p>	<p>At the time of the peer challenge, members of the majority group were involved in extremely detailed discussions about priorities and finance. Opposition groups also contributed to the budget process. From an officer perspective, while the 2014/15 budget process was extremely demanding, increased member engagement added considerable value. The Challenge Team's proposal to build on this experience is supported.</p>	<p>Mark Kimberley, Corporate Director</p>
<p>Consider increasing the Council's asset base</p>	<p>This observation/suggestion reflects the limited land holdings of the Council (number and financial value). In 2013 the Council acquired the Grove public house for social housing and the Druids public house for car parking. So when opportunities arise, the Council will look to increase its asset base.</p>	
<p>Earlier engagement of Service Managers in organisational development; more internal peer challenge</p>	<p>The suggestion to strengthen the links between senior and middle management is supported. Regular joint SLT and Service Manager meetings have been put in place and every Service Manager recently presented their Service Plans to SLT. As referred to earlier, it is proposed to implement an organisational development programme that will actively involve Service Managers in its design and delivery.</p>	<p>Chief Executive</p>

<p>Improve staff capacity, capability and morale</p>	<p>The focus given by the Challenge Team to organisational capacity is welcomed and covers a lot of ground. Some things – such as PDR's, Team Meetings and 1-1's – are basic management responsibilities and the expectation that these are a fundamental job requirement has been clearly spelt out. Other issues raised – such as up skilling in project management and improving Employee:Management relationships will be taken forward and incorporated within the organisational development programme referred to earlier.</p>	<p>Chief Executive/ Corporate Directors/ Service Managers</p>
<p>Narrow our priorities; decide where performance may not need to be “quite so high”</p>	<p>The Challenge Team probed around a perceived tension between our ambition and capacity to deliver. This was a fair challenge and the impact of budget reductions is becoming increasingly apparent – internally if not externally as yet. Early warnings of slippage in performance or financial targets will be increasingly important through budget and performance monitoring and this will form the basis for any future consideration/review of priorities.</p>	<p>Senior Leadership Team</p>
<p>Extend partnership working to develop ‘genuine’ shared services</p>	<p>A large number and wide range of opportunities are being explored and some early ‘sharing’ has already taken place with Rushcliffe and Newark and Sherwood. Gedling has been providing support to Newark and Sherwood on revenues and benefits and intranet development and discussions about collaboration on commercial waste, fleet management, building control, payroll and environmental health are up and running. The Challenge Team also fed back a perception from representatives of the voluntary sector that they wanted a more active role in service delivery. Asset transfer of community centres is one example that is being progressed and meetings have been scheduled with two ‘infra-structure’ organisations to explore their future role.</p>	<p>Senior Leadership Team/ Service Managers</p>

<p>Enhance the effectiveness of overview and scrutiny; develop a shared work programme between scrutiny and Cabinet; invest in training of scrutiny members</p>	<p>There are plenty of examples of scrutiny's input to policy development and performance improvement. Nevertheless, the feedback from the Challenge Team reflects the perceptions of some elected members. The Peer Challenge report is scheduled to be considered by Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 29 April 2014 and members' views will direct the response/action to this item.</p>	<p>Stephen Bray, Corporate Director/ Overview and Scrutiny Committee</p>
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