

Report to Cabinet

Subject: Corporate Peer Challenge – feedback report and Action Plan

Date: 8 December 2022

Author: Chief Executive

Wards Affected

Borough-wide.

Purpose

For Cabinet to consider the Corporate Peer Challenge Feedback Report and to approve the Corporate Peer Challenge Action Plan.

Key Decision

This is not a key decision.

Recommendation

THAT CABINET:

1. Considers the Corporate Peer Challenge Feedback Report.
2. Approves the Corporate Peer Challenge Action Plan.

1 Background

- 1.1 All Councils who are members of the Local Government Association are expected to receive a Corporate Peer Challenge at least every five years. Gedling Borough Council was due a review in 2020 but this had to be postponed due to Covid-19.
- 1.2 A Peer challenge provides robust, strategic, and credible challenge and support to councils, by bringing together political and managerial leadership through the use of member and officer peers.
- 1.3 Peer challenge is a tried, tested and trusted tool. It is not an inspection. It is a tool for improvement, providing opportunities for councils to learn from colleagues in other local authorities. The 'peer team' act as 'critical friends', bringing knowledge and expertise from their respective organisations, gathering information from a range of sources, and then reflecting on and challenging performance in the areas the council has asked to be reviewed.

- 1.4 The peer team for Gedling comprised of one lead member, one LGA associate, two senior officer peers, and one LGA support officer. The team prepared by reviewing a range of documents and information provided to them in advance of the on-site visit, to help ensure they were familiar with the Council and the challenges it was facing. They then spent three days on-site in June 2022 where they:
- Gathered information and views from more than 30 meetings, in addition to further research and reading;
 - Spoke to almost 100 people including a range of council staff together with members and external stakeholders.
- 1.5 The peer team used these meetings to identify strengths and areas for improvement. At the end of the visit, the team gave some informal feedback, presented their initial views to an audience of members and officers, and followed this up with a draft feedback report with key recommendations. The Council was afforded the opportunity to comment on the draft feedback report before it was finalised in the version appended to this report.

The Feedback Report

- 1.6 Gedling Borough Council invited the peer team to visit the council to offer an impartial and informed reflection on its achievements, and to provide an objective assessment on the robustness of its plans to support ongoing improvement. Continuing changes to the Council's operating environment presented the perfect opportunity to take stock and receive peer challenge.
- 1.7 The peer review team recognised that:
- The Council is a well-regarded authority where members are hardworking and clearly dedicated to local residents.
 - There are several examples of good and successful projects.
 - There is significant and valuable performance monitoring.
 - The Council has had to undergo recent staff changes and reductions in order to 'balance the books' after significant funding reductions.
 - The workforce is highly enthusiastic and committed to delivery for the borough.
 - The Council handled Covid well and is moving through the recovery phase. It planned ahead and was able to actively support its residents during much of the most active phase of the pandemic.
- 1.8 The peer review team made several observations and suggestions, and the following are their key recommendations to the Council:
- Reset GBC's ways of working;

- Establish a clear strategy for income generation and cost recovery alongside funding bids;
- Consider comprehensive customer centred approach to transforming service delivery, and what resources and technology are needed;
- Invest to save: good IT systems improve efficiency;
- Consider imaginative ways to increase capacity;
- Build up programme and project management capacity;
- Widen member engagement, particularly through scrutiny;
- Use strategic risks and the Corporate Risk register as part of the corporate planning process;
- Widen partnership engagement to include businesses, LEP and Combined Authority discussions.

1.9 The full Feedback Report (Appendix 1) provides a more detailed overview of their observations and recommendations. The Peer Review Action Plan (Appendix 2) sets out the Council's response to the key recommendations made.

2 Proposal

2.1 Cabinet is asked to consider the Corporate Peer Challenge Feedback Report and to approve the Corporate Peer Challenge Action Plan.

3 Alternative Options

3.1 Members could choose not to consider the Corporate Peer Challenge Feedback Report and to not approve the Corporate Peer Challenge Action Plan, however this process is seen as best practice conducted by respected peers and local authority colleagues.

4 Financial Implications

4.1 There are no financial implications arising from this report. Any financial impacts arising from the plan will be considered separately as actions are developed.

5 Legal Implications

5.1 There are no legal implications arising from this report. There is no statutory requirement to undertake a peer review, however it is considered best practice.

6 Equalities Implications

6.1 There are no equalities implications arising from this report.

7 Carbon Reduction/Sustainability Implications

7.1 There are no carbon reduction/sustainability implications arising from this report.

8 Appendices

8.1 Appendix 1: LGA Corporate Peer Challenge Feedback Report.

8.2 Appendix 2: Corporate Peer Challenge Action Plan.

9 Background Papers

9.1 None.

10 Reasons for Recommendations

10.1 A peer challenge presents opportunities for councils to receive endorsements from other local authorities about how well services are being delivered but also to learn how things could be done differently to best meet the needs of the Council and the wider community.