

Report to Cabinet

Subject: Peer Challenge 2013

Date: 6 June 2013

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Wards Affected

Borough-wide.

Purpose

- To update members on progress towards a Peer Challenge of the Council later this year
- To seek member views on the proposed scope of the Peer Challenge.

Key Decision

This is not a Key Decision

Background

- 1 Peer Challenge is a key part of the LGA's Local Government Self-Regulation Programme. It involves independent assessment by political and managerial peers of a council's performance and progress. It is increasingly seen as a valuable means of reviewing progress and identifying areas for future improvement.
- 2 In the Council Plan, the Council has committed to a Peer Challenge during 2013/14, following a previous commitment to explore Peer Challenge during 2012/13.

Proposals

- 3 Unlike previous assessment regimes, Peer Challenge does not work to a set of prescribed key lines of enquiry. Rather, the scope and focus of the challenge is set by the Council itself, in consultation with LGA Review Managers with experience of managing reviews at various authorities.
 - 4 Early consideration has been given to the possible scope of Gedling's challenge, through discussions with the Leader and Deputy Leader of the Council, the Chief Executive and LGA review managers.
 - 5 Arising from these discussions, in broad terms it is proposed that the Peer Challenge should form a generic health check of the progress of the Council, including a degree of validation for current performance, but should also robustly challenge current and
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future thinking, plans, strategy, action and outcomes. More detailed issues to be considered are set out at **Appendix A**. Comments on this proposed scope are sought.

- 6 There are also common components of all Peer Challenges, and these will also apply in Gedling. Those components include an assessment of: -
- a. Understanding of local context and priority setting: Does the council understand its local context and has it established a clear set of priorities?
 - b. 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?
 - c. Political and managerial leadership: Does the council have effective political and managerial leadership and is it a constructive partnership?
 - d. Governance and decision-making: Are effective governance and decision-making arrangements in place to respond to key challenges and manage change, transformation and disinvestment?
 - e. Organisational capacity: Are organisational capacity and resources focused in the right areas in order to deliver the agreed priorities?

It is felt that all are particularly relevant to the general health check the Council is seeking.

- 7 It now looks likely that the Council's Peer Challenge will take place in November 2013. The review team, likely to be of a lead Chief Executive from another authority and possibly another senior officer from another authority; one or two elected members from other authorities; and a review manager from the LGA will be on site for three consecutive days at that time – the exact dates are to be confirmed. The LGA are now looking to source suitably qualified and experienced peers.

Alternative Options

- 8 The LGA Peer Challenge is increasingly seen as the key self-assessment tool for local authorities. As such, there are no realistic alternatives available that compare with it.

Financial Implications

- 9 Peer Challenge is offered at no cost to LGA members. There are costs associated with officer time in supporting such a review, but these are likely to be small compared to previous more formal assessments such as CPA. There are also potential longer-term resource benefits, in that the findings of the Challenge may help the Council to better target future resource deployment.

Appendices

A – Draft scope for Peer Challenge

Background Papers

None

Recommendations

- (a)** To note the latest position in progressing towards a Peer Challenge for Gedling Borough Council
- (b)** To seek members' comments on the proposed scope for the Peer Challenge.

Appendix A

Proposed scope for Peer Challenge

Overall to review

- What difference the Borough Council is making to its community
- The degree to which the Council is prepared for future challenges.

Through a generic health check of the progress of the Council, to include a degree of validation for current performance, and a robust challenge of current and future thinking, plans, strategy, action and outcomes

Specific issues to explore

- Does the Council have clear ambitions
- Do systems and processes contribute effectively to this agenda
- Member and officer roles, responsibilities and relationships – specifically whether members' skills are being effectively used and the extent to which all members are appropriately involved in policy development, decision making, performance management and scrutiny
- The impact of recent political and managerial change – from member perspective to include differences between member roles before and now and how that's impacted member/member and member/officer relationships
- 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, including those to manage demand, those to reduce the cost base of its activities and different ways of achieving its priority outcomes.