CORPORATE PEER CHALLENGE ACTION PLAN

FEBRUARY 2024

In October 2023, the council undertook a Local Government Association Corporate Peer Challenge. Peer Challenges are delivered by experienced elected councillor and officer peers. The peers were selected based on their experience in respect of the relatively new political leadership of the council. The peer team considered the following five themes which form the core components of all Corporate Peer Challenges. These areas are critical to council's performance and improvement.

1. **Local priorities and outcomes:** Are the council's priorities clear and informed by the local context? Is the council delivering effectively on its priorities and achieving improved outcomes for all its communities?

2. **Organisational and place leadership:** Does the council provide effective local leadership? Are there good relationships with partner organisations and local communities?

3. **Governance and culture:** Are there clear and robust governance arrangements? Is there a culture of respect, challenge, and scrutiny?

4. **Financial planning and management:** Does the council have a good understanding of its current financial position? Does the council have a strategy and a clear plan to address its financial challenges?

5. **Capacity for improvement:** Is the organisation able to support delivery of local priorities? Does the council have the capacity to improve?

The peers highlighted eight key recommendations and this action plan outlines the council's response to implement the change required.

Recommendation 1   Engage, consult and co-produce with residents and communities – Develop a customer engagement strategy/charter.

Recommendation 2   Talk and listen to staff, create new regular channels of ongoing staff engagement

Recommendation 3   The political and managerial leadership needs to take stock and think about how to make the council fit for the future.

Recommendation 4   Re-focus SLT on strategic issues and empower managers to manage and deliver.

Recommendation 5   Use headroom to deliver ongoing annual revenue savings to address the underlying budget gap in 2026/27.

Recommendation 6   Put in place a transformation programme that designs everything around residents and communities.

Recommendation 7   Performance measures and data should focus on priorities and outcomes and provide the right information for members to make decisions.

Recommendation 8   Undertake a governance review to focus meetings on adding value to decision-making and scrutiny.

Recommendation 1

Engage, consult and co-produce with residents and communities, develop a customer engagement strategy/charter

What do we want to achieve?	How are we going to do it?	Timescale
1.1 Develop/deliver a customer Engagement Strategy	a. Form an officer working group of staff volunteers to work with relevant officers to work together to develop a Public/Community Engagement Charter and Strategy. b. Officer working group to comprise customer facing roles including teams not based at King's Court	Working Group – March 2024 Final strategy – October 2024
1.2 Engage with partners on examples of best/shared practices and co-production	a. Develop the working group's Terms of Reference to include working with partners and stakeholders b. Work specifically with the stakeholder groups that represent younger residents. c. Develop a consultation framework that makes best use of partner and council resources and aims for effective consultation to optimize use of consultation channels.	April-Sept 2024
1.3 Review the capacity and skills within the council's Communications team to align with ongoing consultation and engagement work	a. Conduct a review of the Communications Team considering the new Corporate Strategy and actions arising from the Peer Review b. Incorporate findings from Customer Engagement Strategy to inform future resource requirements within Central Services to ensure there is a clear focus on staff and resident engagement	April-June 2024
1.4 Provide training for staff on engagement and consultation to ensure management of expectations	a. Arrange for training on consultation and engagement for managers to inform when consultation and engagement should occur and how to manage expectations around engagement and consultation b. Engage with partners to inform and share best practice	June-July 2024
1.5 Devise methods of consultation and feedback from customers and stakeholders	a. A series of community events have been set up for Spring/early Summer 2024 (Beat the Bills, Food for Thought) b. Use learning from the community events to consider what went well, what could be better, in terms of the effectiveness of the consultation and whether it attracted the target audience. c. Annual Plan/Corporate Strategy and annual budget to be published with email set up to receive feedback from customers and stakeholders	May 2024

Recommendation 2

Talk and listen to staff, create new regular channels of ongoing staff engagement.

What do we want to achieve?	How are we going to do it?	Timescale
2.1 Review and improve current arrangements for internal communications	a. Progress actions arising for the internal comms survey undertaken in 2023. b. Establish an employee working group, with representatives from all services and Unison, to support improvements in employee communication and engagement. c. Scope, develop and implement a new Intranet.	Spring 2024 Spring 2024 December 2024
2.2 Undertake and act on the findings of an employee opinion/engagement survey	a. Procure an external survey provider. b. Ensure scope is considered by groups other than the Senior Management Team with a view to increasing objectivity, reach and integrity of intentions. c. Undertake survey and analyse results. d. Develop and agree action plan. e. Progress workstreams arising from action plan	February 2024 April 2024 May 2024 Ongoing
2.3 Improve engagement with staff across all service areas	a. Identify the resources required to progress actions in relation to this recommendation. b. Work with Assistant Directors and managers to ensure all staff have the opportunity for regular two-way communication. c. Create a middle manager peer group that meets bi-monthly, initially to enable them to discuss and monitor progress of this action plan, share best practice, input to task groups and be aware of new practices and outcomes to increase awareness and adopt change. d. Use feedback from staff face to face engagements sessions and feedback sessions held with middle managers to inform work undertaken. e. Ensure internal communications are appropriate to the intended audience (e.g. Public Open Space) and not King's Court centric. f. Deliver Corporate Strategy sessions for staff programmed for April/May 2024	Spring 2024 Summer 2024 Summer 2024
2.4 Continue to support employee wellbeing initiatives, including introducing an Employee Assistance Programme	a. Provide an annual programme of wellbeing initiatives and activities. b. Implement an Employee Assistance Programme c. Make recommendations regarding a volunteering scheme (including. volunteering leave) for employees	Ongoing Spring 2024 Autumn 2024

2.5 Review the Working Arrangements Framework	a. Undertake a post Implementation review of the working Arrangements Framework b. Consult staff and consider best practice elsewhere, particularly for professions with recruitment and retention problems. c. Engage with the HR processes Working Group of staff and Unison to ensure they contribute to the review. d. Undertake all staff consultation on recommendations prior to final agreement and implementation of any changes resulting in a "You said, We did" output.	July 2024

Recommendation 3

The political and managerial leadership needs to take stock and think about how to make the council fit for the future

What do we want to achieve?	How are we going to do it?	Timescale
3.1 Review structure and resources relevant to strategic direction of the council	a. Establish a working group, comprised of officers and members, supported by an external resource, to develop the culture and values work to support the strategic direction of the council. b. Use analysis of discretionary services and resources to update service identities and ensure non-value-added activities are stopped, with resources redeployed to priorities and statutory services.	March 2023
3.2 Training Needs Analysis (finance, political awareness, Change Management)	a. Conduct a training needs analysis of Assistant Directors and Service Managers to highlight specific areas for improvement. b. Allocate funding from the training budget, scope and deliver training to meet areas of priority need	July 2024

Recommendation 4

Refocus SLT on strategic issues and empower managers to manage and deliver

What do we want to achieve?	How are we going to do it?	Timescale
4.1 SLT and MT informal meeting fortnightly and formal fortnightly	a. Formal SLT (decision making) meetings now held fortnightly and informal SLT fortnightly. b. Create a Terms of Reference for SLT meetings to convey the purpose/theme of the meeting	Completed

4.2 Only items which need a decision to come forward. Other items will be discussed at Directorate level	a. Carry out a review of all items which are considered by SLT to reduce the number of operational matters which could be decided by middle managers. b. ED's and ADs to hold more directorate meetings to reduce the number of items to come forward to full SLT. c. Review of Scheme of Delegation to empower officer decision making. d. Compile register of agreed delegated decisions.	July 2024
4.3 Assistant Directors to appoint reps to attend SLT in their absence	a. Monthly Service Manager meetings to be restarted to improve peer to peer engagement across the authority. b. ADs to ensure Service Managers are updated to enable them to communicate with their wider teams. c. Service Managers to deputise for AD's at SLT meetings	March 2024

Recommendation 5

Use headroom to deliver ongoing annual revenue savings to address the underlying budget gap in 2026/2027

What do we want to achieve?	How are we going to do it?	Timescale
5.1 SLT and Cabinet hold regular budget development meetings	a. Held budget briefing sessions in January prior to budget setting – drop in sessions also held by Section 151 Officer. b. Budget development sessions with ED's AD's and Cabinet throughout the budget cycle programmed in with the Corporate Strategy sessions. c. Up to date and relevant reporting on budget monitoring to all staff – sessions have been booked in for Spring 2024.	Ongoing
5.2 Cost management and income generation plan is being progressed	a. The initial cost management and income generation plan has been included with the budget papers. b. Engage with staff on further development on the CMIG plan	February/March 2024
5.3 Greater staff engagement and consultation in cost savings/income generation work	a. Build on sessions held with staff in January 2024 b. The CMIG to be owned by AD's, updated with progress monthly and reported to Cabinet bi-monthly. c. Budget Manager Workshops to be held by Finance to increase understanding and management of budgets. d. Devise a Terms of Reference for working groups. e. Prepare a plan for ongoing staff engagement/information sharing on cost savings and income generation	Sept 2024

Recommendation 6

Put in place a transformation programme that designs everything around residents and communities

What do we want to achieve?	How are we going to do it?	Timescale
6.1 Ensure the Senior Management Team Structure reflects and supports the delivery of transformation throughout the authority	a. Report to Cabinet/Council how the structure supports the challenge of transformation and the delivery of the budget savings required. b. A series of Officer Working Groups will be formed from Managers and members of staff who have expressed an interest in taking part. Suggested themes of these groups have been included in this plan. c. In response to the CPC Report, a transformation program will be implemented, informed by the recommendations and outputs from the suggested Officer Working Groups.	By December 2024
6.2 Set up Officer Working Groups to focus on recommendation 4 of the CPC Report along with other areas that the council had previously identified such as Digital Transformation, Culture and Values plus the Productivity Plans recently announced in line with the Local Government Finance Settlement	Proposed Officer Working Groups (subject to change as progress is made) a. Cost reduction/Income Generation/Productivity Plan b. Digital Strategy c. Office Accommodation d. Internal Communications/Staff Engagement/Corporate Intranet e. Community Engagement f. HR Processes g. Corporate Performance Management System h. Culture and Values	Ongoing

Recommendation 7

Performance measures and data needs to focus on priorities and outcomes and provide the right information for members to make decisions.

What do we want to achieve?	How are we going to do it?	Timescale
7.1 Procurement of new software to support Performance Management and decision making and risk management. Wider work to incorporate statutory and discretionary services and workstreams	a. Put a project team together to ensure corporate representation. b. Complete specification for new Performance Management Software c. Engage with procurement on the procurement process. d. Select supplier. e. Implement new system. f. Investigate the need for resources to produce data to inform decisions. g. Engage with Communities Working Group on establishing customer needs and requirements of performance reporting	December 2024
7.2 Revitalise the employee performance management process to emphasise the link with staff performance to the Corporate Strategy	a. Conduct a review of the processes which support the Performance Management Appraisal process. b. Engage with staff and managers on proposed changes to the process. c. Agree recommendations and implement changes.	December 2024
7.3 Constantly review and update the performance management reporting according to requirements	a. Work with the LGA Performance Management leads to establish best practice across other local authorities. b. Review Key Performance Indicators and Corporate Strategy reporting framework on an ongoing basis. c. Simplify Risk Monitoring and embed within the management of services and monitoring of performance	December 2024

Recommendation 8

Undertake a governance review to focus meetings on adding value to decision-making and scrutiny

What do we want to achieve?	How are we going to do it?	Timescale
8.1 Undertake a governance review to focus meetings on adding value to decision-making and scrutiny	a. Cabinet report March/April 2023 refers to the Governance Task Group b. Governance Task Group to be refocused to look at current Panel and Committee Structure c. Task Group to report on recommendations. d. Cabinet Report to be prepared based on recommendations. e. Engage with the Centre for Public Scrutiny to advise and recommend on the scrutiny function at the council	December 2024