

Meeting:	General scrutiny committee
Meeting date:	06 March 2019
Title of report:	Corporate peer challenge progress update
Report by:	Cabinet member finance and corporate services

Classification

Open

Decision type

This is not an executive decision

Wards affected

(All Wards);

Purpose and summary

To consider the progress made against the recommendations following the Local Government Association (LGA) corporate peer review held in February 2018.

In adding this matter to its work programme the committee expressed the wish to receive an overview, with particular reference to the relationship with town and parish councils and the partnership with the voluntary sector where their work meant a reduction in the need for statutory services. In addition, given the time that has now passed since the Cabinet meeting, the committee is interested to receive a report to include reviewing implementation of Cabinet's response to the findings.

Recommendation(s)

That:

- a) the committee determine any recommendations it wishes the executive to consider in order to further embed the learning from the corporate peer challenge**

Alternative options

1. There are no alternative options to the recommended action as it is a function of the committee to make recommendations to the executive on the discharge of the executive functions.

Key considerations

2. Herefordshire Council invited the Local Government Association (LGA) to carry out a corporate peer challenge in February 2018. The corporate peer challenge is the most robust independent, external full council assessment, review and challenge process available to local government. It provides the opportunity for councils to benefit from external objective assessment of its leadership, performance, achievements and plans.
3. The five core elements of a review in all corporate peer challenges are:
 - Local place and priority setting
 - Capacity to deliver
 - Leadership of place
 - Organisational leadership and governance; and
 - Financial planning and viability

In addition, the team were asked to provide views on scrutiny, organisational culture, policy development and decision-making.

4. The peer challenge team consisted of elected members and senior officers (7 people) from other local authorities whose experience reflected the requirements and focus of the review. Over their four day visit, they interviewed a wide range of staff, partners and members (over 100 people) and produced a report of their findings which is contained in the report attached at appendix 2.
5. Cabinet considered the findings from the challenge visit in June 2018 and agreed an approach to taking forward the recommendations made by the peer challenge team. That approach was to ensure that the recommendations are used to inform strategic and operational planning going forward rather than the establishment of a bespoke action plan not embedded in the wider corporate planning processes.
6. The peer challenge team will be returning to Herefordshire Council in November 2019 to undertake a follow up review on progress against their recommendations.
7. The outcome of the peer challenge in 2018 was very positive, with the team finding strong evidence in areas which can be broadly summarised as:
 - **Commitment to and understanding of place** – demonstrated by staff and members through the corporate plan, joint strategic needs assessment and engaged workforce
 - **People and resources** – evidenced by a secure financial position, effective and professional officer and member relationships
 - **Delivery and improvement** – good understanding of the importance of scrutiny and challenge and a general appetite to learn and improve

8. The peer challenge team also identified areas where the council could seek to improve further; these areas can be summarised into three main themes:
- **Developing the narrative for Herefordshire** – understanding the unique selling points of the county to attract inward investment and developing and defining the council's relationship with communities
 - **Developing a “one council” and “one Herefordshire” approach** - enabling more effective planning and coordination of resources
 - **External communications** - Underpinning the approaches through improved communications and confidence in role of community leadership
9. Progress update against each of the key recommendations are contained within the report attached at appendix 1.

Community impact

10. In accordance with the adopted code of corporate governance, Herefordshire Council is committed to promoting a positive working culture that accepts, encourages constructive challenge and recognises that a culture and structure for scrutiny are key elements of accountable decision-making, policy development and review.
11. Inviting the corporate peer review and publically reporting its outcome helps to ensure that the council establishes and maintains appropriate systems, processes and culture.

Equality duty

12. Under section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, the ‘general duty’ on public authorities is set out as follows:
- A public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to -
- a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;
 - b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
 - c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it
13. The public sector equality duty (specific duty) requires the council to consider how it can positively contribute to the advancement of equality and good relations, and demonstrate that it is paying ‘due regard’ in its decision making in the design of policies and in the delivery of services.
14. It is not considered that this progress report will have an impact on the council's equality duty.

Resource implications

15. There are no resource implications arising from the update against progress. Any resource implications associated with individual activities will be subject to the normal governance processes being progressed.

Legal implications

16. The council's duty under the Local Government Act 1999 to secure best value in the delivery of all its services and functions is effectively a duty to seek continuous improvement and to invite scrutiny of the council's performance in delivering for the communities of Herefordshire. The corporate peer challenge informs and supports this process.
17. There are no direct legal implications arising from the content of this report; changes made to council services or the workforce as part of the implementing the recommendations, these will be subject to appropriate levels of engagement and consultation as required in individual situations.

Risk management

18. The risk of not responding to and progressing the recommendations made by the peer challenge team is that opportunities for improvement are not taken or informing the council's strategic and operational planning.

Consultees

19. None

Appendices

Appendix 1 CPC recommendations update Feb 2019

Appendix 2 Local Government Association Corporate Peer Challenge

Background papers

None