

Report subject	Corporate Peer Challenge Feedback Report and Action Plan
Meeting date	13 April 2022
Status	Public Report
Executive summary	<p>In November 2021 the Local Government Association (LGA) carried out a Corporate Peer Challenge of BCP Council.</p> <p>The peer team was made up of eight 'critical friends' which included two lead members and four senior officers from other Local Authorities and two LGA advisors.</p> <p>The Peer challenge focused on:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Local priorities and outcomes 2. Organisational and place leadership 3. Governance and culture 4. Financial planning and management 5. Capacity for improvement <p>and at the council's request:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transformation • Partnership working • Summer response <p>Informal feedback was given at the end of the onsite visit which was followed up by a draft feedback report and final feedback report in January 2022.</p> <p>An action plan has been prepared in response to the feedback report and is presented, along with the final feedback report, for Cabinet approval.</p>
Recommendations	<p>It is RECOMMENDED that Cabinet</p> <p>a) Receives the Corporate Peer Challenge Feedback Report; and</p> <p>b) Approves the Corporate Peer Challenge Action Plan</p>
Reason for recommendations	<p>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.</p>

Portfolio Holder(s):	Leader of the Council
Corporate Director	Chief Executive
Report Authors	Bridget Webber, Head of Policy and Research
Wards	Not applicable
Classification	For Recommendation

Background

1. All councils who are members of the Local Government Association are expected to receive a Corporate Peer Challenge at least every five years and as a relatively new council, this was the first for BCP Council.
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.
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.
4. 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.
5. The peer team for BCP Council, comprised of two lead members, four senior officer peers and two LGA advisors. They were on site for four days in November 2021.
6. 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 four days onsite where they:
 - Gathered information and views from more than 51 meetings, in addition to further research and reading
 - Spoke to more than 185 people including a range of council staff, members, and external stakeholders
7. They used these meetings to identify strengths and areas for improvement. At the end of the visit, the CPC Team gave some informal feedback, they followed this up with a draft feedback report and a final report with key recommendations.

8. The council were afforded the opportunity to comment on the draft feedback and although officer feedback was shared, there were no material changes to the final feedback report.
9. The next steps for the council were to:
 - publish the final feedback report. Appended to this paper.
 - prepare and publish an action plan. Appended to this paper.

The Feedback Report

10. BCP invited the peer team to visit the Council to offer an impartial and informed reflection on its achievements as a relatively new organisation 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.
11. The peer review team recognised that the council has exciting long-term ambitions for its place agenda and has a resolute focus on its leadership role for the whole area that it serves. It also noted that the council had a clear understanding of the challenges as well as the opportunities in the BCP area.
12. The review found that the council has worked tirelessly to create the large-scale unitary authority that it has become, bringing together district, unitary, and county level services from four preceding councils, serving a population of circa 400,000 people.
13. It was noted that the council has achieved much since vesting day in April 2019 and that the transition to date has been a huge achievement for members and officers and should be celebrated.
14. The review recognises that the council is driving organisational change through the £45m transformation programme, acknowledging that this was against a backdrop of political change and while the council was responding to the many challenges presented by the Covid 19 and pandemic.
15. The peer team captured feedback from many partners who felt the council has performed well and has demonstrated strong leadership and organisational resilience through the pandemic. It particularly highlighted the Summer Response as an excellent example of this.
16. The dedication of staff, their commitment to delivering the best outcomes for residents and their widespread understanding of, and enthusiasm to achieve the ambition and vision for the BCP area was commended.
17. The review found the council had a solid financial base following LGR, from which to build, and noted the positive audit opinion.
18. The full feedback report, appendix 1 to this report, provides a more detailed overview of the achievements so far. It has been received by officers as being a fair assessment of the organisation.
19. Amongst the positive feedback are areas for improvement. The Peer Review Action plan at appendix 2, sets out the council's response to the key recommendations and some other observations of the Peer Review Team.

20. Officers gave feedback against some of the key recommendations in the draft report, but whilst acknowledged by the Peer Team, there were **no** changes to these in the final report.

The Corporate Peer Review Action Plan

21. The action plan is largely structured around the key recommendations from the feedback report. These are set out below:

- Revisit the 'Big Plan' to ensure parity between the peoples and place agendas. This will help to rebalance the focus across the two areas ensuring capacity and resource are better aligned and that there is a clearer narrative on the benefits for people arising from the economic regeneration initiatives, including from skills and employment opportunities.
- Engage members, officers, partners, and residents to give a wider understanding of the vision and priorities for the Council that is collectively owned and clearly understood.
- Work through the alignment of strategic programmes and create appropriate and clear prioritisation for the delivery of them.
- Following the agreement of priorities consider reviewing the current SMT structure to ensure senior capacity is available at the right level to drive the council's priorities.
- Ensure increased emphasis is given to developing a culture change programme through which the Leadership of the organisation set the culture for the organisation. This must be a priority because without it there are risks to wider transformation objectives.
- Provide a development programme for both members and officers to improve joint working and a better understanding of respective roles and responsibilities.
- Develop a clear approach for staff engagement and consider whether the Council has the right Organisational Development and internal communications resources and expertise to do this well.
- Maintain a sound financial platform underpinned by robust risk management and ensure that the Council takes the difficult decisions which will enable the delivery of the medium-term financial plan.
- Realign the transformation programme from an IT process driven approach to one that is culture led.
- Provide greater clarity on the purpose and remit of the Urban Regeneration Company.
- Clarify the Council position and actions on climate change and make sure objectives are centrally embedded.
- Embed equality and diversity into the culture of the organisation.

22. There will be a follow up visit by the LGA Peer Team, in late summer or early autumn, to review progress with the action plan.

Summary of financial implications

23. There are no known additional financial implications. Any actions will be taken forward within existing resources.

Summary of legal implications

24. There are no known legal implications because of the review. A Peer Review is not an inspection. Council's take part in them voluntarily and take forward learning as a matter of good practice.

Summary of human resources implications

25. There are no known human resource implications. There is a recommendation for the council to develop a clear approach for staff engagement and consider if it has the right organisational development and communications to do this well. The response to this is set out in the action plan.

Summary of sustainability impact

26. There are no known sustainability impacts because of the review. There is a recommendation for the council to clarify its position and actions on climate change and to make sure the objectives are centrally embedded.

Summary of public health implications

27. There are no known public health implications.

Summary of equality implications

28. The review did not identify any equality implications but it did identify that the council needed to embed equality and diversity into the culture of the organisation. The response to this is set out in the action plan.

Summary of risk assessment

29. Organisational risks have been addressed in the council's response to the key recommendations, in the action plan.

Background papers

[Corporate Peer Challenge Position Statement](#)

[LGA Council improvement and peer support](#)

Appendices

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| 1 | Corporate Peer Review Feedback Report |
| 2 | Corporate Peer Review Action Plan |