



Corporate Peer Challenge End Of Year Progress Report 2022-2023

In line with the statutory requirement to continually improve the Council, an LGA Corporate Peer Challenge (CPC) was carried out in November 2021. This enabled a review of progress two years after the formation of BCP Council.






The CPC recognised that, whilst much work had been done to create this new influential and large-scale unitary Council, the Council still had a significant job to do to consolidate policy, practice, and procedure. Some significant challenges remained, including the harmonisation of pay and reward to bring together all staff onto a common pay scale and with common terms and conditions. There was also a recognised need to balance the leadership's ambitious visions for the place of BCP against an ability to deliver a sustainable medium term financial plan.

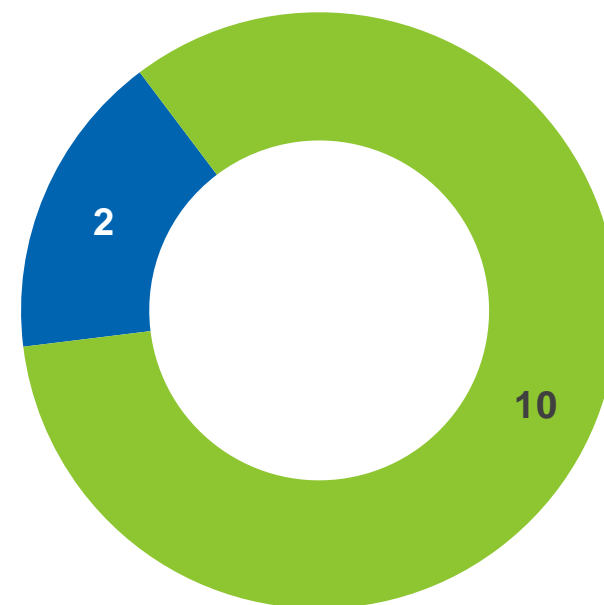
The Council responded appropriately to the recommendations of the CPC with an action plan and revisited this with the peer challenge team at their progress visit a year later in December 2022. The peer team gave positive feedback about how the Council had embraced the CPC and the actions taken as a result showed the Council's commitment to sector led improvement. Further the peer team reported very positively on how the Council is "maturing into a well-regarded, well led and well managed council". They also highlighted some areas which still require attention and recommended that BCP Council next has a Corporate Peer Challenge no later than 2024/25.

This is an end of year progress report against the 12 recommendations made by the peer challenge team following the CPC in November 2021.

In summary, progress against the 12 recommendations is good, as can be seen from the chart to the right. 2 of the 12 recommendations are complete and 10 are progressing well. Detailed updates for each of the 12 recommendations are described on the following pages.

Key

	Completed		Monitor		Action Required
	On Target		Stopped		Not started



Progress with Peer Challenge Recommendations

Local Priorities and Outcomes

Recommendation	Update
<p>Revisit the 'Big Plan' to ensure parity between the people 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.</p>	<p>Since the initial peer challenge in November 2021, the delivery plan actions underpinning the Corporate Strategy priorities were reviewed to ensure they supported the aims of the Big Plan. The updated Corporate Strategy, and delivery plans were approved by Cabinet in February 2022.</p> <p>Following local elections in May 2023, Cabinet and Corporate and Service Directors will be bringing the Big Plan and the Corporate Strategy into a single cohesive document which will set out the long-term vision and the key objectives for the Council to deliver in the next 3-4 years, informed by a full programme of consultation and engagement with residents, partners, councillors and officers.</p> <p>This will simplify the strategic framework of the Council and will help to guide the key priorities for services and for budget planning.</p>
<p>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.</p>	<p>External Communications</p> <p>In March 2021, the Council adopted a Communications Strategy and Plan that aligns available resources and capacity with the organisation's priorities. Every campaign is shown with a direct link to the priorities set out within the Corporate Strategy or the Big Plan. Delivery of the strategy and plan continues, with realignment work in 2023 following local elections, and a new strategy and plan due early 2024.</p> <p>Stakeholder Engagement/Consultation</p> <p>The Council also continues to run a full consultation and engagement programme across all service areas and for key corporate priorities. For example, the Council budget was met with challenges posed by the cost-of-living crisis and as part of setting a balanced budget for 2023/24, residents were engaged to understand what their priorities are, to help inform the decision-making around the budget. The results were considered alongside the budget report at Cabinet and Council.</p> <p>Also, public consultation and engagement informed the development of the Council's Corporate Strategy in September 2019 and as mentioned above, a consultation and engagement programme involving residents, partners, councillors and officers, will be in place as part of the process of developing a new combined Big Plan and Corporate Strategy (following May 2023</p>

	<p>local elections). As part of this, there will also be an external communication plan, with purposeful dialogue with residents, communities, and key partners at BCP.</p> <p>The Council plans to conduct another survey with local residents to gather information on a range of topics such as satisfaction with local services, local communities and health and wellbeing to inform service delivery. This valuable research provides insight into what our residents think about the Council, local area and some of the services we provide. Results are broken down by various demographics and also by ward area to help understand the needs of different residents.</p> <p>A Community Engagement Strategy was approved in July 2021 with delivery underway, with the development of intranet pages to support service areas in community engagement including resources and toolkits.</p> <p>A Communities & Partnership workstream has been established as part of the Transformation Programme which seeks to develop a council-wide function that supports the growth of partnerships, coproduction, and collaboration within the Voluntary and Community Sector.</p> <p>The Council also often collaborates with partners to set the strategic direction of service delivery. For example, the creation of the Economic Development Strategy, published Nov 2021, was informed by discussions with business leaders and formal consultation also followed with businesses and key stakeholders (universities, college, LEP, Chambers of Commerce and other trade groups).</p> <p>Internal Communication</p> <p>The internal communications delivery and improvement plan was approved in July 2021 and has seen further development and implementation from the Director of Marketing and Communications alongside the Director of People & Culture, reviewing the contribution this can make to the culture of the Council.</p>
<p>Work through the alignment of strategic programmes and create appropriate and clear prioritisation for the delivery of them.</p>	<p>After the May 2023 local elections, the Council will bring the Big Plan and the Corporate Strategy into a single cohesive document which will set out the long-term vision and the key objectives for the Council to deliver in the next 3-4 years, at least. This will be informed by a comprehensive programme of stakeholder engagement. A new Corporate Strategy will present a single set of priorities, balancing both the people and place agendas, underpinned by a set of delivery or action plans. This will simplify the strategic framework of the Council, guiding service priorities and budget planning.</p>

		<p>A new Corporate Strategy will also help to re-establish the direct link between the budget and key priorities for delivery, as well as creating a vital component for policy delivery and performance management, whilst enabling good governance and transparency in decision-making.</p> <p>Policy harmonisation has been an ongoing priority activity for the Council since formation in April 2019. Work continues to align and harmonise policies. All policies, strategies and work programmes will align to the new Corporate Strategy.</p> <p>We will also be taking the biggest step forward in our Transformation Programme in the next 18 months, continuing to review what we do and how we do it, which will ensure that we provide services and facilities efficiently and effectively in a way that is modern, affordable and sustainable.</p>
Following the agreement of priorities consider reviewing the current Senior Management Team structure to ensure senior capacity is available at the right level to drive the Council's priorities.		<p>A review of the leadership structure has taken place to reduce the cost of the senior leadership of the Council and to reduce the number of direct reports to the Chief Executive. There is continued evolution of the senior management structures to respond to the changing needs and resources of the Council and our relationships with key partners.</p> <p>The objectives within the current Corporate Strategy and Delivery Plans have been matched to individual service directors and corporate directors and form an integral component of their annual performance management objectives. This will be reviewed following the refreshed Corporate Strategy in 2023 and of course will involve rigorous application of the performance management framework so that accountability for delivering the key objectives is maintained, alongside accountability for delivering the budget and KPI's.</p>
Provide greater clarity on the purpose and remit of the Urban Regeneration Company (URC).		<p>Several activities have been undertaken since the peer challenge and follow-up visit to provide greater clarity on the purpose and remit of BCP FuturePlaces Limited, the Council's Urban Regeneration Company (URC). This included internal events to explain the purpose, scope and role of URC services, the commissioning team function, governance processes and future ways of working. FuturePlaces also produces an annual performance review and business plan.</p>
Clarify the Council's position and actions on climate change and make sure objectives are centrally embedded.		<p>A new Head of Climate Action was recruited in November 2021 and since then the team have been redesigning and maturing the Climate Service, developing a draft climate change policy and strategy, and have begun refreshing and rationalising the action plan so that it can become comprehensive and integrated centrally and in service plans. This includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ensuring that a local climate change risk assessment has been completed to inform corporate, service, and regional risks registers and adaptation plans

- working to centralise activity and integrate delivery with the Transformation, FuturePlaces and Economic Development team
- forming strategic partnerships with external organisations to support and facilitate collaborative regional action towards the climate objectives.

The draft BCP Climate Strategy and two-year action plan will be the overarching structure, containing roadmaps to ensure Strategic Aims are met. It is currently in early draft form and is to be developed further over the next few months, with the intention to include it in a public engagement process before being revised and ultimately adopted by Council. We are working to finalise documents and bring them back to Cabinet Summer 2023.

An annual progress report on tackling the Climate and Ecological Emergency was presented to Council in March 2023. The Action Plan 2023/24 – 2024/25 lists intended measures we expect to take over the next two years to ensure we remain on the correct trajectory to meet Strategic Aims. A new Action Plan will be produced annually.

We also officially launched a Local Climate Partnership with 14 key local organisations who pledged to work together to tackle climate change and we commissioned a climate vulnerability report to tell us about the local risks we face from climate change.

To ensure actions are centrally embedded the Council continues to embed the team in a central position in the organisation, to ensure other activity can be seen and influenced by the team.

Sustainability discussions will also be incorporated into the development of the new Corporate Strategy following May 2023 elections.

Furthermore sustainability considerations form part of the Local Plan and Asset Management Plans formation and will be integrated into key relevant policies, strategies and service plans.

Organisational and Place Leadership

Recommendation	Update
Embed equality and diversity into the culture of the organisation.	The Council made commitments to Equality & Diversity in the first Corporate Strategy approved in November 2019 and more recently through the Equalities Footprint, approved by Cabinet in July 2021. These commitments will be reviewed as part of developing a new Corporate Strategy following May 223 elections.

The Council has had an Equality & Diversity Governance framework in place since April 2019, headed up by a Strategic Equality Leadership Group and underpinned by Community Equality Champions, Service Unit Equality Champions and Staff Network Groups. An independent Equality Action Commission, with a particular focus on ethnic minority groups, was added to the governance framework in 2020.

A Community Equalities Champion Network meets quarterly to share information, raise issues or concerns and support diverse communities across the BCP area.

A Communities and Partnership workstream makes up part of the Transformation Programme. This is seeking to develop a council-wide function which supports the growth of community engagement and partnerships working with our communities. It is proposed the function will also develop a 'knowledge management' service to enable better engagement with diverse communities in the way that works best for them.

After the follow-up visit, the peer team positively recognised evidence of significant strides being taken in terms of embedding equality and diversity in service delivery, employment practice and as a community leader in a short space of time.

There is a well-established group of Service Unit Equality Champions with representation from all service units, who help ensure their services discharge their public sector equality duty throughout all decision-making processes. They have been instrumental in the success of the internal Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) Panel, which was a process introduced in June 2021, raising awareness of the need to consider the Council's public sector equality duty (PSED) throughout decision making processes and in improving the quality of EIAs.

An Equality and Diversity (E&D) Communications Plan has been adopted by the Council and is integral to the Communications Strategy and Plan. This focuses on supporting the organisation as a whole to exceed best practice communication standards, improving the directorate's own offer to support E&D, and promoting community cohesion by amplifying the E&D content of others.

Staff Network Groups have been set up by staff, for staff, which align with protected characteristic, to provide a safe space for the discussion of issues and help raise awareness of these to the wider organisation. These groups cover Women, Race & Cultural Diversity, LGBTQ+, Religion and Belief and Disabled staff and a group is also being considered for members of the armed forces community. Corporate Management Board (CMB) champions have been identified for each Staff Network Group (SNG). SNGs continue to be promoted to all

staff and participation encouraged as well as drawn on by the organisation to improve workplace culture.

Further actions being looked into include:

- A review of the Equality & Diversity Policy, Governance Framework and terms of reference for each group that underpins, ensuring they have easy access to the Strategic Equality Leadership Group
- Developing a corporate response to the latest Staff Survey results, with a particular focus on understanding and improving levels of satisfaction for staff who present with a disability
- Disability Awareness training to be made available for Senior Leaders Network and all member of groups in the Equality & Diversity Governance Framework.
- Embed independent observers into recruitment practices to increase the diversity of the workforce
- Standardised equality & diversity questions to be mandatory for every interview
- A review of the Equalities Footprint.
- Review capacity to properly implement the actions with the E&D Communications Plan.

A separate report on progress with E&D is being prepared and presented to Cabinet as part of end of year progress reports.

Culture and Governance

Recommendation	Update
<p>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.</p>	<p>The Council has a People Strategy developed in 2019 designed around principles of putting our colleagues' experience at the heart of everything we do; embedding our values and behaviours; working as a team, where everyone has clarity, feels enabled and recognised to do the right thing; and working in a modern working environment that is inclusive, safe, ethical and supports personal growth.</p> <p>In March 2022 an entire day, face-to-face meeting of the Senior Leaders Network focused on culture, looking at the behaviours and values as set out in the People Strategy. Attendees were supported to cascade and share learning in their teams across the Council.</p> <p>At the follow up visit, the peer team heard about the tangible benefits that were now being derived from the Council's focus on culture change, embracing of equality, diversity and inclusion and starting to mainstream both this and transformation plans into the Council's</p>

	<p>'Business as Usual' way of doing things – all of which are key aspects of an improvement plan and response to the original peer challenge. The appointment of a Director of Marketing and Communications, since the first CPC, has been a significant catalyst for change, and the delivery of more effective internal communications is reflected in the culture change work.</p> <p>A more formal approach has been developed to identify the key measures that will change the culture which will be led by the Chief Executive, supported by the Director of Marketing and Communications and the Head of HR&OD.</p> <p>The People Strategy will be reviewed in 2023 and a clear programme of deliverables will be developed for the journey towards our target culture of embedding our values and behaviours and ensuring that all staff are familiar with the golden thread and the expectations of them as employees of BCP Council. This needs to be underpinned with regular feedback to colleagues to ensure visibility of positive cultural implementation at all levels and all across the Council.</p>
<p>Provide a development programme for both members and officers to improve joint working and a better understanding of respective roles and responsibilities.</p>	<p>The Monitoring Officer and Head of Democratic Services delivered a series of comprehensive training sessions to all councillors on the LGA Model Code of Conduct, the last session of which was on 6 January 2022. This reaffirmed the Nolan Principles of Public Life, set out the changes to the Code of Conduct and the expectations of councillor behaviour.</p> <p>The Monitoring Officer also delivered a report on decision-making to CMB and worked with Corporate Directors to raise awareness and articulate defined roles.</p> <p>A workshop with the Chair of Standards took place in April 2022 at which officers planned a further programme of awareness raising and training.</p> <p>Training sessions were held in March 2023 for all report authors on report writing skills with the aim of improving the content of reports and thus enabling decision-makers to make more informed decisions.</p> <p>A full Member Induction Programme was developed for the post-election period from May 2023. This provides a comprehensive programme for both existing and new councillors covering all introductions to service areas, key information regarding decision-making, code of conduct and behavioural expectations, and specialist committee training. A Virtual Councillors Resource Room has been established via SharePoint/Teams to which a recording of each session has been uploaded together with the slides and handouts. This has been very welcomed by councillors and will be expanded to include other useful resources (e.g. forms, guidance, policies).</p>

	<p>The Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report is being presented to each of the existing Overview and Scrutiny Committees during May and June 2023 for consideration and comment. The final report will be presented to full Council in July 2023. The report includes specific references to the Peer Review and proposes a range of actions to be taken to strengthen scrutiny to better align with the statutory guidance.</p> <p>In addition to the above, the Council has also adopted (as of March 2023) the LGA 'Debate Not Hate' campaign promoting civility in public life. The 'Debate Not Hate' branding is being promoted in Council democracy publications (e.g. agenda for meetings) and in the Induction and Training slides relating to decision-making and code of conduct.</p>
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.	<p>From the peer team's perspective, establishing a distinct BCP culture and set of behaviours is progressing well – albeit that this now needs wider and richer staff engagement. It struck the peer team that this is now starting to establish a far more coherent foundation for the Council's future organisational development plans, and this should be something it continues to build upon.</p> <p>Since the formation of BCP Council, annual staff satisfaction/ engagement surveys have been conducted including a Wellbeing survey. Directors Strategy Group and Senior Leaders Network have had workshops to develop a corporate action plan in response to the annual staff engagement surveys. Corporate Management Board (CMB) have also been monitoring improvement with staff engagement quarterly through the corporate action plan.</p> <p>An internal communications delivery and improvement plan is being implemented which has included regular staff update sessions from CMB with some of these being face-to-face.</p> <p>Plans to improve staff engagement moving forward include the introduction of an Engagement Index at service level to be monitored through bi-annual surveys. Directors will also be provided with toolkits and action plans to identify actions from staff feedback.</p> <p>The Council's approach to internal communications, and in particular the level of resources available to support the Council's ambitions in this area, are being reviewed.</p>

Financial Planning and Management

Recommendation	Update
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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.

Following the Peer Challenge in November 2021, a robust budget for 2022/23 and medium-term financial plan (MTFP) was issued and approved by Cabinet and Council in February 2022. This included a statutory Section 25 report by the Chief Financial Officer (CFO) which identified a number of risks contained within the budget and drew these to councillors' attention.

Residents were engaged as part of the budget-setting process for 2023/24 and the results were considered alongside the budget report. In February 2023, a balanced budget for 2023/24 and MTFP was presented and approved by Cabinet and Council aimed at protecting essential services for residents whilst ensuring a secure financial position for the future of BCP Council.

Key risks within the budget are monitored regularly which has included monthly reviews of the Council's financial position and key financial indicators continue with the Leader, Chief Executive, CFO and relevant budget holder and Portfolio Holders.

From a governance perspective the Council's ongoing financial monitoring has been sound, with monthly monitoring reports to Cabinet replacing the normal quarterly budget monitoring with each such report being subject to pre-Cabinet scrutiny monitoring.

Transformation Programme

Recommendation	Update
<p>Realign the transformation programme from an IT process driven approach to one that is culture led.</p>	<p>The Organisational Design & Operating Model element of the Transformation Programme was, to begin, technically focussed for very good reasons, i.e. the nature of the operational and service issues faced by the Council as a consequence of the Local Government Reorganisation journey. Without this emphasis and investment in the organisational context and ways of working any attempt to materially change the culture of the organisation would not have been sustainable.</p> <p>Culture is changing as result of the Transformation Programme, we have new flexible ways of working, constantly listening to staff feedback about how things are working and how we can make them better.</p> <p>The progress of the Estates & Accommodation elements of the programme, have focused on the softer elements of the transformation in a way that is aligned with and complementary to the redesigned capabilities that the Organisational Design & Operating Model has given the</p>

Council. We have a single set of values and behaviours that we all work to. This will help us become a single, connected organisation, thinking and working as one to deliver services for our vibrant communities.