

**13 March 2019**

**Agenda Item: 6**

## **REPORT OF SERVICE DIRECTOR FOR FINANCE, INFRASTRUCTURE & IMPROVEMENT**

### **LOCAL GOVERNMENT ASSOCIATION CORPORATE PEER CHALLENGE**

#### **Purpose of the Report**

1. To seek Committee's approval of a proposed scope for a Peer Challenge by the Local Government Association (LGA) in 2019.

#### **Information**

2. At the meeting on 6 November 2018, Members raised the suggestion of a Corporate Peer Challenge in 2019 and it was resolved to refer this to the Council's Corporate Leadership Team (CLT) for further consideration. The suggestion was discussed and supported by CLT, and this report now seeks Committee's input to shape the proposed scope for the review.
3. Peer Challenge is a core element of the LGA sector-led improvement offer to local authorities and is widely regarded as a tried, tested and trusted tool to support improvement. Peer Challenges are managed and delivered **by** the sector and **for** the sector. They are improvement focused, with the scope agreed with, rather than imposed upon, councils. This enables councils to shape reviews to reflect local needs and specific requirements. The peer team will comprise elected members and officers from across the sector and beyond.
4. The LGA encourages all councils to take up a Peer Challenge every 4-5 years. This Council's last Peer Challenge was in July 2012, with details of the findings and the Council's response [published](#) in September 2012. Feedback received from colleagues at that time was of a positive experience engaging with peers from other local authorities who understood local government.

#### **Key considerations for scoping**

5. The Peer Challenge process is intended to be proportionate, minimising the burden rather than making unnecessary demands that absorb capacity and divert attention from other priorities.

6. The focus of the Peer Challenge is typically pitched at a broad organisational level. The LGA would not expect it to include in-depth service reviews, since this would duplicate other services they provide. However, it can include a service specific element. Recent examples of this have been the following:
- Surrey County Council (March 2017) - the emphasis was on children's social care performance and demand management across a range of council services as a result of demographic change
  - Gloucestershire County Council (June 2018) – a strong focus on the Council's response to its 'Inadequate' Ofsted rating in 2017
  - Staffordshire County Council (September 2018) – the review centred on the Council's transformation programme for children's services and its arrangements for managing demand in this area.
7. There is significant flexibility to enable the Peer Challenge to focus on those priorities, outcomes and ambitions which are important locally. The Council's previous peer review focused on the following areas:
- strategic planning process
  - performance management arrangements
  - transformation and improvement programme
8. Current Peer Challenge reviews are typically comprised of the following core components:
- a) Understanding of the local place and priority setting: Does the council understand its local context and place and use that to inform a clear vision and set of priorities?
  - b) Leadership of Place: Does the council provide effective leadership of place through its elected members, officers and constructive relationships and partnerships with external stakeholders?
  - c) Organisational leadership and governance: Is there effective political and managerial leadership supported by good governance and decision-making arrangements that respond to key challenges and enable change and transformation to be implemented?
  - d) 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?
  - e) Capacity to deliver: Is organisational capacity aligned with priorities and does the council influence, enable and leverage external capacity to focus on agreed outcomes?

Early discussion with the LGA representatives confirmed that the above components will adequately cover the Council's framework for an integrated approach to strategic and financial planning and performance reporting. This was a particular area of interest for CLT:

## **Timeframes and conduct of the review**

9. The Peer Review is scheduled to take place in week commencing 3<sup>rd</sup> June 2019. Prior to this, a scoping meeting will be held, involving a visit by LGA representatives to discuss the council's needs, the areas on which it wants to concentrate and the results it wants to achieve.

10. The Council also has the opportunity to shape the team that it would like to visit. Discussions to date have confirmed the following lead members of the team:
- Baroness Jane Scott, Leader at Wiltshire County Council
  - John Henderson, Chief Executive at Staffordshire County Council
- Other members of the team will be agreed with the LGA. It is expected the Peer Challenge will involve four days on-site.
11. Feedback from the review team is typically provided on a daily basis to the Leader and Chief Executive at an evening debrief, to manage the process and facilitate a 'no surprises' approach. The end outcome of the review can be flexible to the Council's needs. The previous review included:
- Member to Leader feedback
  - Lead Peer to Chief Executive feedback
  - Verbal feedback session in the Rufford Suite
  - Written summary
12. It is best practice to publish any written summary, although not a requirement. For the Council to gain value from the process it would be expected to produce and implement an action plan to address any issues identified and accepted from the Peer Review. The Improvement and Change Sub-Committee will be well placed to performance manage delivery against this, along with the Council's Extended Corporate Leadership Team.

## **Costs**

13. There is no direct charge for the Peer Challenge. Indirect costs for the review team can be met from a budget held by the Office of the Chief Executive.

## **Other Options Considered**

14. There is flexibility offered by the LGA in scoping the Peer Challenge. CLT considered that the standard, core components set out above will deliver the assurance it is looking for from the review.

## **Reason for Recommendation**

15. To seek the Committee's views on the scope for the Peer Challenge, to enable the arrangements for the review to be finalised with the LGA.

## **Statutory and Policy Implications**

16. This report has been compiled after consideration of implications in respect of crime and disorder, data protection and information governance finance, human resources, human rights, the NHS Constitution (public health services), the public sector equality duty, safeguarding of children and adults at risk, service users, smarter working, sustainability and the environment and where such implications are material they are described below. Appropriate consultation has been undertaken and advice sought on these issues as required.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

1) That Committee agrees the proposed scope for the Peer Challenge, as set out above in the report.

**Nigel Stevenson**  
**Service Director for Finance, Infrastructure & Improvement**

**For any enquiries about this report please contact:**

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### **Constitutional Comments (SLB 28/02/2019)**

17. Governance and Ethics Committee is the appropriate body to consider the content of this report.

### **Financial Comments (SES 01/03/19)**

18. The financial implications are set out in paragraph 13 of the report.

### **Background Papers and Published Documents**

Except for previously published documents, which will be available elsewhere, the documents listed here will be available for inspection in accordance with Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972.

- None

### **Electoral Division(s) and Member(s) Affected**

- All