

EBC response to Peer Challenge Recommendations

	Recommendation	Response
1	Re-consider staffing structures, job titles, and pay. Align resources to core business and key priorities, supporting and developing staff with more training opportunities including apprenticeships.	Initial discussions have taken place with LGA. Working to amend job descriptions - moving away from specialist advisor / senior specialist advisor roles. Also looking at corporate back-office functions and numbers. Continued focus on training and development, detailing the number of opportunities on offer including apprenticeships which are available to existing as well as new staff and can result in qualifications from the same level as GCSE's through to bachelors or master's degrees.
2	Create strategic frameworks to guide the delivery of key priorities and empower middle management to deliver them.	A variety of strategies have been introduced to address these key priority areas, with involvement of middle managers. External consultant in final stages of assessing catering and conference offering in Devonshire Quarter. Plans underway to transfer theatres to a Local Authority Controlled Company in advance of potential Trust model. Opportunities being considered to get operators to take on services where more appropriate for private sector to run e.g. Pavilion/Glass House, Helen Garden.
3	Invest in improved ICT (including mobile working solutions), back-office systems, and automation, with a focus on service delivery to ensure tools are fit for purpose.	Continuing to review and align ICT systems through the Digital Transformation programme of the Recovery & Stabilisation portfolio. A range of projects are in progress to update the ICT systems used by the council e.g., replacing revenues/benefits with single system in autumn 2023. Project to replace the 2 Planning systems with single system started in Jan 2023. Considering further investment in improved mobile working solutions. The Artificial Intelligence and robotics project is maximising benefits of existing technology and exploring opportunities for further automation. Business case on next phase of chat bot - ELLIS - on the phones, is being finalised.
4	The peer challenge team strongly recommends revising the members allowance from the very low base in time for the new municipal term, taking	EBC considered the Independent Remuneration Panel (IRP) recommendation at full Council in Feb 2023. It was resolved not to accept the

	onboard the views on the Independent Panels.	recommendations this side of the election and instead reconvene a new IRP, following May, for consideration in November 2023.
5	Improve cross-department communications and joint working. Create opportunities for staff to meet in person and across teams	Following the discussion at the Senior Managers Forum in February, an Internal Communications Working Group has been created to lead the implementation of the new Internal Communications Strategy. The first meeting of the group was held on 24 April 2023.
6	Continue to closely monitor the finances and consider a longer-term approach to financial planning.	A new fully integrated business and financial planning process has been devised and will be delivered this year, addressing both revenue and capital requirements in a joined-up way. Training for Senior Managers Forum will be delivered in June. The Medium-Term Financial plan also now shows a detailed 4-year position more strongly than previously.
7	More use of financial scenarios to evaluate the impact of inflationary pressures, cost of living and increased borrowing costs.	This will be considered, and awareness created at the Senior Managers Forum in June to ensure relevant data/info are provided when writing future reports and for future business plans.
8	Undertake an asset review to ensure assets contribute and align to core services, key priorities and have a demonstrable value. Re-evaluate the cost of upcoming projects and returns on investment.	The capital programme now only contains items which address health and safety issues, or which help us to maintain financial stability. A further review of assets which may be disposed of in the longer term is now also taking place.
9	Demonstrate commitment to the key corporate priority of sustainability and carbon neutrality by assigning a suitable budget to ensure delivery.	Commitment to this corporate priority remains for 2023/24 and activity to deliver the corporate climate action plans. Regular meetings with members and climate change panel (outside of the pre-election period) to ensure this work remains on track. £500,000 allocated in HRA to sustainability. Officers working on a sustainability programme. A green consultancy team has been established to progress carbon reduction initiatives. The revised Corporate Plans will also focus on this area.
10	Housing Delivery Tests have not been met and the Local Plans are still under development and have been delayed due to external issues. Addressing this	The Council has published a revised Local Development Scheme (agreed/endorsed by Cabinet) which gives new milestones for the delivery of the

	needs to be a priority so the councils retain control over the local planning and place making, which will be essential to meet their ambitious goals.	Local Plans. Cabinet has agreed to support financially (with a dedicated payment) the delivery of the evidence to support the Local Plan Production.
11	Ongoing evaluation of investments, commercial activities, and the capital programme in the current challenging economic context	Phase 2 of the Recovery and Stabilization Programme will continue to look at this as a priority. CMT reviewing the need for a commercial strategy/framework for the council.
12	Conduct a self-assessment against the CIPFA assurance review to help the organisation move forward.	Self-assessment work completed as recommended. CIPFA carried out a follow up light touch re-assessment in April 2023. Outcome awaited.
13	Continued work on financial resilience focussing on adequacy of reserves.	This was set out in the budget report for 23/24. It was demonstrated how Recovery and Stabilisation will ensure the council has the ability to maintain adequate reserves.