

Report to:	Cabinet
Date:	13 June 2023
Title:	LGA Peer Challenge
Report of:	Robert Cottrill, Chief Executive
Cabinet member:	Councillor Stephen Holt, Leader of the Council
Ward(s):	All
Purpose of report:	To consider the report provided by the Local Government Association (LGA) and the council's response to the recommendations
Decision type:	Non-key
Officer recommendation(s):	To note the Local Government Association report and the council's response to its recommendations
Reasons for recommendations:	The LGA report is intended to provide the council with suggestions and advice that may help support future improvement.
Contact Officer(s):	Name: Jo Harper Post title: Head of Business Planning and Performance E-mail: jo.harper@lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk Telephone number: 07925 893201

1 Introduction

- 1.1 A Local Government Association (LGA) Corporate Peer Challenge (CPC) is designed to be a tool to aid council improvement. It is not a mandatory process, but councils are encouraged to undertake a CPC every 5 years to provide a 'practitioner perspective' and 'critical friend' challenge to help support their improvement journey.
- 1.2 EBC undertook a CPC in September 2022, which was completed jointly with Lewes District Council. The CPC took place over one week, engaging a team from the LGA together with peer partners from various councils. The team was made up of;
- Cllr Rowena Hay, Leader, Cheltenham District Council (Liberal Democrat Member Peer)
 - Cllr Martin Fodor, Bristol (Independent Member Peer)

Rob Weaver, Chief Executive (Cotswolds District Council Chief Executive Peer)

- Andrew Jarrett, Deputy Chief Executive and S151 Officer, Mid Devon District Council (Senior Officer Peer)
- Emily Bolton, Climate Crisis Strategy Manager, Cambridgeshire (Officer Peer)
- Mia Shelton (LGA Shadow Peer)
- Angela Kawa (LGA Peer Challenge Manager)

2 The Corporate Peer Challenge

2.1 Ahead of the review, the team were provided with a comprehensive set of documentation which provided background information about the council and how it operates. This enabled them to come to the process well informed about the two councils and how we operate together. During the CPC the team carried out interviews with a large number of individuals and groups, including officers, members and partners, to gain a full picture of the councils' operations. Over the week on site, 44 meetings and 10 focus groups were held.

2.2 The LGA use a standard methodology for their CPCs. This looks at 5 key themes,

1. Local priorities and outcomes - Are the council's priorities clear and informed by the local context? Is the council delivering effectively on its priorities?

2. Organisational and place leadership - Does the council provide effective local leadership? Are there good relationships with partner organisations and local communities?

3. Governance and culture - Are there clear and robust governance arrangements? Is there a culture of challenge and scrutiny?

4. Financial planning and management - Does the council have a grip on its current financial position? Does the council have a strategy and a plan to address its financial challenges?

5. Capacity for improvement - Is the organisation able to support delivery of local priorities? Does the council have the capacity to improve?

In addition, the council asked that the CPC also considered its approach to **sustainability and net zero**.

2.3 The full results of the CPC are set out at appendix 1. In particular, members may wish to focus on the executive summary which reads;

"The Chief Executive and senior management team of the councils are well-respected. Partners and staff consistently gave this feedback for both councils during interviews. The peer challenge team found that the political leadership of both councils provide clear direction and leadership for their areas. The political leaders at both councils are well-respected by partners and have good working relationships with them. There is very strong partnership working at both councils. Local organisations, other public sector bodies and voluntary groups

see the councils as a 'trusted partner'. The peer challenge team met with staff at both councils and found the staff to be hard-working. The peer challenge team also saw evidence that staff have delivered for the local areas during a very difficult period whilst dealing with the Covid-19 pandemic."

2.4 It is encouraging to see that many positive comments were made about the council, its staff, its members and how it interacts with its partners throughout the report. The council was found to be demonstrating good performance against the 5 criteria used by the Peer team. Particular comments were made about the councils' effective delivery of services, and how we 'make things happen'.

2.5 However, as would be expected, a number of recommendations were made where it was felt the council could further improve. These recommendations were given informal endorsement by the Leader prior to the election. Cabinet is now asked to note these recommendations, many of which have already been responded to in full by the council. The recommendations are set out at part of the appended report (appendix 1).

3 Next Steps

3.1 As indicated above, officers have already taken steps to start to address many of the recommendations in the report. Indeed, in some instances, the recommendations have already been fully acted upon. Progress in responding to the action plan is set out at appendix 2.

3.2 As part of the CPC process, it is usual practice for the LGA to provide a follow up 'check in' session. This usually takes place around 6 months on from the initial Challenge session, but due to borough elections and other factors this has been slightly delayed, and this is now scheduled to take place in July 2023. The follow up will enable the council to update the Peer team on progress made since their initial visit.

4 Consultation

4.1 Throughout the CPC process staff, members and partners have been kept informed of progress. In particular, in the lead up to the challenge event in September 2022, there was regular information provided to staff to prepare them for the visit. Now the CPC report has been received, further consultation and engagement with staff, members and where appropriate with partners, has been, and will be, undertaken to share the findings and help shape the resultant improvement activities.

5 Corporate plan and council policies

5.1 The CPC assessed the council's progress against its corporate plan alongside other considerations. No specific issues arose relating to this. However, it was noted by the Peer Team that the council may benefit from developing more formalised strategies around tourism and economic development.

6 Financial appraisal

- 6.1 There are no immediate financial implications arising directly from this report, other than staff time. Where decisions are taken as part of the action plan regarding the Peer Challenge recommendations, these will be subject to appropriate financial appraisal and addressed through the Council's Budget/Medium Term Financial Plan as required.

7 Legal implications

- 7.1 There are no legal implications arising out of this report. The council has voluntarily taken part in the review and is taking forward recommendations as a matter of good practice.

[012063-JOINT-KS 15th May 2023]

8 Risk management implications

- 8.1 Although not a mandatory requirement for councils, the LGA Peer Challenge is very much encouraged. The results can be very helpful to the continuous improvement of the council. If the council were not to participate in this process, there is a risk that it might miss out on opportunities to improve.

9 Equality analysis

- 9.1 Equality and fairness were a key consideration in the CPC process, as can be seen in the report at appendix 1.

10 Environmental sustainability implications

- 10.1 The CPC focused, at the council's request, particularly on sustainability. As a result, an improvement action relating to this was included in the action plan.

11 Appendices

- Appendix 1 – LGA Corporate Peer Challenge – Feedback Report
- Appendix 2 – EBC response to recommendations

12 Background papers

The background papers used in compiling this report were as follows:

- None