

OPEN

Corporate Policy Committee

21 August 2024

Corporate Peer Challenge Action Plan

Report of: Karen Wheeler – Interim Director of Policy and Change

Report Reference No: CP/30/24-25

Ward(s) Affected: All

Purpose of Report

- 1 To provide Corporate Policy Committee with the latest draft Corporate Peer Challenge action plan for comment in response to the Local Government Association's (LGA) report and recommendations.
- 2 To note and comment on the feedback from the Assurance Panel on 9 August which will be fully considered in order for the Chief Executive to finalise the action plan and arrange for its publication by 28 August 2024, as required by the LGA.

Executive Summary

- 3 Cheshire East Council invited the LGA to undertake a Corporate Peer Challenge in March 2024. Following a Corporate Peer Challenge, a report outlining the key findings and recommendations is shared with the council and is required to be published. [Cheshire East's report](#) was published on the council and LGA websites on Monday 8 July 2024 and reported to Full Council on 17 July.
- 4 Councils are required to develop and publish an action plan addressing the recommendations in the report within five months of the peer team being onsite so no later than 28 August 2024. The action plan in response to the 18 recommendations within the report is at Appendix 1.
- 5 The draft action plan was presented to Full Council on 17 July 2024. The draft plan was agreed in principle with delegated authority to the Chief Executive to finalise the plan.

- 6 The plan has been updated to reflect feedback from Members through the briefings held prior to Council in July as well as from officers. The action plan was also considered by the newly established independent Assurance Panel on 9 August.
- 7 Delivery of the Corporate Peer Challenge action plan is one of four critical improvement and transformation priorities requiring a council-wide response at this time, the others being ensuring financial sustainability, organisation wide transformation and Children's Services improvement.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Committee is recommended to:

1. Note and comment on the draft Corporate Peer Challenge Action Plan and feedback from the Assurance Panel.
2. Note that the Chief Executive will finalise the Corporate Peer Challenge Action Plan taking account of the Assurance Panel's feedback and publish the plan by 28 August 2024 as required by the LGA and in line with the delegated authority from Full Council in July 2024.

Background

- 8 Cheshire East Council invited the LGA to undertake a Corporate Peer Challenge in March 2024. The peer team, made up of cross-party Members and officers from other councils and representatives of the LGA, were onsite from 25-28 March 2024.
- 9 The peer team considered the following five themes which form the core components of all Corporate Peer Challenges, and are key to councils' performance and improvement:
 - Local priorities and outcomes
 - Organisational and place leadership
 - Governance and culture
 - Financial planning and management
 - Capacity for improvement
- 10 Following a Corporate Peer Challenge, a report outlining the key findings and recommendations from the peer team is shared with the

council and is required to be published. Cheshire East's report was published on the council and LGA websites on Monday 8 July 2024.

- 11 The peer team heard examples of good services that are appreciated by residents and that there is a willingness for improvement which is seen as a priority across the organisation. However, they also recognised that the council urgently needs to focus on significant challenges, including the financial position and longer-term transformation.
- 12 The report includes 18 recommendations which have been prioritised by the peer team on the grounds of urgency, sequencing, and importance.
- 13 Councils are required to develop and publish an action plan addressing the recommendations in the report within five months of the peer team being onsite so no later than 28 August 2024. The action plan is at Appendix 1 and progress is being made at pace in many areas.
- 14 The action plan also includes two additional actions relating to Children's Services improvement while not specific recommendations are significant issues referenced within the report and which the council is taking action to address closely linked to the overall transformation programme.
- 15 The draft action plan was presented to Full Council on 17 July 2024. The draft plan was agreed in principle with delegated authority to the Chief Executive to finalise the plan and arrange for its publication by 28 August 2024, as required by the LGA.
- 16 The plan has been updated to reflect feedback from Members through the briefings held prior to Council in July as well as from officers through the Wider Leadership Community. The Committee is invited to make any further comments on the draft plan. Updates since Council include:
 - Recommendation 2 - Updates to the actions related to the senior management structure to align with the report to Full Council on the timeline for decisions and recruitment
 - Recommendation 4 - Inclusion of the programme and change management action
 - Recommendation 5 – Updates to actions related to officer values and behaviours, competency framework and staff survey action plan to provide additional detail
 - Recommendation 6 – Addition of an action to refresh the council's Customer Experience Strategy

- Recommendation 11 – Addition of an action to ensure Member briefings on key topics ahead of Committee/Council meetings where appropriate
 - Recommendation 14 – Addition of Members/officers working together/roles and responsibilities, risk and assurance, safeguarding and equality, diversity and inclusion to the training programme
 - Recommendation 14 – Addition of engagement in internal cross-council opportunities for officers to support breakdown of silos
 - Recommendation 14 – Addition of separate action for leadership and management development programme
 - Recommendation 16 – Addition of an action to refresh the internal communication and engagement strategy
- 17 While many of the actions in the plan have responsible officers identified from Corporate Services, Corporate Leadership Team, the wider organisation and Members, have a critical role to play in its delivery.
- 18 Delivery of the Corporate Peer Challenge action plan is one of four critical improvement and transformation priorities requiring a council-wide response at this time, the others being ensuring financial sustainability, organisation wide transformation and Children’s Services improvement.
- 19 The action plan was considered by the newly established independent Assurance Panel on 9 August. Key points and development areas identified by the Panel were to:
- Create a narrative that sits around the plan and articulates the outcomes that will be delivered by implementing it e.g. what will good look like
 - Consider clustering the actions around shared themes and packages of activity e.g. governance, culture
 - Avoid ‘ongoing’ as a timescale for completed actions
 - Review completion dates against capacity to deliver and priorities e.g. target operating model expected October but many actions have September timescales
 - Consider additional interim support requirements for the Chief Executive to be assured of delivery at pace
 - Actively seek additional support from the LGA for Members and officers.

- 20 As far as is practical these will be included in the final plan.
- 21 Progress against delivery of the action plan will be reported to the Assurance Panel and will be central to the LGA and peer team's Progress Review expected to be completed in winter 2024.

Consultation and Engagement

- 22 The peer team spoke to approximately 165 people including a mixture of Councillors, officers, partners and residents during the peer challenge process to inform the report and recommendations.
- 23 The draft action plan was agreed in principle at Full Council in July. The plan has since been updated following further engagement with Corporate Leadership Team and the Wider Leadership Community, feedback from the two Member briefing sessions held in July and also considered by the Assurance Panel. The Committee is invited to make any further comments on the draft plan.

Reasons for Recommendations

- 24 To provide Corporate Policy Committee with the draft Corporate Peer Challenge action plan for any further feedback.
- 25 For the Committee to note and comment on the feedback from the Assurance Panel on 9 August which will be fully considered in order for the Chief Executive to finalise the action plan and arrange for its publication by 28 August 2024, as required by the LGA.

Other Options Considered

- 26 No other options considered due to the need to meet the LGA's requirements of a Corporate Peer Challenge.

Implications and Comments

Monitoring Officer/Legal

- 27 There are no legal implications arising directly from this report and whilst there is no statutory requirement to undertake a peer review the LGA Corporate Peer Challenge is seen as a valuable improvement and assurance tool.
- 28 The action plan contains proposed activity to improve governance and compliance, which will require advice and support from both Legal and Democratic Services as the final plan is confirmed and during implementation.

Section 151 Officer/Finance

- 29 There are no direct financial implications arising from this report. The action plan contains activity to address the council's serious financial situation, many of which are already actively in progress. Addressing the Corporate Peer Challenge recommendations through delivery of the action plan will be an important part of demonstrating the council's compliance with Best Value principles.

Policy

- 30 No direct impact. Addressing the recommendations will support the delivery of the council's overall vision and aims within the Cheshire East Plan 2024/25 and support the development of the Corporate Plan 2025 onwards.

An open and enabling organisation.	A council which empowers and cares about people.	A thriving and sustainable place.
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Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

- 31 No direct impact. The report recognises the importance of equality, diversity and inclusion and need to ensure the council supports and embeds this agenda.

Human Resources

- 32 No direct impact. The report and action plan makes reference to work to ensure capacity and capability for change and improvement.

Risk Management

- 33 No direct impact. The action plan contains proposed activity to further ensure effective risk management.

Rural Communities

- 34 No direct impact.

Children and Young People including Cared for Children, care leavers and Children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)

- 35 No direct impact. The action plan includes additional actions relating to Children's Services improvement while not specific recommendations in the Corporate Peer Challenge report are significant issues referenced within the report which the council is taking action to address.

Public Health

36 No direct impact.

Climate Change

37 No direct impact.

Access to Information	
Contact Officer:	Karen Wheeler, Interim Director of Policy and Change karen.wheeler@cheshireeast.gov.uk
Appendices:	Appendix 1 – Corporate Peer Challenge Action Plan
Background Papers:	Report to Full Council, 17 July 2024: Productivity Plan Report CPC June 2024.docx (cheshireeast.gov.uk)