

Report to: **Council**

Date: **12 February 2019**

Title: **Peer Challenge Report**

Portfolio Area: **Leader of the Council**

Wards Affected: **All**

Urgent Decision: **N** Approval and clearance obtained: **Y**

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RECOMMENDATION

- 1. That Council endorses the recommendations set out in the Peer Challenge report attached as Appendix A;**
- 2. That Council agrees to form a Member/Officer Working Group, jointly with South Hams District Council, with delegated authority being given to the Leader of the Council to nominate the Member representatives for West Devon Borough Council; and**
- 3. That the draft action plan be presented to Hub Committee for approval at its meeting on 19 March 2019 with responsibility for the ongoing monitoring of progress against the action plan being allocated to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.**

1. Executive summary

- 1.1 All Councils are able to access a fully funded sector-led Corporate Peer Challenge every 4 to 5 years.
- 1.2 The Council requested that the Local Government Association ("LGA") undertake a Peer Challenge of West Devon Borough

Council and South Hams District Council in order to identify their strengths and any areas for improvement.

- 1.3 A team from the LGA spent 4 days on site during November 2018 during which time they spoke to more than 115 people including Council staff Councillors, external partners and stakeholders.
- 1.4 The week concluded with the Peer Team presenting their initial findings to Councillors and staff.
- 1.5 This report sets out a summary of the Peer Team's findings and sets out what happens next with regard to developing an action plan for considering and implementing the Peer Team's recommendations.

2. Background

- 2.1 The Council last commissioned an LGA Peer Challenge in October 2012 prior to the implementation of the current operating model (known as T18).
- 2.2 Corporate Peer Challenges are fully funded and have been designed to assist the continuous improvement approach adopted across local government. The Peer Challenge programme is sector-led (delivered by local government colleagues and Members from other local authorities).
- 2.3 It is recommended that councils undertake a Peer Challenge every 4-5 years. As the Councils' new operating model has been implemented and embedded over the last four years, now was the right time to commission a Peer Challenge.
- 2.4 As the Council shares services with South Hams District Council, the Peer Challenge was a joint review but with individual recommendations for the Governance and Political element of the Council.
- 2.5 The Peer Challenge core components are:-
 - 2.5.1 Understanding of the local place and priority setting
 - 2.5.2 Leadership of Place
 - 2.5.3 Organisational leadership and governance
 - 2.5.4 Financial planning and viability
 - 2.5.5 Capacity to deliver
- 2.6 In addition to the core components, we specifically asked the Peer Challenge to focus on:
 - 2.6.1 Options to secure the financial sustainability of the two Councils
 - 2.6.2 Resource pressures for both Councils and the implication for the delivery of non-statutory services
 - 2.6.3 Proposed plans for investment and commercial delivery
 - 2.6.4 The extent to which the Council has embraced the use of e-technology
 - 2.6.5 Ability to deliver economic growth and housing
 - 2.6.6 Working arrangements of elected Members across the two Councils and how these may be improved

- 2.7 Ahead of the Peer Challenge, the Council provided the Peer Team with a self-assessment of our current position which contained key facts, figures and background information for both Councils.
- 2.8 During the 4 days on site, the Peer Challenge Team met with more than 115 stakeholders including:
- Elected Members
 - Staff & the Leadership Team
 - Town and Parish Councils
 - Partner organisations
 - Members of the public
- 2.9 Overall, 260 hours of interviews and assessment have been brought together into a report setting out the Peer Challenge Team's findings and recommendations (Appendix A – Peer Challenge Report).

3 Options available and consideration of risk.

- 3.1 The Peer Challenge Report provides a positive endorsement of the resilience and dedication of Members and Officers in implementing the current operating model. It also highlights exemplar pieces of work such as the Joint Local Plan and the recent Leisure and Waste procurements.
- 3.2 The Report does set out a number of observations and recommendations for the Council to consider.
- 3.2.1 Ensure there is both sufficient strategic capacity and direction to enable the Councils to effectively plan for and deliver their aspirations into the medium term
- 3.2.2 Strengthen the Councils' political governance arrangements
- 3.2.3 Ensure there is a continued organisational focus on achieving financial sustainability
- 3.2.4 Prepare a viable accommodation strategy for future service delivery
- 3.2.5 Clarify partnership priorities and seek to strengthen key sub-regional partnerships
- 3.2.6 Clarify what new IT solutions are required for the future
- 3.3 It is important to note that the Council is already taking steps to implement actions which will address many of the Peer Team's recommendations:
- 3.3.1 A review of the Senior Leadership and Extended Leadership structure has commenced with the intention that a revised structure is implemented within 6 months of the new Council
- 3.3.2 The Council is already developing Corporate Theme delivery plans with drafts being considered at Member workshops in February and the final plans being considered in May/June 2019

- 3.3.3 A robust Member induction programme has been approved, with ongoing Member training and support being a core focus
- 3.3.4 Accommodation Strategy proposals for the Council are being developed for consideration by the Hub Committee in March 2019
- 3.3.5 Project plan for the future IT platform is in development with an external assessment of requirements due to be undertaken in March 2019
- 3.4 In addition to the recommendations above, the Peer Review report clearly sets out that restarting joint working between the two Councils should be a focus for the coming months. As the Peer Review was a joint report, with some joint recommendations, it is recommended that a joint Member and officer group develops a detailed action plan for approval by each Council and with ongoing monitoring by the Overview & Scrutiny function.
- 3.5 It is proposed that the Group includes provision for six elected Members (three Members from each Council) and, in the event of South Hams District Council also approving this proposal at its meeting on 21 February 2019, it is then recommended that the Leader of Council be given delegated authority to nominate the Council's three Member representatives

4 Proposed Way Forward

- 4.1 To develop a joint action plan with South Hams District Council to address the recommendations of the Peer Challenge Team for consideration by the Hub Committee in March 2019 through a joint working group of Members and officers.
- 4.2 Provide quarterly update reports on progress against the action plan to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
- 4.3 Arrange an LGA Peer review follow up visit to take place, no later than the end of 2020 to assess progress made against the recommendations in the Peer Challenge Report.

5. Implications

Implications	Relevant to proposals Y/N	
Legal/Governance	Y	There are no direct legal implications to this report but any Constitutional changes that are proposed in the action plan will be brought back to Members.
Financial	N	There are no direct financial implications to this report.

Risk	Y	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. That the report is not adequately considered to assist in our continuous improvement activities <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Sufficient time needs to be provided to enable consideration of the recommendations and develop an action plan 2. The process is not considered to have been worthwhile <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Follow up with all individuals that took part in the process and share the recommendations with them b. Public engagement through press release with key findings c. Ensure resulting action plan also made publically available 3. Insufficient resources to deliver action plan <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Prioritisation of resources through programme board / SLT
Comprehensive Impact Assessment Implications		
Equality and Diversity	N	None
Safeguarding	N	None
Community Safety, Crime and Disorder	N	None
Health, Safety and Wellbeing	N	None
Other implications	N	None

Supporting Information

Appendix A – Peer Challenge report and recommendations