

Report to: **Executive**

Date: **6 June 2024**

Title: **Corporate Peer Challenge 2024**

Portfolio Area: **Cllr Julian Brazil**
Leader South Hams District Council

Wards Affected: **All**

Author: **Andy Bates** Role: **Chief Executive**

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RECOMMENDATIONS:

That the Executive:

- 1. NOTES the positive assessment of South Hams District Council provided in the Local Government Association’s feedback report following the Peer Challenge in March 2024.**
- 2. ENDORSES the recommendations set out in the report and the proposal to collaborate with partners and key stakeholders to develop an action plan in response to the recommendations made, with an initial draft action plan being considered at the next Executive meeting (to be held on 18 July 2024).**

1. Executive summary

- 1.1 All councils are expected to undertake a Corporate Peer Challenge every 5 years.
- 1.2 The Local Government Association (“LGA”) undertook the Peer Challenge of both South Hams District Council and our shared services partner, West Devon Borough Council in March 2024.
- 1.3 A team of sector specialists spent 4 days on site during which time they spoke to more than 100 people including councillors, external partners, managers and staff. The week concluded with the peer team presenting their initial findings, which have now been developed further in their final report for South Hams (Appendix A).
- 1.4 The next step is for the council to consider the recommendations and feedback provided and to develop an action plan in response. It is proposed, where appropriate, to develop the action plan with partners to ensure it reflects our shared ambitions and then to incorporate it into the wider Council Plan. It is intended that the

initial draft action plan will be considered by Executive at its meeting on 18 July 2024.

2. Key Findings

- 2.1 The executive summary of the report provides a very useful overview of the peer team's findings and conclusions, and which is overall extremely positive of the work the council is doing.
- 2.2 Key findings include that, **"South Hams is a high performing council, which is well led and managed and is delivering consistently well on behalf of its communities"**. There is also positive endorsement for the clear strategic direction provided by the new political administration in quickly agreeing its plans and for the inclusive approach taken by the leader to involving all political groups in the work of the council's Executive, and the positive way in which the leaders of other political groups have responded to this. The positive organisational culture exemplified by good member to member and member to officer working relationships is also highlighted.
- 2.3 The report points to the key significance of the partnership arrangements between South Hams and West Devon supported by a single workforce, and integrated systems and process, and concluded, **"it is this joint working that is at the heart of a highly productive organisation"**.
- 2.4 The peer team commented on the good organisational leadership, robust governance and an effective and established performance culture which is delivering improved outcomes, pointing to a focus by the senior officer team on professionalism, leadership, accountability and delivery and to the positive feedback staff had given on working for the council.
- 2.5 The report highlights the council's sound financial management, saying, **"The council has an excellent track record of financial management and planning, which is one of its underpinning core strengths"**
- 2.6 It also commented positively on the council's approach to partnership working and to the complimentary feedback from partner organisations, which demonstrates how well regarded the political and managerial leadership of South Hams DC are.
- 2.7 The report sets out eight recommendations for the council to build upon its solid foundations. These recommendations are:
 1. have a relentless focus on the delivery of the council plan
 2. create opportunities for your senior leadership team to focus on the key challenges and opportunities ahead

3. agree your desired approach to community development and then create a structured approach to delivery.
 4. use the opportunity provided by the new council plan to revisit your stakeholder engagement.
 5. tell your story louder – which clearly articulates both your vision for place and the impact of your activity.
 6. build upon the foundations of your new organisational development plan over the next 2 to 3 years to ensure you can meet new and emerging challenges and opportunities.
 7. develop a 4-year member development programme that maximises the input and engagement of your members.
 8. Review the role, function and purpose of advisory panels and working groups.
- 2.8 It is encouraging the above reflect areas that the leadership of the council had already assessed as requiring focus. These recommendations will form the basis for our action plan.
- 2.9 Members, officers and our partners should be rightly proud of the positive endorsement of our collective progress and working relationships and we can now continue to work together to address the recommendations of our peers.

3. Next Steps

- 3.1 The LGA expects the council to publish its report on our website by 22nd June 2024.
- 3.2 The Executive and Senior Leadership Team have already commenced steps of developing an outline action plan to address the recommendations as set out in 2.7 of this report.
- 3.3 The intention is that where it makes sense to do so, we will develop actions with our partners.
- 3.4 The outline action plan will be considered by the Executive at its meeting to be held on 18 July 2024.
- 3.5 A follow-up review by a smaller team of peers will take place in early 2025 to assess progress against the recommendations.

4. Implications

Implications	Relevant to proposals Y/N	Details and proposed measures to address
Legal/Governance		A Corporate Peer Challenge provide an opportunity for an in-depth review of the Councils governance framework. An assessment of this is included within Appendix A to this report. There are however no direct legal or governance implications.

Financial implications to include reference to value for money		The Corporate Peer Challenge considers the financial management, planning and overall Value for Money of the Council and sets out its findings within Appendix A. There are however no direct financial or value for money implications arising from this report.
Risk		The Corporate Peer Challenge considers the Councils approach to risk and opportunity management with its findings being set out within Appendix A. There are however no risk implications arising from this report.
Council Plan contribution		All
Consultation & Engagement Strategy		The Corporate Peer Challenge involved a wide range of stakeholders from elected members, officers, key partners and neighbouring local authorities.
Climate Change - Carbon / Biodiversity Impact		No climate and biodiversity impact as a result of this report.
Comprehensive Impact Assessment Implications		
Equality and Diversity		NA
Safeguarding		NA
Community Safety, Crime and Disorder		NA
Health, Safety and Wellbeing		NA
Other implications		NA

Supporting Information

Appendices:

Appendix A: - South Hams District Council Peer Challenge Report 2024

Background Papers:

None