

**WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL**  
**FINANCE AND MANAGEMENT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**  
**WEDNESDAY 3 APRIL 2019**

**CORPORATE PEER CHALLENGE – DRAFT ACTION PLAN**

**REPORT OF THE HEAD OF PAID SERVICE**

**(Contact: Dene Robson, Tel: (01993) 861481)**

**1. PURPOSE**

To consider and comment on the proposed Draft Action Plan ([Appendix](#)) formed in response to the recent Local Government Association's (LGA) Feedback Report following the Corporate Peer Challenge – the comments used to inform Cabinet's further consideration and approval of an appropriate Action Plan.

**2. RECOMMENDATION**

That the Committee comments on the LGA Corporate Peer Challenge Draft Action Plan to inform the further consideration and approval of this item at Cabinet.

**3. BACKGROUND**

- 3.1. The Council invited the Local Government Association (LGA) to conduct a Corporate Peer Challenge in 2018. A Corporate Peer Challenge provides for an external review of a Council's functioning and its ability to deliver on its plans, proposals and ambitions. The review exercise is undertaken by a team that is knowledgeable and experienced in local government. The review team acts as a "critical friend" and it produces feedback that provides a "health-check" and commentary on areas of strength and potential areas for further consideration.
- 3.2. The Corporate Peer Challenge Team gathers information from a wide range of sources and attends various meetings, whilst also conducting interviews with staff, councillors and the Council's partner organisations. The Council's performance is then reviewed in terms of a core set of assessment areas:
  - Understanding of the local place and priority setting
  - Leadership of place
  - Financial planning and viability
  - Organisational leadership and governance
  - Capacity to deliver.
- 3.3. In addition to covering the core assessment areas, the Council requested that the Peer Challenge should consider the culture of the organisation following a period of considerable change, the progress in delivering transformation plans and an external view on the operating model and the effectiveness of its governance.
- 3.4. The Council's Corporate Peer Challenge took place between 8 and 11 October 2018 and further to the initial discussion of key findings this was reported in the final Feedback Report which set out a number of key recommendations. In commenting on the Council's performance, the Feedback Report outlines a range of positive factors including the comment that the Council has strong leadership and plays an active and valued role in the wider strategic agenda. There are strong levels of councillor

engagement and staff commitment. The Council is recognised as having robust financial management and a strong financial position.

- 3.5. The Feedback Report also sets out areas where the Council could consider issues that would enhance its current approach. These include a stronger focus on effective communication (particularly around transformation); support to transformation; governance arrangements for the new Council/ Publica operating model; and better articulation of key strategic objectives in an updated Council Plan.
- 3.6. The Feedback Report was received by Cabinet at its meeting on 13 February 2019. The full Report was distributed as part of the agenda papers and is available at the link [here](#). Cabinet was recommended to note the Feedback Report and request that officers prepare a Draft Action Plan in response to the recommendations – the Draft Action Plan to be considered by Finance and Management Overview and Scrutiny Committee, prior to consideration and approval at Cabinet. The current report includes the proposed Draft Action Plan for Committee’s consideration (see [Appendix](#)).
- 3.7. The Feedback Report’s recommendations have been used to form the Draft Action Plan. The Council has made progress on a number of the areas in the period since the Corporate Peer Challenge was conducted. The purpose of the Draft Action Plan is to formalise and convert recommendations into actions in a work programme that ensures relevant issues are addressed within a given time period. Further to this, specific work areas (eg development of the Council Plan) will also be consulted on at the appropriate future time. The pursuit of the suggested actions in this report will enable the Council to support its continuous improvement and provide a suitable narrative that informs follow-up to the Peer Challenge.

#### **4. ALTERNATIVES/OPTIONS**

The Council sought a Corporate Peer Challenge and the next steps outlined in this report present the logical further stage of work to derive value from this exercise.

#### **5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

At this stage, any cost in addressing the Peer Challenge recommendations is not known. It is likely that in many cases the relevant action can be encompassed in work that will be undertaken in any case in the coming period and will not impose additional cost. Where budget or a defined staff resource is required, this will be assessed at the appropriate time as the action is planned in more detail.

#### **6. RISKS**

The Council faces a reputational risk if it does not act on the Feedback Report.

#### **7. REASONS**

The Corporate Peer Challenge provides a valuable resource that informs the Council’s future approach and it will help ensure a focus on community priorities and the continued provision of efficient and value for money services.

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Head of Paid Service

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Date: 21 March 2019

Background Papers:

None

## LGA Corporate Peer Challenge 2018 – Draft Action Plan (21 March 2019)

Recommendation	Proposed Actions	Expected Outcome	By Whom	By When	Budget Necessary
<p>I. There is a pressing need to develop the narrative around Transformation and develop a Communication and Engagement Plan to support delivery of this. This should include a clear vision for the Transformation with accompanying narrative, setting out what sort of organisation WODC and Publica will be at the end of Transformation and some outcomes by which it will be clearly measurable whether the benefits of Transformation have been delivered.</p>	<p>Governance Group (including the Group Manager for Corporate Support and Executive Director for Commissioning) to advise on addressing this recommendation (supported by Business Manager, Communications and Marketing).</p> <p>The Publica Board has adopted a communications strategy in January 2019</p> <p>Communications work to consider the further development of the narrative and understanding of transformation and the information needs of different groups (staff, members etc) as commented on in the Peer Review Report.</p> <p>The communications strategy outlines the internal and external stakeholders and how they will be engaged and the desired outcome.</p> <p>Further staff events were held in October 2018 and January 2019 to set out the narrative of the changes to Terms and Conditions and the Pay and Grading arrangements together with the scope and timeline of the transformation programme.</p> <p>Some key statements on Purpose, Vision, Positioning and the Value Proposition are being developed for agreement by partners so that we can gain a collective view on what the ambition is for Publica through transformation.</p>	<p>Communication and Engagement Plan.</p>	<p>Publica (Governance Group)</p>	<p>April 2019</p>	<p>No</p>

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<p>2. The Council / Publica need a plan setting out how it will deliver transformation, including, importantly, how it will support staff through the significant change ahead to ensure they retain their goodwill and enthusiasm and that they are able to adapt to new ways of working.</p>	<p>Governance Group to advise on this recommendation and the approach to form part of the Transformation Programme/ People Plan.</p> <p>Publica has adopted a change management strategy in November 2018 - <a href="#">here</a></p> <p>Approach to be advised and supported through ongoing involvement of the Managers Liaison Group.</p> <p>The work with the Managers Liaison Group is ongoing and they meet every month. Further information has been presented to all staff on the next steps in the transformation programme in the January 2019 staff sessions.</p> <p>A high level timeline has now been developed which sets out how and when all services will be touched by service reviews. All these service reviews are supported by the change activities set out above.</p>	<p>Transformation Programme/ People Plan to detail how transformation will be delivered and staff will be supported.</p>	<p>Publica (Governance Group)</p>	<p>April 2019</p>	<p>Part of transformation resources.</p>
<p>3. We would urge the Council to continue to seek and learn from the Transformation experiences of others within the sector.</p>	<p>The Council has and will continue to learn from others – particularly in terms of governance and the transferable lessons to be derived from the operation of local authority owned companies.</p>	<p>A programme of learning from peers (with suitable guidance from the LGA Peer Review Team) that enhances the client function.</p>	<p>Head of Paid Service, Council  Council Leader</p>	<p>June 2019</p>	<p>No</p>

Recommendation	Proposed Actions	Expected Outcome	By Whom	By When	Budget Necessary
<p>4. There is a need to ensure organisational capacity exists at a strategic level and the wider organisation so that the Council can successfully deliver transformation alongside maintaining service delivery and progressing strategic objectives. The committed group of managers as well as the wider staff cohort represent an asset and resource to the Council in this regard and should be considered in addressing this recommendation.</p>	<p>Head of Paid Service to derive a more detailed definition of the roles of Council retained staff and the consequent support required from Publica resources to achieve Council priority ambitions and effective governance.</p> <p>The Council Plan development (refer: recommendation 9) is related to the above as it should inform areas of required staff support and resourcing that relates to the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS).</p> <p>Head of Paid Service to co-ordinate a periodic check (quarterly) undertaken jointly with the Publica Executive Director (Commissioning) and Chief Finance Officer.</p> <p>Relevant information to inform periodic check:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transformation Team progress reports;</li> <li>• Service review summaries;</li> <li>• Core performance indicators;</li> <li>• Budget monitoring;</li> <li>• Ongoing consultation feedback from Managers Liaison Group – covering resilience.</li> </ul>	<p>More developed role definitions for Council retained staff and more effective linking with supporting resources within Publica.</p> <p>A more informed (and risk assessed) ongoing management of the transformation programme. This portfolio of information should give internal and external audit assurance.</p>	<p>Council and Publica</p> <p>Council Head of Paid Service</p> <p>Publica Executive Director Commissioning</p> <p>Chief Finance Officer</p>	<p>June 2019</p>	<p>Yes - to be defined as work progresses.</p>
<p>5. The Council should more rigorously assess the issues that are considered by overview and scrutiny and prioritise matters which directly contribute to the delivery of Council ambitions and priorities. This will enable the Council to ensure it is making the best use of both officer and member time – with the objective being to focus on quality of outputs rather than quantity.</p>	<p>Head of Paid Service will consider this issue and consult political leadership.</p> <p>Head of Democratic services plans to review possible sources of external training consultancy on Overview and Scrutiny (eg LGA/ SE Employers) and consider how to tailor an approach that suits the Council's requirements.</p> <p>The intended training should equip members to function effectively within the Council's Constitution.</p>	<p>A revised approach to supporting Overview and Scrutiny that enhances the focus and value of this work.</p>	<p>Council Head of Paid Service/ Head of Democratic Services</p>	<p>July – Sept. 2019</p>	<p>Yes</p>

Recommendation	Proposed Actions	Expected Outcome	By Whom	By When	Budget Necessary
<p>6. The work already underway to develop the People Plan needs to continue apace to support wider organisational priorities.</p>	<p>Production of a People Plan to a defined timetable.</p> <p>The People Plan is programmed to be complete by the end of May 2019 and a request for additional funding for a key part of this (graduate and intern programme) sent to Cabinet in March.</p>	<p>A People Plan</p>	<p>Head of Human Resources</p>	<p>May 2019</p>	<p>To be assessed.</p>
<p>7. Review and strengthen governance in relation to Publica so that it is future proofed and able to withstand the inevitable changes in key personnel that will occur at some point in the future. Particular attention should be given to the role of the Council as a part owner of Publica to ensure the Council continues to properly exercise its role on the future direction of the company; as well as the approach to strategy and commissioning, to ensure this serves the Council to best effect and clearly avoids any conflicts of interest.</p>	<p>The recommendation will be informed through our work to address related recommendations 3 and 4. The steps to be taken will be defined following completion of this supporting work</p> <p>In January 2019 the member liaison group reviewed the governance and liaison arrangements and agreed some changes to enhance the exposure of backbench Councillors to Publica updates.</p> <p>The work to respond to this item will encompass relevant action to address an external audit recommendation on the Council and Publica relationship.</p> <p>External Audit Recommendation: Formalise liaison and communication arrangements between members and Publica to ensure members have the opportunity to challenge and scrutinise Publica's performance.</p>	<p>A more developed Council client function in relation to Publica as evidenced in suitable report commentaries.</p>	<p>Council Head of Paid Service and Head of Finance</p>	<p>Sept. 2019</p>	<p>To be assessed.</p>

Recommendation	Proposed Actions	Expected Outcome	By Whom	By When	Budget Necessary
<p>8. Clarify the role and responsibility of the Head of Paid Service and the commissioning support provided to this role, so that the position can successfully fulfil the role of Lead Commissioner and ensure that what Publica delivers, fully meets WODC's needs.</p>	<p>The commissioning role of the Head of Paid Service will be better specified following the work to address recommendations 4 and 7.</p> <p>The related work to separate and revise the future professional responsibility for management of the Planning function will be advised through the Publica service review work (supported by relevant Publica Business Managers).</p> <p>The transition to revised arrangements will be reviewed and capacity further considered following the changes.</p>	<p>A more comprehensive definition of the role of the Head of Paid Service and associated staff support areas (drawing on appropriate Publica resources).</p> <p>A better articulated Council commissioning function. Management support and reporting that gives proper effect to the role.</p>	<p>Council and Publica</p> <p>Council Head of Paid Service</p> <p>Publica Executive Director Commissioning</p> <p>Chief Finance Officer</p>	<p>Sept. 2019 and then reviewed at periodic intervals after that.</p>	<p>To be assessed.</p>

Recommendation	Proposed Actions	Expected Outcome	By Whom	By When	Budget Necessary
<p>9. The development of a new Council Plan should be utilised as an opportunity to:</p> <p>a. Align strategic objectives ensuring they support each other and minimise potential for conflicting priorities.</p> <p>b. Make good use of the community voice, building on the work carried out through the Local Plan process to ensure the community voice is reflected in the wider agenda as set out in the Council Plan.</p> <p>c. Articulate and give clarity to the Council's economic ambitions setting out clear outcomes for business and employment growth, infrastructure and capitalising on the opportunities of being part of the wider Oxfordshire knowledge economy with its related potential for innovation and high value growth as will be set out in Oxfordshire's Local Industrial Strategy.</p> <p>d. Consider the potential to use Council reserves for the benefit of the community and to develop a longer term approach to investment given the Council's strong financial position.</p>	<p>A new Council Plan produced in 2019 that takes the opportunity to address the points raised in the Peer review.</p> <p>The Council Plan development will draw on data analysis/ insight and address Council/ community priorities.</p> <p>Use will be made of community insight and engagement from a range of sources - including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Issues and challenges identified in our recently adopted Local Plan (and in the evidence base that underpins this);</li> <li>• engagement with key stakeholders (eg the intended training sessions on Planning with town/ parish councils);</li> <li>• customer insight exercises used to inform service transformation work; and</li> <li>• the development of work on priority issues that are identified and set out in the Council Plan and then further refined in liaison with community and partner interests.</li> </ul>	<p>A Council Plan that sets out the ambitions for West Oxfordshire on key priority issues and builds on the relationship with partners (at County and sub-regional level).</p> <p>The Council Plan will connect with relevant and supporting other resources:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cabinet portfolios</li> <li>• Priority tasks</li> <li>• Commissioning strategy</li> <li>• Performance framework</li> <li>• Group/ Service Plans</li> <li>• Capital strategy</li> <li>• Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS)</li> <li>• Publica Business Plan.</li> </ul>	<p>Council Head of Paid Service/ Council</p> <p>Publica Executive Director Commissioning/ Group Manager (Corporate Support) (co-ordination)</p> <p>All Group Managers</p> <p>Transformation work.</p> <p>Communication function.</p>	<p>June 2019</p>	<p>To be assessed.</p>