

 WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL	WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL
Name and date of Committee	FINANCE AND MANAGEMENT OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WEDNESDAY 2 OCTOBER 2019
Report Number	AGENDA ITEM No. 9
Subject	LGA CORPORATE PEER CHALLENGE – ACTION PLAN PROGRESS REPORT
Wards affected	ALL
Accountable member	<p>Cllr James Mills, Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Policy Framework and Corporate Plan. Email: james.mills@westoxon.gov.uk</p> <p>Cllr Toby Morris, Resources (and Deputy Leader) and Cabinet Member for Finance and Management Email: toby.morris@westoxon.gov.uk</p>
Accountable officer	<p>Giles Hughes, Chief Executive Tel: 01993 861658 Email: giles.hughes@westoxon.gov.uk</p>
Summary/Purpose	<p>The Council invited the Local Government Association (LGA) to conduct a Corporate Peer Challenge in October 2018. A Corporate Peer Challenge is an external review of a Council's functioning and its ability to deliver on its plans, proposals and ambitions. The resulting feedback report and recommendations have underpinned an action plan that has been informed and endorsed in Finance and Management Overview & Scrutiny Committee and finalised through approval at Cabinet in April 2019. The current paper provides a review of progress against defined actions, prior to consideration in Cabinet.</p>
Annexes	Annex I: Action Plan Progress Report (September 2019)
Recommendation/s	<i>To consider the review of progress in respect of the LGA Corporate Peer Challenge Action Plan and provide comments.</i>
Corporate priorities	ALL

Key Decision	NO
Exempt	NO
Consultation	Internal consultation with officers.

1.1. The Council invited the Local Government Association (LGA) to conduct a Corporate Peer Challenge in 2018. The Corporate Peer Challenge provided an external review of the Council's functioning and its ability to deliver on its plans, proposals and ambitions.

1.2. The Corporate Peer Challenge looked at 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.

In addition to covering the core assessment areas, the Council's Peer Challenge provided comment on 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.

1.3. The Council's Corporate Peer Challenge took place between 8 and 11 October 2018 and the resulting Feedback Report was reported to Cabinet in February 2019. The Feedback Report and the draft Action Plan formed in response to this exercise was then considered in Finance and Management Overview & Scrutiny Committee in April 2019 and then the resulting Action Plan was endorsed at the Cabinet meeting on 17 April 2019. The current report provides a progress report (as at September 2019) in terms of the key recommended actions.

2. MAIN POINTS

2.1. The Corporate Peer Challenge outlined a range of positive factors relating to the Council's performance: this included – strong leadership; the active role played in the wider strategic agenda; and the Council's robust financial management and strong financial position. The Feedback Report also highlighted areas where the Council could consider issues that would enhance its current approach: this included - 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.

2.2. The current paper provides a progress report set against the agreed action plan that was formed as a response to the Corporate Peer Challenge. An up to date commentary on progress (as at September 2019) is provided for each of the recommended actions in the schedule at Annex I.

2.3. As can be seen in Annex I, there has been significant progress made in a number of areas and the Peer Challenge has been a valuable resource in charting the Council's development work. The timescale set for some of the actions has proved ambitious and in some areas the work is ongoing.

- 2.4. The progress report is now available to Finance and Management Overview and Scrutiny Committee to enable comment that can inform Cabinet's further consideration of this matter. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee may wish to offer insight that can inform Cabinet's review of progress.

3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1. None directly arising from the current progress report. The action to address the Peer Challenge is encompassed in work that is underway in any case to assist the Council to deliver on its priorities and in the transformation work pursued through Publica. Where budget or a defined staff resource is required this has been/ will be assessed at the appropriate time and in relation to the specific action.

4. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1. None.

5. RISK ASSESSMENT

- 5.1. The Council faces a reputational risk if it does not complete its action in response to the Corporate Peer Challenge and it would compromise the instructive value of the exercise in this situation. The current progress report seeks to manage this risk and keep the Council on track in maintaining a focus on agreed actions.

6. EQUALITIES IMPACT (IF REQUIRED)

- 6.1. Not applicable.

7. CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1. Not applicable.

8. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 8.1. The Council sought a Corporate Peer Challenge and the pursuit and completion of improvement work in response is the logical further step to derive value from this exercise.

9. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 9.1. None.

LGA Corporate Peer Challenge 2018 – Action Plan Progress Report (23 September 2019)

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<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>	Communication and Engagement Plan.	Publica (Governance Group)	April 2019	No	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A report titled Publica Update is being presented to Finance and Management Overview & Scrutiny Committee on 2/10/2019. Staff survey conducted in Q1 2019/20 and results to be published in Q2 2019/20. Review of Publica Portal completed to enable more effective engagement and communications with staff.

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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>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 - here</p> <p>Approach to be advised and supported through ongoing involvement of the Managers Liaison Group. The work with the Managers Liaison Group is ongoing and they meet every month.</p> <p>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>	Transformation Programme/ People Plan to detail how transformation will be delivered and staff will be supported.	Publica (Governance Group)	April 2019	Part of transformation resources.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff survey conducted in Q1 2019/20 and results to be published in Q2 2019/20. People strategy adopted by the Publica Board in Q1 2019/20. Review of Publica Portal completed to enable more effective engagement and communications with staff. All Publica staff have had a 1:1 Directed Discussion during Q1/2 2019/20. Approach to Service Modernisation approved by the Board and being presented to newly established senior leadership forum.
3. We would urge the Council to continue to seek and learn from the Transformation experiences of others within the sector.	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.	A programme of learning from peers (with suitable guidance from the LGA Peer Review Team) that enhances the client function.	Head of Paid Service, Council Council Leader	June 2019	No	<p>A report - Ten Years of Collaboration and Sharing was produced and launched at the LGA Conference in Q2 2019/20.</p> <p>The Council and Publica have gained further experience in transformation and have an enhanced understanding of knowledge areas that can be</p>

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						<p>developed. The Council and Publica will also benefit from the insights gained from the LGA Corporate Peer Challenge of Cotswold District Council (5 to 7 November 2019).</p> <p>A programme of learning (and visits to other local authorities) will now be planned to fully address this recommendation.</p>
<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. Relevant information to inform periodic check:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Transformation Team progress reports; Service review summaries; Core performance indicators; Budget monitoring; 	<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>	June 2019	Yes - to be defined as work progresses.	<p>The role of Head of Paid Service was redefined as the Council's Chief Executive in July 2019 and a new job description was approved by Council. The Chief Executive will now be able to review the role of retained staff. The work on the Council Plan will inform the Council Priorities for the next four years and will feed into the development of the Medium Term Financial Strategy and budget for 2020/21.</p> <p>Fortnightly Joint Management Team meetings now take place between the Publica Managing Director, Executive Directors and the Council Retained Staff to discuss strategic matters which impact upon the Council and Publica. This includes the reporting of</p>

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ongoing consultation feedback from Managers Liaison Group – covering resilience. 					financial information, performance management information and risks.
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>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>	A revised approach to supporting Overview and Scrutiny that enhances the focus and value of this work.	Council Head of Paid Service/ Head of Democratic Services	July – Sept. 2019	Yes	<p>Scrutiny Training for members held in June 2019.</p> <p>New Government Guidance on Scrutiny has been issued recently and this will be reflected on and used to inform future training.</p>
6. The work already underway to develop the People Plan needs to continue apace to support wider organisational priorities.	<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>	A People Plan	Head of Human Resources	May 2019	To be assessed.	<p>A People Plan has now been produced and signed off by both the Executive and Public Board. In order to deliver the activities outlined in the plan a bid to the transformation fund is being prepared.</p> <p>Funding for the graduate and intern programme was agreed by the Council in March 2019.</p>

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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>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>	A more developed Council client function in relation to Publica as evidenced in suitable report commentaries.	Council Head of Paid Service and Head of Finance	Sept. 2019	To be assessed.	<p>A Commissioning Framework has been drafted and this will be considered first by Finance & Management O&S Committee and then submitted for approval at Cabinet in October 2019.</p> <p>Organisation governance has been strengthened with the establishment of the Joint Management Team and Heads of Paid Service Meetings (see earlier comments in relation to recommendation 4).</p>
8. Clarify the role and responsibility of the Head of Paid Service and the commissioning support provided to this role, so that the	<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</p>	A more comprehensive definition of the role of the Head of Paid Service and associated staff support areas (drawing	<p>Council and Publica</p> <p>Council Head of Paid Service</p> <p>Publica</p>	Sept. 2019 and then reviewed at periodic intervals after that.	To be assessed.	<p>See earlier comments in relation to recommendation 4.</p> <p>The Business Manager with responsibility for the Planning function is now in post and is enabling the Chief Executive to undertake the lead</p>

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position can successfully fulfil the role of Lead Commissioner and ensure that what Publica delivers, fully meets WODC's needs.	<p>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>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>Executive Director Commissioning</p> <p>Chief Finance Officer</p>			<p>commissioner role. The Commissioning Framework is on the Cabinet Agenda for October 2019.</p> <p>The New Council Plan will set out new Council Priorities and will feed into the update of the Medium Term Financial Strategy and the detailed budget for 2020/21.</p>

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<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</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"> • Issues and challenges identified in our recently adopted Local Plan (and in the evidence base that underpins this); • engagement with key stakeholders (eg the intended training sessions on Planning with town/ parish councils); • customer insight exercises used to inform service transformation work; and • 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. 	<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"> • Cabinet portfolios • Priority tasks • Commissioning strategy • Performance framework • Group/ Service Plans • Capital strategy • Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) • Public Business Plan. 	<p>Council Head of Paid Service/ Council</p> <p>Public 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>	<p>Following a Cabinet Away Day in June 2019 and the development of a supporting Evidence Base, a draft Council Plan has been developed.</p> <p>The draft Council Plan is now be subject to consultation with Overview and Scrutiny Committees in September/ October and the finalisation of the Plan will be instructed through Cabinet/ Council in October 2019. Supporting actions and the performance management specification of these will follow. As noted in respect of recommendations 4 and 8, the work on the Council Plan will feed into the development of the Medium Term Financial Strategy and budget for 2020/21.</p> <p>The Council is developing the use of Parish Forums (meetings with Towns and Parishes) to engage with and gain input to the Council Plan. These Forums can assist the development of thematic work. the next Forum (10 October 2019) has an environment focus.</p>

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<p>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>						