

RIBBLE VALLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL REPORT TO POLICY AND FINANCE COMMITTEE

Agenda Item No. 7

meeting date: 12TH SEPTEMBER 2017
 title: CORPORATE PEER CHALLENGE UPDATE
 submitted by: DIRECTOR OF RESOURCES
 principal author: MICHELLE HAWORTH – PRINCIPAL POLICY AND PERFORMANCE OFFICER

1 PURPOSE

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to update Committee on the LGA Corporate Peer Challenge.
- 1.2 Relevance to the Council's ambitions and priorities:
- Community Objectives – The scope of the Peer Challenge can be tailored to reflect local needs. We may, like many other
 - Corporate Priorities – authorities, wish the Peer Challenge to look at how
 - Other Considerations - well we perform in achieving Corporate Priorities.

2 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 As part of their 'sector led improvement' support to local government, the Local Government Association (LGA) offers the delivery of a Corporate Peer Challenge. The Peer Challenge is designed to help Councils improve their performance.
- 2.2 The scope of a Peer Challenge is agreed with each Council and, if required, tailored to reflect local needs and specific requirements. There is a core component that looks at issues of leadership, governance, corporate capacity and financial resilience.
- 2.3 The Peer Challenge is conducted by senior/experienced officers (likely to led by a Chief Executive from another Council) and Councillors (who are likely to reflect the political make-up of the Council) supported by an LGA Peer Challenge Manager.
- 2.4 For district councils the Peer Challenge is generally conducted over a 3-day period and involves the Peer Challenge team reviewing the Council's policies, strategies, performance as well as having discussions with a range of focus groups, eg representatives of the private sector, voluntary sector etc.

3 UPDATE

- 3.1 The Chief Executive and the Principal Policy and Performance Officer met with Neil Shaw, LGA Principal Advisor, on 12th July. The meeting was set up to begin the scoping process, discuss timing of the challenge and other issues such as next steps.
- 3.2 Notes of the meeting are provided below:

Draft scope and focus

The council has been making good progress on delivering its priorities for local communities, coping with the national local government financial pressures and maintaining good core service performance. It's good to see such progress. The council appointed a new Leader in May – Cllr Ken Hind. The council is seeking to use the peer challenge as a general 'healthcheck' on its plans going forward but would also like to explore issues related to the interconnected theme of local growth, housing and planning. As a result, in outline, the council has decided to focus on the following

indicative themes:

1. Promoting local growth – this will likely explore how the council might better promote Ribble Valley as a place for businesses to start up and grow. This recognises the local challenges in many people commuting out of borough to work and will seek to examine how the council might better develop the borough as a place to work, not just reside.

2. Balancing growth and housing – this will likely explore how the council can progress sustainable local development, including increasing the number of new homes (including affordable homes) being built in the context of the desire of many local people to limit the number of housing development in the borough.

We recognise that the council may seek to refine these two areas of focus over the coming weeks. Alongside these two areas of focus, as with all corporate peer challenges, the challenge will explore the following ‘core questions’ to ensure the council is prepared to tackle its future priorities:

3. Understanding of local context and priority setting: Does the council understand its local context and has it established a clear set of priorities? This will also examine the nature of the council's future challenges.

4. Financial planning and viability: Does the council have a financial plan in place to ensure long term viability and is there evidence that it is being implemented successfully to address future challenges?

5. Political and managerial leadership: Does the council have effective political and managerial leadership and is it a constructive partnership?

6. Governance and decision-making: Are effective governance and decision-making arrangements in place to respond to key challenges and manage change and transformation?

7. Organisational capacity: Are organisational capacity and resources focused in the right areas in order to deliver the agreed priorities?

Timing of the peer challenge

You have identified the council has some flexibility in the timing of the challenge. We are proposing to undertake the challenge over three days in either the third or fourth week of November or the first week of December 2017. The exact dates for the peer challenge will be narrowed based on the availability of senior peers for the team.

Peer team

We discussed the make-up of the peer team required to deliver the peer challenge (based on current thinking about the scope and focus). We are able to confirm the team will be made up as follows:

- Chief Executive, from a borough/district council (as the lead peer) – they will need to be from an authority which understands the Ribble Valley economic and housing context
- A Conservative Leader (as the member peer) *
- Two senior officers – these are likely to be officers who have senior roles with a growth or housing background
- LGA Review Manager

We have started the process to secure the Chief Executive peer and will come back to you once we have heard from them. * As we discussed, we will progress the sourcing of the member peer through our Conservative Political Group Office but will mention Cllr Hind is interested in the Leader of Fenland being considered for the team.

Follow up

Around 9-12 months after the peer challenge we will look to undertake a one-day follow up visit. The aim of the follow up visit is to explore the progress the council has made in implementing the recommendations from the peer challenge. The exact timing of this and the nature of the follow up visit will be determined in discussion with the council. It is likely to involve some (but not necessarily all) the members of the peer team and would aim to meet a number of stakeholders to explore the progress the council has made and report back through a short presentation.

Next steps

In terms of next steps:

1. Please can you reflect on the proposed areas of focus and let me know of any changes to this proposed focus
2. We will progress the sourcing of the Chief Executive peer and come back to you
3. Over the coming months the council will start the process of drafting a position statement, a timetable of on-site activity and supporting documentation for the team and we will liaise with Michelle (Haworth) on the preparation and our LGA Review Manager – Cindy Lowthian – will make contact with her direct.

3.3 Further to the above note it has now been confirmed that arrangements have begun to be made to have the Peer Challenge during the last two weeks of November or the first week of December.

4 RISK ASSESSMENT

4.1 The approval of this report may have the following implications

- Resources - The Council is currently a subscriber to the LGA. The Corporate Peer Challenge is provided by the LGA at no additional cost to the Council. Some officer time would be required to help organise and support the Peer Challenge.
- Technical, Environmental and Legal – None identified.
- Political – None identified.
- Reputation – None identified.
- Equality & Diversity - None identified.

5 DECISION

5.1 Approve the scope and timing for the Peer Challenge as outlined in the note of the meeting above.

Michelle Haworth
PRINCIPAL POLICY AND
PERFORMANCE OFFICER

Jane Pearson
DIRECTOR OF RESOURCES

BACKGROUND PAPERS:

REF:

For further information please ask for Michelle Haworth, extension 4421