

## **CORPORATE PEER CHALLENGE PROGRESS QUARTER 4 2019/20**

### **1. BACKGROUND AND FOREWORD**

- 1.1 The Local Government Association (LGA) offers all local authorities the opportunity to participate in a Corporate Peer Challenge every 4 years or so as part of its sector-led improvement programme.
- 1.2 The Council's Corporate Peer Challenge took place between 26 and 29 March 2019. It was conducted by a team of elected members and senior officers from other local authorities together with LGA advisors.
- 1.3 The Peer Challenge team reviewed the Council's self-assessment, key documents. They conducted site visits, interviews and workshops with a wide selection of staff, members, stakeholders and partners, meeting with 107 people and holding 47 meetings during their stay.
- 1.4 The Council received the Peer Challenge team's feedback report in May 2019 and reported it to Council on 16 May 2019. The report set out eight recommendations in respect of areas for development and improvement.
- 1.5 An Action Plan was developed in respect of the 8 recommendations, including timescales and organisational leads. These are recorded on our performance management system – Excelsis.

### **2. PROGRESS ON THE ACTION PLAN**

- 2.1 A summary of progress made in Quarter 4 is set out below. Appendix 1 sets out the detailed action plan as recorded on Excelsis.

#### **REC 1 (CRD1) Commence senior officer restructure to ensure sufficient strategic capacity is in place at the top of the organisation**

- All 4 Directors are in place with the Interim Monitoring Officer also part of the senior leadership team.

#### **REC 2 (CRD2) Agree short-term priorities and actions for the period to May 2020.**

- This action was completed with the adoption of the Corporate Delivery Plan Key Actions for 2019/20 at Council on 16 May 2019. Updates are reported quarterly to this Committee and recorded and monitored on Excelsis.

#### **REC 3 (CRD3) Ensure the integrity of the current IT system. Review the progress and suitability of current plans, capability and capacity in respect of this, and beyond that to confirm the emerging plans in respect of ICT**

**development and digital delivery fit with longer term transformational plans.**

- The Infrastructure Upgrade Project has made good progress despite resources at times diverted to support the organisation through the Covid-19 response. An outline IT strategy, including cloud transition approach, was agreed with SLT in May 2020 which will provide clear direction for a new Head of Technology post. The details of the post were agreed by SLT just prior to the lockdown and consequent enforced homeworking, which was successfully supported by the IT team at speed as the infrastructure project had just rolled out laptops to the staff. The extraordinary events in this quarter means that although progress remains generally on track for the infrastructure works, the deadline dates for longer term strategy and capacity have been pushed back to August 2020.

**REC 4 (CRD4) Work with all key stakeholders over the next year to develop a clear vision and priorities for the council aligned to our Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP), to be agreed in the next iteration of the Corporate Delivery Plan (CDP) and once approved ensure this is communicated effectively to residents, businesses and other partners.**

- CDP work was underway with sessions held with members and planned with T&PC. The CDP work is now likely to be rolled into the recovery strategy for the Council.

**REC 5 (CRD5) Create time, once the senior officer team is appointed, for the political and managerial leadership teams, both informally and formally, to have ‘strategic conversations’. This will help develop a strong leadership team and help them develop clear priorities and plans to be put in place focused on SDC’s improvement, for the district and wider county and sub region.**

- This action has been completed. A new leadership team is now completely in place and is establishing effective working relationships including team building. Space has been created for informal conversations with political leadership which has included initial conversations around the CDP.

**REC 6 (CRD6) Establish effective workforce planning and performance management arrangements so that the Council has a committed and engaged staff group with clarity in terms of the expectations of them and sufficient capacity to deliver its plans. The Council should:**

- Review is future staffing arrangements, ensuring strategic fit and the development of a ‘one council’ ethos
- Develop core transformation plans and ensure sufficient capacity to enable effective delivery and monitoring. This includes consideration of ICT provision.

- **Establish appropriate pay and reward arrangements for staff**
- **Ensure consistent compliance with, and outcomes arising from, core HR policies are delivered eg appraisals**
- **Ensure consistent oversight, management and compliance with key performance management practices.**
  - The Corporate Policy and Governance team is now in place, albeit some vacancies remain. The Strategic Director of Transformation is establishing a modernisation plan including IT and Organisational Development elements.

**REC 7 (CRD7) Building on its relatively strong financial position, review how its investment and commercial plans could be enhanced. A key focus of this will be to help deliver the Council's priorities as well as sustain its financial viability into the medium term.**

- Significant progress has been made with new investments placed and fees and charges policy introduced. Commercial plans will need to be reviewed in the light of the Covid-19 pandemic.

**REC 8 (CRD8) Consider reviewing governance arrangements to ensure better decision making in order to deliver its revised priorities and plans. As part of this the Council should:**

- **Look to develop better collaboration at an early stage in producing policy or service options, taking account of expertise available from members where appropriate, together with ensuring that operational, financial and legal implications of options are effectively understood**
- **Seek to build greater political consensus before decision making reports come to members, with greater opportunity for testing and rigour.**
  - The Corporate Policy and Governance Team are now in place, but there are some posts still vacant and recruitment is necessary.
  - Due to the Covid-19 emergency, a great deal of the initiatives underway were placed on hold, for example, the Constitution Working Group has not met since February and its work plan has been placed on hold. However, there have been good examples of emergency working with the Covid Officer decision making process and the fact that the Council has gone from never having had remote meetings to operating solely on a remote basis. Changes have been made to the Constitution to reflect the governance around the new arrangements.
  - There are good processes in place to ensure that there is better collaboration at an early stage in the decision making processes with work planning meetings. The new report template has ensured that the operational, financial and legal implications are clearly set out and understood. Reports are considered at an early stage by members to ensure earlier input.

- 2.2** Three of the eight recommended actions have been completed. Significant progress has been made on the other actions, but due to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, particularly in having to postpone the local council election until May 2021, further progress has been delayed. The Plan has been rolled forward to 2020/21 and will continue to be kept under review and quarterly progress will be reported to S&R Committee.

## Corporate Peer Challenge LGA 2019/20 – Q4 progress

Code	Action/Milestone Required	Deadline	Lead Officer	Status	Comments
<a href="#"><u>CRD1</u></a>	Commence senior officer restructure to ensure sufficient strategic capacity is in place at the top of the organisation.	31/10/2019	Lucy Powell	Completed	22/06/2020: Quarter 4: All 4 Directors are now in post.
» <a href="#"><u>CRD1.1</u></a>	Improve capacity in the short term until restructure implemented	31/05/2019	Kathy O'Leary	Completed	16/07/2019: Interim Director of Resources in post 1 June 2019 Interim Senior Leadership Team (SLT) in place and meeting weekly May 2019; wider Operational Managers Team (OMT) established early 2019 and meets monthly.
» <a href="#"><u>CRD1.2</u></a>	Review senior leadership team to address lack of strategic capacity and reflect structural and cultural changes required	31/10/2019	Lucy Powell	Completed	18/06/2020: All Directors are now in post.
» <a href="#"><u>CRD1.3</u></a>	Consider the need for additional short-term capacity at director level to drive forward the Council's digital and wider transformation programme at pace	31/10/2019	Lucy Powell	Completed	18/06/2020: Director of Transformation now in post.
<a href="#"><u>CRD2</u></a>	Agree short-term priorities and actions for the period to May 2020.	16/05/2019	Kathy O'Leary	Completed	16/07/2019: Quarter 1: The updated Corporate Delivery Plan with Key Actions for 2019/20 was approved by Council 16 May 2019. Progress will be recorded and monitored regularly by SLT and OMT (on Excelsis) and reported quarterly to SLT and committees.

# Appendix 1

Code	Action/Milestone Required	Deadline	Lead Officer	Status	Comments
<a href="#">CRD3</a>	Ensure the integrity of the current IT system. Review the progress and suitability of current plans, capability and capacity in respect of this, and beyond that to confirm that emerging plans in respect of ICT development and digital delivery fit with longer term transformation plans.	31/05/2020	Sean Ditchburn	On Target	29/06/2020: Quarter 4: The Infrastructure Upgrade Project has made good progress despite resources at times diverted to support the organisation through the Covid-19 response. An outline IT strategy, including cloud transition approach, was agreed with SLT in May 2020 which will provide clear direction for a new Head of Technology post. The details of the post were agreed by SLT just prior to the lockdown and consequent enforced homeworking which was successfully supported by the IT team at speed as the infrastructure project had just rolled out laptops to the staff. The extraordinary events in this quarter means that although progress remains generally on track for the infrastructure works, the deadline dates for longer term strategy and capacity have been pushed back to 31/07/20.
» <a href="#">CRD3.1</a>	Seek external expertise to review the Socitm work undertaken to ensure short, medium and long term priorities are set out.	30/09/2019	Sean Ditchburn	Completed	19/11/2019: Foresight have delivered a plan to deliver on the immediate infrastructure refresh which is now commenced and will run for approximately 9-12 months
» <a href="#">CRD3.2</a>	Review ICT capability and capacity professionally and across the organisation to support transformation and day to day service delivery	31/05/2020	Caron Starkey	On Target	25/06/2020: Review of current capacity and capability undertaken with assistance from Foresight. Head of Technology role agreed with SLT in March 2020, roles reporting into this post scoped to form the new management and leadership of the service. This package of roles, together with the outline IT Strategy, will form a consultation exercise with relevant team members before any recruitment exercise.

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» <a href="#">CRD3.3</a>	Develop a clear route map and resource plan to implement agreed actions to ensure suitability of IT for transformation as well as day to day service delivery	31/05/2020	Caron Starkey	On Target	25/06/2020: Progress continues on the essential infrastructure works being carried out under the guidance of Foresight, there are clear plans and project management is in place. There have been delays in some elements as the IT resources have been diverted to support the organisation through the Covid-19 response and hardware supply from outside the UK was interrupted but has now been received. The aging infrastructure has been put under pressure due to the increase in traffic created by a remote workforce which has resulted in further outages which have been resolved due to the exceptional efforts of the team. The critical components of the infrastructure upgrades and replacements should be completed by the end of the next quarter which will provide a stable and resilient technology environment and a platform for ongoing digital developments.
<a href="#">CRD4</a>	Work with all key stakeholders over the next year to develop a clear vision and priorities for the council aligned to our medium term financial plan (MTFP), to be agreed in the next iteration of the Corporate Delivery Plan (CDP) and once approved ensure this is communicated effectively to residents, businesses and other partners	31/05/2020	Andrew Cummings	Overdue	29/05/2020: Quarter 4: CDP work was underway with sessions held with members and planned with T&PC. The CDP work is now likely to be rolled into the recovery strategy for the Council.
» <a href="#">CRD4.1</a>	Analyse available data on district to ensure SDC and its members are well briefed on a strong evidence base to compellingly underpin priorities and decision making processes	31/10/2019	Andrew Cummings	On Target	08/01/2020: Results of the budget consultation will be presented to Members on 9th January. An updated profile of Stroud District and Economic Needs Assessment report have been prepared and are available on the Hub.

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» <a href="#">CRD4.2</a>	Engage members in district wide priorities, using their knowledge and understanding of their communities to shape and inform them, and ensuring a strategic focus on financial sustainability and the district as a whole rather than on individual wards. Local initiatives can often draw capacity from SDC as a whole and make it difficult for the Council to deprioritise and stop doing things	31/05/2020	Andrew Cummings	Not Started	16/07/2019: A budget workshop on linking the MTFP with priorities from the emerging CDP 2020+ is planned.
» <a href="#">CRD4.3</a>	Engage other key stakeholders, including staff, Parish & Town Councils; LSP and partners.	30/04/2020	Andrew Cummings	On Target	08/08/2019: Meetings with T&PC, GAPTA have taken place and will continue.
» <a href="#">CRD4.4</a>	Prepare an internal and external engagement plan for the preparation of the new CDP 2020-2024 and a Communications Plan for the agreed CDP	30/09/2019	Ben Falconer	On Target	06/09/2019: Report presented to SLT on 3 September.
» <a href="#">CRD4.5</a>	Adopt new Corporate Delivery Plan 2020-2024	31/05/2020	Kathy O'Leary	Not Started	
<a href="#">CRD5</a>	Create time for the political and managerial leadership teams, both informally and formally to have the 'strategic conversations'. This will help develop a strong leadership team and help them develop clear priorities and plans to be put in place focused on SDC's improvement, for the district and the wider county and sub region.	30/04/2020	Andrew Cummings	Completed	29/05/2020: Quarter 4: A new leadership team is now completely in place and are establishing effective working relationships including team building. Space has been created for informal conversations with political leadership which has included initial conversations around the CDP.
» <a href="#">CRD5.1</a>	Schedule regular meetings between SLT and lead members to jointly discuss strategic matters.	30/04/2020	Kathy O'Leary	Completed	16/07/2019: CDP and budget workshops scheduled for Summer and Autumn 2019
» <a href="#">CRD5.2</a>	On a county and sub-regional level, more members and officers need to be bolder, more active and lever SDC strategic planning influence on the broader stage for the benefit of its residents, businesses and the wider region. Revisit potential for collaboration in formal and informal partnerships including working more closely with other districts on shared services or joint priorities	30/04/2020	Andrew Cummings	Completed	29/05/2020: SDC Officers have been working on cross County groups throughout the year and are playing key roles as part of Covid recovery.



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<a href="#">CRD6</a>	<p>Establish effective workforce planning and performance management arrangements so that the Council has a committed and engaged staff group with clarity in terms of the expectations of them and sufficient capacity to deliver its plans. The Council should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review future staffing arrangements, ensuring strategic fit and the development of a 'one council' ethos</li> <li>Develop core transformation plans and ensure sufficient capacity to enable effective delivery and monitoring. This includes consideration of ICT provision.</li> <li>Establish appropriate pay and reward arrangements for staff</li> <li>Ensure consistent compliance with, and outcomes arising from, core HR policies are delivered eg appraisals</li> <li>Ensure consistent oversight, management and compliance with key performance management practices.</li> </ul>	30/04/2020	Andrew Cummings	On Target	29/05/2020: Quarter 4: The Corporate Policy and Governance team is now in place, albeit some vacancies remain. The Strategic Director of Transformation is establishing a modernisation plan including IT and OD elements.
» <a href="#">CRD6.1</a>	Review the staffing structure and develop a clear workforce plan to ensure skills and capacity are aligned to delivery of Council priorities	30/04/2020	Lucy Powell	Overdue	25/06/2020: Currently considering our approach to this and will be formulated as part of the transformation programme.
» <a href="#">CRD6.2</a>	Create a learning organisation; in terms of leading, influencing and shaping places there is significant knowledge and talent which needs to be more effectively harnessed, tapping learning from different projects and programmes within the lead department across the Council.	30/04/2020	Andrew Cummings	On Target	29/05/2020: Corporate Policy Team now in place
» <a href="#">CRD6.3</a>	Develop effective mechanisms for staff engagement to develop and promote more effectively the values, behaviours and new ways of working.	31/12/2019	Lucy Powell	Overdue	25/06/2020: Currently working on developing a programme for engagement as part of the people and change work stream, alongside other key OD programmes.
» <a href="#">CRD6.4</a>	Put in place appropriate systems for and application of performance management. The current system could do with improved clarity, purpose, consistent compliance and effective monitoring arrangements.	29/02/2020	Andrew Cummings	On Target	16/07/2019: Quarterly performance reports to SLT and Committees. Excelsis training workshops to be arranged for OMT to ensure all managers are conversant with the system.

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» <a href="#">CRD6.5</a>	Undertake a council-wide staffing, pay and reward review. (Likely to take 18 months)	30/04/2020	Lucy Powell	Overdue	25/06/2020: This is ongoing and is forming part of the wider people and change workstream. There has been a delay in progressing this due to Covid-19.
<a href="#">CRD7</a>	Building on the Council's relatively strong financial position, review how our investment and commercial plans could be enhanced. A key focus of this will be to help deliver the council's priorities as well as sustain our financial viability into the medium term.	30/04/2020	Andrew Cummings	On Target	29/05/2020: Quarter 4: Significant progress has been made with new investments placed and fees and charges policy introduced. Commercial plans will need to be reviewed in the light of the Covid-19 pandemic.
» <a href="#">CRD7.1</a>	Learn lessons from the past where projected savings / income have not been achieved eg introducing car parking charges in some market towns	29/02/2020	Andrew Cummings	Completed	29/05/2020: All savings targets in the current MTFP have been achieved.
» <a href="#">CRD7.2</a>	Forecast income more effectively	31/03/2020	Andrew Cummings	Completed	29/05/2020: Budget monitoring activity was increased in 2019/20.
» <a href="#">CRD7.3</a>	Manage SDC's capacity into the future, recognising that key areas as staffing structure, pay and reward, skills and transformation require financial planning and commitment	31/03/2020	Andrew Cummings	On Target	17/07/2019: Reserves put in place.
» <a href="#">CRD7.4</a>	Increase visibility and transparency around cost of services and options	31/03/2020	Andrew Cummings	On Target	17/07/2019: CPC report notes that a good start has been made.
» <a href="#">CRD7.5</a>	SDC to internally consider what commercialism means to the Council in order to develop a strategy as part of its longer term plan, eg how it links investment to priorities, place shaping etc	31/03/2020	Andrew Cummings	On Target	23/07/2019: Draft presentation now received from LGA consultant
» <a href="#">CRD7.6</a>	Treasury management – the Council is regarded as being fairly risk averse, and commercialisation opportunities that deliver enhanced return and other policy priorities should be positively considered within a controlled environment in relation to risk and reward.	31/03/2020	Andrew Cummings	Completed	29/05/2020: New Strategy completed and new investments have been placed.
» <a href="#">CRD7.7</a>	Routinely review income derived from fees and charges	31/03/2020	Andrew Cummings	Completed	29/05/2020: Policy now introduced
» <a href="#">CRD7.8</a>	Ensure members have sufficient financial and performance information on which to make informed decisions and deliver challenge	31/03/2020	Andrew Cummings	Completed	29/05/2020: All decisions are accompanied by sufficient financial information. Members are kept regularly briefed on key financial developments.

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<a href="#">CRD8</a>	<p>Consider reviewing governance arrangements to ensure better decision making, in order to deliver the Councils' revised priorities and plans. As part of this the Council should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Look to develop better collaboration at an early stage in producing policy or service options, taking account of expertise available from members where appropriate, together with ensuring that operational, financial and legal implications of options are effectively understood</li> <li>Seek to build greater political consensus before decision making reports come to members, with greater opportunity for testing and rigour.</li> </ul>	30/09/2021	Patrick Arran	On Target	29/06/2020: Quarter 4: The Corporate Policy and Governance Team are now in place, but there are some posts still vacant and recruitment is necessary. Due to the Covid-19 emergency, a great deal of the initiatives underway were placed on hold, for example, the Constitution Working Group has not met since February and its work plan has been placed on hold. However, there have been good examples of emergency working with the Covid Officer decision making process and the fact that the Council has gone from never having had remote meetings to operating solely on a remote basis. Changes have been made to the Constitution to reflect the governance around the new arrangements. There are good processes in place to ensure that there is better collaboration at an early stage in the decision making processes with work planning meetings. The new report template has ensured that the operational, financial and legal implications are clearly set out and understood. Reports are considered at an early stage by members to ensure earlier input.
» <a href="#">CRD8.1</a>	Carry out a review of the committee system, and the governance arrangements that support it (member / officer working groups and separate member and officer meetings), to gauge how effectively the current way of working operates and especially whether its application in practice enables effective decision making	30/09/2021	Hannah Emery	Not Started	22/06/2020: This was delayed due to the elections scheduled for 2020 which have now been postponed until May 2021.
» <a href="#">CRD8.2</a>	Develop a longer term forward plan and associated with this, clarity around approaches to challenge and effective scrutiny to improve decisions, and importantly the quality of reports to underpin this	31/08/2020	Hannah Emery	On Target	22/06/2020: A Forward Plan was produced for 2019/20 which also led to a revised dispatch timetable to incorporate dates for consultation with SLT and Members. The Forward Plan for the year ahead has been produced but needs to be reviewed.

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» <a href="#">CRD8.3</a>	Support the development of member capacity, through further focused training and development	31/03/2020	Patrick Arran	On Target	22/06/2020: A detailed programme of training was put in place in readiness for the induction post election, but the election has been postponed until 2021. We will have to consider what training needs to be provided on an interim basis.
» <a href="#">CRD8.4</a>	Member / officer training to ensure both are aware of their respective roles, responsibilities and accountabilities and staff have a strong sense of political awareness to respond effectively and lead and deliver improvement.	31/10/2020	Hannah Emery	On Target	22/06/2020: Training sessions on the Code of Conduct and Good Decision Making were held in 2019, due to COVID-19 we have not been able to implement the Member Induction Programme as planned but refresher training will be offered in the interim. Work still needs to be done to arrange for political awareness training for officers.
» <a href="#">CRD8.5</a>	Utilise the existing programme management capacity that is available; further clarity of role and purpose is needed.	31/10/2019	Andrew Cummings	On Target	08/08/2019: Initial draft structures have been produced to reviewed by HR, Chief Executive and Director of Resources.
» <a href="#">CRD8.6</a>	Ensure the Constitution is updated to reflect the changes resulting from the implementation of the CPC Action Plan.	30/09/2020	Patrick Arran	On Target	22/06/2020: A report was taken to S&R in December and authority was provided to set up the Constitution Working Group together with a number of initial projects relating to an update of the Constitution. The CWG met twice and approved a new Member Officer Relations Protocol which was adopted by Council in May. A work plan has been devised but the CWG meetings have been postponed due to Covid-19 and will be re-starting in July with consideration of the Scheme of Delegation. In the interim, a new Standing Order in relation to remote meetings has been drafted by the Monitoring Officer and has been approved by Council together with some changes to the Constitution in terms of quorum for remote meetings, emergency delegations to the Chief Executive and amendment to the delegations to the Monitoring Officer in respect of amendments to the Constitution.