

STROUD DISTRICT COUNCIL
STRATEGY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

THURSDAY, 9 JUNE 2022

Report Title	LGA CORPORATE PEER CHALLENGE ACTION PLAN			
Purpose of Report	To consider the Action Plan resulting from the LGA Corporate peer Challenge Feedback report received at the end of April and reported to Council on 19 May 2022.			
Decision(s)	The Committee RESOLVES to: a) Agree the Action Plan; and b) Note that progress will be reported to future Strategy & Resources Committee meetings.			
Consultation and Feedback	The Peer Challenge process involved meetings with the Leader, Group Leaders, Committee Chairs, other Members, the CE, senior management and a cross-section of staff as well as external partners and agencies. The Action Plan has been developed in consultation with senior managers and members of this Committee.			
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Options	The Local Government Association encourages all local authorities to undergo a Corporate Peer Challenge every 4-5 years. The Council undertook one in 2019 and in ordinary circumstances the peer team would have carried out a 'light touch' revisit within 2 years to assess progress, but as this was delayed by the pandemic and 3 years have now elapsed, a fuller review has taken place. Peer Challenges are designed to complement and add value to the Council's own performance and improvement focus. The preparation of an Action Plan to address the recommendations set out in the feedback report is optional and will help guide improvement.			
Background Papers	Report to Council on LGA Corporate Peer Challenge Feedback Report 19 May 2022. LGA Corporate Peer Challenge Feedback Report 2022 (Appendix 1 to that report).			
Appendices	Appendix 1 – Action Plan			
Implications (further details at the end of the report)	Financial	Legal	Equality	Environmental
	No	No	No	No

1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1** The Local Government Association (LGA) gives all local authorities the opportunity to participate in a Corporate Peer Challenge as part of its sector-led improvement programme. The Council undertook a Peer Challenge three years ago in March 2019, as the then new Chief Executive and Leader considered that an ideal time to take up the offer to review how the council was doing and how best to tackle current and future challenges.
- 1.2** The 2019 Peer Challenge feedback was very positive and was reported to Council in May 2019. Four short-term and four medium-term recommendations formed the basis for an action plan agreed by Strategy & Resources Committee in July 2019. Progress on those actions was subsequently regularly reported to the committee, with the short-term recommendations quickly achieved and the medium-term ones largely integrated into the council's Fit for the Future modernisation programme.
- 1.3** The peer team would normally have carried out a light-touch revisit within two years of their original visit, but this was delayed by the pandemic and so a fuller review was undertaken this year, three years on from the team's original visit.
- 1.4** The review took place between 8 and 10 March 2022 and was conducted by a team of elected members and senior officers from other local authorities, together with advisors from the LGA. They were invited to give us the benefit of their experience of working with and leading similar organisations.

1.5 Every corporate peer challenge considers 5 core components:

- a) **Local priorities and outcomes** - Are the council's priorities clear and informed by the local context? Is the council delivering effectively on its priorities?
- b) **Organisational and place leadership** - Does the council provide effective local leadership? Are there good relationships with partner organisations and local communities?
- c) **Governance and culture** - Are there clear and robust governance arrangements? Is there a culture of challenge and scrutiny?
- d) **Financial planning and management** - Does the council have a grip on its current financial position? Does the council have a strategy and a plan to address its financial challenges?
- e) **Capacity for improvement** - Is the organisation able to support delivery of local priorities? Does the council have the capacity to improve?

In addition to these questions, the council asked the peer team to provide feedback on its response to Covid-19 and support to the community and reflections on the new Council Plan and delivery ambitions.

- 1.4** The team prepared by reviewing the range of documents and information, including the council's key documents, submitted as part of our self-assessment / position statement to familiarise themselves with the council, the challenges we are facing and the progress we have made since the last Peer Challenge visit in 2019. Pre-engagement calls took place, and a focus group was held with town and parish council representatives in advance of

travelling to the district. The team then spent two and a half days on site at Ebley Mill during which they gathered information and views from a wide selection of staff, councillors, stakeholders and partners and carried out further research and reading. The team held some 29 meetings and met with more than 80 people.

- 1.5** The Council received the Peer Challenge team's feedback report in April 2022 and reported it to Council on 19 May 2022. Council unanimously welcomed the findings of the peer team, who provided feedback as critical friends, based on their knowledge and experience of local government. The report to Council identified the headlines in the feedback report, which include reflecting on the good progress that the council has made in the last three years in respect of the 2019 Peer Challenge recommendations, our excellent response to the pandemic, and the ambitious delivery framework that we have put in place stemming from the adoption of the Council Plan and underpinning strategies. The peer team stressed that to ensure successful delivery of these, we would need to concentrate on delivering agreed objectives and actions and avoid 'mission creep', that is, adding in new priorities which we were not resourced to deliver.
- 1.6** The Peer Challenge team set out eight key recommendations in respect of areas for development and improvement on pages 4 to 6 of the feedback report.

2. ACTION PLAN

- 2.1** The Action Plan at Appendix 1 sets out the 8 recommendations in full and the actions identified to address them. The anticipated timescale and progress against each action is recorded and lead officers / members identified.
- 2.2** As further work is carried out in respect of each recommendation and action, which will include lead members and officers engaging with the LGA and others for advice and support, the Action Plan will be underpinned by further detail.
- 2.3** The recommendations reflect work already started and in one case completed, and on which progress will be reported through regular performance monitoring of the Council Plan and Fit for the Future modernisation programme, or reporting to appropriate policy committees, as indicated at Appendix 1.

3. NEXT STEPS

- 3.1** The Peer Challenge process includes a check-in session in six months' time, which provides an opportunity for the council's senior leadership to update peers on progress against the action plan and discuss next steps.
- 3.2** Prior to that check-in, it is intended to report back to this committee on 29 September the progress made in respect of the 8 recommendations to inform the check-in session due in October / November.

4 CONCLUSION

- 4.1** Members are asked to endorse the emerging Action Plan at Appendix 1 which is being developed to respond to the LGA Corporate Peer Challenge team's feedback report.

4. IMPLICATIONS

4.1 Financial Implications

There are no financial implications arising directly from the report. Actions included within the plan can be accommodated within existing budgets, including those allocated to the Fit for the Future programme.

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4.2 Legal Implications

There are no legal implications arising from the content of this report.

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4.3 Equality Implications

There are no equality implications arising from the report itself. The equality implications of actions taken will be considered by Committee as appropriate.

4.4 Environmental Implications

There are no environmental implications arising from the report itself.