

Committee: Cabinet

Date: 7 March 2016

Subject: LGA Corporate Peer Challenge and Action Plan

Lead officer: Ged Curran, Chief Executive

Lead member: Stephen Alambritis, Leader of the Council

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Recommendations

1. That Cabinet note the findings and key recommendations from the recent LGA Corporate Peer Challenge.
2. That Cabinet agree the draft action plan that addresses the key recommendations set out in Appendix 1.

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 This reports sets out the key findings from the LGA Corporate Peer Challenge undertaken in October 2015 and the proposed response to the peer team's recommendations – see Appendix 1. In their feedback report the peer team acknowledged the considerable improvement the Council had undergone over the last ten years. They found the Council reliable and efficient, with elected members who work well together. Also, that it has a skilled and committed workforce. They endorsed the Council's programme to be the Best London Council by 2020 as pivotal to meeting the considerable challenges facing local government over the coming years.

2. DETAIL

Background

- 2.1 Following the abolition of the Audit Commission and the requirements for local authorities to undergo Comprehensive Performance Assessments, the Local Government Association developed a system of Corporate Peer Challenges to support improvement within the sector. The purpose of the Peer Challenge programme is to assist local authorities to improve through a peer review process and to help share best practice across the sector. The process is a voluntary one and available on request to any local authority. The Council invited the LGA to undertake a Corporate Peer Challenge of Merton Council in October 2015.

Scope

2.2 The Peer Review process involves a team of experienced local government officers and elected members visiting an authority and seeking answers to five critical questions:

1. Does the Council understand its local context and place and use that to inform a clear vision and set of priorities?
2. Does the Council provide effective leadership of place through its elected members, officers and constructive relationships and partnerships with external stakeholders?
3. Does the Council have a financial plan in place to ensure long term viability and is there evidence that it is being implemented successfully?
4. Is there effective political and managerial leadership supported by good governance and decision-making arrangements that respond to key challenges and enable change and transformation to be implemented?
5. Is organisational capacity aligned with priorities and does the Council influence, enable and leverage external capacity to focus on agreed outcomes?

In addition, the local authority can ask the peer team to consider two additional areas to review and provide feedback. We asked them to consider the Council's approach to Regeneration and also to Information Technology.

Methodology

2.3 The LGA, in consultation with the Council, put together a peer team comprising:

- Rob Leak – Chief Executive, London Borough of Enfield
- Cllr Nick Forbes – Leader of Newcastle City Council
- Cllr Sean Anstee – Leader of Trafford Metropolitan Borough Council
- Pat Hayes – Executive Director for Regeneration and Housing, Ealing Council
- Nadira Hussain – Customer Services Transformation Manager, London Borough of Tower Hamlets
- Megan McGovern – Business Improvement Consultant, Surrey County Council
- Kay Burkett – Programme Manager, Local Government Association

The team spent three days in Merton. The process involved speaking to over 70 people including Council staff, Councillors, external partners and stakeholders. The team went to 37 meetings and went out to visit key sites in Merton. They also reviewed a wide range of documents and data to ensure they were familiar with the borough.

Key findings

- 2.4 The peer team acknowledged that the Council had travelled a long way over the past ten years. That it had earned the respect and confidence of residents, stakeholders and partners. They found that the Council is reliable and efficient, with elected members who work well together on a cross party basis to serve the community. They noted that all local authorities are facing considerable challenges from external pressures including demographics and changing government policy. They felt that the programme recently launched by the Council to be the best London Council by 2020 was critical to ensuring that the Council was well prepared to meet these challenges. The detailed findings are set out in Appendix 2. The peer team made five key recommendations:
1. Discuss the feedback and issues raised to help inform the focus and Council response for future strategy
 2. Profile the service impact of the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP)
 3. Consider the opportunity to better align the capital programme to the MTFP
 4. Develop a more compelling future narrative for Merton (the place and its people) and the role of the Council in delivering it
 5. Consider how the Council's vision for the place is delivered through regeneration activity and the structure and funding required to achieve this

The Council's response

- 2.5 The Council's Corporate Management Team has considered the findings of the Peer Challenge and has developed a draft action plan to address the recommendations – see Appendix 1.

3. CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN OR PROPOSED

- 3.1 As part of the peer challenge process the LGA peer team spoke to a wide range of stakeholders including partners, staff and elected members. As part of its response to the peer team's recommendations the Council intends to share the findings with staff and senior managers. In addition, the Council, will use the process of updating Merton's Community Plan to develop its future vision for Merton.

4. TIMETABLE

- 4.1 The timescales proposed for actions in response to the recommendations are set out in Appendix 1.

5. FINANCIAL, RESOURCES AND PROPERTY IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 None specific to this report.

6. LEGAL AND STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 The recommendations of the LGA Corporate Peer Challenge have no statutory or legal imperative.

7. HUMAN RESOURCES, EQUALITIES AND COMMUNITY COHESION IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 It is proposed that the key findings are shared with managers and staff.

8. CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 None specific to this report.

9. RISK MANAGEMENT AND HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 None specific to this report.

APPENDICES – THE FOLLOWING DOCUMENTS ARE TO BE PUBLISHED WITH THIS REPORT AND FORM PART OF THE REPORT

- Draft Corporate Peer Challenge action plan
- Corporate Peer Challenge Feedback Report

APPENDIX 1: DRAFT CORPORATE PEER CHALLENGE ACTION PLAN

Ref.	Recommendation	Action	Responsible	By when
1.	Discuss the feedback and the issues raised to help inform the focus and Council response for future strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include feedback in internal communications, including Staff Roadshow events • Cascade down to DMTs the whole report for discussion • Build into Target Operating Models (TOMs) where appropriate • Review overall progress on Corporate Peer Challenge Action Plan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Head of Communications • CMT • CMT • CMT 	<p>Summer 2016</p> <p>Spring 2017</p>
2.	Profile the service impact of the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The service impact of external financial pressures will be considered as part of the ongoing process to update the MTFP, linked with a review of the Service Plans 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Director of Corporate Services 	Autumn 2016
3.	Consider the opportunity to better align the capital programme to the MTFP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Capital Board to take lead and review this on an ongoing basis 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Director of Corporate Services 	Summer 2016
4.	Develop a more compelling future narrative for Merton (the place and its people) and the role of the Council in delivering it	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a Council narrative on completion of the TOM, this supported by Departmental narratives and summary narratives for each TOM document • Consider and discuss the TOMs at Staff Roadshow events • Develop revised vision as part of next Community Plan refresh 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CMT • Head of Communications • Head of Policy & Partnerships 	<p>Spring 2016</p> <p>Summer 2016</p> <p>Autumn 2016</p>
5.	Consider how the Council's vision for the place is delivered through regeneration activity and the structure and funding required to achieve this	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a short narrative specifically on regeneration setting out our ambition for places, linking back to the Future Merton TOM and the Capital requirements being discussed and agreed at Capital Board by June 2016 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Director of Environment & Regeneration 	Summer 2016

APPENDIX 2: MERTON CORPORATE PEER CHALLENGE FEEDBACK REPORT