

Report of the Assistant Director Office of the Chief Executive to the meeting of the Governance and Audit Committee to be held on 28th September 2017.

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Subject:

Local Government Association Corporate Peer Challenge review findings and Improvement Action Plan 2017

Summary statement:

Bradford Council invited the Local Government Association (LGA) to undertake an independent Corporate Peer Challenge review, which took place in March 2017. This report details the areas the review looked at, its findings and the Council's response in the form of an Improvement Action Plan.

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Overview & Scrutiny Area: Corporate

1. SUMMARY

Bradford Council invited the Local Government Association (LGA) to undertake an independent Corporate Peer Challenge review, which took place in March 2017. This report details the areas the review looked at, its findings and the Council's response in the form of an Improvement Action Plan (IAP).

2. BACKGROUND

2.1 The Corporate Peer Challenge Review

- 2.1.1 At the request of the Leader and Chief Executive of the Council, an LGA team conducted a Corporate Peer Challenge review of Bradford Council during the period 27- 30 March 2017.
- 2.1.2 The LGA team was comprised of six local government professionals led by the Chief Executive of Wigan Council and the Leader of Newcastle City Council.
- 2.1.3 A Corporate Peer Challenge review is designed to complement and add value to a council's own performance and improvement, it is not an inspection. Corporate Peer Challenge reviews have taken place in many councils and are an established method to help determine the "health and awareness" of a council, identifying areas in which it needs to improve.
- 2.14 Corporate Peer Challenge reviews look at five areas:
1. Understanding of the local place and priority setting:
 - Does the council understand its local context and place and use this to inform a clear vision and set of priorities?
 2. Leadership of place:
 - Does the council provide effective leadership of place through its councillors, officers and constructive relationships and partnerships with external stakeholders?
 3. Organisational leadership and governance:
 - 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?
 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?
 5. Capacity to deliver:
 - Is organisational capacity aligned with priorities and does the council influence, enable and leverage external capacity to focus on agreed outcomes?

- 2.1.5 The Council asked the LGA Corporate Peer Challenge review team to focus on social inclusion and opportunities for young people in skills, education and employment, reflecting Bradford being the youngest city in the country, while reviewing the above five areas.
- 2.1.6 The review team spoke to over 260 people including council staff, councillors, partners, stakeholders and young people. They gathered information and views from over 60 meetings and collectively spent more than 230 hours to determine their findings.
- 2.1.7 The full report has been on the Council website since June when it was received from the LGA and is attached as **Appendix 1**

2.2 The Corporate Peer Challenge Review findings

2.2.1 Headlines

The Council “recognises it is on a journey of change” from being a provider of services to “being a facilitator and co-ordinator of all of the local resources around a set of shared priorities”.

“The Council is ambitious, self-aware and an improving organisation with huge potential, well positioned to benefit from the ambitious goals and programmes set out in the District and Council Plans and increasingly influential within the West Yorkshire Combined Authority.”

There is “effective ward and neighbourhood leadership by councillors, officers, partner organisations and active and committed community leaders and voluntary sector.”

“Exceptionally strong partnership relationships are already established, in particular between the Council and the Police” and “there are excellent examples of partnership working improving people’s lives.”

“There is clear recognition of the financial challenges and increasing demand on services faced by local government and its impact, alongside an ambitious approach” to align resources to the priority outcomes in the Council Plan through the budget process.

“The emerging narrative of place needs to more fully reflect the many places that make up the District, alongside clarity around the District’s role and investment requirements in delivering the City Region Strategic Economic Plan.”

“The £5m Transformation Fund should be reviewed to ensure sufficient resources are allocated” to enable the Council to drive change and make the necessary savings.

Consideration needs to be given on “how to consistently engage on issues with young people” and greater use should be made of apprenticeships.

Communications need to focus on engaging residents through ‘People Can’ and “positioning Bradford regionally and nationally.”

The historic civic crest should be used as the Council brand/ logo as it reflects the city and different towns which make up Bradford District.

2.2.2 Review findings under the five areas, in summary

1. Understanding of the local place and priority setting

The review team reported “Bradford Council“ has a sophisticated understanding of its communities” and said they had “heard many examples of excellent work in promoting community cohesion.”

“There is a recognition that leadership of place isn’t only the responsibility of the Leader of the Council and the Chief Executive, but that everyone in the organisation can play a role.” However, the review team felt that “the workforce is considered an underdeveloped asset in telling a more positive story of Bradford District.”

“The Council Plan is clear and coherent and is becoming increasingly embedded” with “many staff aware of the priorities and their role in achieving them.” The review team also saw a “growing sense of optimism that the Council and the place is improving, with recognition that young people are the City’s greatest asset.”

“It is clear that there is strong community, faith, business and voluntary sector leadership” and “a clear alignment between business and political priorities with transport and education seen as key drivers of economic growth.”

“Although there is strong leadership in supporting this vision, turning the vision into a compelling, forward looking narrative for Bradford District will need to be the next stage of the journey.” “This stronger narrative will help partners better understand the Council’s priorities more clearly and enable the Council to focus its resources on partnerships and relationships that are most important in achieving this vision.”

2. Leadership of Place

The review team stated “the Council Leader and Chief Executive are universally recognised as providing strong, clear and complementary leadership” and there is “proactive engagement with other councils and partners across the region.”

The commitment to working within regional and national partnerships, including the West Yorkshire Combined Authority (WYCA) and Key Cities network “was making Bradford increasingly influential.”

The review team found “strong and excellent partnership arrangements with the Police and Voluntary Sector, with active and committed community leadership with organisations who want to work collaboratively with the Council.”

While the engagement between the Council and its partners was seen as positive, there was an acknowledgement that more could be done to streamline and strengthen partnership working with health organisations.

The review team said: “Councillors in Bradford are passionate, committed and fully engaged in the work of the Council, being visible in their local communities and there is good ward and neighbourhood leadership” undertaken by the Council.

The Council’s ‘People Can’ approach to involve citizens in their neighbourhoods and communities through volunteering and other activities was recognised as “powerful” and having “huge potential” to “empower people and communities to do more for themselves.” The review team felt this ‘People Can’ approach should be rolled out across Council departments and partner organisations to show a unified way of working for the benefit of Bradford District.

3. Organisational leadership and governance

The review team said they “saw evidence of a strong and well regarded political and managerial leadership, observed through constructive councillor and officer working relationships at all levels across the Council.”

The review found that “the corporate governance framework works well, with mutual respect and understanding between councillors and officers” with “no adverse indicators” relating to how the Council’s decision making works. Scrutiny Committees were found to be “effectively holding the Executive to account”, although the review team recommended developing a role for Scrutiny in policy making, as well as scrutinising the Council’s decisions.

The review team suggested that “plans and strategies should be reviewed to make sure they are aligned to the Council Plan” which will help in “difficult decisions” about which services and activities the Council will have to stop doing.

Staff met through the review were considered “loyal, committed and highly motivated to deliver good quality services”. There is a “supportive environment evident, with a can do attitude” underpinned with a “developing organisational culture with staff at all levels starting to reflect the Council’s behaviours and values.”

The review team “saw good examples of the Future Leaders programme and the Innovation Hub facilitating a growing sense of empowerment amongst staff” but pointed out that “the changing nature of local government and the increasing focus on commercialism will require different skills and competencies going forward. They suggested the apprenticeship programme should be reviewed to “bring new ideas into the Council” and “make it more representative of the communities it serves.”

4. Financial planning and viability

The review team said “the scale of the future financial challenge” faced by local authorities “is understood by Bradford Council who acknowledges that business as usual isn’t an option.”

Outcomes Based Budgeting, where resources are aligned to agreed priorities in the Council Plan, “has been introduced as a model for ensuring effective and efficient use of resources and is seen as a significant step towards closing the revenue funding gap.”

The review team found the Council “has managed sensitively” big reductions in its resources - £231 million has been saved since 2011 with a further £32 million to find in 2017-2019. “The Audit Statement confirms the Council has a strong track record of delivering savings and generally keeping within budget though there are significant financial pressures within adult’s and children’s services.

Concerns were expressed about potential over-reliance on the use of compensatory savings when planned savings aren’t delivered and about some instances where opportunities for earlier interventions were not being taken to minimise long term financial risks.

The review team also felt the level of transformation funding was too low to address the significant changes the Council faces.

5. Capacity to deliver and resources

The review report states “staff enjoy working for the Council and feel their contribution is highly valued”. “Overall staff said that change is generally managed well” and they recognise “the role of the Council needs to change going forward.”

The review found “many good examples of the Council working well in partnership to deliver improved outcomes for residents,” in areas such as: school improvement, neighbourhood work, hospital discharges, child sexual exploitation and community cohesion.

The Workforce Development Programme was seen by the review team as pivotal to ensuring change and embedding behaviours and values and it felt the work on this should be accelerated.

The review did not see an overarching approach to programme management and suggested improved arrangements are put in place to ensure linkages, sequencing and inter-dependencies between projects are made clear.

The review also stated that the Council “needs to adopt a consistent approach to digital transformation” and data should be used more to inform decision making, as well as for tracking performance.

It was recommended opportunities should be explored for: further co-located working based on the effective work currently seen in the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub, shared service arrangements across neighbouring local authorities “where a business case stacks up” and enhanced integrated commissioning of services.

2.3 The Corporate Peer Challenge Review recommendations

The Review made 8 key recommendations:

1. Develop a coherent narrative of place and your ambitions.
2. Use the narrative to place shape more effectively with partners.

3. Use the 'People Can' approach in a more systematic manner.
4. Make best use of newly appointed Strategic Director roles.
5. More robust financial accountability and allocation of resources within the Medium Term Financial Strategy.
6. Accelerate a Team Bradford approach to using Apprenticeships.
7. Review Re-deployment Policy.
8. Pick one brand for the Council.

2.4 The Improvement Action Plan

- 2.4.1 To ensure the recommendations are acted upon, integrated into and monitored through the current Council Plan Delivery programme, the recommendations were presented to the Outcome Delivery Boards, which are responsible for the outcomes in the Council Plan.
- 2.4.2 The Outcome Delivery Boards checked the relevance of the review recommendations against their remit, proposed actions to help progress the recommendations, and identified a lead officer responsible for delivery and Portfolio Holder for governance and assurance purposes.
- 2.4.3 The Outcome Delivery Boards are integrating the recommendations and actions from the Corporate Peer Challenge review Improvement Action Plan into their own milestone plans, to ensure regular checking of progress on implementation.
- 2.4.4 The Improvement Action Plan (**Appendix 2**) shows the key recommendations along with the outcome to be achieved, actions and timescales for delivery.

2.5 Review follow-up

- 2.5.1 The LGA Corporate Peer Challenge review process includes a follow up visit. The purpose of the visit is to help the Council assess the impact of the peer challenge and to demonstrate the progress it has made against the areas for improvement and developments identified by the review team.
- 2.5.2 The follow up visit is a lighter touch version of the original visit and does not always necessarily involve all members of the original peer team. The timing of the visit is determined by the Council, but it is typical a follow up review will take place two years after the review i.e. March 2019.

3. OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

- 3.1 The Executive received the Corporate Peer Challenge review report and the Improvement Action Plan on 12th September. The Corporate Overview and Scrutiny

Committee is also receiving the Corporate Peer Challenge review report and the Improvement Action Plan on 28 September.

- 3.2 The Governance and Audit Committee is asked to consider the control environment and governance arrangements put in place to ensure the effective delivery and monitoring of the Improvement Action Plan.

4. FINANCIAL & RESOURCE APPRAISAL

The delivery of the Corporate Peer Challenge review Improvement Action Plan will be met from within current resources. Responding to the review and implementing its recommendations are key elements in the work of each Outcome Board which ensure the Council Plan is delivered.

5. RISK MANAGEMENT AND GOVERNANCE ISSUES

Governance arrangements to ensure the delivery of the Corporate Peer Challenge review Improvement Action Plan will be managed within the programme and project management arrangements of the Council Plan Outcome Delivery Boards.

6. LEGAL APPRAISAL

No comments from the legal appraisal.

7. OTHER IMPLICATIONS

None.

7.1 EQUALITY & DIVERSITY

None directly. Equalities Impact Assessments will be considered as necessary.

7.2 SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS

None.

7.3 GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS IMPACTS

Not applicable.

7.4 COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

None.

7.5 HUMAN RIGHTS ACT

No Human Rights Act implications.

7.6 TRADE UNION

If changes are made to Council policy as a result of this action plan, Trade Unions will be consulted as appropriate.

7.7 WARD IMPLICATIONS

None directly.

**7.8 AREA COMMITTEE ACTION PLAN IMPLICATIONS
(for reports to Area Committees only)**

Not applicable.

8. NOT FOR PUBLICATION DOCUMENTS

None.

9. OPTIONS

1. The Governance and Audit Committee is asked to note the report and the actions put in place to monitor the Improvement Action Plan.

10. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee receive periodic progress reports against the Improvement Action Plan.

11. APPENDICES

- Appendix 1: Corporate Peer Challenge. City of Bradford Metropolitan District Council. 27th to 30th March 2017. Feedback Report.
- Appendix 2: Corporate Peer Challenge Improvement Action Plan 2017.

12. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

None.