

# Cabinet



Date of meeting:	12 June 2023
Title of Report:	<b>Local Government Association Corporate Peer Challenge – progress review report</b>
Lead Member:	Councillor Tudor Evans OBE (Leader)
Lead Strategic Director:	Tracey Lee (Chief Executive)
Author:	Giles Perritt (Assistant Chief Executive)
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Your Reference:	GPI20623
Key Decision:	No
Confidentiality:	Part I - Official

## Purpose of Report

The Council commissioned the Local Government Association (LGA) to carry out a Corporate Peer Challenge between 7<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> February 2022. The peer team made ten recommendations to the Council which were agreed by the previous Cabinet in July 2022, alongside an accompanying action plan setting out how the Council would deliver against these recommendations. A follow up session was held on 23<sup>rd</sup> February 2023 to review the Council's progress against the recommendations. The purpose of this report is to update Cabinet on the findings from the LGA's progress review as set out in the report in appendix A.

## Recommendations and Reasons

Cabinet is asked to:

1. Note and endorse the findings from the LGA's follow up report further to the progress review held on the 23<sup>rd</sup> February 2023.  
**Reason:** To ensure the Council continues on its improvement journey and to note the ongoing offer of support from the LGA.
2. Note the development of an Organisational Effectiveness Plan.  
**Reason:** To put in place an overarching internal plan that brings together and reviews the key internal strategies and plans that enable us to be the best organisation we can.

## Alternative options considered and rejected

The Peer Challenge is a voluntary process, and the Council is under no obligation to make commitments with respect to any recommendations made. The process does however represent best practice in the local government sector, and the recommendations and subsequent findings from the progress review represent the considered view of experienced and senior local government peer members and officers.

**Relevance to the Corporate Plan and/or the Plymouth Plan**

The previous Corporate Plan and the Plymouth Plan were key documents considered by the peer team, and are referenced in the report. A new Corporate Plan is being developed and will be used to ensure that the organisation is the best that it can be to enable the delivery of the key priorities for the city.

**Implications for the Medium Term Financial Plan and Resource Implications:**

The quality of the Council's financial planning and its viability was one of the key questions explored during the challenge. In addition, the recommendations and the progress report cover the Council's capacity and potential to deliver against its priorities. Most of the actions in response to the recommendations will continue to be delivered from within existing resources. Where there are new resource implications arising, decisions will be made about allocation of resources in line with the Council's decision making procedures.

**Financial Risks**

None.

**Carbon Footprint (Environmental) Implications:**

Tackling climate change is one of the Council's top priorities having pledged to make Plymouth carbon neutral by 2030. Our commitment to reducing Carbon emissions will be embedded in all our plans and improvements moving forward.

**Other Implications: e.g. Health and Safety, Risk Management, Child Poverty:**

*\* When considering these proposals members have a responsibility to ensure they give due regard to the Council's duty to promote equality of opportunity, eliminate unlawful discrimination and promote good relations between people who share protected characteristics under the Equalities Act and those who do not.*

None arising directly from this report.

**Appendices**

*\*Add rows as required to box below*

Ref.	Title of Appendix	Exemption Paragraph Number (if applicable) <i>If some/all of the information is confidential, you must indicate why it is not for publication by virtue of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 by ticking the relevant box.</i>						
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7
A	LGA Corporate Peer Challenge Progress Review Report, 23 <sup>rd</sup> February 2023							

**Background papers:**

*\*Add rows as required to box below*

*Please list all unpublished, background papers relevant to the decision in the table below. Background papers are unpublished works, relied on to a material extent in preparing the report, which disclose facts or matters on which the report or an important part of the work is based.*

Title of any background paper(s)	Exemption Paragraph Number (if applicable) <i>If some/all of the information is confidential, you must indicate why it is not for publication by virtue of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 by ticking the relevant box.</i>

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
LGA Corporate Peer Challenge Feedback Report – <a href="#">Cabinet, 07 July 2022</a>							

**Sign off:**

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Originating Senior Leadership Team member: Tracey Lee, Chief Executive											
Please confirm the Strategic Director(s) has agreed the report? Yes											
Date agreed: 31/05/2023											
Cabinet Member approval: Councillor Tudor Evans OBE, Leader, approved verbally.											
Date approved: 31/05/2023											

## I. BACKGROUND

The Council commissioned the Local Government Association (LGA) to carry out a Corporate Peer Challenge between 7<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> February 2022. The peer challenge approach can be summarised as an improvement focused review carried out by a team of experienced elected and officer peers who considered a number of key areas critical to all councils' performance and improvement.

This included the following five themes which form the core components of all Corporate Peer Challenges.

1. **Local priorities and outcomes** - Are the council's priorities clear and informed by the local context? Is the council delivering effectively on its priorities?
2. **Organisational and place leadership** - Does the council provide effective local leadership? Are there good relationships with partner organisations and local communities?
3. **Governance and culture** - Are there clear and robust governance arrangements? Is there a culture of challenge and scrutiny?
4. **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?
5. **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 approach to community engagement and empowerment.

The peer team made ten recommendations to the Council (set out on pages 3-5 in appendix A) which were agreed by the previous Cabinet in July 2022, alongside an accompanying action plan setting out how the Council would deliver against the recommendations. The Corporate Peer Challenge recommendations and a November 2022 progress update against the action plan were reported to the Scrutiny Management Board on the 29<sup>th</sup> November 2022.

## 2. CORPORATE PEER CHALLENGE PROGRESS REVIEW

The progress review is an integral part of the Corporate Peer Challenge process and as such a follow up session was held on the 23<sup>rd</sup> February 2023. This included a number of short, on-site / hybrid facilitated sessions to hear how the Council had made progress over the last 12 months, the challenges faced and plans for the future. The sessions were designed to provide space for the council's senior members and officers to:

- Update peers on the early progress made and to receive feedback on this including how the action plan aligns to the Corporate Peer Challenge recommendations.
- Consider peer's reflections on any new opportunities or challenges that may have arisen since the peer team were 'on-site' including any further support needs.
- Discuss any early impact or learning from the progress made to date.

The report in appendix A contains the LGA's findings following this progress review.

## 3. KEY FINDINGS FROM THE PROGRESS REVIEW

In the report the LGA highlighted the progress made, in particular around the council's budget and finances, the cross party approach to budget preparation and a revised budget scrutiny process. The peer team felt a strong sense of the Council working collaboratively to maintain the direction of travel, being guided by the overarching Plymouth Plan. They also noted that although conversations were brief, external stakeholders reflected positively on their experiences of working with the Council.

Whilst acknowledging the progress made the report also recognised that there were still a number of challenges. For example, the organisation's capacity to deliver, with some areas being more affected

than others. The peer team highlighted that key service areas, such as Adult Social Care and Children's Services, should have a clear plan in place which ensures greater focus on the improvements that are needed and that these are effectively led and delivered. The report also noted capacity concerns within the corporate centre given that this is the area that will be required to deliver the Council's overall change and transformation ambitions.

The peer team referenced how the Council had invested time in staff engagement which has resulted in positive relationships and a sense of collaboration. They also cited the importance of the Council developing an organisational development plan, to help create capacity and equip staff to prioritise, as the ambitions of the Council and the city need effective resourcing if they are to be achieved.

#### **4. NEXT STEPS**

Reflecting on the findings from the progress review the Council has committed to developing an Organisational Effectiveness Plan (*N.B. the LGA report refers to this as the Organisational Development Plan*) which will serve as an overarching internal plan that brings together and reviews the key internal strategies and plans that enable us to be the best organisation we can.