

Thursday, 23 January 2025

Report of the Leader of the Council

Corporate Peer Challenge Report and Action Plan

Purpose

To advise members of the Local Government Association (LGA) Corporate Peer Challenge Report and seek approval for the action plan in response to its recommendations and any follow-up actions to complete the challenge in the required timescale.

Recommendations

It is recommended that:

1. Cabinet accepts the recommendations provided in the LGA Corporate Peer Challenge Report as set out in Appendix 1 and agree to publish it by the deadline of 31 January 2025.
2. Cabinet approves the draft action plan developed to respond to the recommendations as set out in Appendix 2 and delegates authority to the Chief Executive in consultation with the Leader of the Council to finalise development of this plan and publish it before the 31 March 2025 deadline.
3. Cabinet agrees to review the action plan as part of their quarterly performance update reports.

Executive Summary

A Corporate Peer Challenge (CPC) is a voluntary process which forms a key part of the LGA's [improvement and assurance framework](#) for local government. It underpins the principals of Sector-led improvement (SLI) to support continuous improvement and assurance across the sector and is recognised as assisting councils to meet their [Best Value duty](#) to gain assurance both of the performance of its services and corporate governance

The LGA encourages all councils to have a Corporate Peer Challenge every five years and to publish their reports online. In addition to publishing the feedback report by 31 January 2025, we are also required to develop an action plan to be published no later than 31 March 2025. For transparency it is recommended to publish the action plan alongside the report if at all possible.

The peer challenge process reviews five core components providing a high-level, external 'health-check' centred upon understanding of local context and priority setting, financial planning and viability, political and managerial leadership, governance and decision making and organisational capacity. We also asked the team to look at our plans to address community cohesion and our use of technology and digital innovation.

During the three-day challenge, the team spoke to more than seventy people including a range of council staff, members, external partners and stakeholders and gathered information and views from more than 30 meetings. The final report from the LGA is attached at **Appendix 1**. The overall opinion is very positive about how the Council performs across the subject areas.

As with all challenges, areas for improvement are identified and twelve key recommendations were made by the review team, and these are set out within pages 6 to 9 of the final report. An action plan comprising these recommendations with associated action points can be found in **Appendix 2**. It is proposed the delivery of the action plan is monitored at the Corporate Projects Programme Board and formally reviewed by Cabinet as part of the quarterly performance update report.

Options Considered

This was a voluntary process to provide assurance which should be undertaken every 5 years. Once entered into, the feedback report must be published and an action plan then developed as previously advised to members. Cabinet and Senior officers have had an opportunity to review and challenge any findings from the Peer Challenge but are now obliged to publish the report and a supporting action plan in due course.

Resource Implications

There are no financial implications as a direct result of this report. The action plan in response to the recommendations has been developed alongside the draft Corporate Plan 2025-2030 and the 2025/26 budget process to ensure sufficient priority, resources and pace can be put to the actions to have clear improvements in place by the time the Peer team return in September 2025. These actions should be prioritised as being necessary to provide assurance. There may be additional financial resource requirements to deliver on some of the actions within the plan which will be reported to Members as appropriate.

Legal/Risk Implications Background

None specifically for this report. Authorities who fail to engage with the CPC process are being challenged by both the Local Government Association and the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government.

Equalities Implications

An Equality, Social Inclusion and Health Impact Assessment (ESHIA) has been completed and attached at **Appendix 3** – No issues relevant to decisions in this report other than to note the far-reaching impact on policy and strategy development for the coming financial year, which has been considered as part of the budget setting and service planning process.

Environment and Sustainability Implications (including climate change)

Not relevant to this report

Background Information

Tamworth Borough Council had its last CPC in 2013. There has been considerable change and challenge across the sector since this period, and the organisation itself has had some significant changes including a new Leader and Cabinet following the borough election in May 2024, and a new Chief Executive who started in April 2024. This CPC was commissioned to support the council in the next stage of its journey.

A CPC provides robust, strategic and credible challenge and support to avoid insularity within councils and covers five core elements:

- Local priorities and outcomes
- Organisational and place leadership
- Governance and culture
- Financial planning and management
- Capacity for improvement.

In addition, the team were asked to:

- review how the council can make best use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) including emerging technologies to support innovation and the delivery of corporate objectives.

- take account of the councils emerging plans for community cohesion following the civil unrest on 4 August 2024.

The CPC process was conducted on 29 to 31 October 2024 and the peer team held over thirty meetings with seventy stakeholders, staff and members. During their visit, the Peer Challenge team were struck by the immense pride held by staff, members, residents, and stakeholders, particularly in relation to Tamworth's rich history and unique heritage.

Following the CPC visit, a report outlining the key findings and recommendations from the peer team was shared with the council as set out in Appendix 1. The overall opinion is very positive about how the Council performs across the subject areas and many areas of good practice but also urges the Council to face the significant financial challenges ahead and address these as our most immediate and pressing priority.

During December this report was carefully considered by officers and members to develop an action plan set out in Appendix 2 to address the recommendations. Due to the overlaps with this work and the new corporate plan a delegation is requested to allow any amendments to actions and timings necessary as the service plans for 2025/26 are being finalised. In the spirit of openness and transparency, we are now required to publish this feedback report, swiftly followed by the final version of our action plan.

It is proposed the delivery and monitoring of the action plan is overseen by the Corporate Projects Programme Board and for it to be formally reviewed by Cabinet each quarter as part of the quarterly performance report.

Members will be aware from previous reports that a progress review will take place approximately ten months after the original 3-day challenge. The progress review provides space for a council's senior leadership to report to the peer team on the progress made against the CPC recommendations, discuss early impact or learning and receive feedback on the implementation of the action plan. This is provisionally scheduled for early September 2025.

Following the progress review, a final report outlining the peer team's findings is shared with the council. In the spirit of openness and transparency, the council are required to publish this report no later than 12 months after the original CPC, which is 31 October 2025 to complete the challenge.

Report Author

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List of Background Papers

Cabinet Report [LGA Peer Assessment 2013](#)
LGA [Feedback 2013](#) and [Letter 2013](#)
LGA [improvement and assurance framework](#)
Statutory [Best Value duty](#)
Cabinet Report [Corporate Peer Review June 2024](#)

Appendices

Appendix 1 – LGA Corporate Peer Challenge Report
Appendix 2 – Corporate Peer Challenge Draft Action Plan
Appendix 3 – EQSHIA Corporate Peer Challenge Report and Action Plan

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