

CABINET

THURSDAY, 13 MARCH 2014

REPORT OF THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ASSOCIATION PEER CHALLENGE : 5TH TO 7TH NOVEMBER, 2013 FINAL REPORT

PURPOSE

To inform Members of the outcomes, key findings and recommendations arising from the LGA Peer Assessment of Tamworth Borough Council conducted between 5th and 7th November, 2013.

RECOMMENDATIONS

That Cabinet

1. Endorse the findings from the Peer Challenge and authorise the release of the report to staff and public;
2. Accept the suggestions for consideration as the basis for an improvement plan; and
3. That the Leader of the Council and Chief Executive submit said Improvement Plan to Cabinet for adoption at their meeting scheduled for 3rd April, 2014.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Both the Local Government Association and District Council Networks have actively promoted the benefits of "Sector Led Improvement" since the changes to nationally imposed inspection and assessment regimes.

Peer Challenges or Peer Assessments seek to achieve a balance between qualitative and quantitative performance figures and information and the more strategic competencies such as Political and Managerial Leadership, Financial Planning and Governance and Decision Making.

Whilst there is tangible, evidence based information on performance figures as reported quarterly to Members, the executive management team was keen to obtain an independent assessment of its 'core' competencies.

The Peer Team feedback and the final report was extremely complimentary about the political and managerial leadership and its ability to lead, plan and deliver against a clear Vision.

The team acknowledged that by taking "tough decisions" and standing by them contributed to an MTFs based upon prudent assumptions and the delivery of considered efficiencies.

The Council's reputation for "getting things done" and as a strategic partner considered as the most organised and dynamic justified the decision to embed collaborative working as

core business.

Whilst enormously positive, the assessment also highlighted a number of areas for improvement. These are set out in the report and will form the basis of the Improvement Plan referred to in this report.

Perhaps the most important observation from the team came as no surprise: **Staff here have a clear passion, pride and commitment to doing their best for the people of Tamworth and they recognise the nature of the financial challenges faced by the Council.**

Introduction

Peer Challenges or **Peer Assessments** are managed and delivered by the sector for the sector. They are focused upon improvement and the scope is designed to reflect local needs, circumstances and specific requirements.

Every **Peer Challenge** assesses and reviews five 'core' components; they are as follows:-

- i) **Understanding of local context and priority setting:** Does the Council understand its local context and has it established a clear set of priorities?
- ii) **Financial Planning & 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?
- iii) **Political & Managerial Leadership:** Does the Council have effective political and managerial leadership and is it a constructive partnership?
- iv) **Governance & Decision Making:** Are effective governance and decision making arrangements in place to respond to key challenges and manage change, transformation and disinvestment?
- v) **Organisational Capacity:** Are organisational capacity and resources focused in the right areas in order to deliver the agreed priorities?

In addition to the five core components, Councils have the opportunity to identify other areas of focus for inclusion in the **Peer Challenge**. The **Peer Team** is then assembled with this in mind thereby assuring that the assessment is undertaken by peers considered as best in class nationally.

The two main areas of focus for this exercise were:

1. Community Development

- How do we compare with best practice from other local authorities?
- Review the impacts and outcomes from our existing service delivery model; and
- Consider opportunities to improve the service

2. Partnerships & Commissioning

- Review corporate approach to commissioning; highlight gaps if any; and
- Review approach to voluntary and community sector engagement and commissioning

Peer Challenge Team:

Nicola Bulbeck

Chief Executive – Teignbridge District Council

Councillor Neil Clarke

Leader, Rushcliffe Borough Council & Member of DCN Executive

Jamie Carson

Corporate Director – Chorley Borough Council

Terry Collier

Corporate Director – Spelthorne Borough Council

Ernest Opuni

Peer Challenge Manager, LGA

Summary of Feedback : Overall Messages

Tamworth Borough Council has clear vision of place for the town and this is supported by a mutually beneficial relationship with Lichfield which has prospects for further collaboration into the future.

You have a sound understanding of the economic drivers impacting on the borough and have a reputation amongst your various partners for 'getting things done'. Partnerships are seen as core business and you have good relations with the media. However, we encourage you to develop a strategy to facilitate Tamworth identifying and fully utilising all available joint working opportunities.

There are good working relationships between the senior political and managerial leadership at Tamworth Borough Council. Both have a clear purpose in delivering the vision for the borough and are willing to stand by the tough decisions that have to be taken. In order to maintain this we feel that it is very important that, together, you continue to provide clear, consistent, stable and mutually inter-dependent leadership of the council.

Staff at Tamworth Borough Council have a clear passion and pride and a commitment to doing their best for the people of the town. They value the clear communication they have had with the Council's political and managerial leaders which has ensured that they recognise and understand well the nature of the financial challenges you face. An integral part of your plans for addressing the challenges is the current service review you are undertaking. However, in progressing this we encourage you to ensure you have appropriate synergy and clarity between your 'Sustainability Strategy' and the 'Corporate Change Programme'. There is a need to more clearly prioritise the objectives for each to ensure that both contribute effectively to your overall vision for an effective and sustainable organisation.

Your Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) is based on prudent assumptions and your strategy is buying time for your delivery of efficiencies. We encourage you to assure yourselves that the measures you have in place will help you to 'avoid' rather than 'delay' the risk of falling over the 'financial cliff' you have clearly identified. In doing this we believe there is more to do in addressing your challenges in a fundamentally transformational fashion.

There is a need to articulate clearly which services are appropriate for the various service delivery vehicles you are considering. The clarity at the top of the Council about the Authority being a 'hybrid' is not yet matched across all of the organisation or with all of your partners.

We do not feel that Scrutiny at Tamworth Council is as effective as it could be or that it is adding as much value to Council business as it ought to be. In spite of the improvements that you have made, we do not feel that Scrutiny is strategic or providing the challenge which would enhance the Council's development of policy. We encourage you continue to re-focus Scrutiny on policy development and performance management and give consideration to provision of dedicated support to the function.

You are very aware that in the medium to longer term, you will have yet more difficult decisions to make. Whilst we recognise your track record of taking and standing by tough

decisions, the challenges which all Local Authorities face at the present time are unprecedented. There may be some value in you considering whether, in looking to a future where yet more difficult decisions are required, a review of your current election arrangements might positively enhance your ability to do this whilst also yielding financial savings.

You are viewed as a strong partner by the voluntary and community sectors through your Community Development Officers (CDOs) and other individuals who have a reputation for understanding the value of the Sector (as well as its needs). There is perceived to be strong support from political and managerial leaders for effective community engagement and locality working which involves utilising the CDOs effectively. However, there may be opportunities for partners' contributions which you are not yet fully utilising whilst you may be able to increase take up by partners if you clearly demonstrate how your contributions enhance the achievement of their desired impacts and outcomes.

The Commissioning framework for Tamworth is founded on sound principles of 'procuring outcomes linked to priorities'. It is also 'Compact proofed'. Your 'Commissioning Intentions' document is perceived by partners to be clear and transparent in articulating how you intend to proceed. In building upon this, we encourage you to commence a dialogue with the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) and the County Council to establish appetite and scope for joint commissioning opportunities.

Suggestions for Consideration

1. Consider opportunities for building further clarity on joint working with Staffordshire County Council in order generate more mutual benefits. This includes a focus on locality working and commissioning.
2. Consider how best to embed locality working within the Council and TSP. For example, an annual plan of priorities (for example improved Streetscene, health literacy and positive diversionary activities for young people in locality X) for each of the 4 locality areas would provide direction for the Community. Align mainstream resources to locality working and lever in funding and resources from partners and the HRA account.
3. Communicate and explain the Sustainability Strategy for the council with staff more widely. It was not clear to the team that all staff are as aware of this work as you would wish.
4. Consider developing a higher profile for the Council's political leadership in strategic business planning and decisions. The input from political leaders in raising awareness of future financial challenges for the Council has been effective and you may wish to replicate this more widely in relation to other areas, for example, locality working.
5. Seek to improve the ways in which the positive work you are doing with partner organisations is communicated. There appear to be benefits of more closely interlinked communications across different organisations which are not yet being utilised (e.g. links on each other's websites). Internally consider developing an internal "Who's Who" (in conjunction with the intranet) to help inform users as to who is responsible for what. Review your current approach to learning from (and communication of) complaints, comments and compliments.
6. Develop a more proactive approach to member training with clear rules on compliance and sanctions. With particular regard to scrutiny, consider a structured development programme for the Council's Scrutiny Committees utilising experience from other Authorities. This might include visits to other Councils and targeted support such as:

- mentoring for the committees as a whole (including observation of meetings with feedback)
- targeted one to one mentoring for the Tamworth Chairs from counterparts in other Authorities and
- Assigning Policy 'tasks/projects' for Overview and Scrutiny to consider (e.g. tasking Overview and Scrutiny to come up with recommendations on how you embed locality working).
- Consider introducing a convention that the Chairman and Vice-chairman of Scrutiny Committees are each appointed from opposing political groups.

RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

There are none arising directly from this report. However; subject to the Council's response to the issues for consideration there may be future resource implications. Due process will be applied in all cases.

LEGAL/RISK IMPLICATIONS BACKGROUND

There are none arising directly from this report.

SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS

There are none arising directly from this report.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Information on Sector Led Improvement is available at: www.local.gov.uk/sector-led-improvement

An interim evaluation of the process is available at: www.local.gov.uk/peer-challenge This link includes a series of Case Studies.

REPORT AUTHOR

Anthony E. Goodwin
Chief Executive Officer

LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS

Peer Challenge Correspondence & Files held by John Day on ext. 588.
Peer Challenge Final Report
Peer Challenge Presentation