



Cabinet

Tuesday, 9 April 2024

LGA Corporate Peer Challenge

Report of the Chief Executive

Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Strategic and Borough-wide Leadership, Councillor N Clarke

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1. The Corporate Peer Challenge (CPC) is a part of the Local Government Association's (LGA) sector support programme. It involves senior councillors and officers from other authorities acting as peers to review the Council providing supportive, but critical challenge to the Council and its work. It aims to highlight areas of good practice, as well as identify areas for improvement and ongoing support.
- 1.2. The Council invited the LGA to conduct a CPC, which took place 15-18 January 2024. The last Peer Challenge had been undertaken in 2018 and it is recommended that CPCs are undertaken every five years.
- 1.3. This report provides more information about the process that was carried out, presents the LGA's recommendations and outlines the Council's initial response to these recommendations and the resulting action plan.

2. Recommendation

It is RECOMMENDED that Cabinet:

- a) accepts the LGA's feedback report as detailed in Appendix A;
- b) accepts the Council's action plan and response to the recommendations as detailed in Appendix B.

3. Reasons for Recommendation

- 3.1. The delivery of the proposed action plan is a key component of participation in the LGA's CPC process. This ensures that the Council puts into practice a number of the recommendations put forward by the Peer Team to ensure the Council is delivering the best possible service for residents.

4. Supporting Information

Overview of the Corporate Peer Challenge Process

- 4.1. CPCs are delivered by experienced elected member and officer peers. Rushcliffe's peer team was as follows:
- Member Peer – Peter Fleming OBE, former Leader, Sevenoaks District Council
 - Member Peer – Cllr Martin Stone, Cabinet Member for Climate Change, Planning and Environment, Chesterfield Borough Council
 - Chief Executive Peer – Scott Logan, Chief Executive, Basildon Council
 - Executive Director Peer – Ian Edwards, Director of Economy and Environment, Wychavon and Malvern Hills District Councils
 - Executive Director Peer – Julie Baird, Director of Planning and Growth, West Suffolk Council
 - Shadow Peer – Josh Alderton, Graduate Management Trainee, Southend-on-Sea City Council
 - LGA Peer Challenge Manager – Vicki Goddard.
- 4.2. The Peer Team considered the following themes:
- Local priorities and outcomes
 - Organisational and place leadership
 - Governance and culture
 - Financial planning and management
 - Capacity for improvement
 - Environment (this was an additional theme, requested by the Council).
- 4.3. CPCs are improvement focused and are not an inspection. The process is not designed to provide an in-depth or technical assessment of plans and proposals, but rather a high-level overview based on the CPC team's experience and knowledge of local government.
- 4.4. The CPC team took part in 50 meetings, meeting with more than 105 people including a range of council staff together with councillors and external stakeholders.

Overview of Feedback

- 4.5. The feedback report can be viewed in its entirety in Appendix A.
- 4.6. The feedback report reflects positively on the Council and the Borough, stating that 'The borough of Rushcliffe is a great place to live, and Rushcliffe Borough Council's varied, dedicated work is a clear contributing factor'. While the report by its nature is focused on areas for improvement, there are a great number of positives identified, including:
- RBC is an exceptional partner, locally and sub-regionally, as highlighted by all partner organisations that the peer team spoke to, from the police to the voluntary sector, from the sub-region to parish and town level.

- RBC’s Chief Executive, who is “tapped into all partnership arrangements” and Leader of the Council, provide excellent, ambitious, outward-looking place leadership and are well respected for doing so.
- RBC’s councillors have a strong role also at the community level, having often built strong relationships with their parish and town councils.
- RBC has a robust, current financial position, endorsed by its auditors. External and internal auditors were equally impressed with RBC’s management of its finances and its responses to audit recommendations generally.
- RBC has a positive, robust and considered approach to its finances, alongside its debt-free status. This is to be commended, especially in light of its successful delivery of many significant capital projects, housing allocations and its plans with strategic partners for the Ratcliffe-on-Soar site.
- RBC’s recent ambitious capital investments have enabled successful delivery of new environmentally-friendly community facilities such as the Bingham Arena leisure centre, a business centre and the Rushcliffe Oaks Crematorium – one of the UK’s first electric cremators that other councils have visited to learn from. All of these new facilities are benefiting local residents and businesses and have business cases to provide income to the Council.
- RBC leads and drives the environmental agenda at regional level. RBC consistently leads the way locally in raising the importance of the climate change agenda through its cross-boundary partnerships. Many neighbouring and sub-regional partners also look to the Council for support on this agenda. The Council is already exceeding its targets for this programme and is “chomping on the bit” to achieve more.
- The Council provides a range of good support to, and engages strongly with, its parish and town councils.
- There is a positive culture within the Council generally, which is supportive and caring. Visible, in-person, ‘practice what you preach’ leadership from the Chief Executive and EMT has been a clear contributing factor to this.

4.7. The report also reflects on areas where the Peer Team felt the Council should continue to focus on or do things differently to operate in the most effective way and improve outcomes for residents. These are captured in the key recommendations, as follows:

1.	Take a strategic/corporate approach to programme and project management, building on and aligning with your existing corporate performance management function.
2.	Invest further in staff and councillor training; ensure councillors in particular take up mandatory, essential and other training, including that on councillor/officer roles, political awareness, code of conduct and other internal processes.
3.	Create further time, space, resource and capacity with your strategic partners to identify what could be needed in future regarding changes in the landscape that affect you and your communities, notably the East

	Midlands Mayoral County Combined Authority (EMMCCA), Development Corporation and Freeport.
4	Further develop and align your capital programme with your economic growth strategy once you have agreed the latter for 2024/25, with clear outcomes for both.
5	Use your respected position with all your partners to deliver further defined outcomes across the whole council.
6	Explore options through your climate change action plan to maximise delivery of environmental outcomes across your strategic development and growth sites.
7	Integrate climate change ambitions in all your service areas.
8	Reduce the number of RBC values, eg to a maximum of five, working with your employee liaison group and trade unions.
9	Build up your future, annual or mid-term, light-touch corporate strategy refreshes from community level to best understand and respond to your communities' needs and aspirations for the future.

- 4.8. The recommendations are presented in full, alongside the Council's proposed action plan in Appendix B. The action plan also captures and responds to a number of additional observations which have been pulled out from the feedback report. As can be seen in Appendix B, the Council is in a good position to respond to a number of the recommendations as officers are already in the process of delivering or undertaking relevant work.
- 4.9. There are a small number of observations which we feel may not fairly reflect the organisation. The Council's response to these is captured in the action plan in Appendix B. The Council recognises that the Peer Team had limited time on site and there are many activities and pieces of work that weren't able to be shared with the team due to time constraints.
- 4.10. Overall, the Council was happy with the process and the feedback and would like to thank the Corporate Peer Team and the LGA for their time and commitment.

5. **Alternative options considered and reasons for rejection**

The Council could choose not to accept the findings of the CPC and not put in place a corresponding action plan. However, it is important that the Council remains open to feedback and learning, particularly from experienced peers and the LGA. This is in the best interests of residents and the Borough. The Council agreed in advance that it would publish the report and commit to putting in place an action plan.

6. Risks and Uncertainties

There are no known risks associated with this report.

7. Implications

7.1. Financial Implications

There are no direct financial implications associated with this report. Any financial decisions will be considered as part of future budget reporting and consideration of the Council's broader Medium Term Financial Strategy. There was no direct cost to the Council of undertaking a Corporate Peer Challenge.

7.2. Legal Implications

There are no legal implications associated with this report.

7.3. Equalities Implications

There are no equalities implications associated with this report.

7.4. Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 Implications

There are no crime and disorder implications associated with this report.

7.5. Biodiversity Net Gain Implications

There are no biodiversity net gain implications associated with this report.

8. Link to Corporate Priorities

The Environment	The Council requested that the environment be considered as a sixth key theme in the CPC, reflecting its level of priority to the Council. The Feedback report reflect positively on the Council's work in this area, and makes a number of recommendations, which the Council has responded to in the action plan.
Quality of Life	The feedback report reflects positively on 'Quality of Life' in the Borough and makes a number of recommendations, which the Council has responded to in the action plan.
Efficient Services	The feedback report reflects positively on the Council's approach to delivering efficient services, with a particular focus on the Council's robust financial position. The report makes a number of recommendations, which the Council has responded to in the action plan.
Sustainable Growth	The feedback report reflects positively on the Council's approach to sustainable, particular in relation to the strong partnerships that the Council has, promoting growth across the region. The report makes a number of recommendations, which the Council has responded to in the action plan.

9. Recommendation

It is RECOMMENDED that Cabinet:

- a) accepts the LGA's feedback report as detailed in Appendix A;
- b) accepts the Council's action plan and response to the recommendations as detailed in Appendix B.

For more information contact:	Kath Marriott Chief Executive 0115 914 8291 kmarriott@rushcliffe.gov.uk
Background papers available for Inspection:	None
List of appendices:	Appendix A – LGA feedback report Appendix B – CPC Action Plan