

TEWKESBURY BOROUGH COUNCIL

Report to:	Executive Committee
Date of Meeting:	27 November 2019
Subject:	Corporate Peer Challenge
Report of:	Chief Executive
Corporate Lead:	Chief Executive
Lead Members:	Leader of the Council
Number of Appendices:	None

Executive Summary:

As part of its approach to sector led improvement, the Local Government Association (LGA) offers a fully funded corporate peer challenge to Councils every four to five years. The last peer challenge for this Council was held in November 2014. Peer challenges are improvement focused, they are carried out to the specification of individual Councils and are aimed at improving, not judging, Councils.

The scope of the challenge is agreed in advance and tailored to reflect local needs and specific requirements. Also covered, is a review of five core components which is essentially a high level, external 'health-check'.

The undertaking of a peer challenge has been discussed with Members through informal dialogue and this report gives more detailed information on the process. The date of the peer challenge has been agreed and will commence on Tuesday 3 March 2020.

Recommendation:

To ENDORSE the undertaking of a Corporate Peer Challenge.

Reasons for Recommendation:

It is good practice to be subject to a peer challenge within the prescribed timescales. The challenge will provide an indicator as to the Council's ability and capacity to deliver the priorities within the new Council Plan (2020-2024).

Resource Implications:

The logistics of organising a peer challenge has been planned into the workload of the Corporate Services Team.

Legal Implications:

None directly associated with this report.

Risk Management Implications:

If the Council prepares thoroughly and has a consistent story to tell then, from a reputational perspective, the outcome of the challenge should be positive.

Performance Management Follow-up:

Any peer challenge will inevitably make a number of recommendations. Following the previous peer challenge, an action plan was produced. Responsibility for monitoring progress of the action plan was assigned to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Environmental Implications:

None directly associated with this report.

1.0 INTRODUCTION/BACKGROUND

- 1.1 As part of its approach to sector led improvement, the Local Government Association (LGA) offers a fully funded corporate peer challenge to Councils every four to five years. The last peer challenge for this Council was held in November 2014. Peer challenges are improvement focused, they are carried out to the specification of individual Councils and are aimed at improving, not judging, Councils. The scope of the challenge is agreed in advance and tailored to reflect local needs and specific requirements. Also covered, is the review of five core components which is essentially a high level, external 'health-check'. The undertaking of a peer challenge has been discussed with Members through informal dialogue and this report gives more detailed information on the process. The date of the peer challenge has been agreed and will commence on Tuesday 3 March 2020.

2.0 WHY UNDERTAKE A PEER CHALLENGE?

- 2.1 This is the last year of the current Council Plan (2016-2020). A new plan therefore needs to be developed to set the direction of travel for the period 2020-2024 and beyond. Councils continue to be subject to significant change, working out how to deliver services in a way that costs less but provides the same level and quality of support for residents and communities. Against this backdrop of challenges, it is important the Council has assurance it has the capacity, commitment and vision to achieve its core priorities.

- 2.2 The peer challenge provides a real learning opportunity, through a critical friend approach to confirm both the strengths and areas for improvement for the Council to consider. It is designed to be forward looking, facilitative and problem solving. One thing it is not, is a form of inspection and will not deliver a detailed diagnostic or scored assessment. The offer of peer support is set out in the report 'Sector-led improvement in local government' and is a core part of the LGA's offer to support Councils. Peer challenges are managed and delivered by the sector for the sector. They are improvement focused; the scope is agreed with individual Councils and tailored to reflect local needs and specific requirements.

3.0 PEER CHALLENGE – WHAT IT IS NOT

- 3.1 Succinctly;

- it is not a sector-owned form of inspection.
- it does not deliver a scored assessment.
- it is not a detailed service assessment.
- it is not driven by external requirements.
- it is not reported to government.

4.0 PEER CHALLENGE – WHAT IT IS -THE CORE COMPONENTS

4.1 The scope of each peer challenge includes a general ‘health check’ on five core components:

- **Understanding of local context and priority setting:** Does the Council understand its local context and has it established a clear set of priorities?
- **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?
- **Political and managerial leadership:** Does the Council have effective political and managerial leadership and is it a constructive partnership?
- **Governance and decision making:** Are effective governance and decision-making arrangements in place to respond to key challenges and manage change, and transformation?
- **Organisational capacity:** Are organisational capacity and resources focused in the right areas in order to deliver the agreed priorities?

5.0 TAILORED SCOPE

5.1 In addition to the five core themes, the scope is tailored with a particular focus to address the following questions;

- Are we set up organisationally to successfully deliver our growth plans and ambitions?
- In relation to the above, are we confident in the delivery of the Garden Communities projects?
- In more general terms, the ability and capacity to deliver the new Council Plan?

6.0 LOGISTICS OF THE REVIEW

6.1 In terms of the peer challenge team itself, this usually comprises between five - six team members, including a LGA representative. The team will be led by a Chief Executive from another Council, typically a Council with similar demographics and stature. There will be Member representation on the team and this will reflect the general political make-up of our Council. The remaining members of the team are senior officers from other Councils. The team dynamic and skillset will reflect the scope of the challenge.

6.2 As background information for the peer challenge team, a short position statement is produced. This serves as the terms of reference for the peer challenge and provides a brief to the peer team in terms of their focus. The brief can usefully summarise the key drivers, issues, challenges, context and current thinking in relation to the areas of focus. Usually supporting the briefing note is a request for a small suite of background documentation such as the Council Plan itself, Medium Term Financial Strategy and structure charts.

6.3 In advance of the challenge, a timetable of onsite activity needs to be organised and a template will be provided to help co-ordinate this. During the course of the challenge period, the challenge team will meet with a variety of key stakeholders. For example, during the last challenge, they met with senior management (both collectively and individually), operational manager cohort, staff focus group, Members (both collectively and individually), various partners (e.g. locality partners, external partners and voluntary and community sector), external audit and Chief Executives from neighbouring Councils.

- 6.4** Between now and March, there is obviously a significant amount of preparation work to undertake, particularly around development of the new Council Plan. Additionally, the Council and all stakeholders need to be 'warmed up' in relation to the challenge itself, understanding what it is about and the direction of travel of the Council. Ideally, everyone needs to be on the same page.
- 6.5** At the conclusion of the challenge, a presentation of the key findings will be delivered by the peer challenge lead. It is common practice for all internal participants to be invited to this presentation. A formal report will be produced usually within six - eight weeks of the conclusion of the challenge. It is from this report, an action plan is developed and delivery of this plan will be monitored and reported through the relevant governance channels. It is generally accepted that the report will be published by the Council.

7.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 7.1** None.

8.0 CONSULTATION

- 8.1** There is preparation work to be done with all relevant stakeholders to ensure all are engaged with the process.

9.0 RELEVANT COUNCIL POLICIES/STRATEGIES

- 9.1** Council Plan 2020-2024.

10.0 RELEVANT GOVERNMENT POLICIES

- 10.1** None directly.

11.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS (Human/Property)

- 11.1** Preparation work and delivery of the challenge is factored into the workload of the Corporate Services team. Meeting rooms will need to be block booked for the week of the challenge.

12.0 SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS (Social/Community Safety/Cultural/ Economic/ Environment)

- 12.1** None directly.

13.0 IMPACT UPON (Value For Money/Equalities/E-Government/Human Rights/Health And Safety)

- 13.1** None directly.

14.0 RELATED DECISIONS AND ANY OTHER RELEVANT FACTS

- 14.1** None.

Background Papers: None.

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Appendices: None.