

**CABINET
16 MARCH 2021**

PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT

TITLE OF REPORT: UPDATE ON CORPORATE PEER CHALLENGE ACTION PLAN

REPORT OF: MANAGING DIRECTOR

EXECUTIVE MEMBER: LEADER AND DEPUTY LEADER

COUNCIL PRIORITY: BE A MORE WELCOMING AND INCLUSIVE COUNCIL

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report updates on the progress made against each action on the Corporate Peer Challenge Action Plan agreed by Cabinet on 23 June 2020, following the recommendations of the Corporate Peer Challenge (CPC) held in January 2020.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1. That the progress made on the Corporate Peer Challenge Action Plan as set out at Appendix A be noted.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1. To ensure that Cabinet maintains an overview of the Council response to the matters identified within the CPC report, ensuring that the benefits of the CPC process are realised.

4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 4.1. None considered, given the Action Plan has previously been approved.

5. CONSULTATION WITH RELEVANT MEMBERS AND EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS

- 5.1. The Cabinet reports of 24 March 2020 and 23 June 2020 have previously updated on the CPC and how members, officers and external stakeholders were involved in the process. The CPC Action Plan has been updated in consultation with the Leadership Team and Executive Members. This update will also be considered by Overview and Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 9 March 2021.

6. FORWARD PLAN

- 6.1 This report does not contain a recommendation on a key Executive decision and has therefore not been referred to in the Forward Plan.

7. BACKGROUND

- 7.1. The Cabinet reports of 24 March 2020 and 23 June 2020 set out the background to the CPC process, report from the peer team and the subsequent action plan that was developed.
- 7.2. Since the CPC Action Plan was adopted on 23 June 2020 officers and the administration have sought to progress the various recommendations and actions set out in the plan. Each Action has a lead (or leads) who have been tasked with implementing the actions. The Action Plan is reviewed and updated approximately every quarter.

8. RELEVANT CONSIDERATIONS

- 8.1. The updated CPC Action Plan is attached at Appendix A. Members will recall that at the time of adoption there was a great deal of uncertainty over timescales for implementing many of the actions, due to the impact of the pandemic. Therefore much of the timescales column was previously blank, with consideration of appropriate timescales delegated to the Leader, Deputy Leader and Managing Director. The updated CPC Action plan sets out the expected timescale for each action, with an additional 'Updates' column to provide a narrative update for each action. Completed actions are highlighted in green.
- 8.2. Members will note that progress has been made against many of the actions, with 17 of the 60 actions marked as completed. A number of the actions are for the medium to long term (for example those related to Shaping our Future or the transformation programme) and therefore whilst they are underway will not be completed for some time.
- 8.3. There are two significant factors that have impacted progress against the CPC Action Plan. Firstly the pandemic which has diverted time and resources to supporting our community and running the Council remotely, thereby limiting the time available to dedicate to progressing the CPC actions. Secondly the progress of the Local Plan Examination, itself delayed by the pandemic, which needs to be concluded in order to provide the policy background against which some of the actions will be developed. However overall it is felt excellent progress has been made given the circumstances.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1. Cabinet's terms of reference include at paragraph 5.6.13 "To consider the reports of external review bodies on key aspects of overall service delivery".
- 9.2. The CPC is a voluntary process and therefore there is no legal obligation to either host a CPC or act upon the recommendations. However, it is best practice to undertake a CPC and having done so, to act upon the issues identified.

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1. There are no specific financial implications associated with this report. The majority of the actions contained within the plan do not require additional funding. Specific funding has been allocated from the Special Reserve for the early stages of the transformation project.

- 10.2. The recommended minimum level of reserves referred to in the CPC feedback report only applies to General Fund reserve. When the Council sets its budget each year, there is a requirement for the Chief Finance Officer to recommend a minimum level. This minimum level is set after considering other factors, including the level of specific revenue reserves. Since the CPC report was provided, the pandemic has resulted in additional expenditure and reduced income which has reduced the level of reserves the Council holds. The budget for 2021/22 forecasts a further significant decrease in General Fund balances, and the risks associated with the pandemic have necessitated an increase in the recommended minimum General Fund balance.

11. RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1. The CPC feedback report provided the Council with an opportunity to reflect on its priorities and the actions it was taking to address these. This helps to reduce risk by ensuring that the Council is focused on what it wants to achieve. The CPC feedback report made some specific references to risk (i.e. recommendations 8 and 29). The response to these is detailed in Appendix A.

12. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 12.1. In line with the Public Sector Equality Duty, public bodies must, in the exercise of their functions, give due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation, to advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between those who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- 12.2. There are no known equalities implications that apply to this report. Individual actions on the plan may require equalities impact assessments in due course as solutions are developed.

13. SOCIAL VALUE IMPLICATIONS

- 13.1. The Social Value Act and “go local” requirements do not apply to this report. Individual actions on the plan may have social value implications and these will be considered in due course as solutions are developed.

14. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

- 14.1. There are no known Environmental impacts or requirements that apply to this report. Individual actions on the plan may require environmental impact assessments in due course as solutions are developed.

15. HUMAN RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 15.1 The work set out in the Action Plan has been incorporated into the work programmes of the relevant service areas. In most cases this is additional work, which is why it has been necessary to focus on other priorities during the pandemic. The Shaping our Future programme is a commitment to, and investment in, our staff to ensure that the organisation is able to deliver the programme envisaged.

16. APPENDICES

- 16.1 Appendix A – Updated Corporate Peer Challenge Action Plan

17. CONTACT OFFICERS

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18. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 18.1 Report to Cabinet, 24 March 2020 – Corporate Peer Challenge Report
- 18.2 Report to Cabinet, 23 June 2020 – Corporate Peer Challenge Action Plan