

Report of the Chief Executive

CORPORATE LGA PEER REVIEW1. Purpose of report

To consider asking the LGA to undertake a peer review of Broxtowe Borough Council.

2. Detail.

It is more than five years since Broxtowe had a peer challenge. A peer challenge is a sector-led improvement offer to local authorities managed through the Local Government Association. The purpose of such a review is to generate external perspectives and insights to inform a future improvement journey. More details of what such a peer review might involve are set out in the appendix to this report.

The Council is currently undertaking a Corporate Plan consultation event with a view to arriving at a new Corporate Plan by December 2019. The proposed timing of the review (mid to late December or early January) by which time our budget plans for 2020/21 would be well advanced, would work well if councillors are minded to agree to support the idea.

3. Financial implications

There are no direct costs associated with the review although expenses of the peer team may amount to a few thousand pounds as they have a three-day stay in the Borough, which will be funded from reserves.

Recommendation

The Committee is asked to RESOLVE to invite the LGA to conduct a peer challenge of Broxtowe Borough Council.

Background papers

Nil

APPENDIX



Corporate Peer Challenge for Broxtowe Borough Council

The Local Government Association offers all Councils a free Corporate Peer Challenge (CPC). This tool is a core element of our sector-led improvement offer to local authorities. Managed and delivered by the sector on behalf of the sector, the process is designed to support councils to take responsibility for their own improvement. There is a sector expectations that councils will have a Corporate Peer Challenge every 4 or 5 years.

A 2014 Independent Evaluation of the CPC programme by Cardiff Business School of Cardiff University found that “It is clear that councils which participate in CPC value the experience and derive significant benefits from it.”

They said that “the vast majority of respondents to our survey reported that CPC is

- helping to maintain the reputation of local government (89 per cent)
- is an effective way of ensuring continued improvement of the sector (84 per cent)
- providing a robust challenge to councils (83 per cent)”

Further they concluded that “every council which has received a peer challenge [would] recommend it to other authorities and almost all of the councils we studied said that they would value a second CPC within the next three years.”

Importantly in a world where many councils have seen a significant slimming down of central teams, nearly all respondents to the Cardiff Business School survey (93 per cent) agreed that the challenge placed far less of a bureaucratic burden on their council than previous inspections; such as Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) and Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA).

The LGA have also surveyed CEOs and Leaders of Councils which have had a CPC during the past 12 months and the feedback shows:

- 100% of respondents would be likely to recommend having a CPC to other councils
- 93% said that the CPC had a positive impact on their council's performance
- 86% said that the CPC had a positive impact on the external reputation of their council

Scope and focus

The context within which any Council is operating is becoming increasingly testing in terms of demands and expectations; and in terms of the resources available. The Council would benefit from a (free) Corporate Peer Challenge (CPC) to validate its journey so far, to consider how well it has appraised its own situation and how well prepared and focussed it is for the opportunities and challenges ahead. Your CPC could consider 5 core components and high level questions:

- Understanding of the local place and priority setting: How well does the council understand its local context and place and how has that been used to inform a vision and set of priorities? Is that ambition clearly stated enough and something which resonates with people in the Borough? Are the Council's ambitions for growth, both in terms of economic growth and housing growth (and within that the supply of affordable housing) clear and realistic? What are the Council's ambitions on the environment and in responding to climate change.
- Leadership of Place: Does the council provide effective leadership of the District, within, but also beyond, the Council's boundaries and the wider place (such as Nottinghamshire, D2N2, The East Midlands) through its elected members, officers and constructive relationships and partnerships with external stakeholders?
- Financial planning and viability: Does the council have a financial plan in place to ensure long term sustainability and is there evidence that it is being implemented successfully? How aware is it of its costs compared to similar councils. Is the Council maximising appropriate sharing and "commercial" opportunities to contribute further to self sufficiency but more importantly to enable reinvestment in services?
- Organisational leadership and governance: Is there effective political and managerial leadership supported by good governance. Are decision-making arrangements fleet of foot, responsive to key challenges and opportunities and do they enable change and transformation to be successfully implemented? Are elected and officer roles clearly defined and relationships constructive? Is the way the Council operates its Committee system fit for purpose?
- Capacity to deliver: Is there sufficient corporate capacity and is it aligned with priorities? Does the council influence, enable and leverage external capacity to focus on agreed outcomes? For example how well are councillors carrying out their community leadership roles to build community capacity. Is the internal culture one where colleagues across the Council feel empowered and where good customer service is an outcome? Has the Council arrived at an effective way to manage performance?

Timing and process

There is never a perfect time for a Corporate Peer Challenge, but likewise there is never a bad time. They can benefit a Council at any time, at any point, as evidenced by the evaluation and feedback shown above. However a peer challenge does take around 3-4

months to set up and to secure time in peers' diaries. In your case it would seem particularly valuable to have a Peer Challenge in November or December 2019.

The CPC is a robust but constructive activity. It is intended as a tool for holding up a mirror to you. It is NOT an inspection to pass or fail. You are not given a "score." It is NOT a bureaucratic process, with only minimal work necessary beforehand.

There will be informal feedback to the Leader and CEO at the end of each day and before wider feedback. On the final day, feedback in the form of a presentation with slides on "strengths" and "areas to consider" and recommendations will be given to a wider group of your choosing. We will follow up with a letter summarising our findings and advice after approximately 6 weeks. We will agree the accuracy of the content of this letter with you.

Any particularly sensitive issues will be fed back to you face to face by the peers in a confidential way.

There are no direct costs to the Council of receiving a CPC.

Peer Team

For a District Council we propose that the peer team will spend 3 consecutive days on site.

Although there is flexibility around elements of this, we would suggest a peer team of:

- A Leader peer, ideally a Leader from a Council with a similar context to your Council (although not from the vicinity). In your case we could expect to source a District/Borough Council Leader. We will work with you and the LGA Labour Group Office to identify a potential councillor peer.
- Possibly one or two further member peers reflecting the current political numbers on the Council. We will work with you and the appropriate LGA Group Office to ensure the right choice is made
- A Chief Executive Officer, probably from a District/Borough Council and ideally reflecting an area with a similar context. Stroud was mentioned in conversation as an option.
- A senior officer peer, possibly with a background in the environment and/or climate change.
- A further senior officer peer, possibly an officer with a commercialism focus.
- An LGA Peer Challenge Manager,

There is flexibility around the 4th and 5th members of the team above and they could be from outside the sector. In terms of specific peers for any of the roles, you can suggest any

individuals or Councils you were particularly keen to be involved given their relevance and credibility; or we can come back to you with suggestions. We would want to ensure both the Council and the LGA were happy with the peers selected.

Mark Edgell, LGA, 2019