

REPORT TO:	CORPORATE RESOURCE MANAGEMENT AND GOVERNANCE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
DATE:	16 January 2024
REPORT OF:	Kathryn Rees, Director of Strategy
REPORT TITLE:	DRAFT CORPORATE PEER CHALLENGE REVISIT REPORT 2023

1. Introduction and Background

- 1.1 In November 2022 we invited the Local Government Association (LGA) Peer Challenge team to Stockport to carry out a Corporate Peer Challenge. The Peer Challenge process involves officer and councillor peers from across the sector reviewing Council services and functions through constructive and respectful challenge.
- 1.2 This process enables experience and expertise to be shared across the sector collectively and is a central element of sector-led improvement. Although it is a voluntary process, there is an expectation that all Council's have a Peer Challenge every 5 years.

2. Peer Challenge – November 2022

- 2.1 The Stockport Peer Challenge team was led by Chris Naylor previously Chief Executive of Barking and Dagenham Council . In advance of the visit the Peer Team prepared by reviewing a range of documents and information. This was to ensure that they were familiar with us as a Council, the Borough and the opportunities and challenges that the Council is facing. This included our position statement that the Council produced specifically for the Peer Challenge.
- 2.2 Once the Peer Team had completed their visit, they wrote up their findings into a report.” and identified 11 core recommendations for further development. The report described Stockport Council as “an impressive organisation and recognised the many strengths of Stockport. They were impressed by our close working with local partners to enable, commission, and deliver high-performing services that meet the needs of the local population well. The peer team also recognised the strength of cross-party working and relationships across councillors and officers. They could see that we have clear priorities, big ambitions, and strong financial management.
- 2.3 The Peer Team suggested areas where we could build on our success and make further improvements. These include maximising the benefits of neighbourhood working and exploring future opportunities to work with local partners and build on our already strong relationships. The peer team also acknowledged current economic uncertainty and recommended further financial modelling to underpin our programme of transformational reform. We will also communicate our work and progress more widely, recognising the strength of practice that exists locally and sharing local practice with the wider sector.
- 2.4 An action plan was developed that responded to the recommendations and findings of the review. The activities outlined in the action plan having to be delivered in 2023/24 and a progress review visit to take place within a year of the original visit. Here is a link to peer review report and action plan:

3. Peer Challenge Revisit – October 2023

3.1 In October 2023 we welcomed back members of the Peer Team for a revisit to look at the progress we have made over the past 12 months. The team provided very positive feedback and that we have gone further than expected in delivering on their recommendations.

The key points that the peer team made in their feedback were:

- The Peer Team was impressed at the ‘sophistication’ of our approach to neighbourhood working, and how it incorporates a mixture of functions which peers had seen in other locality models individually, but not brought together to this extent.
- They also noted that we are looking to the future, focussing on longer-term transformation and that we have been busy exploring opportunities to open up and share new ideas across our organisation and partners from inside and outside Stockport.
- The team was impressed with the ‘purposeful and targeted approach’ we have taken to develop our workforce, instilling our core values and a sense of pride in our staff. They said that this was ‘complimented by a visible ‘on the ground’ approach from both the Leader and Chief Executive to connect with staff and workforce across the Council.’
- The Peer Team were impressed with the strength of cross-party working and relationships across councillors and officers. They could see that we put a ‘great deal of thought and capacity’ into our member induction programmes
- The Peer Team was ‘pleased to hear that the council is unashamedly focused on doing the basics well;’ and recognised our ‘strong financial position’ as illustrated through the setting of balanced budgets, the achievement of savings targets and underspends in recent financial years.

3.2 The Peer Team also identified areas where they felt we needed to strengthen and stretch our approach these included:

A continued focus on Equality: The Peer Team reflected that due to the scale and breadth of the work set out in the Council Plan there was a risk that the focus on equality could potentially be diluted.

Neighbourhood Working: The Peer Team that felt that the contribution of Councillors needed to be maximised in the development of the neighbourhood model.

Performance Management Framework: The Peer Team felt that in developing our performance frameworks we needed to focus on thinking about the best measures / indicators that reflect our priorities and also consider reviewing the process for reporting these indicators.

4 Recommendations

The Scrutiny Committee is asked to:

- a) Note the final revisit report from the LGA following the Corporate Peer Challenge Revisit and make comments and recommendations based on the findings

Further Information.

Contact officer for accessing background papers and discussing the report:

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