



**EXECUTIVE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE: 21 October 2021**

CABINET: 2 November 2021

Report of: Chief Operating Officer

**Relevant Portfolio Holder: Councillor Mr Ian Moran - Leader of the Council /
Portfolio Holder for Economic Regeneration**

**Contact for further information: Name (Extn. 5237) Peter Morrison
(E-mail: peter.morrison@westlancs.gov.uk)**

SUBJECT: CORPORATE PEER CHALLENGE

Wards affected: Borough wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 To advise Cabinet that the Local Government Association will be supporting the council with a Corporate Peer Challenge (CPC) in the coming months.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS TO EXECUTIVE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY

2.1 That the Committee consider the content of the report and that the agreed comments of Executive Overview and Scrutiny Committee be passed to Cabinet for consideration.

3.0 RECOMMENDATIONS TO CABINET

3.1 That Cabinet note the contents of the report and the indicative timetable at appendix 1.

4.0 WHO ARE THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ASSOCIATION (LGA)?

4.1 The LGA is a national membership body for local authorities which works on behalf of its members to support, promote and improve local government.

4.2 The LGA is a politically-led, cross-party organisation that works to ensure local government has a strong, credible voice with national government. Their aim is to influence and set the political agenda on issues that matter to councils so that they are able to deliver local solutions to national problems.

5.0 WHAT IS CORPORATE PEER CHALLENGE?

- 5.1 As part of their support offer, the LGA provides a range of resources and tools to help councils with support and challenge to improve. CPC brings together political and managerial leadership, through the use of member and officer peers to provide robust, strategic and credible challenge and support. CPC also enhances the capacity within the sector and helps to avoid insularity within councils.
- 5.2 The LGA advise that the key principles on which peer support is based have been overwhelmingly endorsed by councils and include the following:
- councils are responsible for their own performance
 - stronger local accountability leads to further improvement
 - councils have a sense of collective responsibility for performance in the sector as a whole
 - the role of the LGA is to help councils by providing the necessary support
- 5.3 The LGA are also keen to point out that CPC is not:
- a sector-owned form of inspection
 - a scored assessment
 - a detailed service assessment
 - driven by external requirements or a set of Key Lines of Enquiry
 - reported to government, although the LGA strongly encourages councils to publish the results
- 5.4 The council will be given the opportunity to define the scope and process, so that it best meets our needs and the needs of the council and community. In addition to this, the challenge team will also assess the council against the following five core elements;
1. Local priorities and outcomes – does the council understand its local context and place and use that to inform a clear vision and set of priorities?
 2. Organisational and place leadership – Does the council provide effective leadership of place through its elected members, officers and constructive relationships and partnerships with external stakeholders?
 3. Governance and culture – Is there effective political and managerial leadership supported by good governance and decision-making arrangements that respond to key challenges and enable change and transformation to be implemented?
 4. Financial planning and management – Does the council have a financial plan in place to ensure long term viability and is there evidence that this is being implemented successfully?
 5. Capacity for improvement – Is organisational capacity aligned with priorities and does the council influence, enable and leverage external capacity to focus on agreed outcomes?

6.0 CORPORATE PEER CHALLENGE – THE PROCESS

- 6.1 In autumn 2019, the LGA invited West Lancashire Borough Council to take part in a CPC however, this had to be put on hold given the emergence of the Covid pandemic.
- 6.2 More recently, the LGA have indicated that they intend to recommence their CPC programme and have offered a challenge for West Lancs, in March 2022. The team will be on site during this time, usually for three to four days, and will hold meetings and workshops to meet staff, citizens and other interested parties.
- 6.3 Ahead of the CPC site visit, the LGA will work with the council to plan the scope of the challenge, identify a suitable and robust challenge team and then plan the process. An initial scoping meeting will be arranged with the leader and chief operating officer, usually four to six months in advance of the CPC. At this meeting the following will be discussed and agreed:
- the main focus of the challenge
 - the nature and composition of the peer team
 - when it would be best to undertake the CPC
 - the value and purpose of any preparatory work / material
 - the nature and form of feedback at the end of the CPC
- 6.4 To ensure the council gets the most appropriate challenge, support and ideas for our specific needs, the peer team will be drawn up in line with the council's needs and will reflect the main focus of the CPC; the council will agree the composition of the team. Once agreed, the LGA encourage the respective leaders and chief officers to make contact and discuss the CPC, confirming each other's expectations.
- 6.5 The LGA anticipate that virtually all of the background preparatory information and documentation will be available in the public domain and therefore the process will not place unnecessary burdens on the council. Any requests for information will be proportionate to the scope and focus of the CPC. The council will however be required to prepare a "position statement" about the main focus of the CPC, this will help the peer team understand the issues involved and can be discussed at the scoping meeting.
- 6.6 At the end of the site visit feedback will be provided, the format this takes will be agreed at the scoping meeting, but usually a roundtable session including an audience of the council's choosing. At this event, the CPC team will share its views and offer comments on the core components and the agreed areas of focus.
- 6.7 A feedback report will be prepared and shared with the council which will outline the main findings and conclusions, recommendations for improvement and innovation, signposting of good practice and case study material. The LGA will also offer an improvement planning session, wider feedback event, or other activity which will enable discussion and development of plans to take forward the learning from the CPC.
- 6.8 It is up to the council how it then uses the feedback provided and if it decides to publish the results, although the LGA strongly encourages councils to do so as this shows a commitment to being accountable to the communities being served.

One suggestion cited by the LGA is that the council might publish a statement setting out the findings and recommendations of the peer challenge team along with any improvement actions the council has agreed.

- 6.9 There is an expectation that the council will commit to a follow up visit within two years after the CPC. This will help the council assess and demonstrate the impact of the CPC and the progress made against the areas of improvement and development. This will be a lighter-touch version and does not have to involve all of the original peer team, although experience demonstrates that on-going dialogue with members of the peer team develops and this has proved valuable.

7.0 SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 At this time there are no significant sustainability impacts associated with this report and, in particular, no significant impact on crime and disorder. However, the outcome of the CPC and any resultant improvement actions may have an impact.

8.0 FINANCIAL AND RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 There will be a need for officers and stakeholders to engage in the CPC, attending meetings and workshops. The council will also be required to produce a position statement and supportive information ahead of the on-site visit, although the LGA state that the process will be proportionate to the scope of the challenge and will not place unnecessary burdens on the council.

- 8.2 It is expected that the resource implications will be met using existing resources.

9.0 RISK ASSESSMENT

- 9.1 This item is for information only and therefore does not require a formal risk assessment and no changes have been made to risk registers.

10.0 HEALTH AND WELLBEING IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 At this time there are no health and wellbeing implications arising from this report.

Background Documents

There are no background documents (as defined in Section 100D(5) of the Local Government Act 1972) to this Report.

Equality Impact Assessment

The decision does not have any direct impact on members of the public, employees, elected members and / or stakeholders. Therefore no Equality Impact Assessment is required.

Appendices

- 1 Indicative Timetable
- 2 Minute of Executive Overview & Scrutiny Committee – 21 October 2021
(Cabinet only)

APPENDIX 1 – Indicative Timetable

Corporate Peer Challenge

Milestone	Date	Comments
Scoping meeting	Usually 4 to 6 months before onsite visit	The following will be determined at the scoping meeting; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Main focus of the challenge • Agree make up of challenge team • Value & purpose of any preparatory work / material • Nature & form of feedback
Respective chief officers / leaders make contact	Following scoping meeting	To help get the most from the CPC, the chief officers & leaders are encouraged to make contact after the scoping meeting to discuss and agree each other's expectations
Position statement	Following scoping meeting	The Council will be required to prepare a short statement setting out the current position in relation to the area of focus and the 5 core elements of the CPC. This will help the challenge team understand the issues involved
Information / document review	Following the scoping meeting / before site visit	The challenge team expect that most of the information and documentation needed for the CPC will already be in existence and accessible in the public domain however, there may be a need to support this process
Peer challenge team onsite	March 2022	Date yet to be agreed but the team are usually on site for 3 to 4 days and will hold meeting and workshops with staff, citizens and other interested parties
Onsite feedback session	March 2022	At the end of the onsite visit, the CPC team will provide a feedback session. The nature and form of this feedback will be agreed at the initial scoping meeting
Feedback report	March/April 2022	A feedback report will be shared with the council. This will include the main findings and conclusions, recommendations for improvement and innovation, signposting of good practice and case study material

