

Report to: Council

Date of Meeting 17 April 2024

Document classification: Part A Public Document

Exemption applied: None

Review date for release N/A



Outcome of Corporate Peer Challenge

Report summary:

The Local Government Association (LGA) were commissioned by East Devon Council to conduct a Corporate Peer Challenge ("CPC") following a Motion at Full Council in July 2023.

The CPC took place in early February 2024. The findings can be used to ensure that the Council has the arrangements in place to support and maintain ongoing improvement at the council.

To deliver the recommendations contained in the CPC, an action plan and timetable to identify the necessary resources will be developed and report back to members in June/July 2024.

Is the proposed decision in accordance with:

Budget Yes No

Policy Framework Yes No

Recommendation:

1. To note the report and recommendations from the LGA.
2. To request that the Directors prepare an Action Plan identifying the resources required to deliver the recommendations from the CPC.
3. To present the Action Plan to Cabinet and then to an extraordinary Full Council in June/July 2024.

Reason for recommendation:

To support and maintain ongoing improvement at the Council.

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Portfolio(s) (check which apply):

- Climate Action and Emergency Response
- Coast, Country and Environment
- Council and Corporate Co-ordination
- Communications and Democracy
- Economy
- Finance and Assets
- Strategic Planning
- Sustainable Homes and Communities
- Culture, Leisure, Sport and Tourism

Equalities impact Low Impact

The proposal to develop and prepare an action plan will assess any equality implications arising.

Climate change Low Impact

Risk: Low Risk; The recommendations in the CPC will ensure that the Council has the arrangements in place to support and maintain ongoing improvement at the Council.

Links to background information N/A

Link to [Council Plan](#)

Priorities (check which apply)

- Better homes and communities for all
 - A greener East Devon
 - A resilient economy
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Report in full

1. The Local Government Association (LGA) were commissioned by East Devon Council to conduct a Corporate Peer Challenge (“CPC”) following a Motion at Full Council in July 2023.
2. The CPC took place in early February 2024. The Peer Challenge team spent three days onsite at East Devon District Council, during which they:
 - Gathered information and views from more than 30 meetings, in addition to further research and reading.
 - Spoke to almost 150 people including a range of council staff together with members and external stakeholders.
3. The review focused on five key themes:
 1. **Local priorities and outcomes** - Are the council’s priorities clear and informed by the local context? Is the council delivering effectively on its priorities?
 2. **Organisational and place leadership** - Does the council provide effective local leadership? Are there good relationships with partner organisations and local communities?
 3. **Governance and culture** - Are there clear and robust governance arrangements? Is there a culture of challenge and scrutiny?
 4. **Financial planning and management** - Does the council have a grip on its current financial position? Does the council have a strategy and a plan to address its financial challenges?
 5. **Capacity for improvement** - Is the organisation able to support delivery of local priorities? Does the council have the capacity to improve?
4. The findings from the review can be used to ensure that the Council has the arrangements in place to support and maintain ongoing improvement at the council.
5. The LGA issued their report in late February 2024. The report has to be published by 8 May 2024 (which we have complied with) and our action plan addressing the findings has to be published by 8 July 2024.
6. The full findings are set out in Appendix 1 and include nine key recommendations as follows:

Recruitment of a Chief Executive

- a) Progress the plans to recruit a Chief Executive and ensure sufficient capacity at director level to support the leader and councillors with strategic vision and provide vision and direction to staff.

Consideration of Cabinet working arrangements

- b) Consider and explore options to enhance Cabinet working arrangements, for example: making space for strategic workshop sessions with senior management, so that the Cabinet can work even more effectively.

Invest in councillor and officer development

- c) Invest in an ongoing programme of councillor development and training and political awareness training for staff to ensure wider understanding of the roles and responsibilities of councillors and officers respectively.

Streamline the actions in your new Council Plan

- d) As the council's new Council Plan is developing, further prioritise the number of actions that sit under the four themes in the new Council Plan to and delegate to and empower staff within the organisation to deliver those actions across the life of the plan.

Resist the temptation to undertake further external reviews

- e) Consolidate the learning and recommendations from the reviews the council has undertaken and focus on addressing the actions arising from the various reports. Continue to build on governance improvements systematically reviewing all elements of the council's governance and implementing improvements where necessary.

Develop a programme of external engagement and make outwardly focused work a priority for the new Chief Executive

- f) Develop external engagement with partners and stakeholders for example, undertake work with town and parish councils to include planning matters and host a regular Developer and Agents Forum that includes officers and the portfolio lead for planning. The new Chief Executive should prioritise work on an external focus and profile for the council; external partners are waiting to work with you at a district, county and regional level.

Consider using councillor and officer ambassadors

- g) Consider using councillor and officer ambassadors to address reputation management and assist with 'myth busting'. Sense check where the council is now and where it wants to be.

Review visibility with housing tenants

- h) Whilst ensuring greater visibility with housing tenants is underway, ensure that engagement with them is effective and meaningful to sense check what they would find valuable to support the relationship between housing tenants and the council, and simultaneously address performance.

Provide direction for leisure and culture provision

- i) Identify specific principles for leisure and culture provision that include timescale and budget parameters to ensure a financially sustainable model of service delivery.
7. An action plan, including a timetable for completing actions, will need to be developed to support the recommendations, including identifying any resources required to deliver the

recommendations. This will be presented to Cabinet in June 2024 and then to an Extraordinary Council in late June/early July 2024.

Financial implications:

No direct financial implications arise from the report; however, resource implications may follow from the development of the action plan.

Legal implications:

There are no substantive legal issues to be added to this report