

Report to: **Cabinet**

Date of Meeting 8 January 2025

Document classification: Part A Public Document

Exemption applied: None

Review date for release N/A



Outcome of Corporate Peer Challenge Review

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 Peer Challenge was conducted in February 2024 and an action plan and timetable address those recommendations was presented to members July 2024.

The Peer Challenge Team returned on 28 November 2024 and this report presents to Members the conclusions reached by the Peer Team when reviewing the progress that has been made.

Is the proposed decision in accordance with:

Budget Yes ☒ No ☐

Policy Framework Yes ☒ No ☐

Recommendation:

To recommend to Council that they note the report and positive conclusions of the LGA.

Reason for recommendation:

To support and maintain ongoing improvement at the Council.

Officer: Melanie Wellman, Director of Governance melanie.wellman@eastdevon.gov.uk

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
-

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 LGA issued their report in late February 2024. The report included nine key recommendations under the following headings:
 - **Recruitment of a Chief Executive**
 - **Consideration of Cabinet working arrangements**
 - **Invest in councillor and officer development**
 - **Streamline the actions in new Council Plan**
 - **Resist the temptation to undertake further external reviews**

- **Develop a programme of external engagement and make outwardly focused work a priority for the new Chief Executive**
 - **Consider using councillor and officer ambassadors**
 - **Review visibility with housing tenants**
 - **Provide direction for leisure and culture provision**
5. An action plan was presented to Cabinet in June 2024 and then to Council in July 2024. A copy is attached at Appendix B.
 6. On 28 November 2024 the Peer Challenge team returned to East Devon to review our progress in relation to each of these Recommendations. During that visit they received a presentation from the senior leadership team and Portfolio Holders. They also had focus groups with the opposition Leaders, managers and staff.
 7. We had really positive verbal feedback from the LGA team following the review including mention of the need for us to ensure that we have sufficient confidential rooms and member rooms.
 8. In December 2024 they submitted their review findings to the Council and a copy is attached at Appendix C to this report. The Peer team commented that:-

Of the CPC's nine recommendations, the council's RAG rated action plan reports that 89 per cent of actions are completed or progressed and 11 per cent (equivalent to one recommendation) has been paused.

The peer team were pleased to note how much progress had been made by the council since the corporate peer challenge had taken place just nine months earlier. It was clear from the RAG rated action plan and from the presentation received by the peer team on site, that EDDC has made significant progress which was a positive reflection of the hard work that has been undertaken by the council. EDDC has embraced improvement, and this is evidenced in the action plan which includes not only the key recommendations made by the peer team but also includes progress against additional comments and suggestions that were mentioned in the CPC feedback report.

The full conclusions are outlined in the report at Appendix C.

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

Appendix A – Peer Challenge report – February 2024

Appendix B – Peer Challenge Action Plan

Appendix C – Peer Challenge Progress Report – December 2024