

## **SSDC Corporate Peer Challenge and Review**

*Executive Portfolio Holders:* Cllr. Ric Pallister, Leader, Strategy & Policy  
Cllr Jo Roundell Greene, Transformation  
Cllr Henry Hobhouse, Income Generation

*Chief Executive:* Alex Parmley

*Lead Officer:* Andrew Gillespie

*Contact Details:* [andrew.gillespie@southsomerset.gov.uk](mailto:andrew.gillespie@southsomerset.gov.uk)

### **Purpose of the Report**

This report updates Members on the Corporate Peer Review that took place in March 2017. The report sets out the findings of the Peer Review Team and seeks Member approval for the high level action plan to address the findings of the review.

### **Forward Plan**

This report appeared on the Executive Forward Plan for July 2017.

### **Public Interest**

This report updates on the findings of the Corporate Peer Review of South Somerset District Council. Peer Review is a core element of the Local Government Association's sector-led improvement offer to local authorities. Peer reviews are managed and delivered by the local government sector for the sector. They are improvement focused, recognising that all councils, no matter how good they are, always have scope for improvement. The scope of a Peer Review is agreed with the council and tailored to its local needs and specific requirements.

The Council will consider the findings of the Peer Review and decide on what action it needs to take to improve what it delivers for the communities it serves.

### **Recommendations**

That District Executive:

- I. Note the findings of the Peer Review Team set out in their report attached as Appendix A
- II. Note the recommendations of the Peer Review Team set out in section two of their report attached as Appendix A and summarised in section 3 of this report
- III. Agree the high level action plan set out in Appendix B, in response to the Peer Review findings
- IV. Request the Transformation Programme Board monitors progress with delivery of the action plan and updates on progress be provided to District Executive through the regular reporting on Transformation.
- V. Invite a follow-up visit by the Peer Review Team within the period of the next 12 to 18 months, to help the Council monitor progress with delivery of our plans and ambitions

## Summary

In March 2017, the Council underwent a Peer Challenge and Review. Peer Review is a core element of the Local Government Association's sector-led improvement offer to local authorities. Peer reviews are managed and delivered by the local government sector for the sector. They are improvement focused; the scope having been agreed with the council and tailored to its local needs and specific requirements.

The peer team involved serving peers (Officers and Members) from across the sector. Their aim is to help the council respond to its local priorities and issues in its own way to greatest effect. The make-up of the peer team reflected this Council's requirements and the focus of the peer challenge. Peers were selected on the basis of their relevant experience and expertise and agreed with the Council.

It is important to understand that the peer review is not an inspection. It is a tool aimed at improving, not judging, the council.

The Peer Review process involved reviewing a range of documents and information in order to ensure the team were familiar with the Council and the challenges it is facing. The team then spent four days on site at South Somerset, during which they spoke to more than 100 people including a range of council staff together with councillors and external partners and stakeholders.

Since being on site the Peer Team have reviewed their findings and have now produced a report setting out their analysis of the organisation and their key recommendations. The Council will need to consider the Team's findings and recommendations and where appropriate, take action or address the findings in our plans for the future. This report sets out an initial, high level action plan.

## 1 Background

- 1.1 The Local Government Association (LGA) is a national membership organisation that works on behalf of councils and other public bodies. The LGA has a range of priorities that it works on from year to year, and amongst these priorities is a 'sector-led improvement' programme, which is provided to member councils free of charge. The programme was introduced following the abolition of previous national performance frameworks and associated inspections, and is a tool to help councils improve their own performance by inviting in, and learning from, others within the sector.
- 1.2 The LGA Peer Challenge or Review is an element of the sector-led improvement programme that involves a four day on-site assessment of how well a council is performing across five key areas:
  - Understanding of the local place and priority setting
  - Leadership of place
  - Financial planning and viability
  - Organisational leadership and governance
  - Capacity to deliver
- 1.3 In addition, given the Council's plans and priorities, the Peer Team were asked by the Council to also look at our approach and progress with:
  - The Transformation Programme and associated benefits

- Income generation / commercialisation ambitions and targets
- Cultural change in the organisation to ensure one team focused on the customer and the council's goals for its communities, with a more commercial, business-like approach.

## **2 LGA Peer Review for SSDC**

- 2.1 In the March 2017, the Council hosted a Peer Review Team organised by the LGA. This was to gain an external perspective of how well the Council was performing generally, and to provide input in shaping our plans for the future as we embark on our Transformation Programme.
- 2.2 The Peer team was headed-up by Colin Carmichael, Chief Executive, Canterbury City Council, and contained Members and officers from other councils with a range of experiences including technology enabled transformation, cultural change and commercialisation & income generation. The full team are set out in section three of their report in Appendix A.
- 2.3 Following a review of key documents the Peer team held a series of meetings and discussions with staff, Members, key stakeholders and partners, as well as undertaking a tour of the district. Through this process which involved meeting over one hundred people, they developed key lines of enquiry which resulted in their initial findings and recommendations. Following the on-site work, the LGA Peer team have produced a written report of their findings, including recommendations for the Council to consider. This report is set out in Appendix A.

## **3 LGA Peer Challenge Report – Overview**

- 3.1 The Council is extremely pleased to have received an overall positive assessment and report which will help us in meeting our ambitions for the organisation and the communities we serve. The report recognises the Council's strengths in understanding and meeting the needs of its local communities and the District as a whole and that this is assisted by the area system. This understanding is translated in to a clear set of priorities and we engage well with local partners to deliver for and with our communities, making things happen on the ground.
- 3.2 The strength of political leadership in challenging times and the consensus formed on the priorities and direction of the Council are also recognised by the Peer team, as is the collaborative working relationship between Members and officers. The Council is recognised as having had a prudent approach to financial management that has helped deal with the financial challenges and provide a resource to help the council progress its plans for the future. In addition, the Council is regarded as having enthusiastic and committed staff and managers which are an asset in moving forward with significant change.
- 3.3 As well as recognising the Council's strengths, the report also highlights some areas the Council will need to have regard to and address, in particular, to ensure it is successful in its Transformation and Income Generation ambitions. The Peer Team have made a number of recommendations which are set out in section two of their report in Appendix A. These are in summary:
  - 1) Articulate the transformation vision simply and clearly.
  - 2) Invest in further capacity as soon as possible.

- 3) Develop a detailed implementation plan for the transformation programme as soon as possible.
- 4) Ensure the Chief Executive and SLT have appropriate personal authority and visibility to see through the changes required.
- 5) Make sure our Transformation Implementation Plan is adaptable, and explicitly includes how we will undertake strategic workforce development and our desired cultural change.
- 6) Create a co-ordinated commercialisation approach that has a clear focus on what areas we will and will not pursue.
- 7) Ensure a more structured rigorous and timely process to the assessment of capital investments.
- 8) Take action to see if there are any 'quick wins' to help the Council's financial position

## **4 Responding to the Peer Review findings**

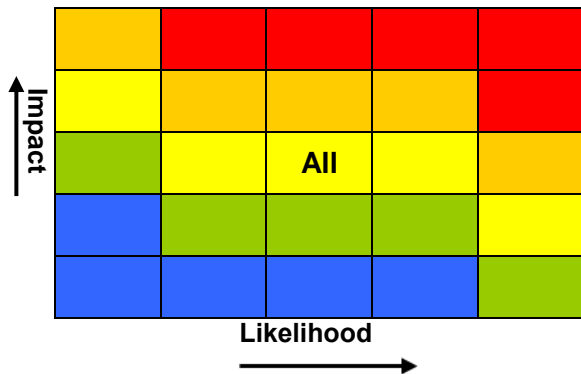
- 4.1 The Council will need to take some time to fully consider the Peer team's findings and how it responds. To commence this process a High Level Response and Action Plan has been developed and is set out in Appendix B. This does not list all the detailed actions to be taken and will need to be added to over the course of the coming months. The District Executive is recommended to agree the High Level Response and Action Plan.
- 4.2 Much of the findings and recommendations fall within the remit of Transformation and should be considered in taking forward our programme. Therefore it is recommended that the Transformation Programme Board take overall responsibility for the Peer Review findings, ensuring that actions are developed and delivered. It is important in doing this that they are integrated in to our Transformation Plans and do not form a separate piece of work that competes for resources. Further, that in reporting on progress with Transformation to the District Executive, that such reports also include updates on the response to the Peer Review and any associated actions.
- 4.3 Recognising that the Peer Review is aimed at assisting Councils with improvement and to help the Council keep a check on progress with its plans, it is recommended that the Peer Review Team are invited back to undertake a follow-up review in the future. It is suggested that a period of twelve to eighteen months' time would be appropriate ensuring time to make progress but also coming before the planned end date of the Transformation Programme.

## **5 Financial Implications**

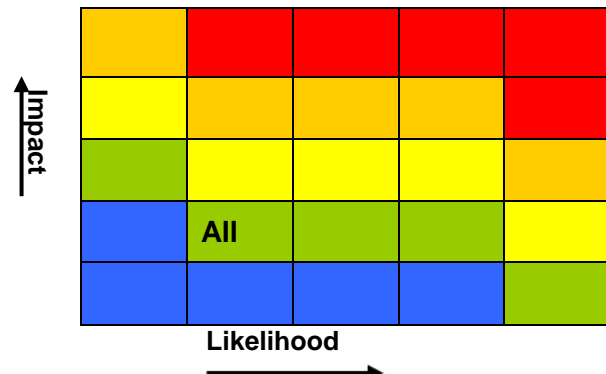
There are no direct financial implications arising from this report. Any actions in response to the Peer Review findings that have financial implications will be reported separately to District Executive.

## Risk Matrix

Risk Profile before officer recommendations



Risk Profile after officer recommendations



## Key

Categories	Colours (for further detail please refer to Risk management strategy)
R = Reputation	Red = High impact and high probability
CpP = Corporate Plan Priorities	Orange = Major impact and major probability
CP = Community Priorities	Yellow = Moderate impact and moderate probability
CY = Capacity	Green = Minor impact and minor probability
F = Financial	Blue = Insignificant impact and insignificant probability

## Council Plan Implications

The Peer Review aims at supporting the Council in better meeting its ambitions as set out in the Council Plan.

## Carbon Emissions and Climate Change Implications

None from this report.

## Equality and Diversity Implications

None from this report.

## Privacy Impact Assessment

None from this report.

## Background Papers

Corporate Peer Challenge Feedback Report  
Peer Review High Level Action Plan