

BARNSTABLE METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL

This matter is not a Key Decision within the Council's definition and has not been included in the relevant Forward Plan.

REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE TO CABINET ON 24th JULY 2019

2019 CORPORATE PEER CHALLENGE FINAL REPORT AND IMPROVEMENT PLAN

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to introduce the final report from the LGA Corporate Peer Challenge Team and present the proposed improvement plan that has been developed in response.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that:

- 2.1 Cabinet note the content and recommendations of the report and the proposed improvements as outlined in the Action Plan.

3. INTRODUCTION

- 3.1 We invited the LGA to undertake a Corporate Peer Challenge (CPC) in February 2019. The final report was received in April 2019 (**Appendix 1**)

- 3.2 The peer team considered the following five areas which form the core components looked at by all Corporate Peer Challenges;

1. Understanding of the local place and priority setting
2. Leadership of Place
3. Organisational leadership and governance:
4. Financial planning and viability
5. Capacity to deliver:

In addition we asked the peer team to review and provide feedback on:

6. Our plans for the future
7. Our approach to SEND

- 3.3 In advance of the on site Peer Challenge we prepared a position statement which provided the team with background information in relation to the key areas outlined above. We also provided a number of key documents and strategies in advance for background information.

- 3.4 The team spent 4 days in Barnsley, during which they:

- Spoke to more than 130 people including a range of council staff together with councillors and external partners and stakeholders.
- Gathered information and views from more than 40 meetings, visits to key sites in the area and additional research and reading.
- Collectively spent more than 350 hours to determine their findings – the equivalent of one person spending more than 10 weeks in Barnsley
- Visited Cudworth, Goldthorpe, Grimethorpe, Mile End Farm and spoke to staff and a wide range of volunteers.

3.5 Summary of Findings and Key Recommendations

3.5.1 There were a number of positive findings from the review. Some of these are outlined below;

- The team found Barnsley to be a high performing council with clear and tangible ambitions for our residents, communities and stakeholders.
- The council is well led, both politically and managerially. The Leader of the Council and the Chief Executive are widely respected for the improvement they have brought to the organisation and its services through their working partnership over the last seven years.
- The review found that change is evident across all levels of the council. Members and officers work well together and irrespective of seniority or role, there is a clear pride in working for Barnsley, both as an organisation and in serving communities and the town.
- Staff feel valued and enjoy working for the council, and also feel invested in.
- The council is clearly delivering against its ambitions and has played a key role alongside a strong partnership with schools to bring about improvement. This achievement has been enabled because the council benefits from sound financial management and there is a willingness to take reasonable risks to bring about change.
- The council has a strong financial grip on both its expenditure and performance against its planned savings programme, and testing has taken place against CIPFA's resilience indices. Like other councils it faces risks due to the size and scale of the future savings it needs to make, increases in service demand and other anticipated changes to local government finance, some of which bring uncertainty and are therefore harder to anticipate and plan for.
- The council clearly leads the area and provides direction and forward thinking across a range of strategic issues, including the economy, housing and culture, and raising the profile of Barnsley beyond its boundaries. An example of this is that the council led the development of coterminous boundaries across its geography with health and police partners. Overall partners describe well developed, mature and open partnership arrangements across most areas.
- The approach to neighbourhood working is innovative and exemplary, and the council is rightly proud of what it is achieving in this approach to local devolution. The creation in 2013 of six Area Councils and 21 Ward Alliances, supported by small teams of officers, has brought a new focus to locality working. It has enabled members to develop their community leadership roles whilst also supporting a longer-term ambition of helping local people become less dependent on the council and become more community minded.
- The thinking behind the neighbourhood strategy, and its range and reach is impressive, as is the degree of energy and enthusiasm it has created across the borough.
- The review concluded that "Looking forward and based on its track record, it is highly likely that the council will continue to deliver. Adults and Children's social care shows good levels of performance and is well managed. There is enthusiasm from councillors and employees to bring about ongoing improvements to the way the organisation is run and how services are delivered".

3.5.2 The following are the peer team's key recommendations to the council. They are suggested in the context of a high performing council:

- a. **Continue to communicate with staff.** The retirement of the current Chief Executive is creating anxiety for some staff who have concerns that the council's overall direction and ethos will change
- b. **Clarify, simplify and reiterate the council's priorities and initiatives.** There is at times a lack of clarity from staff about how values, priorities, initiatives and outcomes relate to each other, and which are most important
- c. **Consider rationalising plans and initiatives post 2020.** The downside of the council's ambitions is that there are many initiatives to be delivered by a significantly reduced workforce, creating concerns from staff about overload. Many current plans come to an end in 2020 and this provides an opportunity to review and streamline strategies
- d. **Revisit the corporate risk register.** Currently the register contains a wide range of identified corporate risks: these need reconsidering in light of the council's priorities

- e. As the council's finances reduce further, **ensure steps are taken to maintain and grow the neighbourhood model**, and that need and gaps in provision are addressed in the more deprived areas
- f. **Work to make the local economy more inclusive.** Take stock regularly to ensure local people, including the most disadvantaged, can benefit as much as possible
- g. **Consider whether the pace of decision making is fast enough for the council's ambitions.** There are concerns from staff that the decision-making cycle, whilst inclusive, is also slow, with decisions not always being made at the right level
- h. **Take more steps to engage with parents on improving SEND outcomes for children.** There are significant risks around school exclusions, NHS waiting times for assessments and the cost of placements to the council. A co-production approach with parents and partners may lead to a better and more cost-effective services
- i. **The council can achieve more on digital transformation.** A new digital transformation strategy is in draft: it needs to articulate the benefits to customers and staff of different ways of working, so that these can be clearly understood, owned and measured, over and above IT improvements. It should also ensure that those without IT access are not excluded from services.

3.6 The Action Plan

We have considered and further refined the recommendations and developed an action plan based on eight key improvement themes (The action plan is outlined in **Appendix 2**). This will be a priority for SMT to take forward and will be subject to regular challenge and review. The Improvement themes are;

- 1) Communications
- 2) Corporate Governance
- 3) Finance
- 4) Human Resources
- 5) Area Working
- 6) Housing
- 7) SEND
- 8) Digital First

4. Implications for Local People / Service Users

- 4.1 The report includes a number of recommendations that will have implications for local people and service users

5. Financial Implications

- 5.1 One of the key areas of focus was financial planning and viability therefore there will inevitably be financial implications arising from the improvement Plan. Improvement actions for finance have been approved by the Strategic Director for Finance.

6. Employee Implications

- 6.1 All employees are key enablers in the delivery of the plan and contribute to this success through their daily activities.

7 Communications Implications

- 7.1 We'll proactively promote the key messages from the report, showcasing areas of best practice and achievements. We'll also explain areas for key developments and where they link into our existing projects and plans.

We'll use Town Spirit to explain how our action plan is part of the #Imagineit and #Changeit themes, and support our communities to get involved and #Ownit for their local areas.

8. Consultations

- 8.1 Employee representatives at all levels across the organisation were consulted by the Peer Review Team while they were on site as part of the review
- 8.2 Consultations have taken place with relevant officers within the council, who have contributed to the development of the improvement plan.
- 8.3 Consultation has also taken place with the Senior Management Team who have collectively reviewed the report and agreed the improvement plan .

9 The Corporate Plan and the Council's performance management framework

- 9.1 The report makes recommendations in relation to the new corporate plan and performance management framework which will be developed through the new corporate planning process from 2020.

10 Promoting Equality, Diversity and Social Inclusion

- 10.1 The report highlights areas for improvement in relation to supporting our children and young people with SEND. The action plan will support interventions that ensure improved services.
- 10.2 The report makes recommendations in relation to the work of the area councils which will improve the promotion of equality, diversity and social inclusion.

10. Risk Management Issues

- 10.1 The report identifies a number of issues and risks as an underlying consideration throughout the report and within the Corporate Governance theme there is a recommendation to completely review the risks in the current corporate risk register

If you would like to inspect background papers for this report, please email governance@barnsley.gov.uk so that appropriate arrangements can be made.

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