

## **LGA CORPORATE PEER CHALLENGE - OUTCOME AND ACTIONS**

### **1.0 Introduction**

1.1 The purpose of this report is to inform the Overview and Scrutiny Committee of the key findings arising from the Corporate Peer Challenge (CPC). Also to provide an update on the progress of the Action Plan developed in response to all the recommendations of the final report received in April 2019.

### **2.0 Background**

2.1 We invited the Local Government Association (LGA) to undertake a Corporate Peer Challenge in February 2019. 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 Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)

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

2.3 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.

2.4 There were a number of positive findings in the review which are provided in detail in the final report (Appendix 1). Overall, the team found Barnsley to be a high performing Council with clear and tangible ambitions for our residents, communities and stakeholders. 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”.

### **3.0 LGA Peer Review - Key Recommendations**

3.1 The peer team made a number of key recommendations, suggested in the context of a high performing Council. The key recommendations are outlined below followed by a summary of the work undertaken so far to address these:

- 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.  
**Action:** The new Chief Executive has taken steps to build relationships with and reassure staff including early morning visits to meet staff at Smithies Depot, walkabouts on each floor at both Westgate & Gateway, a programme of back to the floor sessions with operational staff and a weekly blog, featured in Straight Talk (the Council's internal newsletter for staff).
- 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.  
**Action:** The employee survey and Investors in People assessments have now taken place and the findings were discussed by the Council's Senior Management Team (SMT) in December 2019. Both asked staff to indicate the extent to which they understand the Council's values and the overall vision and priorities. The survey results showed that 88% of respondents agreed they were aware of the Council's vision. Over 93% agreed that they understood the Council's values and what was expected of them as an employee and 94% agreed they were aware of the Council's four priorities. Nevertheless there is more we need to do to create a clear golden thread for staff that links these things together. This is therefore one of the things that we will seek to achieve when the new Council Plan is developed which will refresh all these things as part of the Barnsley 2030 work and we will discuss this with employees during the forthcoming Talkabout sessions in January and February 2020 in order to better explore and understand how this can best be done.
- c. **Consider rationalising plans and initiatives post 2020.** The downside of the Council's ambitions is that there are many projects 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.  
**Action:** The Barnsley 2030 project will develop a vision and set of ambitions for Barnsley as a place by September 2020. This will then help inform the development of the new Council Plan, and our partners' strategic plans. A review of key boards was undertaken in 2017 but we will complete a further review on the back of Barnsley 2030, the Council Plan and other supporting strategies to ensure the governance framework is as streamlined and connected as possible.
- 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.  
**Action:** An independent review of the corporate risk register has been completed and a set of revised proposals have since been agreed at SMT and Audit Committee meetings. It is proposed to go live with the updated register in the new financial year.
- 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.  
**Action:** The Principal Towns programme is now fully embedded at ward level and the Place and Communities Directorates have worked closely on the Inclusive Growth Peer Review which took place in October 2019. Both Directorates have continued to work in partnership to deliver the aim of the programme with projects actively being delivered in line with local requirements. More recently, this has included the creation and publication of long term masterplans for 5 areas which provide a long term legacy vision for local communities. Both Directorates continue to actively engage with Area Councils, Ward Alliances and all relevant stakeholder groups and the programme is further supported by a robust communications strategy aimed at promoting the positive impacts achieved at a holistic and individual level. We also established a Strategic Procurement Forum earlier this year to provide oversight of area commissioning practices which will help us to map the gaps in provision and maximise commissioning outcomes. Additional investment has been agreed to increase Area Council capacity and Ward Alliance budgets.
- 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.  
**Action:** There has been a significant increase in joint working around the Inclusive Economy priority, particularly around the recent Inclusive Growth peer review with West Midlands, which included the joint hosting of an Inclusive Economy stakeholder event and asset mapping exercise. Inclusive Economy progress between the Communities and Place Directorates has also involved joint planning and implementation for workshops with external speakers and partners and BLT sessions (July 2019). In addition discussions have taken place with the Sheffield City Region to encourage a greater focus on Inclusive Economy.

- g. Consider whether the pace of decision making is fast enough for the Council's ambitions.**  
There are concerns from staff that whilst they are included in decisions, the overall process is slow, and that decisions are not always made at the right level.  
**Action:** Decision making processes, templates and guidance have been refined, revised and where appropriate simplified ahead of their publication to the new governance SharePoint site in 2020. An ongoing programme of awareness raising is underway to ensure everyone involved with the decision making process fully understands the BMBC approach to operating 'Executive Arrangements'. This includes proactive induction support for new officers joining the Council. We have also created a new form to monitor and track delegated decisions, which captures all the elements of the process in one place. This has been shared with all Directorates and will also be part of the new guidance on the SharePoint site once operational.
- 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 (where parents and partners are involved with planning and consultation) may lead to a better and more cost effective service.  
**Action:** In November 2019 the revised Barnsley Alliance Education Improvement Strategy 2019-2021 was approved by Cabinet, which has a key focus on developing inclusive practices, reducing the levels of fixed term exclusions and improving outcomes for all children but in particular the most vulnerable. Additional investment has been made by Barnsley Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) to improve waiting times for assessments by April 2020. A SEND co-production model has been developed and agreed with parents. The first sessions were held in November 2019 and focused on the SEND Strategy and Accessibility Strategy. A re-refresh of the SEND Strategy is well underway. This is being produced in consultation with parents/carers, young people and partner agencies. It sets out our vision and ambition for children with SEND and our priorities for achieving this. This will go to a Parent Alliance meeting to be held in January 2020 before a final version is agreed.
- i. The Council can achieve more on digital transformation.** A new digital transformation strategy (outlining changes to IT and smarter ways of working) is in draft: it needs to show the benefits to customers and staff of the 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.  
**Action:** The draft Digital Transformation Strategy has been further developed and we are looking to produce a 'Customer Charter' by June 2020. The intention is for this to be an easy to digest document that clearly articulates the benefits of different ways of working. We are already starting to see some of the benefits through customer interaction as uptake of the digital portal increases, such as 65% of contacts with the Council are currently made online. This will translate into a reduced demand on the front-line teams. Enabling technology (laptops and software to help work collaboratively) is also making us more mobile, allowing us to collaborate better through digital means and overall will lead to more efficient working. Where we are seeing digital exclusion, we are trying to address this through our Digital Champions who already offer support to our workforce but also to the public through drop-in sessions at local libraries.

## 4.0 Peer Review Action Plan

- 4.1 In addition to the key recommendations, throughout the LGA Peer Review report, a number of additional suggestions are made. In order to address all of the points raised, a comprehensive action plan has been developed based on eight improvement themes, which acts as a working document for Council officers. The Senior Management Team (SMT) has made this a priority to take forward and it will be subject to regular challenge and review around the following areas:

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

4.2 The following paragraphs provide a summary of the additional work undertaken under each key theme to address all the peer review suggestions:

#### 4.3 **Communications**

- There has been some criticism in the past regarding business unit or service movements so we have ensured that these are now communicated organisation-wide. Changes to the organisation structure and portfolios are taking effect early in 2020. This has provided the opportunity to reflect on the change process and consult with staff in a more effective way.
- Work is progressing in terms of ensuring that there is a consistent understanding of the Council's values and priorities. The Council currently has 3 main priorities and 12 outcomes which are well communicated through the corporate plan, business and delivery plans, staff performance reviews, the quarterly performance management framework (how we report on Council performance), Cabinet reports and our communication campaigns and plans. The Council's internal vision and values are well embedded in the organisation and this is evidenced by the employee survey results.
- In terms of evaluating the use of social media as a primary means of communication, this work is ongoing. In 2020, we intend to launch a new 'Customer Access Strategy' which will inform the way we engage with our customers as a Council and how they can access our services in the future. We also intend to develop a communications channel for residents who are non-digital users and will measure the effectiveness of this approach. We plan on using insight to help us segment our audience types and track their preferred method of communications. In January 2020, we are re-launching our residents' magazine, which will be distributed to all households in the Borough. This will help us to reach those residents who don't access information through digital channels.
- A key part of the Barnsley 2030 project is engaging with our communities, partners, businesses, young people and our elected members and employees on the future of Barnsley. 'Thinking Place' has been commissioned to manage the engagement with our partners, businesses, young people, elected members and employees, and Barnsley Community & Voluntary Services (Barnsley CVS) have been commissioned to engage with our communities through a community researcher model. As part of the Barnsley 2030 project we will review 'Town Spirit' and ensure this is aligned to what is developed and is effectively used as one of the vehicles to communicate it.
- In terms of reviewing the current budget communications and consultation process, this work is now complete. The budget consultation will now come under the 2030 engagement work and will not need a separate consultation. The communications for the budget will progress as normal and won't be fundamentally reviewed until after the 2030 work.

#### 4.4 **Corporate Governance**

- The corporate performance framework is currently reviewed on an annual basis. There will be a fundamental change to corporate performance reporting as part of the Barnsley 2030 vision and plan. The plan's supporting performance framework will include a much reduced set of measurable 'critical success factors' underpinned by data, insight, intelligence and benchmarking information. The data that sits behind these indicators will be managed through our data management framework.
- An annual report on Overview and Scrutiny activity will be introduced and reported to Full Council. This will commence from the 2019/20 period and will outline the committee's work including its task and finish groups; highlighting its considerations, recommendations and the impact of these.

#### 4.5 **Finance**

- The implications of the Government's one year spending review have been considered and included within proposals for the 2020/21 budget. The Government simultaneously announced that its funding reforms would now be delayed to 2021/22. We will continue to contribute towards various working groups both regionally and nationally to respond to the consultation. This work will be ongoing over the next 12 months.
- We have established a reporting framework to submit regular updates on the Council's financial resilience. A detailed update was included in our annual reporting process and we continue to provide regular updates in the quarterly finance reports. The Chartered Institute of Public

Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) have introduced a new financial management code of practice for 2021. We will assess authority wide compliance with this code.

- Longer-term financial modelling/forecasting has been developed based on improved data and intelligence to reflect the recommendations from the strategic review of SEND. The Oversight Board has developed an initial model based on emerging intelligence, but this needs further refinement into 2020.
- A longer term financial strategy is to be developed in light of the full comprehensive spending review which has been deferred to 2020 and within the context of the emerging Barnsley 2030 vision. The 2030 vision and ambitions will be incorporated into the financial plan but we are awaiting the ongoing settlement position from Central Government.

#### 4.6 **Human Resources (HR)**

- In terms of reviewing the recruitment process, this is planned to be undertaken as part of the 'Success Factors' (electronic HR management system) project, and a wider review of the current recruitment strategy. Phase 1 of Success Factors is due to complete in Sept 2020 and will include an overhaul of employee central (for undertaking employee administration such as electronic HR and payroll forms), the online recruitment process and the on-boarding process (how new employees are introduced to the organisation). Part of this process will be looking at how modern recruitment methods might work for us, such as online screening, psychometric testing (ways of testing skills and/or personalities) and flexible applications. Some improvements that have already been made are enhanced use of social media advertising, creation of a talent pool for candidates and bespoke application forms dependent on roles. Future challenges will be attempting to modernise recruitment practice, whilst adhering to constraints of public sector policy and moving away from a "one size fits all" recruitment process.
- An HR tracker is now live in SharePoint to improve performance data in relation to sanctions and casework. We are currently in the scoping phase of developing a manager dashboard in PowerBi (an online performance dashboard) to give managers access to the data.
- Progress is being made in developing the 'Managers Toolkit' (a central resource of information for managers) for implementation in March 2020. This is to help drive consistency in the application of core processes and policies. We have held workshops to agree the look and feel of the toolkit using the new SharePoint Online solution which is being introduced as part of the Microsoft Office 365 implementation which is all linked to the Digital Transformation work taking place.
- We have explored opportunities to further align related services. In June 2019 the HR functions were transferred to the new Business Improvement, HR and Communications business unit, which now means that HR and Organisation Development are reporting to the same Service Director. Conversations are ongoing regarding the best fit for a number of other functions but these will now be revisited in light of changes in the senior management structures.

#### 4.7 **Area Working**

- Work on developing a framework to outline the best practice principles of co-production (working with partners) in service re-design is now complete. There are a number of current pieces of work taking place across the borough which have enabled good practice examples to be used as models of working. Relevant partners including the third sector and key stakeholders were actively engaged in this work. A guidance document has been written and was received by SMT on 12<sup>th</sup> December. The Stronger Communities Service will be working with SMT to establish the best way to embed this guidance into future work.
- A Voluntary Community Services strategy group will be established in 2020 alongside the development of the overall strategy. This group will be responsible for the direction and development of the Volunteer Community Services. Gap analysis will be undertaken as part of the resident engagement through Barnsley 2030. This will help us to target the areas that volunteering activity has not reached.

#### 4.8 **Housing**

- A full review of the Private Rented Sector (PRS) is underway with a key priority around better regulation and management to improve standards. Work has also been undertaken to identify locations with the greatest challenges, with bespoke intervention plans developed for areas with a high concentration of private rented properties. We are also working on a new model for

landlord accreditation designed to provide advice and incentives (through a grading system) to further encourage higher standards within this sector.

- In terms of expanding our housing offer (beyond social housing), providing a wide range of housing types is a key element of our 2014-33 Housing Strategy. The Council is developing both market sale and social rent housing and we have plans to introduce market rent housing to future developments. This action is now complete.

#### 4.9 **SEND**

- In terms of clarifying individual leads with responsibility for SEND reforms, this action has now been completed. Key people have been identified and given actions within the SEND improvement plan.
- The recommendation to clarify and communicate governance arrangements (how partners can hold each other to account) is now complete. Arrangements have been revised and shared with key partners.
- The action to work with relevant partners to develop a shared understanding of the levels of need that should be met, and provision that should be in place prior to an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHP) assessment is now complete. Guidance has been issued to schools and settings.
- The Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered SEND provision in Barnsley at their meeting on Tuesday 5<sup>th</sup> November 2019. This provided Members with an overview and update on the development and implementation of a SEND improvement programme and the strengthening of governance arrangements. (A link to the meeting papers is included in section 8 of this report).

#### 4.10 **Digital First**

- Digital First is the name given to our programme of works aimed at providing the right technology to access the right information to deliver and develop local services, anytime, anywhere. Also, to fundamentally change the way that the Council 'does digital' with a disruptive approach to introducing improved technology solutions, business processes and governance arrangements across the Council. It is now approaching its last year (2020/21) and during this time the next stage of work will be developed. The next phase will look at optimising use of the improvements that have been made so far.
- To help enable the digital transformation, digital skills need to be improved. There are Trainers, Change Managers and Digital Champions working with staff to ensure the offer meets the requirements of the workforce. Where there are areas requiring more support, specific Talkabout sessions will take place (such as engaging with the School Meals Team and working with the staff at Smithies Depot).
- There is an in-depth report going to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 4th Feb 2020 regarding the Digital First work-streams.

### **5.0 Future Plans & Challenges**

5.1 We are now in Phase 2 of the Barnsley 2030 work, during which we will focus on developing a shared vision and set of ambitions about what we want Barnsley to become. This engagement phase will see 'Thinking Place' leading on the design and delivery of engagement activities with all key stakeholders including residents, staff, elected members, partners, the business community and the voluntary sector.

5.2 With regards to change management, we need to ensure that we maintain momentum around staff consultation, ensuring that future organisational changes are planned well in advance and carefully communicated to staff in a way that meets the need of the change being undertaken.

5.3 Governance and the requirement for a wide range of reports for work that is undertaken and passed through Members is still significant. Streamlining governance and paperwork may result in efficiency improvements and this is something we need to continue to address.

5.4 There are identified challenges in relation to modernising recruitment practices whilst adhering to constraints of public sector policy and moving away from a "one size fits all" recruitment process.

- 5.5 We have finite resources to undertake change management in relation to our Digital First work stream and competing priorities mean that some of our deliverables on this project conflict with business as usual requests and other priority work areas. We also have an ongoing challenge in relation to culture change when implementing new information technology. Work is underway to address these things and the new Executive Director for Core Services will also be asked to review this programme once they are in post.
- 5.6 The Council closely monitors its medium and long term financial strategy; however, there are ongoing challenges with regards to assessing the implications of the Government's funding reforms on the Council. The funding reforms have now been delayed to 2021/22. We will be looking to review the implications of these reforms once we have more clarity.
- 5.7 There are still a large number of competing initiatives taking place in the Council and addressing this will need to be an important feature of business planning going forward.

## **6.0 Invited Witnesses**

6.1 The following witnesses have been invited to attend today's meeting to answer questions from the committee:

- Sarah Norman, Chief Executive of Barnsley Council
- Julia Burrows, Director of Public Health
- Rachel Dickinson, Executive Director - People
- Andrew Frosdick, Executive Director - Core Services
- Matt Gladstone, Executive Director - Place
- Wendy Lowder, Executive Director - Communities
- Neil Copley, Service Director - Finance
- Michael Potter, Service Director - Business Improvement, HR & Communications
- Cllr Stephen Houghton, Leader of Barnsley Council
- Cllr Robin Franklin, Cabinet Support Member - Core Services

## **7.0 Possible Areas for Investigation**

7.1 Members may wish to ask questions around the following areas:

- Did the peer review highlight any unknown issues or were the findings in line with the organisation's self-assessment?
- Which of the positive findings are you most proud of and why?
- What are the main obstacles to improvement and how will you overcome them?
- What does the next 5-10 years look like for the organisation?
- What change management principles will you be using to ensure a smooth transition to 2030?
- What are the main strategic risks that could affect the organisation over the next few years?
- Is the action plan deliverable and affordable and do the benefits outweigh the cost?
- What support is available to ensure the physical and mental wellbeing of employees given the ambitions being delivered by a significantly reduced workforce?
- How might residents be affected by the planned changes to the organisation?
- To what extent do we have concerns regarding the future financial position of the authority to fund both statutory and non-statutory services?
- What can members do to support the improvements and the future direction of BMBC?

## 8.0 Background Papers and Useful Links

- Appendix 1 (attached) – LGA Corporate Peer Challenge Report
- SEND Provision in Barnsley at OSC 5<sup>th</sup> November 2019:  
<https://barnsleymbc.moderngov.co.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=224&MId=5894&Ver=4>

## 9.0 Glossary

BMBC	Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council
BLT	Barnsley Leadership Team (Executive Directors & Service Directors)
CIPFA	Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy
OSC	Overview and Scrutiny Committee
SEND	Special Educational Needs & Disabilities
SharePoint	The Council's Electronic Document Management System
SMT	Senior Management Team

## 10.0 Officer Contact

Anna Marshall, Scrutiny Officer, 20<sup>th</sup> December 2019