

BARNSELY 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 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR CORE TO CABINET ON 9 FEBRUARY 2022

Public.

REVIEW OF PEER CHALLENGE ACTIVITY ACROSS THE COUNCIL

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To provide an overview of peer challenge activity since the last Corporate Peer Challenge in 2019, and to seek approval for the timeline of the next Corporate Peer Challenge and a future programme of possible peer reviews.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 Cabinet note the response to the 2019 Corporate Peer Challenge and the positive programme of peer reviews that have taken place across the Council since.
- 2.2 Cabinet consider the proposed timeline for the next Corporate Peer Challenge and the suggested future programme of peer reviews.
- 2.3 Cabinet endorse the adoption of a centralised system for monitoring peer review activity and final reports.
- 2.4 That this report go to the Governance & Audit committee for information and comments.

3. INTRODUCTION

- 3.1 Barnsley had its last Corporate Peer Challenge (CPC) from 26th February – 1st March 2019. The feedback report concluded that the Council was a high-performing council with clear ambitions and good management both politically and managerially. Nine key recommendations were made:
1. Continue to communicate with staff.
 2. Clarify, simplify and reiterate the council's priorities and initiatives.
 3. Consider rationalising plans and initiatives post 2020.
 4. Revisit the corporate risk register.
 5. Ensure steps are taken to maintain and grow the neighbourhood model
 6. Work to make the local economy more inclusive.
 7. Consider whether the pace of decision making is fast enough for the council's ambitions.
 8. Take more steps to engage with parents on improving SEND outcomes for children.
 9. The council can achieve more on digital transformation.

3.2 Following the CPC, an action plan was developed based on eight improvement themes which incorporated these key recommendations and other suggestions made throughout the CPC feedback report. This was actioned and regularly reported back into the Organisational Improvement Board, which met for the final time on 9th November 2020. In December 2020, the OI board made a decision to close the report down, and any outstanding actions were incorporated in other relevant plans and strategies.

3.3 Beyond the Corporate Peer Challenge, service areas across the Council have continued to engage in peer review activity in order to openly welcome and promote sector-led improvement – despite the impact of Covid-19.

Based on information gathered through business advisors, peer reviews since 2019 are as follows:

Directorate	Services	Peer Review Subject	Peer Review Date
Core	Financial Services & School Catering (BU13)	DWP Peer Review	2021
	Customer Information & Digital Services (BU12)	SAP Collaborative Working	18 th March 2019
	Governance & Business Support (BU18)		
	BII, HR & Communications (BU15)		
	Legal Services (BU17)	LGA: Review Legal Threshold of Safer Neighbourhood related court cases <i>(BU8 & BU17 joint)</i>	29 June 2021
Stronger, Safer Healthier Communities (BU8)			
Adults & Communities	Adult Social Care & Health (BU2)		
	Children's Services	Children's Social Care & Safeguarding (BU1)	Missing from home and care challenge
Front Door Health Check			9 th December 2020
ADCS Peer Challenge Day			15 th January 2021
Commissioned Review – S47s			Sep 2021
Education, Early Start & Prevention (BU3)		ADCS Peer Challenge (SEND Local Offer)	10 th May 2021
Place	Environment & Transport (BU6)		
	Economic Regeneration & Culture (BU4)	Inclusive Growth	October 2019
Public Health	Public Health (BU10)	LGA: Covid 19 Transmission Rates	April 2021
Other		LGA Peer Review of Covid work: Recovery & Renewal	August 2020

- 3.4 The table above does not capture the range of statutory inspections and audits which also drive improvement and reviews in many service areas.

In addition to the peer reviews listed above, a number of which were not organised through the Local Government Association, Barnsley has engaged with the LGA on a range of specific topics/workshops, detailed in *Appendix 1*.

4. PROPOSAL AND JUSTIFICATION

- 4.1 Peer reviews can provide an excellent opportunity for services to be encouraged and challenged by others in the sector, generating recommendations and improvements which ultimately benefit service users.

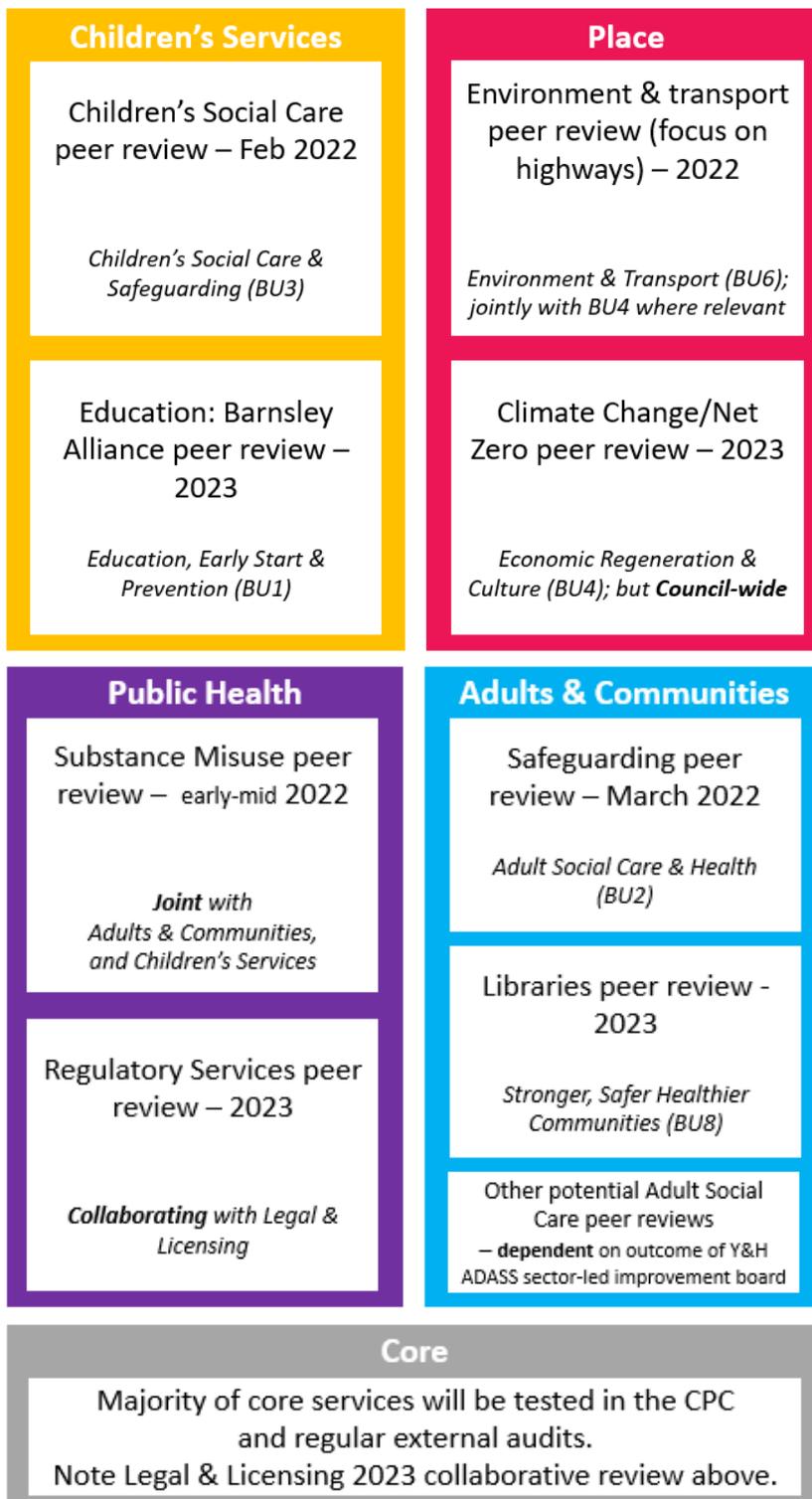
Proposed programme of peer reviews, 2022-2023

- 4.2 In considering a future-facing programme of peer reviews, Executive Directors considered the peer review activity that has taken place since 2019 alongside their views on which areas would benefit most from a fresh peer review with all the time and resource this requires. Some of these reviews are at a broad, service level, while others are slightly more focussed.

- 4.3 In setting out a programme of peer reviews, consideration has to be given to the tension between ensuring every area is peer reviewed, and focussing these reviews on those areas where they will deliver most value. This proposed programme attempts to invite peer challenge across every directorate and service. However, the reviews are prioritised via a staggered timeline over two years, and some will focus on more specific areas within a service that would benefit most from external peer challenge.

This programme also takes into account Council capacity, and the limitations on both the LGA's capacity and expertise. Whilst each review will be tailored to BMBC's needs, some of these reviews will be newer to the LGA and therefore more developmental in nature, bringing benefits to Barnsley and the wider sector.

- 4.4 The proposed programme is set out below:



4.5 This programme covers 2022-2023, to allow for a comprehensive set of peer reviews ahead of Barnsley's next Corporate Peer Challenge. It would see four peer reviews conducted in 2022 and four in 2023, all through the Local Government Association bar the March 2022 Safeguarding Peer Review (Yorkshire & Humber Association of Directors of Adult Social Services). These eight peer reviews cover all Directorates except the Core directorate.

Core services regularly provide support to peer reviews in other directorates; and they are a centrepiece of the Corporate Peer Challenge. Over and above

this, the annual cycle of external audit activity acts as a detailed check and challenge to the effective delivery of core services; covering, amongst other things, the arrangements for financial administration; governance, decision making and internal control; and the council's wider arrangements for securing value for money across all of its functions.

- 4.6 The order of these proposed peer reviews has been developed by the Senior Management Team based on need, risk, and coordination with existing activity, in addition to staff capacity. Note that the Adult's Safeguarding Peer Review (March 2022) and Children's Social Care Peer Review (February 2022) are already confirmed.
- 4.7 The LGA have confirmed that they are happy with and able to resource this suggested programme.

Commissioning the next Corporate Peer Challenge

- 4.7 In addition to the programme above, the Council should commission its next CPC before the beginning of 2024 to ensure that it has a CPC within the four-to-five-year timeframe now required by the Local Government Association.

The ideal time for the next CPC would be late February 2024, five years on from the previous CPC and after a comprehensive programme of peer reviews across the Council. This would include a mandatory follow-up visit six months later (August-September 2024).

- 4.8 Barnsley's next CPC will be well-placed to cover the implementation of 2019's CPC report. It will also cover the immense challenges and transformations prompted by Covid, alongside the Council's rapid digital and workforce transformation. It will capture the impact of a new Chief Executive and strong place-based and partnership working throughout the pandemic and beyond. It will also note the development of Barnsley 2030, a new Corporate Plan, and a number of restructures. A CPC in 2024 would be an ideal opportunity to bounce back stronger from Covid and into the mid-2020s.

Centralising oversight of Peer Review activity

- 4.9 Finally, there is a need for a more centralised system for collating and overseeing peer review improvement activity. Whilst response to review recommendations will happen largely within the relevant services, it would be helpful for a log of peer reviews, their final reports and any associated learning to be compiled and maintained by the Business Intelligence unit.

Audit & Governance Committee

- 4.10 Given the Audit and Governance Committee's role in providing independent scrutiny of the Authority's financial and non-financial performance, it is recommended that this report and suggested peer review activity is referred to a future meeting of the committee for information and comment. Any feedback from the Audit and Governance Committee will be considered in shaping future peer review activity.

5. CONSIDERATION OF ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES

- 5.1 Consideration was given as to whether the Council ought to invite a follow-up visit to its 2019 CPC, which though recommended, did not occur. Following conversation with the LGA, this was discounted as no longer of value.
- 5.2 Consideration was also given to an earlier CPC, in February 2023. However, in light of the ongoing challenges presented by Covid, with some services now in response mode for almost two years, this was felt to be too soon. Secondly, delaying the CPC to 2024 allows for an ambitious programme of peer reviews across the Council in the interim.



6. IMPLICATIONS FOR LOCAL PEOPLE/SERVICE USERS

- 6.1 None at this stage.

7. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 Consultations have taken place with representatives of the Service Director – Finance (S151 Officer).
- 7.2 The financial implications of these proposals are likely to be limited, as many peer reviews are free of charge (including the Corporate Peer Challenge). However, some peer reviews may have small charges associated, in the realm of £5,000 - £14,000. The detail of costs will only become available when finalising and scheduling reviews with the Local Government Association.
- 7.2 Note the LGA's comment on costs below:

In terms of costs, most of these will be free to you (being funded by the LGA through the grants received from DLUHC, DfE and others). Some may have some limited charges attached, particularly where the LGA might need to hire an associate to manage or be part of the peer team.

- 7.3 All costs associated with the peer review will be met from within existing revenue budgets.

8. EMPLOYEE IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 None at this stage.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

9.1 None at this stage.

10. CUSTOMER AND DIGITAL IMPLICATIONS

10.1 None at this stage.

11. COMMUNICATIONS IMPLICATIONS

11.1 None at this stage.

12. CONSULTATIONS

12.1 None at this stage.

13. EQUALITY IMPACT

13.1 Equality Impact Assessment Pre-screening completed determining full EIA not required.
See Appendix 2.

14. THE CORPORATE PLAN AND THE COUNCIL'S PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT FRAMEWORK

14.1 This programme of reviews will supplement the Council's own mechanisms for evaluating the Council's performance and the implementation of the Corporate Plan.

15. TACKLING THE IMPACT OF POVERTY

15.1 None at this stage.

16. TACKLING HEALTH INEQUALITIES

16.1 None at this stage.

17. REDUCTION OF CRIME AND DISORDER

17.1 None at this stage.

18. RISK MANAGEMENT ISSUES

18.1 None at this stage.

19. HEALTH, SAFETY AND EMERGENCY RESILIENCE ISSUES

19.1 None at this stage.

20. COMPATIBILITY WITH THE EUROPEAN CONVENTION ON HUMAN RIGHTS

20.1 None at this stage.

21. CONSERVATION OF BIODIVERSITY

21.1 None at this stage.

22. GLOSSARY

CPC - Corporate Peer Challenge
LGA - Local Government Association
Y&H ADASS - Yorkshire & Humber Association of Directors of Adult Social Services

23. LIST OF APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Further LGA engagement
Appendix 2: Equality Impact Assessment pre-screening

24. BACKGROUND PAPERS

Report author: Hannah Tower

Financial Implications/Consultation



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(To be signed by senior Financial Services officer where no financial implications)