

Report of	Meeting	Date
(Introduced by)	Informal Cabinet Briefing	30 September 2021
	Scrutiny Committee	12 October 2021
	Cabinet	13 October 2021

Is this report confidential?	No
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Is this decision key?	No
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Peer Challenge 2021

Purpose of the Report

1. To share the final report of the LGA (Local Government Association) Peer Challenge 2021.

Recommendations to Scrutiny Committee

2. To review the final report produced by the LGA peer team (appendix A) and consider the proposed action plan (appendix B) to respond to the recommendations.

Recommendations to Cabinet

3. That the final report be accepted.
4. That the action plan is approved for delivery.

Reasons for recommendations

5. To ensure the ongoing improvement of the council in response to the findings of the peer team.

Other options considered and rejected

6. As part of the peer challenge process the council is expected to review, acknowledge and respond to the recommendations made by the peer team.

Corporate priorities

7. The report relates to the following corporate priorities:

An exemplary council	Thriving communities
A fair local economy that works for everyone	Good homes, green spaces, healthy places

Background to the report

8. The peer challenge process is not an inspection but rather an improvement-focused opportunity to explore and reflect on different areas of performance and planning.
9. It involves a team of peers made up of chief officers and experts from across the sector engaging with the council, considering key plans and documents as well as meeting with officers, members and partners.
10. The peer challenge process considers a number of factors including:
 - Understanding of the local context and priority setting
 - Financial planning and viability
 - Political and managerial leadership
 - Governance and decision making
 - Organisational capacity
11. The council can also select additional areas for focus which included the progress made against the Annual Governance Statement action plan, and the approach to development of the community hubs.

The peer challenge process

12. The peer challenge took place between the 30th June and 2nd July 2021. Although originally intending to attend the Civic Centre, restrictions linked to the pandemic prompted a decision to complete the process virtually with the peers using video conferencing to undertake their enquiries.
13. The peer challenge team was made up of five senior officers and members from other authorities who were selected on the basis of their relevant experience and expertise. Prior to the challenge, the peer team were provided with a range of documents and information, including a position statement which set the scene for the challenge.
14. While on site the team spoke to more than 65 people, including a range of council staff, councillors, external partners and stakeholders through over 34 meetings and focus groups totalling 144 hours contact time.

Findings

15. On the final day the team presented their initial findings and subsequently submitted them to the council in a final report. This report can be found at appendix A.
16. In summary, the peer team recognised the promising nature of the work to date and outcomes in relation to governance that have been achieved, while delivering effective services throughout the pandemic and continuing to change ways of working including the implementation of shared services.

17. There is more to do and the good work to date needs to be embedded. Plans and strategies also need to be developed to clearly set out the way forward for the council.
18. The peer team identified 8 recommendations to support continued improvement through a combination of 'quick wins' and longer-term objectives.
- a) Embed a culture of good governance
 - b) Provide full clarity on the ambition and plans for shared services
 - c) Programme Plan for future work and political priorities
 - d) Medium Term Financial Strategy
 - e) Assurance on capital programme delivery
 - f) Organisational development and Management Practice:
 - g) Community Hubs
 - h) Political engagement in a balanced authority
19. The full report was published on the council website in line with LGA requirements.
20. An action plan has been developed to outline how the council intends to respond to the recommendations with key milestones to be managed by the Senior Management Team. The full action plan is included at Appendix B.

Climate change and air quality

21. The work noted in this report does not impact the climate change and sustainability targets of the Councils Green Agenda and all environmental considerations are in place.

Comments of the Statutory Finance Officer

22. The recommendations made by the Peer Team, most notably in relation to the Medium Term Strategy and capital programme delivery, are welcomed and will be incorporated into the development of these areas to support the Council's continuous improvement.

Comments of the Monitoring Officer

23. The action plan responds to the matters raised by the Peer Review and implementation of it will strengthen the ability of the Council to plan and deliver outcomes for the residents of South Ribble.

Appendices

Appendix A: Final peer challenge report

Appendix B: South Ribble peer challenge action plan

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