

CORPORATE PEER CHALLENGE ACTION PLAN

Head of Service:	Jackie King, Chief Executive
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Wards affected:	(All Wards);
Urgent Decision?(yes/no)	No
If yes, reason urgent decision required:	
Appendices (attached):	Appendix 1: Epsom & Ewell Borough Council Corporate Peer Challenge - Action Plan

Summary

This report accompanies the proposed Corporate Peer Challenge Action Plan. The Action Plan has been developed by a group of members and officers, to consider the recommended areas of improvement identified by the peer review team.

Recommendation (s)

The Committee is asked to:

- (1) Endorse the Action Plan as set out in Appendix 1, which responds to the recommendations from the Corporate Peer Challenge Report.**

1 Reason for Recommendation

- 1.1 Corporate Peer Challenge (CPC) is a highly valued improvement and assurance tool that is delivered by the sector for the sector.
- 1.2 Developing the peer team's recommendations into an Action Plan for exploration will ensure that the insights gained from the CPC process result in the intended sector led improvements at Epsom & Ewell Borough Council.

2 Background

- 2.1 The Corporate Peer Challenge process provides robust, strategic, and credible challenge and support, assisting the council to meet its' best value duty.

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- 2.2 Government expects all local authorities to participate in a CPC at least every five years and provides funding to the LGA to ensure that every council can participate at nil cost.
- 2.3 In March 2024, a team of senior local government councillors and officers (the Peer team) undertook a comprehensive review of key finance, performance, and governance information and reviewed a 'Position Statement', provided by the council.
- 2.4 During the three days the peer team spent on site, they met with more than 100 people including members, staff, partners, and residents in a series of workshops and one-to-one meetings. The peer team also reviewed a multitude of the council's key strategies, policies, and performance data.
- 2.5 The peer team had a tour of the borough which focussed on key sites such as the new town hall headquarters at 70 East Street, Bourne Hall and key future regeneration sites.
- 2.6 Each Corporate Peer Challenge process considers council performance against five key areas:
 - 2.6.1 **Local priorities and outcomes** - Are the council's priorities clear and informed by the local context? Is the council delivering effectively on its priorities? Is there an organisational-wide approach to continuous improvement, with frequent monitoring, reporting on and updating of performance and improvement plans?
 - 2.6.2 **Organisational and place leadership** - Does the council provide effective local leadership? Are there good relationships with partner organisations and local communities?
 - 2.6.3 **Governance and culture** - Are there clear and robust governance arrangements? Is there a culture of challenge and scrutiny?
 - 2.6.4 **Financial planning and management** - Does the council have a grip on its current financial position? Does the council have a strategy and a plan to address its financial challenges?
 - 2.6.5 **Capacity for improvement** - Is the organisation able to support delivery of local priorities? Does the council have the capacity to improve?
- 2.7 In addition, Epsom & Ewell Borough Council asked the peer team to consider its approach to governance, and to addressing the rising demand for housing and temporary accommodation.

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- 2.8 The peer team made 11 recommendations following their assessment, analysis and conclusions drawn from their meetings. In order for a recommendation to be put forward it had to be 'triangulated', meaning that it was mentioned in at least three separate scenarios.
- 2.9 Whilst Local Authorities have a choice whether to accept the recommendations resulting from the Corporate Peer Challenge process, all recommendations have been derived as a result of feedback and evidence from multiple sources, triangulated by the peer team and are therefore considered valid. Each of the peer team's recommendations are being explored to establish the benefit they offer to the council in their adoption.
- 2.10 If the council were to explore a recommendation and decide not to adopt it, the expectation of the Local Government Association is that there will be a robust reason for not doing so as the recommendations are given in the spirit of supporting continuous improvement in areas that need addressing.
- 2.11 Summarised below are each of the peer team's recommendations. The final CPC Report – available on the Council website - provides some further context to each recommendation, and in turn, each recommendation has been incorporated into the Action Plan appended to this report (Appendix 1).
- 2.11.1 **Shared Vision:** Create a shared vision for Epsom and Ewell, be clear what your priorities are and deliver these over a five-year period.
- 2.11.2 **Capacity:** Create capacity for strategic political and managerial leadership.
- 2.11.3 **Financial position:** Longer-term financial position must be urgently addressed and relate to the council's vision and corporate priorities once these have been agreed.
- 2.11.4 **Governance:** Governance needs to be reviewed to empower the political leadership of the authority, considering the uniqueness of Epsom & Ewell.
- 2.11.5 **Risk:** Before embarking on a commercialisation agenda, the council needs a shared understanding of the organisation's risk appetite.
- 2.11.6 **Transformation:** A properly resourced Corporate Transformation Programme is needed.
- 2.11.7 **Training:** Training for members and officers is needed to improve understanding of roles and responsibilities and increase skills and capacity.

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- 2.11.8 **Partnerships:** Maximise partnership working to help build capacity to deliver and promote Epsom and Ewell's interests on the wider stage.
- 2.11.9 **Housing:** Take a more strategic approach to tackling the housing challenge, work proactively with partners and address all steps on the housing ladder.
- 2.11.10 **Audit and scrutiny:** Options to decouple the audit and scrutiny function should be explored with scrutiny subsumed into policy committees.
- 2.12 To develop the Action Plan, the RA Group Leader and the Chief Executive led two workshops comprised of cross-party Member representation and officers from across the organisation to ensure a transparent and collaborative approach.
- 2.13 Following the CPC, a follow-up review, including a further one day site visit will take place in December 2024 to assess the council's progress in addressing the identified improvement areas and appended Action Plan.

3 Risk Assessment

Legal or other duties

3.1 Equality Impact Assessment

3.1.1 The CPC process focuses on the council's ability to serve and work with its residents. The recommendations will be utilised to support the council to deliver more efficient, resilient, and resident focused services.

3.1.2 In developing a 'Shared Vision', a recommendation of peer team, and reflected in the attached Action Plan, it will be important to listen to all sections of our community and to carry out a full Equality Impact Assessment of any proposed corporate priorities that arise.

3.2 Crime & Disorder

3.2.1 There are no crime and disorder implications arising from this report.

3.3 Safeguarding

3.3.1 There are no safeguarding issues arising directly due to this report.

3.4 Dependencies

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3.4.1 Development and implementation of an Action Plan is an expected part of engaging positively in the Corporate Peer Challenge process.

3.5 Other

3.5.1 As the Corporate Peer Challenge process has aligned with a need to refresh the current Corporate Plan, there is an opportunity to draw on the insights and recommendations of the peer team in developing a new Corporate Plan.

4 Financial Implications

4.1 The Corporate Peer Challenge process is a valuable assurance tool, provided free of charge to the council.

4.2 Whilst there are no financial implications arising directly from this report, it is recognised that in implementing the appended Action Plan, some investment may be required, for example in providing the Member and staff training referenced by the peer team, and in developing organisational capacity to deliver an all-encompassing Corporate Transformation Programme.

4.3 All costs identified are expected to be met in the first instance through existing, approved budgets, or referred to the appropriate Committee should any anticipated expenditure extend beyond the already approved financial envelope.

4.4 **Section 151 Officer's comments:** None arising from the contents of this report.

5 Legal Implications

5.1 There are no legal issues arising because of this report.

5.2 **Legal Officer's comments:** None arising from the content of this report.

6 Policies, Plans & Partnerships

6.1 **Council's Key Priorities:** The following Key Priorities are engaged:

- **Effective Council.** The peer team's recommendations, and the council's response to them are important in supporting the council's commitment to continuous improvement and transparency.

6.2 **Service Plans:** The matter is included within the current Service Delivery Plan.

6.3 **Climate & Environmental Impact of recommendations:** Please check that the Environment and Sustainability Officer has been consulted if relevant.

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6.4 There are no direct climate and environmental issues arising because of this report, however, in developing a shared vision for Epsom & Ewell, as recommended by the peer team, it will be important to incorporate the council's climate change commitments into any strategic priorities that are developed as a result.

6.5 **Sustainability Policy & Community Safety Implications:**

6.6 There are no sustainability or community safety issues arising directly from this report.

6.7 **Partnerships:**

6.8 Recommendation 2.9.8 set out above deals directly with the council's approach to partnership working and recommends a refreshed approach to collaboration.

7 **Background papers**

7.1 The documents referred to in compiling this report are as follows:

Previous reports:

- None that are applicable.

Other papers:

- [LGA Corporate Peer Challenge Final Report](#)
- [Epsom & Ewell Borough Council Corporate Peer Challenge Position Statement](#)