

Committee Name and Date of Committee Meeting

Cabinet – 18 September 2023

Report Title

LGA Corporate Peer Challenge and Action Plan

Is this a Key Decision and has it been included on the Forward Plan?

Yes

Strategic Director Approving Submission of the Report

Jo Brown, Assistant Chief Executive

Report Author(s)

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Ward(s) Affected

Borough-Wide

Report Summary

All Councils are encouraged to receive a Corporate Peer Challenge (CPC) once every five years. The CPC is carried out by the Local Government Association (LGA) using a process, which is designed to provide robust, strategic and credible challenge and support and avoid insularity.

The LGA CPC took place between 5 – 8 June 2023 and the findings were received in August 2023 (see Appendix 1). The report concludes that: *“Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council serves the town well and is today an impressive organisation.”*

In response to the findings and the seven recommendations in the report, the Council has produced a high-level Action Plan (see Appendix 2) for approval by Cabinet.

Recommendations

That Cabinet:

1. Note the observations and key recommendations made by the Corporate Peer Team to the Council.
2. Approve the high-level action plan which is the Council's response to the findings.

List of Appendices Included

Appendix 1 LGA Corporate Peer Challenge (RMBC) Feedback Report

Appendix 2 LGA Corporate Peer Challenge (RMBC) Action Plan

Appendix 3 Equality Screening Assessment

Appendix 4 Carbon Impact Assessment

Background Papers

[Corporate Peer Challenge Website - Local Government Association](#)

Consideration by any other Council Committee, Scrutiny or Advisory Panel

None

Council Approval Required

No

Exempt from the Press and Public

No

LGA Corporate Peer Challenge and Action Plan

1. Background

- 1.1 All Councils are encouraged to receive a Corporate Peer Challenge (CPC) once every five years. This is delivered at no cost to the Council. The CPC is carried out by the Local Governance Association (LGA) using a process which is designed to provide robust, strategic and credible challenge and support and avoid insularity.
- 1.2 CPCs are focused on ensuring that Councils have the capacity, governance, leadership, and finance to deliver their ambition. The process is not an inspection and is designed to be forward-looking to help accelerate and drive improvement.
- 1.3 Rotherham Council's CPC took place between the 5th and the 8th June 2023 and the findings were received in August 2023. The full report is attached at Appendix 1. In response to the findings the Council has produced a high-level Action Plan for approval by Cabinet and this is attached at Appendix 2.

2. Key Issues

- 2.1 During the Council's CPC, the peer team considered the following five themes, which form the core components of all Corporate Peer Challenges:
 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?
 2. **Organisational and place leadership** - Does the Council provide effective local leadership? Are there good relationships with partner organisations and local communities?
 3. **Governance and culture** - Are there clear and robust governance arrangements? Is there a culture of challenge and scrutiny?
 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?
 5. **Capacity for improvement** - Is the organisation able to support delivery of local priorities? Does the Council have the capacity to improve?
- 2.2 In addition to these five areas, the Council asked the peer team to provide observations and feedback on the Council's progress in the last five years and the work being undertaken to create an inclusive economy.
- 2.3 The CPC was delivered by experienced elected member and officer peers and these peers were selected based on their relevant expertise. The peers involved in the Council's CPC were:

- **Denise Park** (Chief Executive – Blackburn with Darwen Council)
- **Councillor Cllr Eamonn O’Brien** (Leader – Bury Council)
- **Dame Mary Ney** (LGA Associate and former Government Commissioner at Rotherham MBC)
- **Stephan Van Arendsen** (Executive Director for Corporate Resources and Customer Services – Sefton Metropolitan Borough Council)
- **Richard Roe** (Corporate Director for Place – Trafford Council)
- **Satvinder Rana** (Senior Regional Adviser – LGA)

2.4 The peer team prepared by reviewing evidence submitted by the Council and then spent three days onsite at Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council between 5th and 8th June 2023. During this time the team:

- Gathered information and views from over 40 meetings, in addition to further research and reading of over 70 pieces of evidence.
- Spoke to over 100 people including a range of council staff together with members and external stakeholders.
- Went on a tour of the Town Centre and part of the wider borough.

2.5 The ‘LGA Corporate Peer Challenge (RMBC) Feedback Report’ received in August 2023 provides a summary of the peer team’s findings (see Appendix 1). Positively, the report concludes that:

“Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council serves the town well and is today an impressive organisation. Being named the ‘Most Improved Council’ in the country at the Local Government Chronicle (LGC) Award in 2022 provides ample evidence that it is now in a very good place. It is ambitious and has well-established and robust foundations, along with several notable and commendable practices that other councils can learn from.”

2.6 To report includes seven recommendations to support the Council’s continuous improvement journey, which are:

- **Recommendation 1** *Celebrate the council’s achievements!*
- **Recommendation 2** *Develop an externally facing compelling and positive narrative of place which will help to promote and market the borough and capitalise on Rotherham’s assets.*
- **Recommendation 3** *Use the significant investments underway to expand and attract private sector investment at scale, maximising its potential and supporting a more inclusive economic future.*
- **Recommendation 4** *Develop effective pathways and mechanisms for local people, especially young people, to benefit from inclusive growth that can help to deliver improved health outcomes and address inequalities.*

- **Recommendation 5** *Review performance management with a focus on demonstrating impact and an improvement in outcomes in delivering the council's ambition; and use the strong leadership, capacity and capability of the top-team to drive and deliver further organisational transformations and change across the borough at pace.*
- **Recommendation 6** *Building on the Neighbourhood working model, develop a clearer and shared understanding of integrated locality working across the public sector and increase the pace of digital transformation across the organisation to deliver improved outcomes for residents and consistently improve the customer experience.*
- **Recommendation 7** *Continue to keep the medium-term financial strategy under review – testing assumptions and undertaking sensitivity analysis – and continue to report to Members on a regular basis.*

2.7 A high-level action plan has been developed in response to the findings and is attached (see Appendix 2) for Cabinet's approval. The action plan includes 20 actions in total. Once approved, the action plan is to be published on both the Council's and the LGA's website.

2.8 The Chief Executive will oversee the action plan and the development of anymore detailed action plan documents.

2.9 The LGA have advised that a progress meeting is to take place in 2024 to review the progress being made against the recommendations of the CPC. This meeting will take note of any changes in the context the Council is working in and will also capture any case studies about the impact of the CPC. A progress report will be published 12 months after the CPC.

2.10 The Council's next Corporate Peer Challenge should take place in 2028.

3. Options considered and recommended proposal

3.1 The LGA provides guidance and templates for local authorities participating in a Corporate Peer Challenge to ensure that there is a consistent approach and these templates have been used to develop the action plan attached at Appendix 2.

3.2 Cabinet is asked to consider and agree the high-level action plan which is the Council's response to the findings.

4. Consultation on proposal

4.1 The feedback report and draft action plan has been developed in consultation with the Strategic Leadership Team and relevant Assistant Directors.

Additional consultation will also be undertaken as part of the development of the more detailed action plan by November 2023.

5. Timetable and Accountability for Implementing this Decision

5.1 The feedback report and action plan will be published on the Council's and LGA's website after approval by Cabinet.

5.2 Next steps are outlined in paragraphs 2.8 - 2.10, above.

6. Financial and Procurement Advice and Implications

6.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from this report. The Action Plan will be delivered within the resources approved as part of the Council's Budget and Medium-Term Financial Strategy.

6.2 Recommendation 7 relates to the Medium-Term Financial Strategy which will continue to be reviewed and reported to Members.

6.3 There are no direct procurement implications arising from the recommendations detailed in this report.

7. Legal Advice and Implications

7.1 There are no direct legal implications arising from this report.

8. Human Resources Advice and Implications

8.1 There are no direct human resource implications arising from this report.

9. Implications for Children and Young People and Vulnerable Adults

9.1 There are no direct implications for children and young people arising from this report.

10. Equalities and Human Rights Advice and Implications

10.1 The actions contained within the Action Plan are aimed at achieving the best possible outcomes for local people and residents, as well as addressing inequalities.

11. Implications for CO2 Emissions and Climate Change

11.1 There are no direct implications relating to CO2 emissions and climate change arising from this report.

12. Implications for Partners

12.1. Partners played a key role in the Corporate Peer Challenge process and working with partners across the public, private and voluntary and community sectors will be integral to the delivery of the Action Plan.

12.2 Following publication and consideration at Cabinet, the findings will be shared with partners via the Rotherham Together Partnership.

13. Risks and Mitigation

13.1 The LGA CPC process results in a public report which requires a formal response from the Council in the form of an action plan. The principal risk is that the Council fails to fully implement the action plan and, as a result, fails to improve.

13.2 To address this risk, the actions included in the action plan will be monitored quarterly using the process already in place for all external inspections and reviews. This will also be reported to the Audit Committee every six months in line with our current process.

14. Accountable Officer

Sharon Kemp, Chief Executive

Approvals obtained on behalf of Statutory Officers: -

	Named Officer	Date
Chief Executive	Sharon Kemp	04/09/23
Strategic Director of Finance & Customer Services (S.151 Officer)	Judith Badger	30/08/23
Head of Legal Services (Deputy Monitoring Officer)	Bal Nahal	30/08/23

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This report is published on the Council's [website](#).