

Committee Name and Date of Committee Meeting

Cabinet – 18 March 2024

Report Title

Local Government Association Corporate Peer Challenge Progress Review Visit

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

No, but it has been included on the Forward Plan

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. The report concluded that: *“Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council serves the town well and is today an impressive organisation.”*

In response to the findings and the seven recommendations of the CPC, the Council produced a high-level action plan which was approved by Cabinet in September 2023.

A progress review took place on 21 December 2023 to enable the Council to update peers on the progress made and to receive feedback on this. The findings were received in February 2024 (see Appendix 1).

Recommendations

1. That Cabinet note and endorse the observations made by the Corporate Peer Challenge team to the Council.

List of Appendices Included

Appendix 1 LGA Corporate Peer Challenge (RMBC) Progress Review Report
Appendix 2 Equality Screening Assessment
Appendix 3 Carbon Impact Assessment

Background Papers

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

[LGA Corporate Peer Challenge Report and Action Plan to OSMB on 13 September and Cabinet on 18 September 2024](#)

Consideration by any other Council Committee, Scrutiny or Advisory Panel

Overview and Scrutiny Management Board

Council Approval Required

No

Exempt from the Press and Public

No

Local Government Association Corporate Peer Challenge Progress Review Visit

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 Core components for all Corporate Peer Challenges include:
 1. Local priorities and outcomes
 2. Organisational and place leadership
 3. Governance and culture
 4. Financial planning and management
 5. Capacity for improvement

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.

- 1.4 Rotherham Council's CPC took place between the 5th and the 8th June 2023 and the findings were received in August 2023. The report concluded 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."*
- 1.5 In response to the findings and the seven recommendations within the feedback report, the Council produced a high-level action plan which was approved by Cabinet in September 2023. The action plan included 20 actions and was published on both the Council's and the LGA's website.
- 1.6 The Overview and Scrutiny Management Board (OSMB) received the feedback report in September 2023, prior to it being considered by Cabinet. In considering the report, OSMB requested that it receive the outcome of the progress review, prior to the end of the current municipal year.

2. Key Issues

2.1 Following the previous CPC visit in June 2023, the LGA conducted a progress review on 21 December 2023. The purpose of the review was to enable the Council to:

- Update peers on the early progress made and to receive feedback on this, including how the action plan aligns to the CPC's recommendations,
- Consider the peer's reflections on any new opportunities or challenges that may have arisen since the peer team were 'on-site' including any further support needs,
- Discuss any early impact or learning from the progress made to date.

2.2 The peers who returned for Council's CPC progress review included:

- **Denise Park** (Chief Executive – Blackburn with Darwen Council)
- **Councillor Eamonn O'Brien** (Leader – Bury Council)
- **Dame Mary Ney** (LGA Associate and former Government Commissioner at Rotherham MBC)
- **Richard Roe** (Corporate Director for Place – Trafford Council)
- **Satvinder Rana** (Senior Regional Adviser – LGA)

2.3 The peer team met with officers and Members face to face over the course of one day. Representatives from the Council included Cabinet, the Strategic Leadership Team, opposition members and a focus group with managers and officers involved in delivery of the actions in the plan.

2.4 The progress review visit focused on the seven recommendations from the earlier visit, in line with the core components from the original review and as outlined in a detailed action plan. The original recommendations made to support the Council's continuous improvement journey were:

- **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.*

2.5 The findings from the progress review were received in February 2024 (see Appendix 1). The report concluded that:

“The peer team was pleased to see the positive and engaging way in which the council addressed the recommendations of the Corporate Peer Challenge of June 2023, the actions it has taken so far, and the evidence provided to show the progress being made”.

2.6 As part of ensuring an open and transparent process, there is an expectation by the LGA that the finalised progress review report will be published by Rotherham Council.

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

3. Options considered and recommended proposal

3.1 Cabinet is asked to note the observations made by the Corporate Peer Challenge team to the Council (See Appendix 1).

4. Consultation on proposal

4.1 The Strategic Leadership Team have been consulted on the draft progress report.

4.2 Additional consultation took place with directorates to develop a more detailed action plan and Position Statement, which informed the progress review.

5. Timetable and Accountability for Implementing this Decision

5.1 Following endorsement by Cabinet, the progress review report will be published on the Council's and LGA's website.

5.2 Actions from the Corporate Peer Challenge Action Plan will be embedded within the new Year Ahead Delivery Plan for 2024/25 which is reported publicly every six months.

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

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.

10.2 At least two recommendations have been identified as having equality implications. Where necessary, actions arising from the recommendations will be subject to an Equality Analysis, the outcome of which reported through the six-monthly Council Plan/Year Ahead Delivery Plan Progress Reports. Should any of the listed actions within the Corporate Peer Challenge Action Plan require a separate Cabinet decision, they will also be subject to a separate Equality Analysis in the usual manner.

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 principal risk is that the Council fails to fully implement the Corporate Peer Challenge 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. In addition, actions will be embedded within the Year Ahead Delivery Plan which is reported publicly every six months.

14. Accountable Officer

Sharon Kemp, Chief Executive

Approvals obtained on behalf of Statutory Officers: -

	Named Officer	Date
Chief Executive	Sharon Kemp	04/03/24
Strategic Director of Finance & Customer Services (S.151 Officer)	Judith Badger	28/02/24
Assistant Director, Legal Services (Monitoring Officer)	Phil Horsfield	28/02/24

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