



Classification	Item No.
Open	

Meeting:	CABINET
Meeting date:	13 October 2021
Title of report:	LGA Corporate Peer Challenge Feedback
Report by:	Councillor Tahir Rafiq, Cabinet Member for Corporate Affairs & HR
Decision Type:	
Ward(s) to which report relates	All

Executive Summary:

In November 2018 Bury Council benefitted from a comprehensive Corporate Peer Challenge review undertaken by the Local Government Association (LGA), from which a number of recommendations for improvement were made and responded to.

In summer 2021 the Council received a Corporate Peer Challenge Revisit, the purpose of which was to assess the progress made against the recommendations identified during the original peer challenge and the impact this has had.

This report summarises feedback received from the LGA team and the Council's proposed action plan in response. These relate to:

- Considering the number of competing pressures and priorities now facing the Council, prioritise again those objectives and actions which are the most critical corporately
- Clearly set out and agree the approach and strategy for organisational development that senior leaders can then consistently champion
- Give focus to consistently 'getting the basics right' which will help increase the amount of capacity the Council can put towards the transformation ambitions, delivery of saving requirements and the corporate priorities
- Continue to improve the performance management and business intelligence function and consider where further structural alignment of those in these roles is needed

- Completing the planned structural review of the finance function
- Co-design the actions required to achieving the priorities under the 2030 vision
- Work with others to co-design the Community Engagement Strategy

Recommendation(s)

The Cabinet is asked to:

- Note the feedback from the LGA team
- Endorse the “3R” Framework to inform prioritisation
- Endorse the proposed action plan

Key considerations

1 Introduction

In November 2018 Bury Council benefitted from a comprehensive Corporate Peer Challenge review by the Local Government Association (LGA), from which a number of recommendations for improvement were made and responded to.

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2 The 2018 Corporate Peer Challenge Findings

In 2018 Bury Council benefitted from a comprehensive Corporate Peer Challenge review. This involved an experienced team of peers from across the local government sector spending a number of days on site to interview key stakeholders and review documentation, including the Council's self-assessment.

The 2018 report recommended that the Council take a number of actions including:

- Develop a new Corporate Plan which states the priorities for the next three years;
- Strengthen financial management and discipline;
- Co-produce, then consistently live a new workforce culture, reflecting the cultural requirements of a new ‘integrated’ organisation and empower all to meet the level of sustainable corporate transformation required;
- Centralise relevant support and enabling services into a strong ‘corporate core’;
- Develop and deliver a single, comprehensive corporate performance management framework;
- Councillors and officers to co-design a considered, deliverable commercialisation strategy;

- Invest in ICT infrastructure in its entirety (hardware, software, connectivity and training) based on clear business cases. Also to define the Council's digital journey and the steps that will need to be taken to deliver it;
- Refresh the approach to community engagement and look at how the resourcing of the voluntary, community and faith sector could have a greater impact on local priorities;
- Review organisational workforce development;
- Review the role of the strategic 'Team Bury' partnership, the outcomes it can deliver for Bury and the governance arrangements required to do this.

3 The 2021 LGA Revisit

In summer 2021 the LGA made a follow up visit to Bury. The revisit was essentially a scaled back, focussed version of the full peer challenge. It involved a multi-disciplinary team spending 3 days on site to review key documentation, including a refresh of the Council's self-assessment, and to conduct meetings with a range of stakeholders.

3.1 Bury Council Self-assessment – Progress since 2018

The Council's self-assessment, appended, demonstrates that strong action has been taken to respond to each of the LGA's recommendations with the exception of the development of a commercialisation strategy. The self-assessment also makes the point that this improvement work has been delivered at the same time that the Council has had to respond to the unprecedented challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Progress includes:

- Leading the development of 'Let's Do It' – the Strategy for the borough until 2030 – together with other related strategies including an initial Covid-19 recovery strategy; refresh of the Locality Plan for Health and Social Care; a borough housing strategy; corporate plan and MTFs. The Community Safety Plan will be refreshed during this calendar year.
Let's do it! is a proposition for a new relationship between public services and local people based on meaningful engagement and co-design. The strategy was co-produced with Team Bury partners and designed to drive the partnership through a distributed work plan
- A more stable and resilient ICT infrastructure through the upgrade of servers; roll out of new devices; M365 implementation and a cloud migration strategy underway
- Delivery of the first two stages of the adopted model of organisation development ("Form" and "perform") and a clear plan for the third stage: "Transform", as follows:
Form:
 - A strengthened organisation structure is almost fully appointed to, including a Joint Executive Team across the Council and CCG
 - New areas of expertise have been invested in, such as organisation development; strategic finance and public service reform, as well as a number of joint roles between the Council and the CCG

- Council and CCG functions have now been integrated operationally and strategically as far as possible. The Chief Executive/Accountable Officer; Joint Executive Director Finance and Joint Executive Director Strategic Commissioning are all joint posts and the whole team leads across both organisations
- The Corporate Core, recommended within the 2018 LGA report, is now established

Perform:

- Governance has been strengthened including a new Council constitution; procurement regulations and inclusion strategy
- A strengthened, integrated, performance framework is in place across the Council and CCG; at a place-based level and with joint KPIs to drive internal performance reporting
- The Council's strategic finance framework has been fundamentally refreshed including a new strategy for reserves and updated Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS)

Transform

- A multi year transformation strategy has now been approved by the Council's Cabinet. This strategy will contribute c£5m to the Council's budget savings strategy and will deliver operational improvement across a breadth of corporate processes. Included within the strategy is a defined investment case which is provided for from a financial reserve allocated within the Council's 2021/22 budget.

Looking forward, the following key challenges are recognised:

- The NHS White Paper of March 2021 has signalled a shift in the focus of the health and care system and signals the end of CCGs from 31/3/22 to be replaced by a GM Integrated Care System operating across Greater Manchester and in each of the 10 places. This is an opportunity to further local progress on place-based leadership but does present a series of practical changes to deliver through governance and delivery.
- Delivery of the MTFS will be challenging, given the significant risk around the council's financial position in the medium term. A requirement for c£20m savings by 2024/25 has been identified in order to maintain a balanced budget.
- Delivery of the *Let's Do It!* Vision will require particular leadership from the Council on health and care integration; public service reform including community engagement; economic development and climate change.
- There is considerable work now required to move regeneration strategies into delivery including economic, infrastructure and community development strategies across our major sites in Prestwich, Radcliffe and Bury Town Centre.
- The new performance framework will inform increasingly evidence-based decisions including a focus on improvement of operational services such as waste collection and highways repairs.

3.2 LGA Feedback

The LGA have produced a comprehensive report setting out their findings and recommendations. The headline of this report is affirmation that the Council has delivered

the majority of recommendations made in 2018 and as a result “*This peer challenge has been able to observe how in many ways, Bury has become a different Council to what it was in 2018*”. The review also acknowledges progress made beyond the original recommendations including in the areas of strategic regeneration, strategic alignment with the CCG and in responding well to the demands of Covid-19. The Peer Team have, however, observed that:

- Responding to all of these demands has been tough. Capacity remains stretched and the Council must get better at prioritising.
- A further significant budget challenge must be faced between now and 2024/25.
- Key to achieving the next set of priorities is getting to a point where the Council is ‘consistently better at the basics’. This includes internal processes and support, as well as the outward facing services experienced by local residents and partners. Doing so will free up capacity and support the alignment between the capacity to deliver and the local priorities.
- Significantly accelerating the work required in terms of organisational development now has a much more pressing role than was the case in 2018

The team made seven strategic recommendations to help the Council respond to the issues identified.

4 Recommendations and proposed action plan

Key recommendations from the LGA Team and the Council’s proposed response, which will be reflected in the next update to the Corporate Plan, are as follows:

4.1 In light of the number of competing priorities now facing the Council, prioritise again those objectives and actions which are the most critical corporately.

The Corporate Plan provides a single view of all the strategic priorities in Bury Council (and CCG) and a basis for reviewing the totality of demand across the organisations. Over the summer the Cabinet has reviewed its priorities and determined three areas of focus for all delivery and 15 priorities within this:

- Response (to the ongoing emergency)
- Recovery, and
- Renewal through an ambitious borough-wide emergency recovery strategy

The framework provides a lens through which work plans may be assessed to confirm congruence with overall strategy. Each priority within the Corporate Plan has been mapped against this framework and any new demand will be similarly assessed for strategic fit. The framework is summarised below, as a basis for formal endorsement.

3 Strategic Themes with 15 Priorities		
LET'S	DO	It!
Response	Recovery	Renewal
Deploy our Local Outbreak Management Plan including achieving a 80% vaccination uptake for eligible residents in Borough	New Poverty Reduction Plan focused on community wealth building and implementation of the Real Living Wage	Celebrate together as the Town of Culture for 2021 and launch a new cultural strategy for the Borough
Mitigate the impact on children and young people through improving safeguarding, support and access to education	Deliver the Safety Valve work to strengthen SEND, EHCP offer and DSG Grant spend. Review transition arrangements for 2020-22	Prepare the framework for a new Skills Strategy inclusive of Schools, FE, HE and Community Learning
Visible leadership of the Borough's For Each Other approach to the unlock roadmap	Improved Operational Services including waste collection, a reduction in fly tipping, improved highways and second MOT test centre	Develop and implement the first phase of our Climate Change Action Plan to be carbon neutral by 2038
Continued support for health and care with a focus on mental health and managing demand across the system	Transforming health and care to ensure readiness for winter including urgent care, population health and community services	Neighbourhood model operational including Community Hubs , Health & Care, Children's and wider public services
Targeted enterprise support for our businesses and traders through emergency response funds, national grants and other developments	Implementation of the Brownfield Housing Land Programme and a focus on housing standards in social housing or private rented housing	Deliver the Strategic Regeneration Frameworks for our neighbourhoods and implement the Action Plans from each

4.2 Clearly set out and agree the approach and strategy for organisational development that senior leaders can then consistently champion.

The Council has been underway with a multi year organisation development (OD) strategy since 2018. The adopted model of "Form; Perform; Transform" has been used to establish foundational improvement. The focus over the last two years has been to create the structures, systems, processes and resources for improvement, as a basis for more fundamental transformation. The transformation strategy for which these conditions now allow was agreed in July 2021 and includes the workstreams of Let's Do It ...:

- Well
- Once
- Flexibly

In recognition of the expertise required to take forward the OD strategy a new post was created and appointed to earlier this last year, the Director of People and Inclusion. This post is accountable for bringing the expertise and capacity required to further an agenda around culture change and behaviours. Key deliverables which will be brought together into an overarching new "People Strategy" within the remit of the internal transformation programme are as follows:

August – December 2021

- Pay & Grading review (Part 1)
- HR Policy Handbook and Exec Development
- Behaviours and values design

January – June 2022

- Emphasis on absence, casework and Performance and Development Reviews
- Organisation design principles agreed
- People Strategy agreed
- Leadership development and transactional improvements
- Behaviour and culture programme

July 2023 – March 2022

- Full job evaluation and organisation design review
- Leadership development and transactional improvements
- Behaviour and culture programme

4.3 Give focus to consistently ‘getting the basics right’ which will help increase the amount of capacity the Council can put towards the transformation ambitions, delivery of saving requirements and the corporate priorities.

The remit of this feedback exercise was internal, corporate processes only. In that context the review acknowledges the progress that has been made in responding to previous recommendations, including to establish a Corporate Core and the considerable investment and improvement in critical functions including ICT, HR, Performance and Intelligence.

The review did, however, identify the ongoing scale of improvement still required to optimise corporate delivery. The specific recommendation to better support the user experience is recognised, including risk management, customer services, internal audit, complaints monitoring, tracking of member enquiries, HR processes and support for procurement. Improvement work across the majority of these functions is within the scope of the “Let’s Do It ... Well” transformation programme however, to better understand the basis for the recommendation:

- Further engagement will be planned with internal and external users, to inform a plan and prioritise resources accordingly. This will include the engagement of internal self-appointed “change agents” who have been developed to provide a staff voice to senior management over the past 12 months, including a subgroup specifically focussed on support to the Let’s Do It ...Well programme
- A “mystery shopper” exercise will be undertaken and repeated regularly by the Corporate Core Management Team to maintain an understanding of the user experience.

4.4 Continue to improve performance management and consider where further structural alignment of those in these functions is needed.

The Council has invested in an expanded performance and intelligence team over the last 2 years and the function is now within the corporate core. The team has

demonstrated its value throughout the Covid-19 response through the production of a daily data dashboard for use at Gold (strategic) level, production of frequent, high quality data returns at regional and national level and the production of an inequalities index to inform longer term response and recovery plans. The team also provides quarterly “business as usual” performance reports and the data insight to inform the Let’s do it! Strategy and underpinning departmental work including the safety Valve analysis and health and Care Locality Plan.

There is now a need to direct this capacity to support the Council and CCG to make more evidence-based decisions within business planning which, in turn, should inform organisational priorities. The ability to be able to support all areas of the organisation sufficiently is to some extent limited by the capacity of the current structure, however investment in new technologies and ways of working will help to continue to improve the approach. This need for further development of the Performance and Business Intelligence function was recognised within the Transformation Strategy following analysis commissioned from an independent partner, Ameo. Within this work the insufficiency of current resources to meet the corporate vision was highlighted however it was also recognised that there may be analytical capacity embedded in service areas which could be brought together to strengthen the current corporate team.

The recommendation to pursue further structural alignment of related staffing resources which may remain departmentally is welcomed and will be pursued. In parallel an ambitious data management strategy will be led through the digital workstream to ensure that the team has the tools and techniques to maximise the value of data held by both organisations.

4.5 Completing the planned structural review of the finance function will help to shift support for managers and budget holders more towards a business partner model.

Over the past two years the Council has invested significantly in strategic finance delivery including the development of a new multi-year Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) including reserves and capital strategies and a refresh of the Dedicated Schools Grant through support to the Safety Valve project. The team has, however, experienced some turnover at leadership level and it is acknowledged that investment in the strategic agenda has been to the detriment of staff resource planning.

It is therefore acknowledged that the planned finance structure review is very overdue. Work is, however, now underway now on a revised structure which will be brought forward as a basis for consultation shortly.

4.6 Building on the progress made to develop a 2030 vision for Bury and building of relationships with partners, co-design the actions required to achieving the priorities under the 2030 vision.

The Let’s Do It! vision and priorities for 2020 – 2022 were co-designed with partners through the Team Bury partnership. Partners are engaged in delivery through the active leadership of the Team Bury network including monthly

meetings of all public service leaders; a new Strategic Leaders network at non-executive level, chaired by the Leader of the Council and work within and outside of statutory committees such as the Bury Community Safety Partnership.

The feedback that not all partners yet feel they align with the vision or feel they are clear about their role in delivery is helpful and is already being addressed through a different leadership approach which involves the Council:

- Taking specific proposals to partners for their comment and development, to target involvement. For example, the Bury Business Leaders' Group informed the final approach to Covid-19 emergency business grant design.
- Allocation of system-wide leads for actions within an agreed framework. For example, the Team Bury partnership agreed the adoption of the CLES Community Wealth Building strategy as part of the approach to driving inclusive growth. The framework includes five component parts which, through facilitation by the Council, have been allocated across the Bury partnership to achieve distributed ownership and delivery.

The Council will continue to evaluate this more structured but collegiate approach to sharing ownership.

It has been agreed that an annual "State of the Borough" report and corresponding priorities for delivery in the year ahead will be produced at the end of each calendar year. Partners will be engaged in the production of the 2021/22 report and associated action plan, to secure more distributed leadership as described above.

4.7 Work with others to co-design the Community Engagement Strategy. Embed the cultural and workforce requirements of this within the organisational development programme.

At the heart of the Let's Do It! strategy is a commitment to a new relationship with residents, based on co-design and meaningful engagement between residents, communities (of place and identity) and public services. In support of this objective the Corporate Plan includes a commitment to produce a Community Engagement strategy. The strategy is in development and will propose the tools, responsibilities and evaluation measures for the new engagement approach. Underpinning the strategy will be a co-production framework which will define the technical basis for co-design and the circumstances when this does and does not apply.

To inform the strategy two pieces of deep-dive community engagement are presently underway, which are instructive of the council's intended approach. These are:

- Research through the Covid-19 community champions initiative to help the Council better understand current community make-up in order that this can be mapped against the current engagement arrangements and partnerships, to make sure this is representative of the whole community.

- Targeted engagement to better understand the experience of Bury's diverse communities, in the context of "race" being the protected characteristic which it was agreed to focus on this year as part of implementation of the Council's inclusion strategy

The LGA have presented a specific challenge in their feedback for the Council to consider "how far the Council (and potentially other partners) are willing to share space and power in the plan, what each will do with defined review stages" This challenge is welcomed as the next step in developing the newly established neighbourhood model, which brings together all public services, VCSE organisations and residents together, in places and informed by data, to work together in improving local lives and improving outcomes.

Immediate plans to define how "power" will be distributed will be through the planned work to develop the Let's do it" principles (Local; Enterprise; Together and Strengths-Based) into a set of values which will be co-designed to apply across the Council and CCG. The values framework is the intended intersect between communications and organisation development work, as recommended by the LGA team, and is within the scope of the internal transformation programme for delivery by April 2022.

5 Recommendations

The Cabinet is asked to:

- Note the feedback from the LGA team
- Endorse the "3R" Framework to inform prioritisation
- Endorse the proposed action plan which will be incorporated in the next update to the Corporate Plan

Community impact/ Contribution to the Bury 2030 Strategy

The Feedback informs the Council's ability to maximise its leadership of the Let's do it!" strategy

Equality Impact and considerations:

24. *Under section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, the 'general duty' on public authorities is set out as follows:
A public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to -*
 - (a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;*
 - (b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;*
 - (c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.*
25. *The public sector equality duty (specific duty) requires us to consider how we can positively contribute to the advancement of equality and good relations, and demonstrate that we are paying 'due regard' in our decision making in the design of policies and in the delivery of services.*

These proposals do not yet define proposed changes for a policy, service or strategy. It is therefore not possible or appropriate to undertake Equality Assessments. The projects within individual delivery programs will however be subject to robust equality assessment during their development and prior to any implementation decisions being made.

Assessment of Risk:

The following risks apply to the decision:

Risk / opportunity	Mitigation
The feedback highlights a number of risks in the council's operating environment which are described in this report	Failure of the Council to address strategy risks may inhibit delivery and/or financial resilience

Consultation:

The LGA team consulted with a sample of key stakeholders to inform their conclusions, as set out in their report

Legal Implications:

There are no legal implications arising from this report.

Financial Implications:

There are no financial implications arising from this report.

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Background papers:

LGA Peer Review report 2018
LGA Peer Challenge Revisit Report 2021
Council self assessment 2021

Please include a glossary of terms, abbreviations and acronyms used in this report.

Term	Meaning
PSR	Public Service Reform
MTFS	Medium term Financial Strategy
Ameo	The external consultancy who have provided short term advice on transformation
LGA	Local Government Association