

<b>REPORT TO:</b>		Full Council	
<b>DATE:</b>		16 January 2025	
<b>PORTFOLIO:</b>		Councillor Munsif Dad BEM JP - Leader of the Council	
<b>REPORT AUTHOR:</b>		Kirsten Burnett, Head of Policy and OD	
<b>TITLE OF REPORT:</b>		LGA Corporate Peer Challenge Report	
<b>EXEMPT REPORT (Local Government Act 1972, Schedule 12A)</b>	<b>No</b>	Not applicable	
<b>KEY DECISION:</b>	<b>No</b>	If yes, date of publication:	

## 1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To inform elected members of the findings and recommendations from the recent Local Government Association Corporate Peer Challenge (CPC) and to share the full report (Appendix 1).
- 1.2 To inform elected members of the next steps following the report and seek support for the establishment of a cross-party working group to support and have oversight of the action plan.

## 2. Recommendations

- 2.1 That Councillors note the report and the next steps in considering and implementing the recommendations, including the proposed establishment of a cross-party working group of elected members, supported by key officers.
- 2.2 That the full report is published on the Council's website
- 2.3 That the Leader of the Council writes to all those who gave up their time to engage with the peer team, expressing the Council's appreciation and gratitude and informing them where they can access a copy of the final CPC report.

## 3. Reasons for Recommendations and Background

- 3.1 The Council invited a team of senior local government councillors and officers to undertake a Local Government Association Corporate Peer Challenge, including a visit to Hyndburn between 29 and 31 October 2024.

3.2 A CPC is a comprehensive review of key finance, performance and governance information and forms a key part of the improvement and assurance framework for local government. CPC assists councils in meeting part of their Best Value duty, with the UK Government expecting all local authorities to have a CPC at least every five years. Peer challenges are improvement focused, not inspections, and the process is not designed to provide an in-depth or technical assessment of plans and proposals.

### **The Peer Team**

3.3 Peers, who are experienced elected members and officers, are at the heart of the peer challenge process and provide a 'practitioner perspective' and 'critical friend' challenge. Peers take time away from their busy "day job" to contribute to improvement within the local government sector. The peer team for Hyndburn Borough Council comprised:

- Member Peer – Cllr Tricia Gilby, Leader, Chesterfield Borough Council
- Member Peer – Cllr Simon Minas-Bound, Group Leader, Basingstoke & Deane Borough Council
- Chief Executive Peer – Ian Miller, Chief Executive, Wyre Forest District Council
- Officer Peer – Artemis Ansell, Director of Planning & Regeneration, Lichfield District Council and Lichfield West Midlands Traded Services
- Officer Peer – Dominic Bradley, Director of Resources, Horsham District Council
- LGA Peer – Alex Howell, Adviser - Devolution, Local Growth and Digital
- Peer Challenge Manager – Anne Brinkhoff, LGA Associate
- Project Support Officer – Kristel Whittaker, LGA

3.4 The peer team prepared by reviewing a range of documents and information and then spent three days on site at Hyndburn Borough Council, during which they spoke to more than 110 people including a range of council staff, members and external stakeholders. They toured our Accrington Town Square regeneration projects, visited the Raza Jamia Masjid mosque, and attended a meeting of HBC's Cabinet.

### **Findings and Recommendations**

3.5 The team presented their main findings and recommendations verbally to the Council on their final day here and have now provided a formal report.

3.6 The report includes a number of recommendations, listed below, which are designed to help the Council improve and build on the many positive findings of the peer team. Some of these positive findings are outlined in the report and include:

- Strong progress on key projects, such as Accrington Town Centre Regeneration, Huncoat Garden Village, and Leisure Transformation.
- Leveraging cultural and industrial heritage to drive economic growth and community engagement.
- Positive relationships with partners, including police, businesses, and the voluntary sector.

- Strong focus on improving health and well-being through partnerships and innovative projects.
- Successful initiatives to reduce carbon emissions and address climate change.
- Loyal, committed staff with high retention and a friendly, collegiate culture.
- Robust audit arrangements and a commitment to modernisation.
- Improved reserves, better financial systems, and effective management.
- Investments in training and development, internal promotions, and effective apprenticeship schemes.
- A more constructive and collaborative political environment.
- Willingness to embrace external peer reviews and share learning.

3.7 The following are the peer team's key recommendations to the council:

1. Conduct the planned review of the corporate strategy and align the organisational structure accordingly.
2. Engage in top team development to develop effective relationships within Cabinet/CMT as a group to create agreed ways of working and clarity of roles and responsibilities.
3. With partners, lead the development of a clear and well understood vision for the whole borough (Place Strategy).
4. Consider what capacity and skills the council needs to develop and address this as part of the review of organisational structure, including options for collaboration with partners and the use of consultants.
5. Design a transformation & digital strategy and action plan.
6. Develop a strategy for income generation, including commercial income, fees & charges and council tax.
7. Review and implement new plans for internal and external communication, aligning it with the new corporate strategy.
8. Create and implement a well understood and effective process for forward planning of Council decision making which engages Cabinet members and Scrutiny.
9. Promote the Council's approach to climate change and decarbonisation and play a key role in leading the Borough on this agenda.
10. Continue and broaden your engagement with local government and beyond in order to learn from others and offer your experience and learning.

### **Next steps**

3.8 The Council is required to develop an action plan to address the recommendations within 3 months. A separate report on the proposed process for developing this will be brought to Cabinet for agreement. This proposal will include establishing a working group of elected members (4 labour, 2 from other parties), supported by officers, to

help shape and oversee the proposed action plan, and make recommendations to Cabinet.

3.9 A progress visit will be arranged for some or all of the peer team. This is likely to take place in September or October 2025.

#### 4. Alternative Options considered and Reasons for Rejection

4.1 Not applicable. In agreeing to the CPC process, the Council has committed to taking the steps outlined in this report.

#### 5. Consultations

5.1 A large number and range of people spoke to the peer team, in addition to written information. The proposed next steps will involve a similar range of people in terms of developing the action plan.

#### 6. Implications

<b>Financial implications (including any future financial commitments for the Council)</b>	A number of the recommendations are relevant to the management of the Council's finances and resources and any actions identified may bring financial implications. At this stage however, Council is simply asked to note the CPC report.
<b>Legal and human rights implications</b>	None
<b>Assessment of risk</b>	The CPC report will be published openly and the peer team will conduct a follow up review in visit later this year and produce a further report, which will again be published. There are therefore potential reputational risks based on how the Council responds to the recommendations.
<b>Equality and diversity implications</b> <i>A <a href="#">Customer First Analysis</a> should be completed in relation to policy decisions and should be attached as an appendix to the report.</i>	None specifically for this report. The CPC report details some observations / suggestions regarding equality and diversity and this will be picked up as part of the action plan.

#### 7. Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985: List of Background Papers

7.1 N/a

## **8. Freedom of Information**

- 8.1 The report does not contain exempt information under the Local Government Act 1972, Schedule 12A and all information can be disclosed under the Freedom of Information Act 2000.