

*PART A

Report to: Cabinet
Date of meeting: 4 December 2017
Report of: Managing Director
Title: Corporate Peer Challenge: final report

1.0 SUMMARY

- 1.1 In September 2017, Watford Borough Council invited an external team from other local councils to Watford to independently review how we work and the outcomes we are achieving for the town and our local communities. This Corporate Peer Challenge was led by the Local Government Association (LGA) as part of their sector-led improvement programme and is something that all councils are encouraged to participate in.
- 1.2 The Corporate Peer Challenge team comprised a council leader from another district local authority and three local government chief officers (one of whom is a retired chief executive) and a programme leader from the LGA. They were on site at the council from 12 – 14 September but undertook a significant amount of off-site work including reviewing a range of relevant information and a position statement (Appendix A) that we provided in advance. During their visit the team spoke with over eighty people both within the council and from our external partners and stakeholders. This was to ensure they could get a comprehensive overview of the council, how we do business, our performance and, ultimately, our readiness for the future and challenges ahead.
- 1.3 Initial feedback was received on the last day of the review to an audience of staff and members and the team's final report was received in November 2017 (Appendix B).
- 1.4 The challenge team's findings were extremely positive for the council and Watford. The organisation's high performance and strengths were recognised as were the outcomes it is achieving for the town in line with its bold and progressive vision.
- 1.5 As part of the review, the team was asked to focus on future areas for improvement and where the council could learn from best practice. This was particularly around managing Watford's place-shaping and economic development agenda and best practice engagement with communities. The team's recommendations are on pages 2 and 3 of the report. These will be used as the basis for an action plan that the council build into its overall corporate planning over the next 12 months, in advance of the team returning to Watford to assess the progress made.

2.0 Risks

2.1

| Nature of Risk | Consequence | Suggested Control Measures | Response <i>(Treat, tolerate, terminate, transfer)</i> | Risk Rating (the combination of severity and likelihood) |
|--|--|---|--|--|
| Failure to address the recommendations of the Corporate Peer Challenge | Organisation does not benefit from the opportunities and challenges identified by the Corporate Peer Challenge Team do not find progress on return in 12 months | Robust improvement plan that is reflected within the Corporate Plan and service plans | Treat | 4 |

3.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

Cabinet to:

- 3.1 Note the final Corporate Peer Challenge report – Appendix B and to recommend the report to Council.
- 3.2 Note that the Corporate Peer Challenge actions based on the recommendations will be incorporated into the council’s strategic planning at both corporate and service planning level.
- 3.3 Note that the Corporate Peer Challenge team will re-visit Watford next year to assess progress against the team’s recommendations

4.0 Implications

4.1 Financial

- 4.1.1 The Shared Director of Finance comments that the Corporate Peer Challenge recognised that the council shows prudent budget management and that the Financial Review Board provided good scrutiny of the council’s financial resources. The council has been bold and progressive in a time of declining budgets and there are still challenges ahead. Recommendations include better integration of the Medium Term

Financial Strategy with the council's transformation programme, commercialisation and people and digital strategies.

4.2 Legal Issues (Monitoring Officer)

4.2.1 The Head of Democracy and Governance comments that, in line with agreed procedure, the Corporate Peer Challenge report be presented to the next Council meeting (January 2018).

4.3 Staffing

4.3.1 The Corporate Peer Challenge team recognised that staff are the council's biggest asset. Staff were positive about working for the council and enthusiastic and committed to Watford as a place. Of particular note was the council's low and impressive sickness rate, the collaborative working style across the organisation and that staff feel valued and their efforts recognised.

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APPENDIX A. Watford Borough Council: Corporate Peer Challenge. Position Statement. September 2017

APPENDIX B. Watford Borough Council: Feedback Report