

Peer Challenge Revised Action Plan

The Local Government Association undertook a follow-up review in March 2021 to review the way in which the council has implemented the recommendations from the previous review in October 2019 and to also identify any additional actions/support that may be required.

The table below provides an update from the Peer Challenge Team against each of the recommendations made as part of the initial review in October 2019, and provides details of further actions that have been identified as part of the follow-up review.

Embed regular Cabinet and Management Team joint working

Update from the Peer Challenge Team:

The Peer Challenge Team recognised that significant improvements had been made in this area:

- Regular meetings are held with the Leader and the Chief Executive and Directors and portfolio meetings are also held between the Cabinet portfolio holders and the Directors.
- The Corporate Delivery Plan was drawn up at the start of the financial year which forms the backbone for the 1-2-1 meetings between the Chief Executive and the Directors.

The Peer Challenge Team recognised that implementation of the Away days, originally planned for implementation in April 2020, has been delayed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, with the passing of the pandemic, they strongly encouraged the council to implement the Away days/joint meetings to collaboratively consider key strategic issues affecting the council.

Actions identified:

Action	Responsible Officer	Timeframe
Implement a calendar of away days to focus on corporate projects as a Leadership Team (six-monthly). This action has been brought forward from the previous action plan. It is intended to implement a programme of away days once the COVID restrictions have been fully lifted.	Chief Executive	October 2021

Introduce a clear improvement for Planning

Update from the Peer Challenge Team:

The Peer Challenge Team recognised that some progress had been made in planning, especially in relation to the processing of applications. However, they felt it was important to ensure a clear improvement plan for Planning is in place which focuses not only on operational issues but strains issues for consideration. This is something that should be considered as a corporate priority, involving the council's Senior Management Team as well as the Lead Member.

Actions identified:

Action	Responsible Officer	Timeframe
<p>Implement a "Develop a service" improvement plan as part of the internal business process review process and include provisions for subsequent monitoring and review.</p> <p>This action has been brought forward from the previous action plan. This was however further emphasised in the follow-up review with the need to ensure that this is seen as a strategic priority, ensuring both senior management and the Cabinet have responsibility for the overall improvement plan.</p>	Director (Environment)	December 2021
<p>Proceed with a Gateway Review of the Local Plan as a matter of urgency, and ensure completion of the Local Plan.</p> <p>This is a new action identified through the follow-up review process.</p>	Director (Environment)	<p>Completed for Gateway Review</p> <p>Local Plan production is ongoing</p>

Develop a greater partnership working

Update from the Peer Challenge Team:

This was recognised as a clear strength from the council in the follow-up review. The Peer Challenge Team held a focus group with a number of key partners and confirmed that the feedback from partners was very positive. Partners spoke very highly of the council and the way in which the council has a clear understanding of its community and their needs.

The Peer Challenge Team felt that it would be beneficial to build upon these relationships further, by expressing the council's long-term strategic priorities with partners and engaging them even further in support of these ambitions.

Actions identified:

Action	Responsible Officer	Timeframe
<p>Ensure a dedicated grants/bidding resource is in place to assist the progression of projects, both internally and with partners, in terms of sourcing grant-funding opportunities.</p> <p>This action has been brought forward from the previous action plan. Work is underway to recruit to this post with the aim of having an officers in post by Summer 2021 to enable pro-active engagement with partners in respect of funding opportunities for the borough.</p>	Chief Executive	August 2021
<p>Implement an approach to ensure partners are fully aware of the council's strategic priorities and long-term plans, and ensure they are fully engaged in the delivery of council priorities wherever possible.</p> <p>Whilst not a specific recommendation within the follow-up report, it was felt that this was an area for further development by the council and as such, a new action has been included within the action plan.</p>	Chief Executive	December 2021

Seize on the cross-party consensus

Update from the Peer Challenge Team:

It was recognised that action had been taken to engage pro-actively in relation to housing delivery cross the council but the Peer Challenge team felt that more could be done in this area, to engage a broader range of Members in discussions, particularly around the Local Plan. The team felt that consideration should be given to the formation of a Strategic Planning Forum.

Actions identified:

Action	Responsible Officer	Timeframe
Improved liaison with the Kent and Medway Economic Partnership (KMEP), and the South East Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) to	Chief Executive	December 2021 Economic Growth Strategy

Action	Responsible Officer	Timeframe
<p>ensure a stronger focus on Gravesham and the growth areas within Kent.</p> <p>This action has been brought forward from the previous action plan. A piece of work is underway to set the economic context of Gravesham relative to the South East Local Enterprise Partnership (SELEP) and the Kent and Medway Economic Partnership (KEMP). It is considered that this piece of work will set the foundations for Gravesham and the ability to leverage greater funding and support for Gravesham from relevant associations.</p>	Director (Environment)	<p>in place June 2020 and makes this point.</p> <p>Making the Case work underway.</p>
<p>Liaison with the Kent Developers Group to forge stronger relationships with developers across the county by hosting a Group session and engaging with the private sector.</p> <p>This action has been brought forward from the previous action plan. Plans to present to Members of the Kent Developer's Group had to be postponed due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.</p>	Director (Environment)	December 2021 (TBC)
<p>Consideration to be given the implementation of a Strategic Planning Forum to involve the Leader, Cabinet Member, Opposition Leader and Chief Executive to enable wider discussions on specific issues as required.</p> <p>This is a new action identified through the follow-up review process.</p>	Director (Environment)	September 2021
<p>Ensure all Members are briefed and understand the risks associated with the Local Plan, five-year land supply and Housing Delivery test. Updates should be provided on a regular basis.</p> <p>This is a new action identified through the follow-up review process.</p>	Director (Environment)	Ongoing

Be a spokesperson for the area

Update from the Peer Challenge Team:

The Peer Challenge Team reflected that good progress had been made in this area since the original review in October 2019 and advised that partners see Gravesham Borough Council as advocates for the North Kent area and as central to coalitions across the area. It was felt that the council is vocal in speaking up for the area and representing Gravesham at both a local and national level and this is something to be continued for the future, building on the work in areas such as culture, tourism and history.

Actions identified:

Action	Responsible Officer	Timeframe
<p>Develop closer link between the Economic Development Team and the council's Communications Team to ensure a 'brand' for Gravesham is developed.</p> <p>This action has been brought forward from the previous action plan. Work is underway in order to establish a 'brand' for Gravesham and the Communications Team have been working with the Economic Development Team to develop a detailed communications plan, including actions to promote the borough over the forthcoming 12 months.</p>	Director (Communities)	December 2022
<p>Build upon the work that is already being done in the areas of history, culture and tourism in the local area to boost the economy during the recovery period by ensuring this is communicated widely.</p> <p>Whilst not a specific recommendation within the follow-up report, it was felt that this was an area for further development by the council and as such, a new action has been included within the action plan.</p> <p>The Communications team is working with communities' colleagues to publicise developments such as the St George's Arts Hub, Estuary 2021, Fringe, etc and publicising relevant strategies.</p>	Director (Communities)	Tourism & Heritage Strategy approved February 2021

Develop an induction programme for the new Chief Executive

Update from the Peer Challenge Team:

The team felt that the induction for the new Chief Executive went well and he has firmly and quickly established himself in this role. The Chief Executive is respected by partners, officers and Members of the Council and has as such, no further actions are required in his area.

Review council policy for flexible working arrangements

Update from the Peer Challenge Team:

At the time of the initial review on October 2019, it was felt that the council's approach to flexible working needed some improvement, but was not a significant issue. However, given the focus on flexible and remote working brought about by the pandemic, this has now become a significant area of work for the council. Whilst some work has been undertaken in this area, there is still a significant amount of work for the council to address issues with flexible working. There is a feeling amongst officers that the IT infrastructure to support them in working more flexibly is not in place. There is a need for this to be resolved as a matter of urgency as it could create resilience issues for the council, particularly given the proximity to London and the move towards homeworking across all service areas.

Actions identified:

Action	Responsible Officer	Timeframe
<p>Develop a consistent, corporate approach to flexible working for the council as a whole in line with the action plan that has been developed in response to the council's IIP assessment, ensuring this is communicated to all staff. A new agile working policy is required, with staff engaged in the development of the policy.</p> <p>This action has been brought forward from the previous action plan, although this was further emphasised in the follow-up review. A new Agile working policy has been developed and a pilot will commence with effect from 1st October 2021 to the end of March 2022. In the meantime Covid-19 arrangements will remain in the office whilst the infection rate remains high in the borough.</p>	Director (Communities)	October 2021 – March 2022
Undertake a review of current office space requirements in order to determine if there is	Director (Communities)	April 2022 onwards

Action	Responsible Officer	Timeframe
<p>the potential for reducing the number of desks required and develop a more 'hot desking' approach for the workplace.</p> <p>This action has been brought forward from the previous action plan. Upon completion of the Agile Working pilot, these proposals will be progressed further and plans for the new Civic Building will embrace the new flexible working arrangements that the council will have as an employer going forward.</p>		
<p>Ensure that M365 is rolled out across the council (officers and Members) as a priority, and improve the council's telephony system to support agile working ensuring this is communicated to staff.</p> <p>This is a new action identified through the follow-up review process. Implementation of Microsoft 365 across the origination and the introduction of a new telephony system have commenced.</p>	<p>Director (Communities)</p> <p>Assistant Director (IT and Transformation)</p>	<p>Telephony System – September 2021</p> <p>Microsoft 365 – October 2021</p>

A more diverse workforce

Update from the Peer Challenge Team:

The Peer Challenge Team recognised the good work that has taken place to date in relation to the Armed Forces Covenant that is in place and the apprenticeships that the council offers. There is a feeling however that given the diversity of the borough as a whole, this is not reflected across the council in its workforce. There is a need for a corporate approach to the collation of workforce diversity information and the retention and recruitment of diverse officers.

Actions identified:

Action	Responsible Officer	Timeframe
<p>Explore the potential for introducing a jobs/career fair to the borough to not only open up the employment market across the borough but also the council's specific requirements to the community.</p> <p>This action has been brought forward from the previous action plan. Due to the</p>	<p>Director (Communities)</p>	<p>Economic Growth Strategy agreed June 2020 and actions being undertaken to link local people with job opportunities.</p>

Action	Responsible Officer	Timeframe
pandemic, a jobs/career fair has not been progressed and instead the council is exploring other ways to give young people future job opportunities.		
<p>Review of person specification, apprenticeships and work experience opportunities to ensure they are as inclusive as possible.</p> <p>This action has been brought forward from the previous action plan. A piece of work is currently underway to improve and reinvigorate the council's apprenticeship and work experience offering. A new Kickstart/Apprentice co-ordinator will start with effect from August 2021 and will assist with this going forward.</p>	Director (Communities)	Kickstart placements September 2021
<p>Ensure a corporate approach to ensuring a diverse workforce both through recruitment and retention processes but also ensuring accurate and up-to-date information on the workforce is held by HR.</p> <p>Whilst not a specific recommendation within the follow-up report, it was felt that this was an area for further development by the council and as such, a new action has been included within the action plan. The new GBC HR team will look to improve the information that we currently have in place and this work will be a high priority going forward.</p>	Director (Communities)	December 2021

Communicate success more effectively.

Update from the Peer Challenge Team:

Good progress has been made in this area with the introduction of the Communications Strategy and the council undertaking a specific LGA review into the Communications approach of the council. The strategy itself could be further strengthened with measurable outcomes in order to measure success more effectively.

The introduction of weekly updates from the Chief Executive sent by both e-mail and text message, to all council officers has been very well received across the council,

but there is a need to build on this success and further improve internal communications, ensuring feedback from the frontline is fed in to senior management team on a more regular basis.

Actions identified:

Action	Responsible Officer	Timeframe
<p>Explore the inclusion of measurable outcomes as part of the new Communications Strategy, including regular reporting on the KPIs.</p> <p>Whilst not a specific recommendation within the follow-up report, it was felt that this was an area for further development by the council and as such, a new action has been included within the action plan.</p> <p>There is a commitment to the evaluation of campaigns included in Communications Strategy and these being implemented</p>	Communications Manager	Ongoing
<p>Implement a process to enable a clear feedback loop so that information from the frontline reaches seniors management in a timely manner.</p> <p>Whilst not a specific recommendation within the follow-up report, it was felt that this was an area for further development by the council and as such, a new action has been included within the action plan. Working with colleagues in digital and HR, the Communications Manager is undertaking a review of the council's internal communications. This action point will be incorporated as part of that review.</p>	Communications Manager	Spring 2022

Review risk management

Update from the Peer Challenge Team:

The concerns that were previously raised by the Peer Challenge team have been rectified by the council. The review found that there may be a need to consider additional risks for inclusion in the risk register around areas such as the Local Plan and Housing Delivery and IT Infrastructure.

Actions identified:

Action	Responsible Officer	Timeframe
<p>Engage with Zurich Municipal to review the council's overall approach to risk management and implement any recommendations as required.</p> <p>This action has been brought forward from the previous action plan. The recommendations relating to Service Risk Registers will be implemented as part of the Departmental Business Planning process for 2022/23. Following completion of the draft business plans, it is intended to introduced a new method of 'peer review' of plans and service risks at a Corporate Management Team level.</p>	<p>Corporate Performance Manager</p> <p>Wider Management Team</p>	<p>February 2022</p>
<p>Consideration to be given to updating the Corporate Risk Register to include risks in relation to the Local Plan, five-year land supply, Housing Delivery Test and IT Services and infrastructure.</p> <p>This is a new action identified through the follow-up review process</p>	<p>Director (Corporate Services)</p>	<p>November 2021</p>