



<b>Report for:</b>	<b>Cabinet</b>
<b>Date of meeting:</b>	<b>21 May 2019</b>
<b>Part:</b>	<b>1</b>
If Part II, reason:	

<b>Title of report:</b>	Corporate Peer Challenge – Feedback Report
Contact:	<p>CLlr Andrew Williams, Leader of the Council</p> <p>Author/Responsible Officers;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sally Marshall, Chief Executive</li> <li>• Linda Roberts, Assistant Director (Performance, People &amp; Innovation)</li> </ul>
Purpose of report:	For Cabinet to approve the publication of the Local Government Association Corporate Peer Challenge report for the Council.
Recommendations	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Cabinet note the contents of the Corporate Peer Challenge Review Feedback Letter as annexed to this report.</li> <li>2. Cabinet approve the publication of the Local Government Association Corporate Peer Challenge letter for the Council.</li> </ol>
Corporate Objectives:	<p>The Corporate Peer Challenge is an opportunity for the Council to reflect on the services it delivers, how it works and the relationship it has with Members, residents and its wider stakeholder base.</p> <p>Therefore, the findings and recommendations from the report will support the Council to better deliver all of its corporate objectives.</p>
Implications:	<p><u>Financial</u></p> <p>There are no direct financial implications. However, this report has identified a number of recommendations that can support</p>

Value For Money Implications'	<p>the Council to deliver its financial objectives.</p> <p><u>Operational</u></p> <p>The recommendations would ensure that the Council is delivering high quality operational services.</p> <p><u>Value for Money</u></p> <p>This report would support the Council to deliver value for money across all its services.</p>
Risk Implications	There are no risks associated with this report.
Community Impact	The Community Impact of specific actions arising as a result of the Peer Challenge will be individually assessed as plans are developed.
Health And Safety Implications	None
Monitoring Officer/S.151 Officer Comments	<p><b>Monitoring Officer:</b></p> <p>The Peer Challenge feedback did not identify any areas of concern from a Monitoring Officer perspective. It did, however, highlight areas for continued development, which will need to be progressed as identified in the report.</p> <p><b>Deputy S.151 Officer</b></p> <p>There are no direct financial implications of this decision and the report highlights the good financial management arrangements and leadership in place.</p> <p>Any proposals put forward to address the recommendations will need to be either met from within existing approved budgets or will require growth bids for inclusion in the usual budget setting process.</p>
Consultees:	Corporate Management Team
Background papers:	Corporate Peer Challenge – Feedback Report
Glossary of acronyms and any other abbreviations used in this report:	

## **1. Introduction**

- 1.1 The Corporate Peer Challenge (CPC) is a core element of the Local Government Associations sector-led improvement offer to local authorities.
- 1.2 This process involves a small team of local government peers spending time at a council to understand the issues, provide challenge and share learning and ideas.
- 1.3 In February 2019 the Council received its CPC follow up visit and the following report provides details of its findings along with suggested next steps and a recommendation to publish the letter externally.

## **2. Methodology**

### Peer Team

- 2.1 Peer challenges are delivered by an experienced mix of elected member and officer peers. The peers who delivered the review at Dacorum were:
  - 2.1.1 Alan Goodrum, Former Chief Executive of Chiltern and South Bucks Councils, LGA Associate
  - 2.1.2 Councillor Chris Millar, Leader of Daventry DC
  - 2.1.3 Dave Barnes, Strategic Director, Christchurch & East Dorset Councils
  - 2.1.4 James Mehmed Programme Manager LGA
  - 2.1.5 Ami Beeton, Peer Challenge Manager, LGA

### Scope and Focus

- 2.2 The Peer Team structured their feedback over five core themes: Place, Partnerships, Leadership, Capacity and Service Delivery with an initial section on key messages and observations

### Approach

- 2.3 To inform their work the peer team spent two days on site at DBC, during which they spoke to around 50 people, including a range of council officers, councillors and external partners. In addition they conducted a desktop review of the Councils key documents and submissions made by the Council.

### 3 **Feedback – Headline Summary & Recommendations**

#### Headline Summary

##### 3.1 Place

- 3.1.1 DBC remains an organisation that has a strong financial base having recently set a balanced budget for the next two financial years. Robust financial management has enabled the council to be bold in their delivery within a backdrop of a 70% reduction in settlement funding assessment since 2010/11.
- 3.1.2 Members have prioritised the protection of front line services whilst delivering investment into community facilities, housing and regeneration.
- 3.1.3 The Forum provides much more than office accommodation for staff and is serving as a community hub for citizens, which is very impressive.
- 3.1.4 DBC has delivered some highly successful regeneration programmes in Hemel Hempstead for example the Water Gardens and the Town Centre improvements. Although Hemel Hempstead has circa 60% of the Borough's population, the council has invested in other regeneration programmes in Berkhamsted and Tring, ensuring there is balance delivery across the Borough
- 3.1.5 DBC has a positive approach to delivering its enterprise zone, improving its rented housing, investment and house building programmes. It has with partners an ambitious Garden Community proposal.
- 3.1.6 It was clear to see that positive progress has been made on economic development and enabling housing growth with a broad range of planned and successful delivery involving strategic partnerships for house building, creating employment and training opportunities for apprentices in partnership with, for example, West Herts College.
- 3.1.7 The peer team could not fully understand the sequencing and resourcing of the growth and infrastructure projects going forward.

##### 3.2 Partnerships

- 3.2.1 Partnerships have continued to strengthen.
- 3.2.2 The feedback from partners was very positive, with the Council reported as operating with openness and transparency.
- 3.2.3 Given the volume of partnership working the Council has had to prioritise its capacity, which can be challenging whilst maintaining positive relationships with partners. The Council has successfully maintained a balance of provision to partners ensuring they do not over promise in terms of what it can support or deliver.

### 3.3 Leadership

- 3.3.1 The Leader and Chief Executive continue to be seen as good ambassadors for the Council and place. The ambition for place and the people of the Borough is seen as bold, although leadership is tempered by realism and an honest perspective on what can be delivered.
- 3.3.2 Outward facing leadership was seen as positive with members and officers playing a critical role in engaging communities, citizens, partners and the broader business community.
- 3.3.3 There was a feeling that more capacity could be released from the workforce if management and staff were more empowered and allowed increased responsibility for decision making at a service level.
- 3.3.4 In 2016 the peer team recommended DBC to provide clarity to the change management approach. The 'New Normal' strategy has been delivered to provide an organisational change management framework. This was seen as a positive development, although implementation is at an early stage and was seen as a strategy not wholly owned by staff at most levels outside of COG and CMT.
- 3,3,5 Communication was seen as disconnected in part. Despite the blend of intranet communication, face to face briefings, conferences and email messages there appears to be a level of disconnect with some staff. The further development of the communication strategy should help ensure key messages are understood but needs to be rolled out alongside the development of an inclusive organisational culture helping to ensure effective two-way communication with staff rather than communication to staff.
- 3.3.6 Staff suggesting they want to receive corporate messages and more effective communication should be seen as positive and linked to better understanding the organisation.

### 3.4 Capacity

- 3.4.1 The Council has had the challenge of resourcing 'business as usual' whilst identifying capacity for programmes and projects. The improvements made to working practices through moving to the Forum and rolling out new technology has positively supported greater flexibility although it is understood flexible working policies have not been reviewed. The opportunity for further improved working is high, with further scope to enable more flexible working patterns and workstyles that enable DBC to differentiate itself in the employment market and further enhance its employer brand.

3.4.2 There was good evidence of a range of project delivery from HR, which will assist the Council improving its employer brand and ensuring its policies and practices support the business.

### 3.5 Service Delivery

3.5.1 The Forum is operating as a positive community hub and is enabling partners and the broader system to take opportunities to provide great services to the public.

3.5.2 Service users report good levels of satisfaction with services. The challenges over the next few years will be to ensure service delivery is digitised, where appropriate, to ensure front line services are maintained. Although the budget is balanced for the next two years, the future outlook will require potentially more difficult decisions on prioritisation for service delivery.

## 4. Review Recommendations

4.1 Overall the council has made good progress in taking forward the recommendations the peer review team made in 2016, though there are a number of areas that require further attention and action at pace. These are as follows:

- Build on your existing People Strategy and develop an OD plan incorporating your transformation objectives.
- Create an evidence based workforce development plan to profile future staff resourcing and capacity requirements.
- Review your flexible working policy and practices to maximise the opportunities your new working environment provides.
- Continually evolve your approach to internal communication to:
  - Ensure key messages reach all staff quickly
  - There is a feedback loop so decision making is transparent
  - Actively support staff in providing feedback (employee engagement)
  - Create a positive culture of internal challenge
- Ensure leadership is inclusive at all levels and members and managers empowered.
- Ensure that the roll out of “New Normal” includes a strengthened approach to resource planning for projects and initiatives – e.g. growth agenda
- Prioritise development of a new Corporate Plan after the May 2019 elections to effectively coordinate the strategic approach to growth, housing, partnerships and organisational development. Use the plan to create a clear and consistent communications narrative both internally and externally. This presents a great opportunity to roll forward the Councils ambitions and set the narrative for the future.