

Item No. 12.	Classification: Open	Date: 27 January 2016	Meeting Name: Cabinet
Report title:		LGA Peer Review of Southwark	
Ward(s) or groups affected:		All	
Cabinet Member:		Councillor Peter John, Leader of the Council	

FOREWORD FROM COUNCILLOR PETER JOHN, LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

At the start of the New Year I talked about my absolute pride in being Leader of the Council. The progress that we have made over the last five and a half years to set balanced budgets, provide first-class services, build new homes and generate jobs and growth for our residents has been amazing.

That is why it is with some satisfaction and similar pride, that we are today receiving the peer challenge report from the Local Government Association (LGA). The report, based on a comprehensive, external review undertaken late last year by experienced elected members and officers from across local and national government, sets out its findings of Southwark Council.

The LGA found that we are a borough that is “ahead of the curve” with a can do, confident attitude and passion for the place that was impressive and unusual. Our commitment to addressing inequalities with partners is strong and we’re told we have a good track record in engaging and involving local people. We have successfully met the very tough, unprecedented financial challenge that we have been dealt. At the same time we’ve made clear choices to invest, whether in new libraries, housing or through supporting local people into work making good on our council plan to deliver a fairer future for all residents.

Like any comprehensive review, there are also things to reflect on, watch out for and build on – “key pointers” as referred to by the LGA team. We will consider these carefully so they help inform our future delivery plans, whether that’s about the wider regeneration of the borough or more specifically how we modernise the way we work as a Council.

Having an external eye cast over what you do is a very daunting experience, but it is ultimately the right thing to do. I’m incredibly pleased that by talking and listening to residents, staff, councillors and partners, reviewing our plans and progress and taking a look at what we’re doing each day here in Southwark the LGA team found that there is much to be proud of, something which reflects my own pride in Southwark and in our ability to deliver a fairer future for all.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That cabinet note the feedback report from the corporate peer challenge of Southwark Council (Appendix 1) that was undertaken by the Local Government Association (LGA) between 16 and 19 November 2015.
2. That cabinet consider the findings of the report and instruct officers to develop

relevant plans and actions in response, reporting progress through the Council Plan.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

3. The council is committed to continuous improvement and learning in order to achieve its aim to deliver value for money, high quality services and a fairer future for all as set out in the Council Plan 2014-18.
4. To help do this, the council opens itself up to external challenge and review. This is through for example the council's own overview and scrutiny mechanism, through external tests of assurance on service delivery, through internal and external audit and inspection of council processes, governance and service outcomes and importantly through resident feedback to inform future policy and service design.
5. A further mechanism is through external "peer to peer" review. This is where officers and councillors from across different councils are invited into an authority to undertake a review. This could take the form of a review of a single service, a set of related services or a more general corporate exercise that looks at a number of cross-council areas including leadership and management, performance, governance, partnerships and delivery. Peer reviews are improvement-focused and tailored to meet individual councils' needs. They are designed to complement and add value to a council's own performance and improvement focus.
6. The LGA acts on behalf of all local government to deliver the peer review process nationally.

KEY ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

7. On 16 to 19 November 2015, an LGA peer review team comprising one councillor and six officers from across various local and national government bodies was invited into the council to undertake a general corporate review.
8. The review work involved a mixture of desk based research, interviews and focus group discussion with different councillors from all party groups, officers from a range of service areas, residents, partners and other stakeholders. The peer team used their experience and knowledge of local government to reflect on the information presented to them by people they met, things they saw and material they read. The scope and focus of the review is set out on page 3 and 4 of the feedback report (Appendix 1).
9. The feedback report (Appendix 1) sets out the findings from the review.

Much to be proud of: "If anyone can, Southwark can"

10. The LGA found that there is a great deal for the Council to be proud of and in particular noted that 'we heard several times during our discussions the phrase "If anyone can, Southwark can"'. They found Southwark to be highly ambitious with a huge passion and pride for the place amongst everybody they met. This was judged by the LGA as impressive and unusual in its extent.
11. The LGA noted a number of good partnerships are in place and there is a strong

commitment by the council and its partners to addressing inequalities. Further, the council demonstrates a real 'can do' attitude and confident approach, and has successfully met the financial challenge to date whilst simultaneously protecting frontline services. At the same time, significant investment has been made in infrastructure and amenities in the borough.

12. Also, the LGA team found that there is a clear strategy for exploiting the economic advantages of land values, particularly in the North of the borough with the challenge being to make sure that the opportunity is taken in a way that is seen to benefit all local people.
13. In summarising their assessment the LGA noted a number of key pointers. These are the key aspects of the team's findings that the LGA feel would deliver the greatest benefit if the council were to focus on them. These are:
 - a) Further develop the narrative for the future of the borough - being clearer how the benefits of growth assist the most vulnerable residents.
 - b) Ensure that collaborations beyond the borough have flexible geography – determined by the nature of the issue being focused on and the nature of the opportunity.
 - c) Design a future operating model that will underpin the redesign of the council.
 - d) Develop the budget approach to take a longer term view and to enable the necessary organisational re-design and transformation.
 - e) Enable the new management structure to be fully capitalised upon – building relationships, enhancing corporate working and ensuring a further development in collective leadership.
14. By its very nature and as stated by the LGA in the peer challenge report, 'the peer challenge is a snapshot in time. We appreciate that some of the feedback may be about things the council is already addressing and progressing.' For example the peer review came just ahead of the autumn statement and spending review announced by the Chancellor of the Exchequer on 2 December. Some of the financial assumptions discussed on the review week were based on best guess, subsequently further clarified (although not perhaps extensively so) from government and reported to Cabinet as part of the wider budget setting process. In taking account of the LGA's observations it's important that the peer review report be analysed as a part of suite of factors and responded to accordingly.

Next steps

15. As noted within the report at Appendix 1, the peer challenge process is about highlighting positive aspects of the council and the borough as well as local challenges. The aim of the LGA has been to provide some detail on these to help the council understand and consider them and reflect further on findings before determining how best to take action. As a result, cabinet is now asked to consider the report including key pointers in paragraph 13, and ask officers to prepare relevant plans and/or adjust existing plans where appropriate.
16. Further, the Council Plan 2014-18 is now entering a mid point in delivery and it may be timely to consider any response to the peer challenge alongside a broader review of targets and actions within the plan.

17. Finally, in publishing the peer challenge report the council is inviting comment on the findings from residents, partners and other key stakeholders.

Policy implications

18. The council is committed to a fairer future for all as set out in the Council Plan 2014-18. A key organisational value is about being open, honest and accountable. The peer challenge process, undertaken by an external body in the form of the LGA, provided an opportunity for the council to open itself up to external challenge and act on any relevant findings to help support future organisational policy and service design

Community impact statement

19. The public sector equality duty requires public bodies to consider all individuals when carrying out their day to day work, in shaping policy, in delivering services and in relation to their own employees. It requires public bodies to have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity, and foster good relations between different people when carrying out their activities.
20. The LGA in particular noted that there is a strong commitment by the council and its partners to addressing inequalities. The LGA also noted that the council has a good track record of engaging and involving local people with this being reflected in discussions with tenants and residents representatives, partners and elected members. A key pointer identified was the need to further develop the narrative for the future of the borough and being clearer how the benefits of growth assist the most vulnerable residents.
21. This report asks that the cabinet note the feedback from the corporate peer challenge of Southwark Council (Appendix 1), consider its findings and instruct officers to develop relevant plans and actions in response. In doing so, the actions that follow will continue to demonstrate the commitment to advance equality of opportunity for the benefit of all local people.

SUPPLEMENTARY ADVICE FROM OTHER OFFICERS

Strategic Director of Finance and Governance

22. The strategic director of finance and governance notes the recommendations in this report to note the feedback report and to instruct officers to develop relevant plans and actions in response, reporting progress through the Council Plan. Any financial consequences of these actions will be managed and reported through the council’s usual governance processes.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Background Papers	Held At	Contact
None	N/a	N/a

APPENDICES

No.	Title
Appendix 1	Corporate Peer Challenge, London Borough of Southwark, 16 to 19 November 2015: Feedback Report

AUDIT TRAIL

Lead Officers	Eleanor Kelly, Chief Executive	
Report Author	Stephen Gaskell, Head of Strategy and Partnerships	
Version	Final	
Dated	14 January 2016	
Key Decision?	No	
CONSULTATION WITH OTHER OFFICERS / DIRECTORATES / CABINET MEMBER		
Officer Title	Comments Sought	Comments included
Director of Law and Democracy	Yes	No
Strategic Director of Finance & Governance	Yes	Yes
Leader of the Council	Yes	Yes
Date final report sent to Constitutional Team	14 January 2016	