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| <b>Item No.</b><br>9.              | <b>Classification:</b><br>Open | <b>Date:</b><br>17 January 2024  | <b>Meeting Name:</b><br>Cabinet |
| <b>Report title:</b>               |                                | Local Government Association Corporate Peer Challenge – Report and Action Plan |                                 |
| <b>Ward(s) or groups affected:</b> |                                | All  |                                 |
| <b>Cabinet Member:</b>             |                                | Councillor Kieron Williams - Leader of the Council                             |                                 |

## **FOREWORD – COUNCILLOR KIERON WILLIAMS, LEADER OF THE COUNCIL**

I was eager to welcome our Local Government Association Corporate Peer Challenge Team to Southwark at the end of October 2023 in response to my request for a peer review.

Since becoming Leader, I have sought to make transparency core to the administration that I lead. By definition, the Corporate Peer Challenge process opens the doors of the council to scrutiny from a group of experienced and professional peers. The Challenge process is a key point in our learning as we strive to be the best council we can possibly be for our residents.

The Team found much for Southwark to be proud of. It found that we are a good council and noted the energy for change within the council. They singled out the work of our children and adults services, our council house building programme, the work we do within our local economy and our efforts in community safety for particular note.

But they also reflected back our known challenges – that of the ongoing pressures and need for improvement in housing and the challenges wrought within our community by the rising cost of living and the continuing housing supply crisis in London. They have made important points to us about the need to ensure that our interface with residents and members continues to improve, and the need to redouble our efforts to ensure that our systems and processes are modernised and our staff supported to ensure that they can continue to serve our residents into the future.

They noted the strong relationships that we have with partners and our efforts to build on these strong foundations as we move towards our 2030 Strategy.

I am very pleased but unsurprised by the levels of commitment and pride the Team encountered in talking with our staff and councillors.

## **RECOMMENDATION(S)**

### **Recommendation(s) for the Cabinet**

1. Cabinet is asked to note the Local Government Association's Corporate Peer Challenge (CPC) report attached at appendix 1.
2. Cabinet is asked to endorse the action plan as set out in appendix 2, which responds to the eleven recommendations from the Corporate Peer Challenge Report.

## **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

3. In October 2023, Southwark Council welcomed a team from the LGA to undertake a Corporate Peer Challenge (CPC). Peer challenges are delivered by experienced elected member and officer peers. Southwark's Peer Challenge Team was led by Tom Riordan CBE, Chief Executive, Leeds City Council and Cllr Bev Craig, Leader, Manchester City Council.
4. All councils are given the opportunity to have one of these reviews every 4 – 5 years as part of a local government approach to sector led improvement and mutual support.
5. The LGA team spent three days on site, and prepared by reviewing a range of documents and information in order to ensure they were familiar with the council and the challenges it is facing.
6. During their time on site, they gathered information and views from more than 35 meetings, in addition to further research and reading. The CPC team spoke with more than 100 people, including a range of council staff, members and external stakeholders. Some team members were given a tour of Peckham Rye station and parts of the wider Peckham area, including Peckham Library and key community assets
7. The report attached at Appendix 1 provides a summary of the peer team's findings, including the eleven recommendations.

## **KEY ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION**

8. There is an expectation that all councils undertaking a Corporate Peer Challenge will commit to publishing the feedback report and produce an action plan which responds to the recommendations in the report.
9. The recommendations are important in supporting the council's commitment to continuous improvement and transparency.
10. The action plan at appendix 2 sets out what the council will be doing to respond to the recommendations, including specific actions, when they will

be delivered and which senior officer will be responsible for delivering them.

11. The recommendations reference the ongoing priority of housing repairs and the HRA. The report notes the progress being made in these areas, and provides a recommendation that this focus and work continue at pace.
12. Amongst the early actions that the council will take is the establishment of a programme to improve services and support to members, including improved processes for members' enquiries and a new member's services team.
13. In response to the recommendations, we will also develop a new internal change programme called Future Southwark. This will ensure that staff are supported to ensure that they have the skills, tools and processes to do the best job possible for our residents.
14. The CPC team will return in the summer to discuss progress.

### **Policy framework implications**

15. The CPC report responds to the themes in the Council Delivery Plan, the upcoming 2030 strategy, and the council's approach to organisational development. The report and action plan require no changes or alterations to the Policy Framework.

### **Community, equalities (including socio-economic) and health impacts**

#### **Community impact statement**

16. The CPC process focuses on the council's ability to serve and work with its residents. The recommendations will be utilised to support the council to deliver more efficient, resilient and resident focused services.

#### **Equalities (including socio-economic) impact statement**

17. The CPC Report reflects the council's current practices for tackling inequalities and Southwark Stands Together and makes recommendations for improved practice. The feedback from the report will be used to improve practice and reporting.

#### **Health impact statement**

18. There are no direct health implications from this report.

### **Climate change implications**

19. There are no direct climate change implications from this report.

### **Resource implications**

20. The response to the CPC recommendations will be carried out within existing resources.

### **Legal implications**

21. There are no Legal comments.

### **Financial implications**

22. Currently, none of the proposed actions set out in the CPC action plan are expected to require additional resource over and above those already agreed within service budgets.

### **Consultation**

23. The LGA produced the CPC report as a result of multiple conversations with residents, staff, members and stakeholders.

## **SUPPLEMENTARY ADVICE FROM OTHER OFFICERS**

### **Head of Procurement**

24. There are no procurement implications or decisions resulting from this report.

### **Assistant Chief Executive, Governance and Assurance**

25. The Assistant Chief Executive – Governance and Assurance has been consulted in the drafting this report.

### **Strategic Director of Finance**

26. The Strategic Director of Finance has been consulted in the drafting this report.

### **Other officers**

27. Members of the Council's Corporate Management Team have been involved in the creation of the action plan.

## BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

| Background Papers   | Held At                      | Contact  |
|---|------------------------------|--|
| LGA Corporate Peer Challenge Process  | Local Government Association | Local Government Association<br>18 Smith Square,<br>London, SW1P 3HZ<br><a href="mailto:info@local.gov.uk">info@local.gov.uk</a> |
| <a href="https://www.local.gov.uk/our-support/council-assurance-and-peer-support/peer-challenges-we-offer/corporate-peer-challenge-4">https://www.local.gov.uk/our-support/council-assurance-and-peer-support/peer-challenges-we-offer/corporate-peer-challenge-4</a> |                              |  |

## APPENDICES

| No.        | Title   |
|------------|---|
| Appendix 1 | LGA Corporate Peer Challenge Report                           |
| Appendix 2 | Southwark Corporate Peer Challenge Action Plan                |
| Appendix 3 | Southwark Council Corporate Peer Challenge Position Statement |

## AUDIT TRAIL

|   |   |                          |
|---|---|--------------------------|
| <b>Cabinet Member</b>   | Councillor Kieron Williams, Leader of the Council |                          |
| <b>Lead Officer</b>   | Althea Loderick, Chief Executive                  |                          |
| <b>Report Author</b>  | Rhona Cadenhead                                   |                          |
| <b>Version</b>  | Final   |                          |
| <b>Dated</b>  | 4 January 2024                                    |                          |
| <b>Key Decision?</b>  | No  |                          |
| <b>CONSULTATION WITH OTHER OFFICERS / DIRECTORATES / CABINET MEMBER</b> |   |                          |
| <b>Officer Title</b>  | <b>Comments Sought</b>                            | <b>Comments Included</b> |
| Assistant Chief Executive, Governance and Assurance                     | Yes   | Yes                      |
| Strategic Director of Finance   | Yes   | Yes                      |
| <b>Cabinet Member</b>   | Yes   | Yes                      |
| <b>Date final report sent to Constitutional Team</b>                    | 4 January 2024                                    |                          |