

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

LGA Peer Review: Update 9 January 2019

Report of Chief Executive

PURPOSE OF REPORT

To provide an update against the LGA Peer Review Action Plan, and propose a future approach to monitoring key outcomes.

This report is public.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- (1) That the Overview & Scrutiny Committee note the progress updates and refer any recommendations to Cabinet or the Chief Executive, as appropriate.**
- (2) That the Overview & Scrutiny Committee refer future monitoring of key outcomes, identified through the LGA Peer Review or other strategic analysis, to be reported via 'Delivering Our Ambitions' performance and project reporting.**

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 The LGA Peer Review, conducted in 2015, identified a comprehensive range of recommendations for Lancaster City Council to focus on its key aims and improve its future effectiveness in delivering these. An Action Plan was agreed by Cabinet in December 2015 to implement the recommendations.
- 1.2 Progress has previously been reported to Overview & Scrutiny Committee and the Appendix to this report provides a further itemised update on progress against each of the recommendations. The Appendix shows that there has been a considerable level of achievement in progressing many of the priority recommendations, as well as wider initiatives such as implementing the Council's Values with staff and delivering the Council Plan 2018-22.
- 1.3 A key theme of the progress that has been made is in the sphere of partnership and collaboration. Moreover, the Council has had a key role in being an enabler and facilitator resulting in meaningful and productive partnerships with communities, partner organisations and businesses, which is critical to achieving great outcomes. The Appendix identifies just a number of the partners who have been instrumental in delivering success in our area since the Peer Review took place.
- 1.4 The recommendations of the Peer Review for the future direction of the council have since been included in strategic decisions and council prioritisation. Furthermore, priorities identified by the Peer Review such as economic growth (particularly through the visitor economy), service re-modelling and commercialisation, partnership working and digitalisation have all strongly featured in the new Council plan, Cabinet and

Council decisions and discussions on how best to use the council's resources for the benefit of its communities and stakeholders.

2.0 Integration of Peer Review Recommendations

- 2.1 The content of the LGA Peer Review 2015 and subsequent Action Plan have been deeply integrated into the organisation's strategic planning and delivery activity. This can be seen through the priorities and activities set out in the Council Plan 2018-22, which directly reflect many of the recommendations of the Peer Review.
- 2.2 The council's restructured Executive Team, appointed during 2018, will have a fundamental focus on delivering the four Council Plan ambitions, and hence further embed the Peer Review recommendations.

3.0 Additional Themes

- 3.1 The LGA Peer Review 2015 also identified a number of matters not originally included in the Peer Review Action Plan, which are explored below.

3.2 Delegation to Individual Cabinet Members

The Peer Review states

"We would strongly advocate more power being delegated to individual Cabinet members. This would not only help to accelerate the pace of decision making and strengthen the accountability of individual Cabinet members."

The Peer Review Action Plan includes the item *"Consider what level of delegation is most appropriate for Cabinet Members"*, which carries less emphasis than the statement from the Review itself. The Constitution Review project during 2018-19 provides an opportunity for improving decision-making and accountability through delegation.

3.3 Staff Reward and Recognition

The Peer Review states

"To help maintain staff morale the introduction of non-financial staff reward and recognition schemes may well aid organisational culture."

This matter was not included in the Peer Review Action Plan, however staff reward and recognition has been identified as key to developing a healthy culture within the organisation going forward.

In 2017 the council's Celebrating Success staff awards were launched, with a further event in 2018 and opportunities to build reward and recognition into the organisation's everyday work. Staff at all levels and from across the organisation have received awards and recognition for their important work in a way that would not have been possible otherwise.

3.4 Communication

The Peer Review states

“External and internal communication remains a key element of any organisational strategy. With the challenges it faces, and recent changes to its communication capacity, the authority would be well placed to reassess its resource needs in this field. Effective communication will be central to managing the future change process and developing a consistent narrative both internally and externally.”

The Peer Review Action Plan did not include any content around external or internal communication. It is recognised that providing a consistent narrative and the positive management of perception through communication both inside and outside the organisation has a powerful effect on employees and stakeholders.

To this end, additional resource was allocated to the Communications and Marketing function from 2017-18 for an initial fixed period.

The development of external communications has been particularly significant, including the launch of the Lancaster Story and a large growth in the social media presence facilitating positive, direct interactions with residents.

Internal communications have also improved and embedded, for example, regular engagement sessions with managers from across the organisation; senior officers delivering briefings on key initiatives to all staff; and weekly headlines from Management Team to all staff. Further development is required around opening up digital and other communication channels, but a consistent and positive message is being reinforced across the organisation.

3.5 Relationships with Universities

The Peer Review states

“Lancaster and Cumbria Universities are both key stakeholders for the council. The contribution of both universities to the local economic wellbeing of the district is considerable. The council has forged good working relationships at an officer level, with its universities, and it is important the political leadership of the council continues to recognise and build upon these working relationships. The universities are likely to be a source of increasing the council’s capacity in areas like research and intelligence. Tapping into the significant student population in the area should enable the council wider reach on better understanding the needs of local communities.”

Whilst the Peer Review Action Plan identifies the importance of partnerships, the Universities are not specifically mentioned in this. The last two years in particular have seen considerable growth in the breadth and depth of interaction with Lancaster University and University of Cumbria, through activities such as:

- Eden Project North proposals
- Specific projects such as reducing plastic waste and weed spraying
- Participation in courses such as the Executive MBA through scholarships

There will be many further opportunities to work with both Lancaster University and the University of Cumbria in delivering the council's ambitions for the area, and both universities' open and collaborative approach is welcomed in this.

4.0 Future Proposals

- 4.1 It is proposed that given the alignment between the Peer Review Action Plan and the Council Plan 2018-22, the Peer Review recommendations & actions should be integrated into 'Delivering Our Ambitions' regular performance and project reports.
- 4.2 It is also proposed that, in line with good practice, the LGA be invited in the future to conduct a follow-up Peer Review.

CONCLUSION OF IMPACT ASSESSMENT

(including Health & Safety, Equality & Diversity, Human Rights, Community Safety, Sustainability and Rural Proofing):

No direct impact from this report.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

No direct implications from this report.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

No direct implications from this report.

OTHER RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS, such as Human Resources, Information Services, Property, Open Spaces

No direct implications from this report.

SECTION 151 OFFICER'S COMMENTS

The Section 151 Officer has been consulted and has no further comments.

MONITORING OFFICER'S COMMENTS

The Monitoring Officer has been consulted and has no further comments.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

[Cabinet Report December 2015](#)
[Overview & Scrutiny Report April 2016](#)
[Overview & Scrutiny Report March 2017](#)
[Ambitions: Our Council Plan 2018-22](#)

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