

## REPORT TITLE: Corporate Peer Challenge Action Plan

<b>Cabinet Date</b>	Wednesday 27 <sup>th</sup> March 2024
<b>Cabinet Member</b>	Cllr Mark Hawthorne, Leader of the Council
<b>Key Decision</b>	No
<b>Purpose of Report</b>	To report to Cabinet the proposed Action Plan in response to the recommendations of the Local Government Association's (LGA) recent Corporate Peer Review of Gloucestershire County Council
<b>Recommendations</b>	That Cabinet approves the action plan appended to this report in response to the recommendations arising from the Local Government Association's Corporate Peer Review of Gloucestershire County Council.
<b>Reasons for Recommendations</b>	Responding to and acting on the recommendations of the report will demonstrate a clear commitment to continuous improvement.
<b>Resource Implications</b>	Resource implications of any individual action are indicated in the plan and can be delivered within existing budgets. Should any additional resource needs arise as actions progress, further authorisation will be sought.
<b>Background Documents</b>	Gloucestershire County Council Corporate Peer Challenge 2023 Position Statement, November 2023 - <a href="https://www.gloucestershire.gov.uk/media/ge3amfpx/gcc_4031-lga-peer-challenge-november-2023_dev3.pdf">https://www.gloucestershire.gov.uk/media/ge3amfpx/gcc_4031-lga-peer-challenge-november-2023_dev3.pdf</a> Gloucestershire County Council Corporate Peer Challenge 2023 Final Report, January 2024 – <a href="https://www.gloucestershire.gov.uk/media/ge3amfpx/gcc_4031-lga-peer-challenge-november-2023_dev3.pdf">Decision - Corporate Peer Challenge Final Report (gloucestershire.gov.uk)</a>
<b>Statutory Authority</b>	Local Government Act 1999, Part 1
<b>Divisional Councillor(s)</b>	N/A
<b>Officer</b>	Name: Rob Ayliffe Tel. no: 01452 328506 Email: <a href="mailto:rob.ayliffe@gloucestershire.gov.uk">rob.ayliffe@gloucestershire.gov.uk</a>

<b>Timeline</b>	<p>14-17 November 2023 – Corporate Peer Challenge undertaken by LGA</p> <p>31 January 2024 – LGA Report presented to Cabinet</p> <p>17 February 2024 – LGA publish report on their website</p> <p>27<sup>th</sup> March 2024 – Action Plan presented to Cabinet for approval</p> <p>Autumn 2024 – LGA to undertake Progress Review</p> <p>27 November 2024 – Deadline for publication of Progress Review Report by GCC</p>
-----------------	--

## Background

1. Corporate Peer Challenge (CPC) forms the central element to the Local Government Association's (LGA's) framework for Council assurance and peer support. They provide a robust and rigorous assurance and improvement tool that is managed and delivered by the sector, for the sector. It is designed to complement and add value to councils' own performance and improvement frameworks.
2. Although CPCs are voluntary, there is an expectation that all Councils will receive one at least every five years. Each CPC covers the following five core elements:
  - Local priorities and outcomes
  - Organisational and place leadership
  - Governance and culture
  - Financial planning and management
  - Capacity for improvement.
3. Gloucestershire County Council invited the LGA to undertake a CPC during November 2023. In addition to the five core elements, GCC also asked the LGA to focus on two specific areas:
  - The council's effectiveness in leading partners towards achieving the vision for future growth in Gloucestershire.
  - How effectively the council is aligning its corporate resources to drive transformation and improvement organisationally whilst supporting improvement within specific areas such as Fire, Children's Services and Adults.
4. At the end of the week, the LGA presented its initial findings to those who had participated in those meetings, in the form of a presentation. Those findings have now been brought together into a report that was brought to Cabinet in January 2024, and is linked in the covering page to this paper.

## Main findings

5. The CPC report includes much for the Council to be proud about. It recognises the talent and skill of officers and councillors, a strong commitment to delivering services that make a difference for local people, and that the core elements of good governance are in place. Given the significant financial challenges facing many councils at this time, it was particularly pleasing to note that the report also finds that the overall financial position of the council is seen to be sound.
6. The main findings of the CPC were as follows:
  - The key themes that will define the strategic direction of Gloucestershire, including its vision, core partnerships and the structures that will shape and drive delivery, are in transition – albeit not uniquely to Gloucestershire.

- There is much to build on, with positive progress including as active members of the Western Gateway and the Local Enterprise Partnership and through the developing city region approach.
- We met a large number of talented officers and councillors who are hugely committed, are delivering much good work and are passionate about delivering services for the people and communities in the county.
- There has been a marked and positive change in the leadership culture within the council – people have highlighted a more collegiate and supportive style, including increasing amounts of work to promote and enable positive outcomes on equalities, diversity and inclusion.
- Reporting and performance management arrangements have been strengthened and intensified. This is delivering benefits. Senior leaders will want to assess the sustainability of these arrangements given the intense demands this places on meeting time; that there is sufficient cross-council assessment of interdependencies; and that the right issues are highlighted and focused on – particularly around corporate enabling programmes, especially IT.
- The council has huge potential to fly – enabling this will require ongoing commitment to strong partnerships across the council, the county and beyond and providing the necessary corporate service enablers, including addressing the constraints in its core IT infrastructure.

7. The report goes on to make a number of recommendations, the main ones being that GCC should:

- Build on the council's strategic leadership role to work with partners to shape the evolution of a refreshed vision for growth in Gloucestershire.
- Prioritise the continued investment in IT as an enabler to the council's operations and make its improvement a demonstrable and equal part of the council's overall transformation portfolio, with associated funding, expertise and leadership.
- Ensure the equalities, diversity and inclusion agenda is 'lived and breathed' by the entire cohort of leaders.
- Enable greater collective corporate leadership and the development of cross-organisational dialogue, understanding and approaches.
- Demonstrate to people that they are being heard and responded to.
- Enable a greater focus on prioritised outcomes for communities through the more effective use of cross cutting data and intelligence.

8. Within the detail of the report, there are also recommendations relating to:
  - Improving the way that members are kept informed about issues affecting their division.
  - Refreshing county councillor induction, recognising that much of this was undertaken remotely while the Council was still responding to the COVID-19 pandemic.
  - Developing a more co-ordinated approach to the work of Overview and Scrutiny, including extending the scope of the Executive Forward Plan.
  - Remembering to celebrate the Council's successes.
9. These recommendations now form the basis of an action plan that has been developed by council officers with the involvement of cabinet members, Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee, senior leaders and officers across the council.
10. This Action Plan is presented as an appendix to this report for Cabinet approval, before being published by the LGA on their website on 17<sup>th</sup> April.
11. The LGA will follow progress against this improvement Action Plan, and carry out a follow up progress review in November 2024.

## **Options**

12. As CPC recommendations do not have a statutory footing, the Council is not under an obligation to agree the recommendations or any follow up actions in full. Nevertheless, as they are the result of a robust and extensive review process undertaken by experienced leaders within the Local Government sector, they provide a valuable and meaningful opportunity to reflect on the Council's practice and learn from others. As a result, it is anticipated that Cabinet will welcome the Action Plan and its improvement potential.
13. The options are therefore to:
  - a) Accept the Action Plan in full and support its delivery. This is the recommended option.
  - b) Accept some of the actions and support their delivery.
  - c) Reject the Action Plan.

## **Risks**

14. The purpose of the LGA's CPC offer is to provide an independent assessment of the Council's corporate health and direction. As such, it provides an important and valuable element of the Council's Corporate Governance Framework, and helps to mitigate the risk of significant failures in corporate governance.
15. No new significant risks have been identified from the proposed actions in the report.

### **Financial implications**

16. The action plan has been developed by the Planning, Performance and Insight team within existing resources.
17. It is currently anticipated that the resources set out in the draft MTFS will be sufficient to deliver the actions within the plan. Some of the proposed actions may lead to further requests for future resource, but this will be sought and approved through the appropriate channels, not via this report.

### **Climate Change and Ecological implications**

Has the Climate Impact Assessment Tool (CIAT) been completed? **No**

Has an Ecological Impact Assessment (EclA) been produced, or will one be undertaken at a later stage? **No**

18. There are no climate change implications arising from this report.

### **Equality implications**

19. Has an Equalities Impact Assessment (EqIA) been completed? **No**
20. The plan includes actions intended to ensure that there is a continuing and demonstrable commitment to equalities, diversity and inclusion, led from the most senior levels of the organisation. There are no specific equalities implications or impacts on those with protected characteristics arising directly from this report.

### **Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA) implications**

21. There are no Data Protection implications arising from this report.

### **Social value implications**

22. There are no social value implications arising from this report.

### **Consultation feedback**

23. The CPC included extensive engagement with elected members, officers and partners of the Council, all of which has been taken into account by the peer team when developing their report. The Action Plan in response has likewise been developed in engagement officers, elected Members and partners as appropriate.

### **Officer recommendations**

24. That Cabinet:
- approves the action plan appended to this report in response to the recommendations arising from the Local Government Association's Corporate Peer Review of Gloucestershire County Council.

### **Performance management/follow-up**

25. Once agreed, performance management of the action plan will be integrated into quarterly Corporate Performance reporting.
26. The LGA will undertake a review of progress in autumn 2024 and the Council will publish a Progress Review Report by 27<sup>th</sup> November 2024.