

REPORT TO CABINET

16 May 2018

Subject:	LGA Corporate Peer Review and Investors In People Accreditation
Presenting Cabinet Member:	Councillor Steve Eling – Leader of the Council Councillor Steve Trow – Cabinet Member for Core Council Services
Director:	Chief Executive – Jan Britton Executive Director – Resources – Darren Carter Executive Director – Neighbourhoods – Dr Alison Knight Executive Director – Adult Social Care, Health and Wellbeing – David Stevens
Contribution towards Vision 2030:	
Key Decision:	Yes
Forward Plan (28 day notice) Reference:	SMBC06/05/2018
Cabinet Member Approval and Date:	Cllr Eling – 18/04/2018 Cllr Trow – 19/04/2018
Director Approval:	Darren Carter – 18/04/2018
Reason for Urgency:	Urgency provisions do not apply
Exempt Information Ref:	Exemption provisions do not apply
Ward Councillor (s) Consulted (if applicable):	Ward councillors have not been consulted
Scrutiny Consultation Considered?	Scrutiny have not been consulted
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DECISION RECOMMENDATIONS

That Cabinet:

1. Receive the report and recommendations of the LGA Corporate Peer Challenge and Investors in People (IIP) Assessment
2. Note the award of IIP Silver
3. Approve the response to the recommendations from the LGA Corporate Peer Review and IIP Assessment as contained within appendix A
4. Invite the LGA to conduct a follow up visit in around 12 months
5. Approve that officers continue to engage with the IIP annual monitoring process and re-assessment in 2020.

1 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 This report provides Cabinet with the findings of the council's recent Local Government Association (LGA) Corporate Peer Challenge, details of IIP Silver Award, and a proposed response to their recommendations.

2 IMPLICATIONS FOR SANDWELL'S VISION

- 2.1 External review of the Council's leadership, governance, capacity and financial management contributes to the Council's continuous improvement which underpins all ambitions in Sandwell's Vision.
- 2.2 The Peer Review identified that the Council has established a strong vision for the future of the Borough through Vision 2030 and acknowledged the impressive levels of awareness across the Council and amongst external partners.

3 BACKGROUND AND MAIN CONSIDERATIONS

- 3.1 The Council requested the LGA Corporate Peer Challenge and IIP accreditation to support our continuous improvement as an organisation.

LGA Corporate Peer Challenge

- 3.2 In January 2018, a team of 6 experienced Local Government peers, elected members and officers spent 4 days in Sandwell. They met a range of internal and external stakeholders, considered a self-assessment document, key evidence and undertook a short tour of the 6 towns of Sandwell. During this time they spoke to more than 130 people including a range of council staff together with councillors and external partners and stakeholders.
- 3.3 Peer challenge is a proven tool for improvement. The process involves a small team of local government officers and councillors spending time at the Council as peers to provide challenge and share learning. The Council's last Peer Challenge took place in 2009.
- 3.4 The Peer Challenge focused on 6 question areas:

Understanding of the local place and priority setting: Does the council understand its local context and place and use that to inform a clear vision and set of priorities?

Leadership of Place: Does the council provide effective leadership of place through its elected members, officers and constructive relationships and partnerships with external stakeholders?

Organisational leadership and governance: Is there effective political and managerial leadership supported by good governance and decision-making arrangements that respond to key challenges and enable change and transformation to be implemented?

Financial planning and viability: Does the council have a financial plan in place to ensure long term viability and is there evidence that it is being implemented successfully?

Capacity to deliver: Is organisational capacity aligned with priorities and does the council influence, enable and leverage external capacity to focus on agreed outcomes?

Maximising opportunity: Is the organisation maximising opportunities through its external relations to deliver growth and development opportunities within the borough?

- 3.5 The Peer Review identified the Council's strengths and successes and praised the Council for protecting frontline services through its budget planning, and having a strong vision for the future of the Borough.

The report identifies the pride, passion and positivity of staff and a commitment to improve the outcomes for those who live in, work in and visit the Borough. The review acknowledged the challenges that the Council faces but identified that the relatively new leadership team of senior officers and cabinet members presents an opportunity for a fresh momentum and to draw a line under past events, and take the new agenda forward in line with 2030 Vision.

3.6 The Peer Team made 12 recommendations to the Council and these support the activities already underway. The recommendations and a summary of how the Council plans response:

3.6.1 Ensure Vision 2030 drives prioritisation, resource allocation, performance management and place leadership to improve outcomes for Sandwell.

Vision 2030 has been designed to focus our prioritisation, resource allocation, performance management and place leadership to improve outcomes for Sandwell. This recommendation has supported our intentions and we have continued our plans to focus business planning on the Vision ambitions, and are developing an outcomes framework that will tell us how we are doing on the journey to 2030.

3.6.2 Engage with partners to co-produce the short, medium and long term priorities, deliverables and outcomes that will realise Vision 2030.

Vision 2030 was designed with and is owned by our partners. This recommendation supports our planned next steps which are to identify the activities that will be delivered to achieve the ambitions. This will be linked to our forthcoming outcomes framework.

3.6.3 Develop a consistent understanding of the 'offer' and 'asks' that the Council leadership can communicate to others.

We already have a platform on the Regional and Sub-Regional level through our engagement with key structures and decision-making bodies e.g. Combined Authority and LEP and along with our local partnership working, was recognised by the Peer Review Team as bringing benefits to the Council and delivering outcomes. The recommendation challenges us to be more consistent with our understanding of 'asks' and 'offers' which we will progress in line with our work around developing a clearer strategic regeneration and skills plan and our leadership development.

3.6.4 Consider how the current financial planning approach needs to evolve in the longer term.

The Peer Review praised the Council's budget planning and excellent track record of delivering savings and efficiencies. We have continued this approach through our Medium Term Financial Strategy for 2018-2021 and will shortly start our review of our longer-term strategy.

3.6.5 Invest in political and managerial leadership team development.

We have a long-standing programme of Cabinet summits and workshops which give us space to work together as a collective leadership team. Our updated Member Development Programme is already underway and is a continuation of the Council's investment in the political leadership. Our approach to the development of the Officer leadership team has awaited the final appointments to the Senior Management Team and will now be progressed.

3.6.6 Complete and implement the planned fundamental review of governance.

The Council had already planned to undertake a governance review and shared the scope of that review with the Peer Review Team. The recommendation from the Peer Review reflects our plans. The review is driven by two principal drivers (i) from the 2030 Vision and the need to ensure the Council's governance arrangements were aligned to the ambitions, and (ii) it being recognised good practice for Councils to review their governance arrangements on periodic basis. We have continued to make progress and our approach is to undertake the review as part of a range of initiatives and activities. We have welcomed the ongoing support of the LGA.

3.6.7 Implement the new and evolving Member Development Programme.

The Council's Member Development Programme was in its formative stages at the time of the Peer Team visit and has continued apace with the support of the LGA. We have already identified the training, development and support needs of Elected Members and this will be used to design our Member Development Programme.

3.6.8 Further develop the thinking on Town Plans, including their scope, purpose and function, and how the development and delivery of them will be managed and communicated.

The Peer Team acknowledged that our work around Town Plans was in its formative stages and good progress has already been made to develop this work including engagement events in each town.

3.6.9 Ensure the ICT infrastructure and provision meets the current and future needs of the organisation.

The Peer Team supported our focus on 'digital by default' and we have recognised the importance of this workstream through inclusion as one of our priorities in our Business Plans. In April Cabinet approved a rolling programme of additional investment in ICT that will be used to deliver the required improvements.

3.6.10 Consider and develop a strategic regeneration and skills plan for the Borough.

We have a range of documents that express our aspirations and plans in terms of economic regeneration, physical regeneration and skills. Building on this recommendation, we plan to bring these strands together to develop an overarching prospectus which will provide a coherent narrative.

3.6.11 Refresh the corporate landlord strategy to maximise the potential of the Borough's considerable assets.

The Peer Review recommendation has supported the work already being carried out by the Council as we continue to develop our workplace vision and plan for the whole Council estate. We are continuing to develop the partnership working not only considering the Council's assets but also those of our partners.

3.6.12 Continue to explore other delivery and investment models – e.g. housing, site assembly and acquisition.

We have experience of other delivery and investment models, for example our long-term partnership with SERCO and the recent Children's Trust and we have continued to be open to other opportunities. Building on this recommendation we will explore the detail of what we want to achieve from alternative delivery and investment models.

3.7 A follow up visit within 6-12 months has been suggested by the LGA. This is to help the Council assess the impact of the peer challenge and demonstrate the progress it has made against the recommendations. In addition, the LGA recommend that a Corporate Peer Challenge or Finance Peer Review take place every 4-5 years.

Investors In People (IIP) Assessment

3.8 In October 2017, an IIP Assessment took place and Sandwell Council was awarded Investors in People Silver accreditation. The assessment was led by an external managing practitioner with support from an external practitioner, a team of 10 internal reviewers, and an internal co-ordinator.

- 3.9 Sandwell Council has held IIP accreditation for the past 18 years and at Bronze level since 2015. This IIP Assessment was conducted under a new and more testing IIP Framework (Generation 6) and we achieved a higher level of accreditation – a Silver award.
- 3.10 The IIP process included an online questionnaire to all staff, a context setting discussion with the Executive, onsite visits to observe and interview a sample of staff selected randomly by the managing practitioner, and a desktop review of key data. 793 staff responded to the questionnaire (17% of the working population), and 130 staff participated in confidential interviews (representing 3% of the working population).
- 3.11 The IIP framework is based on three competency areas: Leading, Supporting and Improving and includes 9 indicators against which the Council is assessed. The Council achieved ‘established performance’ across all 9 indicators, and ‘advanced’ in one of these (Indicator 9 Creating Sustainable Success)
- 3.12 The IIP assessment acknowledged the progress made by the Council since the last IIP assessment. Specifically that:
- There is more clarity for staff and an improved understanding of the Vision and consequently, the culture has changed to one that is more consultative and engaging
 - The Council’s Values and Behaviours have been introduced and were seen to be embedded throughout the organisation
 - The Vision for 2030 and Strategic Plans provide people with a clear structure to work within
 - Customer Service and *‘Doing your best for the residents of Sandwell’* was the focus of everyone’s efforts
- 3.13 In addition, the assessment found that:
- Resilience is seen to be a key driver within Sandwell MBC, both by the Executive and staff who take pride in their ability to have dealt with almost constant change in recent years
 - There is faith in Leadership to take the Authority forwards and Trust that has been built through people’s experience of recent financial stability, Jobs Promise and performance improvements.
 - Relationships with the new Executive are building positively
 - Staff were very positive in their views about management styles and levels of support, but there were some inconsistencies in the way Managers fulfil their roles, which, if improved, would support the Authority in reaching higher levels of performance.
 - The Senior Team has a good understanding of the Authority’s level of performance.

3.14 Three areas of improvement were identified which support the plans in place through our workforce development strategy:

3.14.1 Consider the management resource available - to deliver the wide range of services to the people of Sandwell for future sustainability. Consideration could be given to the hours that are being worked and current Managers' ability and intent to continue to deliver this level of input. The age of the team, level of stress, health implications and views on work life balance, could also be factors. There is some sense of fatigue from seven years of major change that could also be taken into account.

3.14.2 Consider the people resource available - to deliver the Ambitions and new projects. Feedback from people indicated that they have been working at full capacity and are somewhat weary. People are very committed to Sandwell's Ambitions but some are finding it demanding to maintain delivery of high levels of activity and quality standards, especially during times when team members are on leave, are absent through sickness or working on projects. There could perhaps be consultation with people about the sustainability of initial plans to deliver additional services through employees' voluntary contributions.

3.14.3 Build upon leadership and management capability, about which people were very positive, but there was sufficient feedback to indicate that not all Managers are delivering their role to the same level of ability as their colleagues, which has an impact upon some teams' performance.

3.15 These three areas of recommendation have reinforced our longstanding approach to consider our future resources requirements in line with the design of services. We are continuing to invest in our staff and are developing a range of employee wellbeing interventions to complement our existing suite of employee approaches and policies including annual leave, an employee benefits scheme as well as flexible and agile working options. A management and leadership development offer has continued to be developed and in line with the peer review recommendation, we will now start to develop the approach for our Senior Management Team.

3.16 The next IIP Assessment is due in Autumn 2020 with annual progress reviews.

3.17 The recommendations arising from the Peer Review and IIP assessment have been given detailed consideration and have been used to identify any additional actions required in line with our business plan priorities. The progress of these actions will be overseen by the relevant Director with support from the whole management team and incorporated within our business plan monitoring. Details of the proposed response to the recommendations is contained in Appendix A.

4 THE CURRENT POSITION

- 4.1 The recommendations from the Corporate Peer Review and IIP Assessment have been given detailed consideration and the proposed response is contained in appendix A.

5 CONSULTATION (CUSTOMERS AND OTHER STAKEHOLDERS)

- 5.1 The proposed action plan has been considered by all Directors.

6 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 6.1 An alternative option would be to reject the recommendations, however, this would not support the Council's continuous improvement.
- 6.2 Alternative actions could be identified to address the recommendations. The proposed actions have been considered by Directors and will be kept under review through the business planning process.

7 STRATEGIC RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 There are no direct strategic resource implications associated with the recommendations of this report.
- 7.2 Any strategic resource implications arising from the completion of the proposed action plan will be subject to detailed consideration and set out in separate reports to Cabinet.

8 LEGAL AND GOVERNANCE CONSIDERATIONS

- 8.1 There are no legal and governance implications associated with the recommendations of this report.
- 8.2 Any legal and governance implications arising from the completion of the proposed action plan will be subject to detailed consideration and set out in separate reports to Cabinet.

9 EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 9.1 An equality impact assessment has not been carried out as the proposals in the report have no direct equality and diversity implications. Equality and diversity will be considered in line with the specific actions contained within the proposed action plan.

10 DATA PROTECTION IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 10.1 Any information used to compile this report is subject to information governance legislation and is managed in accordance with the Council's policies and protocols.

11 CRIME AND DISORDER AND RISK ASSESSMENT

- 11.1 A crime and disorder risk assessment has not been carried out. Any crime and disorder implications will be considered in line with the specific actions contained within the proposed action plan.

12 SUSTAINABILITY OF PROPOSALS

- 12.1 The proposal is for the actions to be incorporated within the Council's Business Plans to ensure their implementation and monitoring of progress, and for Cabinet to receive a specific update on progress in 6 months. This will ensure that progress is being made against the recommendations.

13 HEALTH AND WELLBEING IMPLICATIONS (INCLUDING SOCIAL VALUE)

- 13.1 There are no health and wellbeing implications associated with the recommendations of this report.
- 13.2 Any health and wellbeing implications arising from the completion of the proposed action plan will be subject to detailed consideration and set out in separate reports to Cabinet.

14 IMPACT ON ANY COUNCIL MANAGED PROPERTY OR LAND

- 14.1 There are no implications for Council managed property or land associated with the recommendations of this report.
- 14.2 Any implications arising from the completion of the proposed action plan will be subject to detailed consideration and set out in separate reports to Cabinet.

15 CONCLUSIONS AND SUMMARY OF REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS

- 15.1 Following the LGA Corporate Peer Review and liP assessments, the recommendations have been given detailed consideration. The proposals will help ensure that the recommendations are carried out and support the Council's continuous improvement.

16 **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

16.1 LGA Corporate Peer Challenge Report, January 2018 available here:
www.sandwell.gov.uk/peerchallenge

16.2 IIP Report, January 2018

17 **APPENDICES:**

Response to recommendations from the Corporate Peer Review and IIP
Assessment

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