

# LGA Peer Challenge Response Brighton & Hove City Council

## 1. Issue

As part of the council's continuing commitment to improve its performance and outcomes for the city, the Leader and Chief Executive invited the LGA to conduct a corporate peer challenge to provide an independent and fair analysis of the council's current performance.

The final LGA report and Brighton & Hove City Council's response Action Plan are attached as appendices.

## 2. Background

The peer review team visited the city from 25th to 28th April 2017 and was formed of senior officers and councillors from local authorities around England:

### LGA Peer Challenge Team:

- Tracey Lee, **Chief Executive, Plymouth City Council**
- Councillor Peter Marland, **Leader, Milton Keynes Council (Labour)**
- Councillor Elaine Atkinson, **Poole Borough Council (Conservative)**
- Councillor Mike Bell, **North Somerset Council (Liberal Democrat)**
- Polly Cziok, **Head of Communications, Consultation and Commercial Services, London Borough of Hackney**
- Claire Porter, **Corporate Head of Legal and Democratic Services, Shropshire Council**
- Tanya Khatun, **Programme Support Officer, LGA (shadowing role)**
- Chris Bowron, **Peer Challenge Manager, LGA**

The group interviewed both members and officers from Brighton & Hove City Council and officers from neighbouring authorities as well as trade unions and other key partners in the city. From this and other evidence gathered from BHCC officers the group produced a report of findings that provide an independent view of the council's performance and made key recommendations in the context of the following criteria:

### Peer Challenge Criteria

1. **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?
2. **Leadership of place:** Does the council provide effective leadership of place through its elected members, officers and constructive relationships and partnerships with external stakeholders?

3. **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?
4. **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?
5. **Capacity to deliver:** Is organisational capacity aligned with priorities and does the council influence, enable and leverage external capacity to focus on agreed outcomes?

Brighton & Hove City Council had also asked for the LGA peer challenge team to provide a specific focus on the council's current governance arrangements with the current use of the committee system and to consider its reputation and relevance in the city.

The last LGA corporate peer challenge took place in June 2014 under the previous Administration and LGA corporate reviews or normally undertaken every 3 to 4 years on a voluntary basis.

## 2. Content & Key Findings

The feedback report highlights successes such as the investment in the Modernisation programme, the high calibre of management in the council and the strength of the network of partnerships but also highlights the difficulties faced by the council operating in a complex political environment and without a clearly defined vision for the council or the city.

Other issues identified around the role of members and a need for a greater role in shaping their localities with increased support from officers and how their time is balanced between their local interests and strategic priorities for the city.

A move from 'tactics to strategy' is a consistent theme in the report, highlighting the need to move from managing small projects to programmes and translating data into intelligence as a key tool for enabling more strategic thinking at leadership level.

The final key recommendations are concise and wide ranging and present opportunities for the council to work towards strategic performance improvements for the organisation and the city. They will also add value to our current improvement programmes. Background for each key recommendation is outlined below:

### LGA Report Recommendations

- ***Clarify the shared vision for Brighton and Hove as a city and the role of the council in delivering it.***

The LGA recognised the council holds the only democratic mandate to lead the city and noted it was the council's role to lead the work to clarify the vision for the city and seek to outline how they will contribute to it. It is seen as important the vision is able to transcend political cycles to enable greater confidence and buy in from stakeholders. The work to shape this vision and provide the city with an effective policy framework has begun through the council's Policy, Partnerships & Scrutiny team engaging the city's stakeholders and will be completed by late 2018.

- ***Accept that without a 're-set' of the fundamental relationships within the council, progress can only ever be incremental.***
- ***External facilitation should be brought in and agreement reached by all to 're-set' the council's relationship with its trade unions.***

This refers to the relationships between the organisation (not just the current administration) and the Trade Unions as well as relationships between the different parties that lead the council.

The challenge is establish as high a level of trust between the parties as possible, particularly where there is agreement over the substantial issues. The point is made that all Councillors are there primarily to lead for the good of the city and the good of the council. The report indicates that this is not always the case and that the balance between political considerations, organisational considerations and political considerations is not always as it should be.

The LGA highlighted the potential value of the trade unions role in the future but also the need for the council's relationship with the trade unions to be given a fresh start, beginning with external facilitation to work towards this. Officers will seek to engage members and the trade unions in taking this recommendation forward.

- ***Consider whether current practice is going to deliver strong, consistent and stable leadership for the city.***

This recommendation is made in relation to the active citizenship seen in abundance in Brighton & Hove and the council's approach to democracy allowing local people and councillors the ability to contribute to debate and discussion. Does this allow for the strong leadership and effective and efficient decision making the city needs in the future? This relates directly to the next recommendation:

- ***Settle the issue of council governance and move on.***

The question of the committee or cabinet system is familiar to many in the council and the LGA were asked to consider the current working arrangement and any future options as part of their challenge. Seemingly highlighting that either system can work for the council and a decision on the council's governance to be made by full council and the current system to continue or a new system to be introduced for the next Administration in 2019.

- ***The Executive Leadership Team should establish and articulate a clear organisational narrative for staff which supports the shared vision.***

In relation to underpinning the vision for the city, it is recommended the council clarify how it will contribute to it and provide a clear corporate strategy for the type of organisation it will be in the future. Strategic thinking, rather than tactical was raised as key to providing consistent and effective leadership of the city in the future. The Policy, Partnerships & Scrutiny team will begin the work to produce this strategy in 2019.

- ***Ensure roles and responsibilities within the council are clear and that they are then respected and adhered to.***

The LGA highlight the issue of blurred roles between members and officers and the need to clarify that members set policy and officers then implement it. Ensuring clarity around this

matter for all officers and members will be a key part of the future corporate strategy for the council.

- ***Elected member involvement in HR operational matters should cease.***

The LGA's evidence raised the issue of managers being unable to effectively undertake their role with members involving themselves in HR operational matters that would not normally be part of their role. It was highlighted that officers understand they are accountable to the Chief Executive and members but that this will only be effective if accountabilities are absolutely clear.

- ***Provide an enhanced role and support for councillors in their ward role.***

The LGA highlight the potential for enhanced councillor roles providing an opportunity for greater place leadership and councillors having more influence to help shape their wards. This will be helped by councillors taking on more accountability for translating key policy areas to a community level, such as health and wellbeing and customer experience. This work is currently evolving and it is understood it will require greater support from officers with ward budgets soon to be piloted in the city and member casework support options currently being considered.

### **3. Next Steps**

The council have produced an action plan to respond to these key recommendations, attached as an appendix to this report. Further recommendations within the LGA report will also inform this work over the next 2 years.

The LGA feedback report will be published on the council website demonstrating its commitment to being transparent, open, and honest with city residents and its partners about the challenges it faces and how it is planning to address issues in the future.

### **4. Recommendations**

- Leaders agree to the actions outlined in response to the Peer Challenge Report recommendations
- Agree timing of LGA Peer Challenge group to present findings to cross party council leadership

## LGA Response Action Plan

|    | Recommendation   | Accountable Lead/Team  | Actions   | Key Timings / Deadline   |
|----|--|--|---|--|
| 1. | Clarify the shared vision for Brighton and Hove as a city and the role of the council in delivering it   | Policy, Partnerships & Scrutiny  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Rationalise 'City Vision' work currently in inception stage within the council and ensure alignment with plans for the council's corporate direction</li> <li>Link to July Gov presentations on infrastructure &amp; investment</li> </ul>                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>'City Policy Framework and Vision' to be completed by Dec 2018</li> </ul>   |
| 2. | Those people in the greatest positions of influence within the organisation accept that without a 're-set' of the fundamental relationships within the council, progress will always be slowed and can only ever be incremental. | Group Leaders/Chief Executive/ELO SG&L, Policy, Partnerships & Scrutiny Lead | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Work with Members to ensure greater consensus focusing on the 80% but also accepting there will always be differences</li> <li>Making sure the decision-making process works effectively taking into account the political reality on the ground.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>'City Policy Framework and Vision' to be completed by Dec 2018</li> <li>Officers to continue working with all Groups in the Council.</li> </ul> |
| 3. | Consider whether current practice is going to deliver strong, consistent and stable leadership for the city  | As 3 above   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>As 3 above</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>As 3 above</li> </ul>   |
| 4. | Settle the issue of council governance and move on   | ELO SG&L/ CWG/ Group Leaders   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Take recommendations of the CWG to PR&amp;G for decision i in time for next council (post-2019 election)</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>October 2017</li> </ul>   |
| 5. | The Executive Leadership Team should   | Comms/PPS/PIP/HR   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Short term deliverables</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Short and medium</li> </ul>   |

|    |  |   |   |   |
|----|--|---|---|---|
|    | establish and articulate a clear organisational narrative for staff which supports the shared vision                                 | & OG  | and 2030 'vision' being developed.<br><ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Effective staff communications strategy to be agreed</li> </ul>  | term deliverables agreed in September<br><ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 'City Policy Framework and Vision' to be completed by Dec 2018</li> </ul> |
| 6. | Ensure roles and responsibilities within the council are clear and that they are then respected and adhered to                       | Leaders/CE/ELT                              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Part of on-going development of support, and will be guided by members throughout the process.</li> </ul>  |   |
| 7. | Elected member involvement in HR operational matters should cease  | CEO/ED F&R                                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Part of on-going development of support, and will be guided by members throughout the process.</li> </ul>  |   |
| 8. | External facilitation should be brought in and agreement reached by all to 're-set' the council's relationship with its trade unions | Leaders/CEO/ELT                             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consult with trade unions on willingness to participate in the process of strengthening relationships, pending Group discussion)</li> </ul>  | By December 2017  |
| 9. | Provide an enhanced role and support for councillors in their ward role  | PPS, Democratic Services and Communications | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Progress work on neighbourhood governance.</li> <li>• Pilot ward budgets</li> <li>• Explore development of community councillor roles</li> <li>• Survey</li> <li>• Introduction of new case management system</li> </ul> |   |

