

Corporate Policy and Resources Committee



11 July 2022

Title	LGA Corporate Peer Challenge update
Purpose of the report	To note
Report Author	Daniel Mouawad – Chief Executive Lee O’Neil - Deputy Chief Executive Terry Collier – Deputy Chief Executive
Ward(s) Affected	All Wards
Exempt	No
Exemption Reason	N/A
Corporate Priority	Community Affordable housing Recovery Environment Service delivery
Recommendations	Committee is asked to: Note the contents of the report and progress with preparing for the LGA Corporate Peer Challenge.
Reason for Recommendation	Not applicable

1. Summary of the report

- 1.1 At the last Corporate Policy and Resources Committee (CPRC) it was agreed that the Council would participate in a Local Government Association (LGA) Corporate Peer Challenge (CPC) later this year.
- 1.2 This report seeks to provide the Committee with some more background information on the process involved and progress with preparations for the CPC.

2. Key issues

- 2.1 Spelthorne’s last full Corporate Peer Challenge was undertaken in 2014 with a more focused Finance Peer Review undertaken remotely in 2020. Full CPCs are recommended to be undertaken every five years. The Council is therefore planning to undertake such an exercise later this year.
- 2.2 Peer challenges are designed to support councils to drive improvements and efficiency and to assist local authorities to respond to local priorities and issues in their own way to the greatest effect. The CPC team will involve

peers from across the sector and beyond (including senior officers and councillors (usually including a Leader) from other local authorities).

- 2.3 The CPC is not an inspection, does not involve a scored assessment and the Peer Team do not undertake any sort of detailed service assessment. The results are not reported to government. They are improvement focused and the scope will be agreed with the Council and tailored to reflect our local needs and specific requirements.
- 2.4 Each CPC covers five core elements:
- (a) Local priorities and outcomes
 - (b) Organisational and place leadership
 - (c) Governance and culture
 - (d) Financial planning and management
 - (e) Capacity for improvement
- 2.5 In addition to these five core elements, the Council will also have an opportunity to ask the Peer Team to specifically focus on an area of particular interest for the Council, where it might want some external review or expertise to assist a particular local issue or challenge. This main focus of the challenge will be agreed in advance as part of the planning process for the CPC so that LGA can build a Peer Team that will include some expertise in the relevant area of interest.
- 2.6 The proposed main focus for Spelthorne is:
- ‘How can Spelthorne ensure that it can continue to deliver sustainable, affordable housing developments for the borough?’*

The Process

- 2.7 The LGA team will work with the Council to:
- (a) Plan the scope of the exercise,
 - (b) Put a suitable and robust team in place, and
 - (c) Plan the peer challenge process.
- 2.8 The CPC itself will be undertaken over a period of three to four days, when the team will meet with staff at the Council, Councillors, residents, business representatives, partners and other interested parties. There will be interaction through meetings and workshops, and at the end of the week they will provide a presentation and report back to the Council. The Council can then use, share and build-upon the learning and information gained through this process.
- 2.9 Around six months after the CPC, the LGA will organise a check-in meeting. This will be a facilitated session which creates space for the Council’s senior leadership to explore progress and challenges with peers and discuss any next steps.

Preparing for the peer challenge

- 2.10 The CPC process is designed to be flexible and adaptable to suit the Council’s needs, so that it can be focussed on what is most important to

Spelthorne and to get the best result for our authority and area. An important element of this are the initial scoping meetings, whereby the LGA team will normally meet with the Leader and Chief Executive, usually four to six months in advance of the peer challenge to discuss and agree upon:

- (a) the main focus of the challenge
- (b) the nature and composition of the peer team
- (c) when it would be best to undertake the peer challenge
- (d) the value and purpose of any preparatory work/material
- (e) The nature and form of the feedback at the end of the peer challenge.

Dialogue will then continue in the period leading up to the planned CPC date. The first of these scoping meetings was held on 20 June 2022.

- 2.11 The LGA team will only request information and documentation which is proportionate to the scope and focus of the CPC. Much of the background information the peer team needs should already be in existence and in the public domain and they will only ask for additional documents if these are considered essential. The CPC team will be better able to make a more effective contribution when they fully understand the issues involved – so they ask for a short ‘position statement’ to be prepared about the main focus of the challenge. Preparation of this document and additional background information has commenced.

The peer team

- 2.12 The peer team will include experienced officers and councillors to ensure the Council gets the most appropriate challenge, support and ideas for its specific needs. This team will be drawn up in line with the Council’s needs and will reflect the main focus of the peer challenge. The composition of the teams will be agreed in advance and will typically comprise of senior and experienced officers and councillors, although there is scope to involve other peers from across the public, private or voluntary sectors, depending on the focus of the peer challenge. Each team will have an LGA peer challenge manager.

Results from the peer challenge

- 2.13 Feedback will take place in a number of different ways that will be discussed and agreed with the Council:
- (a) The peer team will provide continuous feedback throughout the peer challenge process.
 - (b) A roundtable feedback discussion on the final day on-site comprising of an audience of the Council’s choosing. The team will share its views and offer comments on the core components and any additional areas of focus.
 - (c) A feedback report will be produced for the Council outlining the main findings and conclusions, recommendations for improvement and innovation, and signposting examples of good practice and case study material.
 - (d) An improvement planning session, wider feedback event, or other activity can be offered to enable discussion and development of plans to take forward the feedback from the peer challenge.

- 2.14 The intelligence gained from the key leadership and corporate capacity research will be fed back into the LGA to inform the planning of future support. It will also contribute to the LGA's sector knowledge base to demonstrate how sector-led improvement works for local government.
- 2.15 It is for the Council itself to decide how it uses the feedback provided and if, when and in what form it plans to publish the results of the peer challenge. The LGA strongly encourages councils to publish the results, and most do this as part of their continuing commitment to be accountable to the communities they serve.

3. Options analysis and proposal

- 3.1 The Committee is asked to note the contents of the report and progress with preparations for the LGA CPC.

4. Financial implications

- 4.1 There are no additional costs for the LGA to undertake a CPC as the Council pays an annual £10,000 LGA subscription.

5. Risk considerations

- 5.1 It is possible that due to internal and external pressures, and availability of LGA Peers, the proposed start date for Spelthorne's CPC may need to be adjusted.

6. Legal considerations

- 6.1 There are no direct legal considerations relating the proposed CPC.

7. Other considerations

- 7.1 Following the Corporate Finance Review in November 2020 (with the final version of the report received in January 2021), the Cabinet agreed, in April 2021, an Action Plan outlining 24 actions, with an assessment of state of progress against each of those actions.
- 7.2 Progress against the Action Plan was most recently reported (alongside an updated self-assessment against the CIPFA Financial Management Code) to Audit Committee on the 25 November 2021, when 13 actions had green status, 9 had amber status and one was no longer applicable (as a result of no longer have separate Overview and Scrutiny Committee following the move to a committee system).

8. Equality and Diversity

- 8.1 There are no direct equality and diversity considerations relating to the proposed CPC.

9. Sustainability/Climate Change Implications

- 9.1 The proposed main area of focus for the CPC Peer Team would include an opportunity to consider environmental sustainability issues relating to the Council's affordable housing developments.

10. Timetable for implementation

- 10.1 At the CPRC meeting on 22 April 2022 it was suggested that the CPC could potentially be undertaken around September/October 2022. Following discussions internally and with the LGA, it has been agreed that the optimal time for this would now be slightly later in the year (towards the end of

November). A further update will be provided to the Committee once these dates are finalised.

11. Contact

Daniel Mouawad, Chief Executive: dcm.cex@spelthorne.gov.uk

Lee O'Neil, Deputy Chief Executive: l.o'neil@spelthorne.gov.uk

Terry Collier, Deputy Chief Executive: t.collier@spelthorne.gov.uk

Background papers: There are none.

Appendices: There are none.