

Surrey Heath Borough Council

Executive

19 July 2022

LGA Corporate Peer Challenge

Portfolio Holder:	Cllr Alan McClafferty
Strategic Director/Head of Service	Damian Roberts – Chief Executive
Report Author:	Rachael Bradbury – National Management Trainee
Key Decision:	No
Date Portfolio Holder signed off the report	30 June 2022
Wards Affected:	All

Summary and Purpose

This report outlines the background and process of a Corporate Peer Challenge undertaken by the Local Government Association (LGA), and details the plans for Surrey Heath Borough Council to undergo a Corporate Peer Challenge in early Summer 2023.

Recommendation

The Executive is advised to confirm that a request is made to the Local Government Association (LGA) for the a Corporate Peer Challenge at Surrey Heath Borough Council to be conducted in Summer 2023.

1. Background and Supporting Information

- 1.1 Peer Challenge is an established sector-led improvement tool initiated by the Local Government Association (LGA), involving a team of experienced officers and members who understand the challenges and opportunities facing local government, spending time in another council as 'peers' to provide constructive feedback and share learning.
- 1.2 Participating councils receive a comprehensive report and recommendations from the peer team and then identify their own action plan to respond.
- 1.3 The Peer Challenge includes a focus on leadership, governance, corporate capacity and financial resilience.

2. Reasons for Recommendation

- 2.1 The recommendation nationally is for councils to undertake a Peer Challenge at least every five years. However, this ambition has been severely impacted

over the past two years by the pandemic and efforts are now being made to ensure that all Councils are able to schedule in their next Peer Challenge. Surrey Heath Borough Council previously had its Peer Challenge in 2014.

- 2.2 While a Peer Challenge is not mandatory, the LGA encourages councils to take up this offer as undergoing a Peer Challenge every few years is an effective tool for independent challenge and improvement and ensures councils have a sense of collective responsibility for performance in the sector as a whole.
- 2.3 The recommendation is for the Corporate Peer Challenge to be run next year, in Summer 2023, following the all-out elections in May. The process which involves Councillors, will provide the new Council with valuable insight to inform its future priorities over their next four-year term.
- 2.4 The suggested timescale is also appropriate given the current corporate improvements the Council is making.

3. Contribution to the Council's Five Year Strategy

- 3.1 Feedback from the Peer Challenge will enable the Council to action improvement and deliver on its Five Year Strategy priorities to a high standard.
- 3.2 In particular, the process will contribute to the Council's priority of being an effective and responsive council.

4. Resource Implications

- 4.1 The funding for the peer challenge is covered by the LGA. As such, there will be no financial resource implication on the Council.
- 4.2 There will be some preparation needed in advance of the Peer Challenge, however, the LGA aims to ensure information and documentation requested is proportionate to the scope and focus of the Peer Challenge.
- 4.3 The majority of background information for the peer team should already be in existence and other documentation is only needed if it cannot be obtained from the public domain.
- 4.4 The peer team require a short self-assessment 'position statement' from the Council which sets out current priorities, performance, challenges and areas of improvement. which is shared in advance of the start date of the Peer Challenge.

5. Section 151 Officer Comments:

- 5.1 Engagement in the Peer Challenge is supported fully and will assist the Council in its endeavours for best value.

6. Legal and Governance Issues

- 6.1 Participation in the Peer Challenge is voluntary and it is expected that the process will result in recommendations to further improve Governance at the Council.

7. Monitoring Officer Comments:

- 7.1 The Monitoring Officer has no additional comments.