

**Comments and observations from the Performance & Finance Scrutiny Committee on 15
November 2023 – Peer Challenge**

- The Committee comment that the plan included a significant number of action and queried whether it was achievable. Officers noted this was a ‘long list’ and that the final action plan would be shorter and focus on deliverable actions within resources available that would make the most impact on the areas of recommendation.
- It was questioned whether all the actions had to be delivered by April. Officers reported that members of the Peer Challenge Team would return to the Council in April or May, but that not all actions had to be completed by that date. What would be looked for was a strong indicator of progress.
- It was suggested that a future Member Development Plan should include a Member skills audit.
- The relative priority of the different actions was queried. Officers responded that, while this was not explicitly set out in the Peer Challenge Report, the highest priority would be bringing the Council’s finances back to a sustainable position.
- It was suggested that when policies were being reviewed or implemented these should be linked back to the Peer Recommendations and action plan. It was commented that many of the areas within the recommendations were areas where there was already strong examples of achievement (for example the Menopause Policy).
- It was noted that some actions were already completed, for example the public question time that had taken place at the start of the Committee, which was a positive outcome.
- Councillors commented that there was already a strong digital approach at the Council, for example with the new website and Member ICT equipment. Officers agreed and commented that the approach to the Peer Challenge was to embrace suggestions even in areas of existing strength to enable the Council to achieve yet more strongly.
- The Committee discussed upcoming AI technology and its application for the Council and a number of views were discussed. Some Members commented that the risks of AI needed to be understood. Other Members noted that it should be embraced as an opportunity and acknowledged that AI was already in use and the Council didn’t want to be left behind, although this had to be within sustainable resources. Cyber security should be audited on an annual basis. It was suggested that ICT colleagues could brief Members on the opportunities of AI and to dispel any fears about its introduction, and Officers agreed this could be added to the programme of Members briefings. Officers commented on the already positive opportunities for AI that were being used, for example in the introduction to the Borough video used in Members’ induction. They noted that its application for use in transactional services, for example planning applications, was more problematic particularly where personal information was involved.