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Dear Members

Cabinet

A meeting of the Cabinet will be held on **Thursday 5 May 2022 at 6.30pm** in the **Craddock Room, Civic Centre, Riverside, Stafford** to deal with the business as set out on the agenda.

Please note that this meeting will be recorded

Members are reminded that contact officers are shown at the top of each report and members are welcome to raise questions etc in advance of the meeting with the appropriate officer.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "I. Curran".

Head of Law and Administration

CABINET - 5 MAY 2022

Chair - Councillor P M M Farrington

A G E N D A

- 1 Minutes of 7 April 2022 as circulated and published on 8 April 2022
- 2 Apologies
- 3 Councillors' Question Time (if any)
- 4 Proposals of the Cabinet Members (as follows):-

Page Nos

(a) LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

- | | |
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| (i) Establishment of the Staffordshire Leaders Board | 3 - 18 |
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Membership

Chair - Councillor P M M Farrington

- | | |
|------------------|---|
| P M M Farrington | - Leader |
| R M Smith | - Deputy Leader and Resources Portfolio |
| J M Pert | - Community and Health Portfolio |
| J K Price | - Environment Portfolio |
| F Beatty | - Economic Development and Planning Portfolio |
| C V Trowbridge | - Leisure Portfolio |

ITEM NO 4(a)(i)

ITEM NO 4(a)(i)

| | |
|-------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Contact Officer: | Tim Clegg |
| Telephone No: | 01785 619200 |
| Ward Interest: | Nil |
| Report Track: | Cabinet 05/05/2022 (Only) |
| Key Decision: | Yes |

**SUBMISSION BY COUNCILLOR P M M FARRINGTON
LEADER OF THE COUNCIL**

**CABINET
5 MAY 2022
Establishment of the Staffordshire Leaders Board**

1 Purpose of Report

1.1 To propose the Council's participation in the Staffordshire Leaders Board on the basis of the terms of Reference set out in the appendix to the report and to agree the representation on the board from the council.

2 Proposal of Leader of the Council

2.1 That the Council:

- (i) Join the Staffordshire Leaders Board on the basis of the Terms of Reference set out in the **APPENDIX** to the report;
- (ii) Appoint the Leader of the Council as the Council's representative on the Leaders Board;
- (iii) Appoint the Deputy Leader of the Council as the substitute for the Leader on the Leaders Board when the Leader is unavailable.

3 Relationship to Corporate Priorities

3.1 The Council Leaders in Staffordshire have identified areas for joint working , as set out below, that contribute to the following corporate priorities in the Council's Business Plan vision 2021-2024:

"To deliver sustainable economic and housing growth to provide income and jobs."

“To improve the quality of life of local people by providing a safe, clean, attractive place to live and work and encouraging people to be engaged in developing strong communities that promote health and wellbeing.”

“To tackle Climate Change by implementing our Climate Change and Green Recovery objectives.”

Effective partnership working between the councils in Staffordshire has the potential to contribute to our objective: “To be a well-run, financially sustainable and ambitious organisation, responsive to the needs of our customers and communities and focussed on delivering our objectives.”

4 Key Issues and Reasons for Recommendation

- 4.1 As Members will be aware, the Council along with the County Council and the seven other Borough and District Councils from across Staffordshire have been meeting to formalise a new Leaders Board to facilitate stronger two tier working and to position the partnership to enter in discussions with the Government for a formal County Deal.

At a meeting of the Leaders and Chief Executives of the County, Borough and District Councils in Staffordshire on the 2 December 2021 the Leaders discussed the strength of the relationship between the nine local authorities and the joint working that was already taking place. The meeting also considered the opportunities that existed to take this work forward by further joint working, and how this might be further enhanced with the support of a devolution deal (“County Deal”) from Government providing additional powers and funding.

The Leaders identified a range of areas where further joint working might be explored in 2022 including:

- (a) Climate Change - bringing together strategies, skills and expertise for reaching Net Zero.
- (b) Waste - strengthening the waste partnership, exploring greater collaboration on waste collection, and improve recycling.
- (c) Economy - continuing to create the right conditions for economic growth, and the creation of more, better-paid jobs and opportunities for the people of Staffordshire.
- (d) Improving Public Services - Making it as simple and easy for the people of Staffordshire to interact and engage with local public services.
- (e) Health Inequalities - In support of the establishment of the Integrated Care System and the Health and Wellbeing Board, there is an opportunity for local government partners in Staffordshire to work better, together to tackle many issues that have a significant impact on health, such as housing, parks and open spaces, leisure centres and employment.

The Leaders also considered how a County Deal might support joint working within Staffordshire. It was felt that a County Deal should not be seen as a one-off bid, but the start of a new, ongoing dialogue with central government, that builds on Staffordshire's strengths, and addresses national challenges at a local level.

5 Report Detail

5.1 A County Deal will accelerate delivery of the local authorities' ambitious programmes, improve public services, deliver on the Levelling Up agenda, and produce excellent returns for both the people of Staffordshire and the UK. Initially, the Leaders propose to focus on the following priorities:

- (a) Climate Change - To place Staffordshire as a leading location for the green economy.
- (b) Social Care - To address recruitment pressures in care, ease the pressure on the NHS, and develop innovative solutions that allow Staffordshire people to stay independent, healthy and living at home, for as long as possible.
- (c) Logistics - To support the logistics sector to be innovative, cleaner, greener and higher value.

To allow Staffordshire to achieve the above, a full range of additional powers and funding would be required from Government. In exchange for these powers Staffordshire would deliver significant benefits for the people of Staffordshire and beyond, making a significant contribution to the Levelling Up agenda. This would include a significant increase in the number of local green economy jobs, a carbon neutral Staffordshire, and transformed logistics and social care sectors.

In order to drive this agenda forward the Leaders recognised that the existing informal networking arrangements needed to be put on a more formal footing. They decided that a Joint Committee would provide them with a vehicle that has the status and authority to speak to Government on behalf of the nine authorities, and that has the ability to make decisions itself to drive the existing joint working forward.

The Leaders therefore decided to take back a proposal to each of their respective Cabinets proposing that their existing informal meetings are formalised as an Executive Joint Committee to be called the Staffordshire Leaders Board. The remit of the Leaders Board will be:

- (a) To lead and oversee the development of a county devolution deal for Staffordshire with HM Government.
- (b) To lead and oversee the alignment of relevant local authority action on Climate Change, Waste and Sustainability.
- (c) To lead and oversee the alignment of relevant local authority plans for Enterprise and Government Funding and Investment streams.
- (d) To lead and oversee the alignment of local authority interaction with the Health sector in Staffordshire.

- (e) To lead and oversee the alignment of relevant local authority plans for future Infrastructure.
- (f) To lead and oversee the alignment of relevant local authority plans in relation to Housing and Homelessness.
- (g) To initiate, lead and oversee Staffordshire-wide joint initiatives to enhance local government efficiency and effectiveness.
- (h) To act as a local public sector decision-making body for strategic economic growth.
- (i) To act as a conduit to other sub-regional and regional bodies such as the Local Enterprise Partnerships and the Midlands Engine.
- (j) Where appropriate, to agree shared priorities and bids for funding to existing and new funding sources such as Local Growth Funds and the Shared Prosperity Fund.
- (k) To monitor and evaluate projects and programmes of activity commissioned directly by the Committee.
- (l) To communicate and, where unanimously agreed, to align activity across Staffordshire on a range of other key public priorities that affect citizens.
- (m) To prioritise and make decisions on the use of the funding that the Committee may influence or control.

The Leaders Board will consist of the Leader from each of the nine local authorities and will operate on the basis of one member, one vote. Scrutiny will be undertaken by each of the constituent authority's own scrutiny arrangements.

The arrangements make provision for the Board to admit Stoke-on-Trent City Council to its membership as an equal member in the future.

The full Terms of Reference proposed for the Leaders Board are attached as an **APPENDIX**.

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| 6 Implications | |
| 6.1 Financial | There are no immediate and significant financial implications arising from the establishment of the Leaders Board in itself. It is intended that it will derive its support from its constituent members. As and when individual projects are commissioned the board will give consideration to the resource requirements necessary to deliver those projects. |
| Legal | The Leaders Board will act as a Joint Committee under Section 9EB of the Local Government Act 2000 and pursuant to Regulation 11 of the Local Authorities (Arrangement for the Discharge of Functions) (England) Regulations 2012. The establishment of joint arrangements in respect of executive functions rests with the Cabinet. The appointment of representatives to executive positions rests with the Leader of the Council |
| Human Resources | The Leaders Board may result in increased work for the Leader of the Council, The Chief Executive and some members of Leadership Team. |
| Human Rights Act | Nil |
| Data Protection | None at this time. |
| Risk Management | None at this time. |
| 6.2 Community Impact Assessment Recommendations | <p>Impact on Public Sector Equality Duty: The Borough Council considers the effect of its actions on all sections of our community and has addressed all of the following Equality Strands in the production of this report, as appropriate:- Age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation.</p> <p>Wider Community Impact: Where the Leaders Board agrees projects and programmes that the Council takes part in that impact on our communities a Community Impact Assessment will be undertaken where this appropriate</p> |
| Previous Consideration - Nil | |
| Background Papers - Nil | |



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APPENDIX

The Staffordshire Leaders' Board

Constitution for the Joint Committee

1. Purpose

- 1.1 To establish a Joint Committee of the local authorities in Staffordshire to explore opportunities for improved joint working and to develop and implement plans for devolution from Government through a County Deal.

2. Governance

- 2.1 The Joint Committee will act as a Joint Committee under Section 9EB of the Local Government Act 2000 and pursuant to Regulation 11 of the Local Authorities (Arrangement for the Discharge of Functions) (England) Regulations 2012.
- 2.2 The Joint Committee will be known as the Staffordshire Leaders' Board ("the Leaders' Board").
- 2.3 The Leaders' Board will comprise the local authorities within the Staffordshire area: Cannock Chase District Council, East Staffordshire Borough Council, Lichfield District Council, Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council, South Staffordshire District Council, Stafford Borough Council, Staffordshire County Council, Staffordshire Moorlands District Council, and Tamworth Borough Council ("the constituent authorities").
- 2.4 The Leaders' Board may admit Stoke-on-Trent City Council to membership at a later date and therefrom they will become a constituent authority with all the same rights and obligations as the other constituent authorities.
- 2.5 Political Proportionality rules will not apply to the Leaders' Board as constituted.
- 2.6 The Leaders' Board will be a legally constituted body with powers delegated to it by the constituent authorities in the following areas:
- a) to prioritise and make decisions on the use of the funding that the Leaders' Board may influence or control.



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- b) to review future governance requirements and delivery arrangements and how these can be best achieved in Staffordshire.
 - c) to have direct oversight of the projects and initiatives which the Leaders' Board has initiated or over which it has influence or control of the funding.
 - d) to have strategic oversight of other key projects and initiatives within its remit as set out herein.
- 2.7 The Leaders' Board will not hold funds or monies on behalf of the constituent authorities.
- 2.8 Should the Leaders' Board work plan necessitate a change in the delegated powers and terms of reference of the Leaders' Board any such change would require the approval of all the constituent authorities.
- 2.9 These terms of reference will be reviewed on a biennial basis or sooner if necessary.

3. Remit

- 3.1 The remit of the Leaders' Board will be:
- i. To lead and oversee the development of a county devolution deal for Staffordshire with HM Government.
 - ii. To lead and oversee the alignment of relevant local authority action on Climate Change, Waste and Sustainability.
 - iii. To lead and oversee the alignment of relevant local authority plans for Enterprise and Government Funding and Investment streams.
 - iv. To lead and oversee the alignment of local authority interaction with the Health sector in Staffordshire.
 - v. To lead and oversee the alignment of relevant local authority plans for future Infrastructure.
 - vi. To lead and oversee the alignment of relevant local authority plans in relation to Housing and Homelessness.
 - vii. To initiate, lead and oversee Staffordshire-wide joint initiatives to enhance local government efficiency and effectiveness.



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- viii. To act as a local public sector decision-making body for strategic economic growth.
- ix. To act as a conduit to other sub-regional and regional bodies such as the Local Enterprise Partnerships and the Midlands Engine.
- x. Where appropriate, to agree shared priorities and bids for funding to existing and new funding sources such as Local Growth Funds and the Shared Prosperity Fund.
- xi. To monitor and evaluate projects and programmes of activity commissioned directly by the Committee.
- xii. To communicate and, where unanimously agreed, to align activity across Staffordshire on a range of other key public priorities that affect citizens.
- xiii. To prioritise and make decisions on the use of the funding that the Committee may influence or control.

4. Membership

- 4.1 One member from each constituent authority (such member to be the Leader from each constituent authority) and for the purposes of these terms of reference this member will be known as the principal member.
- 4.2 Each constituent authority to have a named substitute member who must be an executive member.
- 4.3 Where both the principal member and the substitute member attend a meeting of the Leaders' Board the principal member shall be deemed as representing their authority by the Chair or Vice Chair.
- 4.4 In the event of any voting member of the Leaders' Board ceasing to be a member of the constituent authority which appointed him/her, the relevant constituent authority shall as soon as reasonably practicable appoint another voting member in their place.
- 4.5 Where a member of the Leaders' Board ceases to be a Leader of the constituent authority which appointed him/her or ceases to be a member of the Executive of the constituent authority which appointed him/her, he/she shall also cease to be a member of the Leaders' Board and the relevant constituent authority shall as soon



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as reasonably practicable appoint another voting member in their place.

- 4.6 Each constituent authority may remove its principal member or substitute member and appoint a different member or substitute as per that authority's rules of substitution, and by providing twenty-four hours' notice to the Chair or the Secretary.
- 4.7 The Leaders' Board may from time to time, following a unanimous vote of those present and voting, co-opt additional non-voting members ("co-opted members") at its discretion but such co-opted members will not be members or officers of the constituent authorities.
- 4.8 Each constituent authority may individually terminate its membership of the Leaders' Board by giving twelve months written notice of its intent to leave the Leaders' Board to the Chair or the Secretary. At the end of these twelve months, but not before, the authority will be deemed to no longer be a member of the Leaders' Board.
- 4.9 Where an authority has previously terminated its membership of the Leaders' Board it may rejoin the Leaders' Board with immediate effect on the same terms as existed prior to its departure.

5. Quorum

- 5.1 The quorum shall be 5 members. No business will be transacted at a meeting unless a quorum exists at the beginning of a meeting. If at the beginning of any meeting, the Chair or Secretary after counting the members present declares that a quorum is not present, the meeting shall stand adjourned.

6. Chair and Vice Chair

- 6.1 The Chair of the Leaders' Board will be the principal member of Staffordshire County Council (subject to para 6.2 below)
- 6.2 The Leaders' Board will vote annually at its first meeting after all the constituent authorities' annual meetings as to whether the Chair should continue to be the principal member of the County Council or should be the principal member of one of the other constituent authorities.



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- 6.3 The position of Vice Chair shall be filled by the principal member of one of the other constituent authorities of the Leaders' Board and this role will rotate annually between those other constituent authorities.
- 6.4 The Chair or in their absence the Vice Chair or in their absence the member of the Leaders' Board elected for this purpose, shall preside at any meeting of the Leaders' Board.
- 6.5 Appointments will be made in May of each year.
- 6.6 Where, at any meeting or part of a meeting of the Leaders' Board both the Chair and Vice Chair are either absent or unable to act as Chair or Vice Chair, the Leaders' Board shall elect one of the members of the Leaders' Board present at the meeting to preside for the balance of that meeting or part of the meeting, as appropriate. For the avoidance of doubt, the role of Chair and Vice Chair vests in the principal member concerned and in their absence the role of Chair or Vice Chair will not automatically fall to the relevant constituent authority's substitute member.

7. Voting

- 7.1 One member, one vote for each constituent authority.
- 7.2 All questions shall be decided by a majority of the votes of the members present, the Chair having the casting vote in addition to their vote as a member of the Committee. Voting at meetings shall be by show of hands.
- 7.3 On the requisition of any two Members, made before the vote is taken, the voting on any matter shall be recorded by the Secretary so as to show how each Member voted and there shall also be recorded the name of any Member present who abstained from voting.

8. Sub-Committees and Advisory Groups

- 8.1 The Leaders' Board may appoint sub-committees from its membership as required to enable it to execute its responsibilities effectively and may delegate tasks and powers to the sub-committee as it sees fit.
- 8.2 The Leaders' Board may set up advisory groups as required to enable it to execute its responsibilities effectively and may delegate



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tasks as it sees fit to these bodies, which may be formed of officers or members of the constituent authorities or such third parties as the Leaders' Board considers appropriate.

9. Hosting and Administration

- 9.1 The Leaders' Board will at their first meeting decide which of the constituent authorities will be the host authority, and the Head of Democratic Services (or equivalent post) from that authority shall be Secretary to the Committee ("the Secretary").
- 9.2 The Leaders' Board will at their first meeting decide which of the constituent authorities will provide the s151 Officer role
- 9.3 The Leaders' Board will at their first meeting decide which of the constituent authorities will provide the Monitoring Officer & Legal Adviser to the Leaders' Board.
- 9.4 The administrative costs of supporting the committee will be met equally by the constituent authorities, with each authority being responsible for receiving and paying any travel or subsistence claims from its own members.
- 9.5 The functions of the Secretary shall be:
 - a) to maintain a record of membership of the Leaders' Board and any sub-committees or advisory groups appointed
 - b) to publish and notify the proper officers of each constituent authority of any anticipated "key decisions" to be taken by the Leaders' Board to enable the requirements as to formal notice of key decisions as given under the Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012 to be met;
 - c) to carry out such notification to and consultation with members of any appointing constituent authority as may be necessary to enable the Leaders' Board to take urgent "key decisions" in accordance with the requirements of the Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012;
 - d) to summon meetings of the Leaders' Board or any sub-committees or advisory groups;



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- e) to prepare and send out the agenda for meetings of the Leaders' Board or any sub-committees or advisory groups; in consultation with the Chair and the Vice Chair of the Committee (or sub-committee/ advisory group);
- f) to keep a record of the proceedings of the Leaders' Board or any sub-committees or advisory groups, including those in attendance, declarations of interests, and to publish the minutes;
- g) to take such administrative action as may be necessary to give effect to decisions of the Leaders' Board or any sub-committees or advisory groups;
- h) to perform such other functions as may be determined by the Leaders' Board from time to time

10. Meetings

- 10.1 The Leaders' Board will meet no less than quarterly and meetings will be aligned where necessary with deadlines for decisions on resources and investment plans.
- 10.2 Meetings will be held at such times, dates and places as may be notified to the members of the Leaders' Board by the Secretary, being such time, place and location as the Leaders' Board shall from time to time resolve.
- 10.3 Meeting papers will be circulated five clear working days in advance of any meeting. The Chair may choose to accept or reject urgent items that are tabled at any meeting.
- 10.4 Additional ad hoc meetings may be called by the Secretary, in consultation, where practicable, with the Chair and Vice Chair of the Committee, in response to receipt of a request in writing, which request sets out an urgent item of business within the functions of the Leaders' Board, addressed to the Secretary:
 - (a) from and signed by two members of the Leaders' Board, or
 - (b) from the Chief Executive of any of the constituent authorities.
- 10.5 The Secretary shall settle the agenda for any meeting of the Leaders' Board after consulting, where practicable, the Chair or in their absence the Vice Chair; and shall incorporate in the agenda any items of business and any reports submitted by:



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- (a) the Chief Executive of any of the constituent authorities;
- (b) the Chief Finance Officer to any of the constituent authorities;
- (c) the Monitoring Officer to any of the constituent authorities; or
- (d) any two Members of the Leaders' Board.

10.6 The Leaders' Board shall, unless the person presiding at the meeting or the Leaders' Board determines otherwise in respect of that meeting, conduct its business in accordance with the procedure rules set out in paragraph 13 below.

11. Access to Information

- 11.1 Meetings of the Leaders' Board will be held in public except where confidential or exempt information, as defined in the Local Government Act 1972, is being discussed.
- 11.2 These rules do not affect any more specific rights to information contained elsewhere under the law.
- 11.3 The Secretary will ensure that the relevant legislation relating to access to information is complied with. Each constituent authority is to co-operate with the Secretary in fulfilling any requirements.
- 11.4 Any Freedom of Information or Subject Access Requests received by the Leaders' Board should be directed to the relevant constituent authority(s) for that authority to deal with in the usual way, taking account of the relevant legislation. Where the request relates to information held by two or more constituent authorities, they will liaise with each other before replying to the request.

12. Attendance at meetings

- 12.1 The Chair may invite any person, whether a member or officer of one of the constituent authorities or a third party, to attend the meeting and speak on any matter before the Leaders' Board.
- 12.2 Third parties may be invited to attend the Leaders' Board on a standing basis following a unanimous vote of those present and voting.
- 12.3 Where agenda items require independent experts or speakers, the Officer or authority proposing the agenda item should indicate this to the Secretary and provide the Secretary with details of who is



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required to attend and in what capacity. The participation of independent experts or speakers in Leaders' Board meetings will be subject to the discretion of the Chair.

13. Procedure Rules

13.1 Attendance

13.1.1 At every meeting, it shall be the responsibility of each member to enter their name on an attendance record provided by the Secretary from which attendance at the meeting will be recorded.

13.2 Order of Business

- 13.2.1 Subject to paragraph 13.2.2, the order of business at each meeting of the Leaders' Board will be:
- i. Apologies for absence
 - ii. Declarations of interests
 - iii. Approve as a correct record and sign the minutes of the last meeting
 - iv. Matters set out in the agenda for the meeting which will clearly indicate which are key decisions and which are not
 - v. Matters on the agenda for the meeting which, in the opinion of the Secretary are likely to be considered in the absence of the press and public
- 13.2.2 The person presiding at the meeting may vary the order of business at the meeting.

13.3 Disclosable Pecuniary Interests

- 13.3.1 If a Member is aware that he/she has a disclosable pecuniary interest in any matter to be considered at the meeting, the Member must withdraw from the room where the meeting considering the business is being held:
- (a) in the case where paragraph 13.3.2 below applies, immediately after making representations, answering questions or giving evidence;
 - (b) in any other case, wherever it becomes apparent that the business is being considered at that meeting;



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(c) unless the Member has obtained a dispensation from their own authority's Standards Committee or Monitoring Officer. Such dispensation to be notified to the Secretary prior to the commencement of the meeting.

- 13.3.2 Where a member has a disclosable pecuniary interest in any business of the Leaders' Board, the Member may attend the meeting (or a sub-committee or advisory group of the committee) but only for the purpose of making representations, answering questions or giving evidence relating to the business, provided that the public are also allowed to attend the meeting for the same purpose, whether under a statutory right or otherwise.

13.4 Minutes

- 13.4.1 There will be no discussion or motion made in respect of the minutes other than except as to their accuracy. If no such question is raised or if it is raised then as soon as it has been disposed of, the Chair shall sign the minutes.

13.5 Rules of Debate

- 13.5.1 A Member wishing to speak shall address the Chair and direct their comments to the question being discussed. The Chair shall decide the order in which to take representations from members wishing to speak and shall decide all questions of order. Their ruling upon all such questions or upon matters arising in debate shall be final and shall not be open to discussion.
- 13.5.2 A motion or amendment shall not be discussed unless it has been proposed and seconded. When a motion is under debate no other motion shall be moved except the following:
- i. To amend the motion
 - ii. To adjourn the meeting
 - iii. To adjourn the debate or consideration of the item
 - iv. To proceed to the next business
 - v. That the question now be put
 - vi. That a member be not further heard or do leave the meeting
 - vii. To exclude the press and public under Section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972



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13.6 Conduct of Members

13.6.1 Members of the Leaders' Board will be subject to their own authority's Code of Conduct.

14. Application to Sub-Committees

14.1 The procedure rules and also the Access to Information provisions set out at paragraph 11 shall apply to meetings of any sub-committees of the Leaders' Board.

15. Scrutiny of decisions

15.1 Each constituent authority which operates executive arrangements will be able to scrutinise the decisions of the Leaders' Board in accordance with that constituent authority's overview and scrutiny arrangements.

16. Winding up of the Leaders' Board

16.1 The Leaders' Board may be wound up immediately by a unanimous vote of all constituent authorities.

17. Amendment of this Constitution

17.1 This Constitution can only be amended by resolution of each of the constituent authorities.

ITEM NO 4(a)(ii)

ITEM NO 4(a)(ii)

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| Contact Officer: | Tracy Redpath |
| Telephone No: | 01785 619195 |
| Ward Interest: | Nil |
| Report Track: | Cabinet 05/05/2022 (Only) |
| Key Decision: | No |

**SUBMISSION BY COUNCILLOR P M M FARRINGTON
LEADER OF THE COUNCIL**

**CABINET
5 MAY 2022
Corporate Peer Challenge - Follow Up**

1 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To present an update to members with regards to the Corporate Peer Challenge Follow Up that took place in November 2021.

2 Proposal of the Leader of the Council

- 2.1 That the report be noted.

3 Key Issues and Reasons for Recommendation

- 3.1 The Council undertook its first Corporate Peer Challenge in July 2018 which found that the Council was a highly regarded, supportive and proactive partner and a well financially managed organisation with valued front line services. It also recognised that the Corporate Business Plan set out a direction of travel with high level of ambition.
- 3.2 A follow up visit had been arranged to take place on the 18 March 2020 but was cancelled by the Local Government Association (LGA) the day before because of the Covid pandemic. This visit was rearranged to take place in November 2021 as a 'light touch' follow up. A wide range of documentation was prepared and forwarded to the peer team in order to demonstrate what progress had been made against the key themes highlighted in the original peer review report.
- 3.3 The follow-up peer challenge observed a council that has continued to make significant progress, despite the huge challenges and circumstances experienced over the past two years. The final report from the LGA was

delayed due to capacity issues at their end and is contained in the **APPENDIX**.

4 Relationship to Corporate Business Objectives

- 4.1 This interlinks with all of the corporate business objectives.

5 Report Detail

- 5.1 The Council undertook its first Corporate Peer Challenge in July 2018 which found that the Council was a highly regarded, supportive and proactive partner and a well financially managed organisation with valued front line services. It also recognised that the Corporate Business Plan set out a direction of travel with high level of ambition. The report made a number of recommendations, which were grouped into three themes: communication, organisation and change. The peer team had recognised the Council's ambition set out in its business plan and felt that it could do even more to promote, celebrate and communicate its positive achievements. There were also recommendations relating to transformational change and workforce development that have been progressed since the original visit.
- 5.2 A follow up visit had been arranged to take place on the 18 March 2020 but was cancelled by the LGA the day before because of the Covid pandemic. This visit was rearranged to take place in November 2021 as a 'light touch' follow up. A wide range of documentation was prepared and forwarded to the peer team in order to demonstrate what progress had been made against the key themes highlighted in the original peer review report.
- 5.3 The peer team then spent an afternoon virtually with the Leader and Chief Executive of Stafford Borough Council and the Corporate Business and Partnerships Manager who identified a number of issues that related to capacity, growth and shared services that were being progressed and will be contained in the action plan that is being developed.
- 5.4 The final report from the LGA was delayed due to capacity issues at their end and this is contained in the **APPENDIX**. The report is very positive and recognises the huge amount of progress that has been made in terms of the original recommendations made in 2018. The follow-up peer challenge observed a council that had made significant progress, despite the huge challenges and difficult circumstances of the Covid-19 pandemic. The team were particularly impressed by how the Council had dealt with this and how they had managed to continue maximising their geographical position in order to sustain the level of ambition for economic growth/regeneration and housing delivery.
- 5.5 The peer team noted that the challenges facing the Council now were related to financial sustainability and we embarked on a shared Chief Executive arrangement, as well as recovering from the impact of the pandemic. It was also recognised that, like many organisations, we have utilised the skills and

talents of our staff to deliver services differently during the pandemic and now has an opportunity to invest in those with greatest potential to ensure they are retained and developed at the Council.

- 5.6 The report highlights that the Council continues to have ambitious transformation plans and to achieve those, the strategic capacity of the senior leadership team should be reviewed. It also acknowledges that the challenges facing local government during the course of the pandemic should not be underestimated, and the council's resilience has been demonstrated through its continued economic growth agenda, the commitment of its staff and leadership as well as its position as an influential partner in the region and beyond.
- 5.7 There are a number of key recommendations that have been identified as a result of the follow up visit which will be incorporated into an action plan. The peer review follow up report will now be published on the council website and a further progress report will be submitted to the LGA in June.

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| 6 | Implications |
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| 6.1 | Financial | |
| | Legal | Nil |
| | Human Resources | Nil |
| | Human Rights Act | Nil |
| | Data Protection | Nil |
| | Risk Management | Nil |

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| 6.2 | Community Impact Assessment Recommendations | There are no known impacts against any of the protected characteristics that have been identified and it does not directly impact on any of the wider community impact areas. |
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| Previous Consideration - Nil |
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| Background Papers - Corporate Business and Partnerships |
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Stafford Borough Council

17 November 2021

Feedback report - Peer Challenge follow up visit



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1. Executive summary

Stafford Borough Council had their first corporate peer challenge (CPC) in July 2018. The timing of the CPC coincided with the bedding in of the council's new Business Plan which set out key objectives on growth, wellbeing and financial sustainability. The team heard a range of positive feedback about the council and the commitment of staff and councillors to Stafford as a place to live and work. There was a consistent message about the role of the Council as a proactive and supportive partner and it was clear that the organisation had strong processes in place to control its finances. The peer team felt that the simplified business plan, launched in 2018, provided an opportunity for the council to accelerate its pace to deliver changes necessary to support the ambition it demonstrated through its vision.

The peer challenge report from July 2018 made a number of recommendations, which were grouped into three themes: communication, organisation and change. The peer team had recognised the Council's ambition set out in its business plan and felt that it could do even more to promote, celebrate and communicate its positive achievements. To this end there were recommendations about undertaking an LGA communications review and developing a communications strategy, linked to the corporate business plan.

The July 2018 report noted that the Council's leadership team had taken progressive steps towards developing a long-term forward plan that set out Cabinet priorities with milestones and timelines. Recommendations were made to finalise and publish an effective and measurable forward plan to ensure appropriate accountability. Several times throughout the 2018 report reference was made to the Council's level of ambition, in particular to economic growth. The council has a clear understanding of place and is maximising the opportunities brought by its geographical position and the importance of balancing a sense of place, protecting the quality of life whilst at the same time, unlocking the potential that the Borough has to offer. An example of this was particularly evident in the pragmatic approach taken by the Council in relation to HS2 and the recognition of the opportunities and investments that this will bring to Stafford. This was echoed in the recommendations which asked the Council to review their risk appetite in order to make potentially difficult decisions now, in order to transform and facilitate the delivery of their ambitious objectives. To help fulfil these ambitions, the Council were also urged to utilise the talent and skills of staff and Members at all levels of the organisation. This included training for Members on specific skills such as scrutiny and implementing an organisational development programme that would help align the skills of the workforce to the delivery of corporate priorities. It was recommended that financial resources be identified to support any programme of change. Finally, the 2018 CPC recognised the Council's strength as a partner and emphasised the need to capitalise on the goodwill and capacity of partners to deliver plans.



The follow-up peer challenge in November 2021 observed a council that had made significant progress, despite the huge challenges and difficult circumstances of the Covid-19 pandemic. The team were particularly impressed by how the council had dealt with this and how they had managed to continue to maximise their geographical position in order to sustain the level of ambition for economic growth/regeneration and housing delivery. It was noted that the challenges facing the council now were related to financial sustainability and organisational matters including the relationship with Cannock Chase Council, as they embarked on a shared chief executive arrangement, as well as recovering from the impact of the pandemic. Like many organisations, Stafford has utilised the skills and talents of its staff to deliver services differently during the pandemic and now has an opportunity to invest in those with greatest potential to ensure they are retained and developed at the council. The Council continues to have ambitious transformation plans and to achieve those, the strategic capacity of the senior leadership team should be urgently reviewed. The challenges facing local government during the course of the pandemic should not be underestimated, and Stafford's resilience has been demonstrated through its continued economic growth agenda, the commitment of its staff and leadership as well as its position as an influential partner in the region and beyond.

2. Feedback

The feedback below has been grouped into the same three categories as the recommendations in the original report: communication, organisation and change. An additional category 'capacity' has been added. A summary of the peer challenge process, as well as the recommendations from the initial review can be found at Annex A.

Communication

The original peer challenge recommended that the Council develop a communications strategy to celebrate and communicate the vision set out in the Business Plan, with a further recommendation that an LGA Communications review be commissioned to support this. The communications review had been scheduled for June 2020, however, due to the Covid-19 pandemic the LGA made the decision to postpone. During the discussions between the peer team and the Council at the follow-up review, it was recognised that it was timely to revisit discussions internally about the next steps for a communications review.



An observation of the first Peer Challenge was that there was a clarity of narrative about the vision and ambition for economic growth within the Borough. Economic growth has remained an important part of Stafford's story and despite the pandemic the Council have continued to maximise the opportunities brought by their geographical position to progress on major regeneration projects such as Meecebook, Stafford Station Gateway and the wider town centre regeneration programme and deliver housing growth consistently above target. The Peer Team noted that this was particularly impressive given the challenging circumstances of the last 18 months. Examples that demonstrate Stafford's ability to drive forward development, even during the pandemic, include the opening of the newly refurbished Victoria Park and Holmcroft Park, Stafford Western Access Route (now known as 'Unicorn Way') and the demolition of the magistrate's court as part of a regeneration scheme. Economic growth and recovery remain a priority for the Council, as recognised in its commitment to the Stafford Growth, Regeneration and Infrastructure Partnership (SGRIP). This is further demonstrated through joint meetings held with Staffordshire County Council that include the Leaders and Senior Officers of both councils.

It had been noted during the first visit that the Council can point to a number of achievements and examples of community work with positive social impact, however, these were less visible within corporate communications. The Peer Team recommended that the Council should seek to proactively communicate the positive work it is undertaking for its community, alongside its growth achievements. An example of where progress had been made in this area was the introduction of community question and answer sessions to dispel myths about the Council's role in tackling climate change. The Council should continue to host opportunities to interact with its communities to clarify the role of the council in local matters and publicise its numerable successes. Since the follow-up review has taken place, the Council's annual community awards have been featured in local publication 'The Staffordshire Newsletter'. The Council has also had at least 8 front page articles that included features on the Community HUB, the new Local nature Reserve, Future High Streets Fund, Westbridge Park and press releases have been increased by 40%. The continued use of positive publicity to raise the profile of the Council's role is encouraged. The Peer Team felt that it was timely to undertake a communications review to ensure that the Council has a strategic approach to positively promoting more of what it is doing for its community. They emphasised that this would involve further recognising that communications is a strategic responsibility of the whole Council leadership and not just a function of the communications department. The Council should not be afraid to be confident and bold in telling its positive stories.



Progress had been made in a number of areas, and in particular the Peer Team commented on the positive #oneteam project that had evolved internally to celebrate staff and successful projects. It was clear that the communications manager had worked closely with representatives across the organisation to improve internal communications. Furthermore, it was noted that since the first Peer Challenge, a communications plan for every major event or project had been created – the Peer Team encouraged the Council to take this one step further by capitalising on successful stories both internally and externally to raise the profile of the council's achievements.

The peer team praised the work of the internal communications team and, in particular, the creation of a network of communication champions across the organisation, coordinated by the Communications Manager. However, the peer team also recognised that promotion of successful projects was a responsibility of the Council corporately and not just the small communications team. Upon reviewing the Council's social media, the Peer Team felt that it was often reactive in nature. However, the Council have demonstrated that their press releases are distributed through Facebook, Twitter, Nextdoor and LinkedIn. Consideration should be given to using social media to more proactively celebrate the Council's successes. There is no doubt that the Council demonstrate influence over the local agenda in Staffordshire and beyond, for example through the Leader's membership on the Local Enterprise Partnership Board. However, the Peer Team reiterated that more could be done to communicate the Council's ambition and success to its communities through social media and other relevant channels.

Organisation

When the Peer Team first visited in 2018, Stafford Borough Council had recently adopted a new Corporate Business Plan, which set out how the Council would deliver across three clear objectives: growth, wellbeing and financial sustainability. A recommendation was made to publish an 'effective and measurable forward plan, setting out Cabinet priorities alongside timescales and milestones'. Significant progress has been made against this recommendation, with the introduction of a 'business flow document' in August 2018, shortly after the Peer Challenge. The document ensures that the Council's Leadership Team are able to effectively keep track of organisational business activity and helps enable the scheduling of items for decision-making earlier to facilitate strategic discussions. Evidence that the Business Flow document was proving successful was triangulated through discussions with the Council, where the peer team heard that scrutiny committee meetings were linked to the business flow and that all middle managers had been trained on how to use the



document. This has resulted in improved business planning and performance management, with discussions about risks and opportunities happening at an earlier stage.

The Business Plan covered the period until 2021 and has subsequently been refreshed to encompass a new business objective focussing on climate change and the green recovery, as well as a broad focus on covid recovery across each of the business objectives. The addition of a climate change objective followed the declaration of a climate emergency in the Borough in July 2019. The team heard examples of the Council's work to tackle climate change, including its commitment to becoming a carbon neutral authority by 2040. The target of 2040 was probed, and the Peer Team suggested that the figure be reviewed to consider whether it was ambitious enough. At the time of the follow-up peer challenge, work was already under way and links established with Stroud District Council, who were the first council in Europe to become carbon neutral. Stafford Borough Council was taking positive steps towards fulfilling its climate change priority, including through the designation of two cabinet members and a senior officer as the climate change leads for the authority. However, the Peer Team recommended that the Council's political leadership consider, and confirm, the level of ambition and will it has aligned to its corporate priority on climate change and the green recovery to ensure that appropriate resources are available to deliver the outcomes required.

Change

During the original peer challenge, the team were impressed by Council employees who were noticeably engaged and motivated. It was recommended that the Council immediately look to utilise the talent and skills of staff at all levels of the organisation to help deliver objectives. The follow-up review offered an opportunity to discuss how untapped potential amongst members of staff had been identified during the pandemic. Like many organisations, Stafford relied on employees working flexibly to deliver services differently during the pandemic. One example provided was the growth of the aforementioned internal communications network: the Council has a small communications team, but just before the pandemic a network of individuals across the organisation was created to coordinate internal messages. This has proved successful and enabled staff to develop their skills and indeed use skills that were not traditionally part of their 'day job'. Further examples were provided that evidenced how the whole council had 'banded together' during a time of need. For example, a community hub was set up during the pandemic and enabled staff and elected members to work together to support vulnerable residents. Examples were shared of staff learning new skills or readily helping other departments, for example a member of the Planning Team had created maps that showed locations of 'help hubs' across the Borough and the successful delivery of business support grants



involved a range of staff working collaboratively across both Stafford and Cannock councils. It was clear that Stafford's employees remain committed and enthusiastic and there were a number of examples during the pandemic where teams had 'stepped up to the plate' to help each other. For example, the elections team were redeployed to cover areas where there were staff shortages or increased workload. Stafford Borough Council employees undoubtedly demonstrated flexibility and willingness to support each other and the Council's services during a busy and challenging time for local government.

During the pandemic, the Council had set up internal recovery groups (financial, community, economic and organisational) to lead the recovery programme. This is an example of the Council utilising the skills and talent of its employees by engaging staff from across the organisation, including those who would not have traditionally become involved in corporate projects of this nature. The internal recovery groups have seized the opportunity to harness the skills and ability of existing staff and, indeed, the Council spoke about individual members of staff 'shining through' during the pandemic. The Peer Team felt that this laid the foundations for creating a formal talent management process, so that rising stars could be developed and nurtured within the Council.

The Council can be commended for redistributing resource and utilising skills across departments to ensure that it could continue to deliver its core services, alongside the additional pressures presented by the pandemic. It was noted during the first peer challenge that training for staff had been reduced in line with overall budget pressures. The Council was already taking steps to redress this by linking aspirations and personal goals to performance and the Council's objectives. Further progress has now been made with the introduction of a cross-council Organisational Development Plan and a formal process for recoding all qualifications held by staff, ensuring the leadership team have a truer understanding of the skills across the whole organisation. Training for managers has been stepped up during the pandemic to help support them manage their teams remotely and the Council continues to work with its employees to embed changes and improvements to the Council offices to equip them for more flexible and hybrid working in the future. It is recommended that the council should continue to recognise and celebrate talent within the organisation by formalising arrangements to effectively manage talent and succession plan, so that the Council's rising stars are retained and developed.

Capacity

During the follow-up review, a significant portion of the discussion was dedicated to the joint working arrangements with neighbouring authority, Cannock Chase Council. Since June 2021, Stafford Borough Council's Chief Executive has been on a



secondment to provide services as the joint chief executive of both Stafford Borough and Cannock Chase Councils. Sharing services between the two councils is not an entirely new arrangement, with a number of support, corporate and front-facing services being shared since 2010. Following the resignation of Cannock Chase Council's managing director in February 2021, the decision was made to appoint the Stafford chief executive in a joint role for a period of 12 months, in order to develop a business case for further shared services between the councils.

The Council recognises the level of transformation required to bring the two management teams at Cannock Chase and Stafford together is significant. There is currently no dedicated transformation team at either council and transformation work relies on 'champions' embedded within the services. Although staff are demonstrating willingness and excitement to be involved in transformation projects, the lack of dedicated transformation team means that responsibility for it sits 'on top of the day job'. The peer team found that this formed part of a larger capacity issue, with the recent departure of a number of senior officers from Cannock Chase Council's senior management team adding pressure on the joint chief executive and other senior officers at both authorities. The Peer Team reviewed structure charts for the two councils and noted the flat structures which, through discussion with the Council, they recognised as leading to the bulk of the 'strategic thinking' falling to the Chief Executive, as other senior officers had more operational duties to deal with. The Council have made progress in addressing this issue by appointing a deputy chief executive at each of the councils, but it was noted that within the small teams and flat structures, there was a level of risk and vulnerability if even one or two members of the senior team became unavailable, for example through sickness. Indeed, due to staff absence, the Chief Executive was already taking on the running of the Development Team, which further stretched his own capacity and ability to move forward the transformation work with Cannock Chase.

The Peer Team emphasised that bringing the two councils' management teams together would require considerable investment but that, if successful, rewards such as financial savings and increased capacity would be realised over time. With the political vision for the council's joint arrangements having clear red lines around sovereignty, the council must also consider the significant resources required to run two sets of council meetings, cabinets and committees, for example. The team heard an example of where the Finance Team had become one shared service, but information for each authority continued to be presented in different ways. Streamlining processes across the two councils would help release some capacity, for example, ensuring that back-office systems are the same for both councils, especially where teams are shared.



The Peer Team emphasised that serious consideration should be given to the strategic capacity to undertake the transformation required, if Cannock Chase and Stafford councils are going to join together long term. While the Council has continued to deliver against its objectives during the pandemic, the long-term ability to continue transforming relies on adequate capacity and resources to enable resilience within the leadership team. It was noted, for example, that the new climate change objective had been added to the Business Plan without the removal or reduction in priority of other objectives. The Council's political leadership need to give careful consideration to prioritisation of the objectives in the business plan, in the context of limited budgets and reduced corporate capacity.

During the original Peer Challenge, the team noted that the Council had strong, well-established partnerships and that the Leader and Chief Executive were influential at a regional and national level. It was recommended that the Council continue to capitalise on the goodwill and capacity of relevant partners to help deliver ambitious plans. It is clear that the Council remains an influential partner in the Staffordshire region, and this is demonstrated through its relationship with the County Council and neighbouring boroughs, for example through current discussions around a devolution deal for Staffordshire. There is no doubt that the pandemic has had a major financial impact on the Council due to a loss of income and additional cost pressures that are likely to continue throughout the financial year. However, the exploration of further shared services, the continued impressive economic growth agenda and the move towards more agile working are likely to help the Council to continue its measured and considered approach to budget management. It is impressive that the Council have shown great resilience and commitment to continue delivering their services as well as adapting approaches to support their communities despite the challenges of the pandemic.

3. Key recommendations

The following are the peer team's updated key recommendations to the council:

Recommendation 1:

Serious consideration should be given to the strategic capacity to undertake the transformation required if Cannock Chase and Stafford Borough councils are going to join together long-term. The amount of resource, capacity and transformation required to bring two councils together should not be underestimated. The Council should review priorities alongside capacity to ensure it has the resources to deliver the level of transformation required.

Recommendation 2:

Formalise arrangements to effectively manage talent and succession plan, so that the Council's rising stars are retained and developed. The Council has identified rising stars, who have gone above and beyond during the pandemic, as well as recruiting graduates to specialised roles. A talent management plan will help ensure that those individuals with the greatest potential are retained and developed at the Council.

Recommendation 3:

Undertake a communications review to ensure that the Council is able to positively promote more of what it is doing for its community. The Council has a number of positive stories to tell and communicating these is a strategic responsibility of the whole council leadership and not just a function of the communications department.

Recommendation 4:

The council should consider and confirm the level of ambition and will it has aligned to its corporate priority on climate change. The Council's business plan's three core objectives were expanded in July 2019, when the Council declared a climate emergency. The Council should review this objective to ensure its associated goals accurately reflect the level of political ambition regarding climate change in the Borough.

Overall, the Peer Team felt that Stafford Borough Council had coped well with the challenges and pressures brought about by the pandemic. To continue on their transformation journey, they will need to consider strategic capacity, but the will and enthusiasm of their officers and members stands them in good stead to remain a reliable and influential council.

4. Next steps

It is recognised that senior political and managerial leadership will want to consider, discuss and reflect on these findings.

Both the peer team and LGA are keen to build on the relationships formed through the peer challenge. The CPC process includes a six-month check-in meeting. This will be a short, facilitated session which creates space for the council's senior leadership to update peers on its progress against the action plan and discuss next steps.



In the meantime, Helen Murray, Principal Adviser for the West Midlands, is the main contact between your authority and the Local Government Association. Helen is available to discuss any further support the council requires.

Helen.murray@local.gov.uk

Annex A

5. Summary of the peer challenge approach

The peer team

Peer challenges are delivered by experienced elected member and officer peers. The make-up of the peer team reflected the focus of the peer challenge and peers were selected on the basis of their relevant expertise. The peers for this follow-up CPC were:

- Kathy O'Leary, Chief Executive of Stroud Borough Council
- Councillor William Nunn, Breckland Council
- Helen Jenkins, LGA Peer Challenge Manager

Scope and Focus

As part of this Corporate Peer Challenge follow-up, the team explored progress against the recommendations from the original peer challenge. The aim of this work was not review performance in service areas at depth, but to review progress against the corporate recommendations made previously. The peer team had considered five questions which formed the core components looked at by all Corporate Peer Challenges, as they are areas that are critical to the councils' performance improvement. They are:

1. Understanding of 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?

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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?

In the original recommendations, were:

Communication

1. Commission an LGA Communications review to support the ambitions of the business plan. External and internal communication requires examination and coordination across to organisation to ensure consistent and transparent messages to Members, staff and stakeholders.

2. Develop a communications strategy to celebrate and communicate the vision set out in the Corporate Business Plan. The Council can point to a number of achievements and examples of community work with positive social impact, however, these appear to be less visible within corporate communications. The Council should seek to more proactively communicate the positive work is undertaking for its community, alongside its growth achievements.

3. Maintain and enhance communications in respect of delivery of current and future plans. As Stafford continues its ambitious journey of transformational change it will be increasingly important to communicate the vision, achievements and plans to key stakeholders to bring partners on the journey with the Council.

Organisation

4. Publish an effective and measurable forward plan. The Leadership Team have taken progressive steps towards developing a long term forward plan setting out Cabinet priorities which includes timescales and milestones. This should be finalised and published to ensure actions have appropriate accountability and that there are mechanisms in place to ensure timely and considered decisions, performance metrics and risk management including contingencies.

5. Review risk appetite and make difficult decisions now to transform and facilitate the delivery of objectives. The Council has an ambitious plan of growth which relies on the pace of change accelerating. It is timely for the Council to grasp the opportunity for increasing the pace of change and review its risk appetite. This may mean taking bold decisions about future structures and direction.

6. Continue to implement new scrutiny structure and ensure appropriate training to enable effective scrutiny and policy development. The alignment of scrutiny committees with the corporate objectives offers an opportunity to provide more predecision scrutiny and policy development. To realise the potential of overview and scrutiny, the Council should offer scrutiny Members training and support to continue to develop essential skills required for robust scrutiny.

Change

7. The Council should immediately look to utilise the talent and skills of staff and Members at all levels of the organisation to deliver objectives. The Council has a wealth of committed and motivated Members and employees with a desire to facilitate change. Consideration should be given to undertaking a skills audit of the workforce to utilise existing expertise and develop talent.

8. Develop, communicate and implement an organisational development programme. To achieve the delivery of corporate objectives the Peer Team recommend the benefit of a cross-council approach to organisational change/development which aligns the Council's workforce activities and skills to the delivery of corporate priorities. The development and implementation of an organisational development programme should include the creation and communication of expectations, values and behaviours required to support change.

9. Continue to capitalise the goodwill and capacity of relevant partners to deliver plans. Stafford has a proven track record at building and facilitating effective partnerships and these relationships can help the Council unlock capacity to deliver its ambitious goals. The Council should ensure that there are adequate and robust arrangements in place so that they can continue to engage the right and relevant partners in the delivery of current and future plans.

10. Identify financial resources to support change management programme. The Council has a consistent and stable financial outlook with a balanced budget and clean audit opinions. Financial resources should be reviewed to identify a budget to invest in a comprehensive change management programme to support the organisational transformational required to meet objectives. This may include a dedicated programme team to provide a focus and drive on key projects.

The peer challenge process

Peer challenges are improvement focused; it is important to stress that this was not an inspection. The process is not designed to provide an in-depth or technical assessment of plans and proposals. The peer team used their experience and knowledge of local government to reflect on the information presented to them by people they met and material that they read.



The peer team prepared by reviewing a range of documents and information in order to ensure they were familiar with the council and the challenges it is facing. This included a statement prepared by the Council which provided an update on the progress made against the 2018 recommendations, as well as how the Council had responded to the coronavirus pandemic. Alongside the progress statement, the council provided numerous documents including their delivery plans for strategic objectives, their communications strategy, climate change and green recovery strategy, staff survey results and member briefings.

The team then spent an afternoon virtually with the Leader and Chief Executive of Stafford Borough Council and the Corporate Business and Partnerships Manager during which they gathered information and explored key lines of enquiry.

This report provides a summary of the peer team's findings. In presenting feedback, they have done so as fellow local government officers and members.