

Bedford Borough Council LGA Corporate Peer Challenge - Action Plan

January 2024

Ref	LGA Recommendation	Action	Cabinet Sponsor/s	Lead Service Area
1.	Ensure the approach to developing the Corporate Plan maximises engagement internally and with partners and communities.	<p><i>The Council recognises that there is an opportunity to develop the Corporate Plan in collaboration with partners and communities in the Borough, and to build on work already underway as the Executive sets out its vision for key priorities.</i></p> <p><i>We will therefore extend the current timeframe by 4 months for engagement and consultation to run until June 2024.</i></p> <p><i>Analysis of the outcomes and a final draft of the Corporate Plan will be presented at Executive in September 2024 before consideration by Full Council.</i></p> <p><i>This action is also linked to Recommendations 2, 4 and 20.</i></p>	Mayor/ Deputy Mayor	Chief Executive
2.	Determine a clear set of council priorities through the development of the Corporate Plan.	<p><i>The Executive has an ongoing programme to develop its priorities through a series of strategies and vision documents. These include Town Centres, Leisure, Health and Wellbeing, and Homelessness.</i></p> <p><i>These vision documents will be integrated into Corporate Plan development to ensure that there is one set of priorities for the Council to work to.</i></p> <p><i>The extension of the engagement period for the Corporate Plan will also allow for further consideration of key priorities in line with the strategies and vision documents.</i></p> <p><i>This action has the same timeframe as Recommendation 1.</i></p>	Mayor/ Deputy Mayor	Chief Executive

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		<i>This action is linked to Recommendations 1 and 4.</i>		
3.	Continue the work to strengthen evidence-based decision-making in the council	<p><i>The Council recognises that it can improve the way in which it uses available evidence to support its decision making, for example, work is already underway to improve staff skills in data analysis as part of this. There is also a workshop planned for Chief Officers and Managers to take this forward.</i></p> <p>By July 2024 the Council will agree a protocol to have a clear standard across all directorates e.g.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share existing examples of strong evidence-based decision making to embed similar practice across all council services, • Ensure best practice from others is sought as part of the process. <p><i>This action is linked to Recommendations 8 and 18.</i></p>	Mayor/ Deputy Mayor	Chief Executive/Corporate Leadership Team/ Performance
4.	Engage with partners around the idea of a strategic partnership body being established for the borough	<p><i>The Council is fortunate in having partners who are willing to work more closely with it to further develop our working relationships.</i></p> <p>Actions will include: -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding partners' views through the Corporate Plan engagement process, • Co-production with partners on developing a strategic partnership body and to agree its priorities and ways of working, • Subject to partners' engagement, hold an initial meeting with partners to agree the terms of 	Mayor/ Deputy Mayor	Chief Executive/ Corporate Leadership Team / Community Engagement

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		<p><i>reference and priorities of a strategic partnership body,</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Work with the strategic partnership body to develop a longer-term Strategic Vision for the whole borough.</i> <p><i>These actions will be carried out from February to August 2024, to aim to hold an initial partnership body meeting in the autumn 2024 and agreement of a strategic vision by February 2025.</i></p> <p><i>This action is linked with Recommendations 1, 2 and 20.</i></p>		
5.	Invest the time and effort to forge the necessary relationships across the council's senior political and managerial leadership – investment in 'top team' development	<p><i>The Council describes the current period as a 'reset' for the organisation and agrees that there is a need to build relationships between the Executive and the senior officer Management Team.</i></p> <p><i>To support Recommendations 5, 6 and 7 the Council will</i></p> <p>-</p>	Cabinet	Corporate Leadership Team
6.	Ensure the senior political and managerial leaders are providing the required collective, corporate and visible leadership for the borough and the organisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Work with LGA and others to support 'top team' development, ways to ensure there is visible leadership and that roles and responsibilities are clarified. This development programme will be agreed and completed by July 2024.</i> <i>Develop a work programme for the joint Executive/MT meetings to develop relationships and focus on key topics around priorities and cross-cutting issues for the Council by February 2024.</i> 		
7.	Urgently re-clarify respective roles and responsibilities across the			

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	senior political and managerial leadership			
8.	Capitalise upon the widespread desire to develop pre-decision scrutiny and, in due course, commission an externally-led review of the approach to Overview and Scrutiny	<p><i>The Council has not had a detailed external review of the Overview and Scrutiny (OSC) function for some time, and pre-decision and policy development scrutiny can be supportive of evidence-based policy making.</i></p> <p>The Council's OSC Chairs Forum and Group Leaders will work with officers to commission an external review to be carried out by July 2024.</p> <p><i>This action is linked to Recommendation 3.</i></p>	Mayor/ Deputy Mayor	Chief Executive/ Democratic Services
9.	Ensure reports for elected members are always of good quality and accurate	<p><i>As set out in response to Recommendation 3, the Council will strengthen evidence-based decision making. Good quality, accurate reports for councillors are a part of that action.</i></p> <p>Actions to support this will include development of training and support for all officers who produce reports.</p> <p>These actions will be delivered by July 2024.</p> <p><i>This action is linked to Recommendation 3.</i></p>	Mayor/ Deputy Mayor	Chief Executive/ Personnel/ Democratic Services
10.	In a context of the council's future financial sustainability being at risk, ensure the driving forward of mitigating in-year	<p><i>The Council has a plan in place to address in-year 23/24 overspend. The overspend has been reduced from £12 million to £4.6 million as Directors have been set targets to achieve in year to manage within the budget.</i></p>	Portfolio Holder for Finance, Risk and Welfare	Asst Chief Executive (Finance) & CFO

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	actions and urgently clarify responsibilities and timescales for determining budget options for 2024/25	<i>In relation to the budget for 24/25, since the Peer Review took place Executive has considered budget options which have been out to public consultation (December/January 24) to feed into budget setting in January 2024. More widely Executive and Management Team are part of the wider discussions on balancing the 24/25 budget.</i>		
11	Establish a completely refreshed approach to budget-setting for 2025/26, founded upon collective endeavour and cross-cutting thinking and with absolute clarity around roles, responsibilities and timescales	<i>The Council notes the comments in the report in relation to the budget setting process, including the council meetings in place for this.</i> <i>A review will take place which will review the requirements for budget setting for an elected mayor set out in the legislation.</i> <i>The Council will also set out a programme to review how it sets its budget, including practice elsewhere, to be completed by September 2024 in time for budget setting for 25/26.</i>	Portfolio Holder for Finance, Risk and Welfare	Asst Chief Executive (Finance) & CFO
12	Corporately provide training for officers on budgetary responsibility and ownership	<i>The Council will refresh the training programme to support 25/26 budget setting, and to develop a One Team approach to ownership of the in-year budget monitoring and budget setting.</i> <i>This to be started by June 2024.</i>	Mayor/ Portfolio Holder for Finance, Risk and Welfare	Director of Corporate Services/ Asst Chief Executive (Finance) & CFO
13	Develop a capital strategy, underpinned by a clear understanding of the council's capital assets base	<i>For these four recommendations, the Council will carry out a fundamental review of its approach to the capital strategy, to bring together the different elements across the authority. This will include consideration of establishing a single Board including elected members,</i>	Portfolio Holder for Finance, Risk and Welfare	Asst Chief Executive (Finance) & CFO

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		<i>which could then develop the capital strategy over a longer term and clarification of the different roles of officers and decision-making processes.</i>		
14	Ensure the council has the expert capacity necessary to leverage appropriate levels of capital funding, including Section 106 monies	<p><i>The timetable for this will be linked with the development of the Corporate Plan, with an aim to have arrangements, if agreed, in place by April 2025.</i></p>	Portfolio Holder for Finance, Risk and Welfare	Asst Chief Executive (Finance) & CFO
15	Extend the council's horizon of the council's capital programme in a context of the ambitions of the Administration and the borough		Portfolio Holder for Finance, Risk and Welfare	Asst Chief Executive (Finance) & CFO
16	Ensure appropriate Executive oversight of the council's approach to capital		Portfolio Holder for Finance, Risk and Welfare	Asst Chief Executive (Finance) & CFO
17	Address the series of 'unintended consequences' that are resulting in issues around staff retention, high proportions of agency staff, ineffective use of people's time and managers at all levels being focused on operational matters	<p><i>The Council has started work in this area which will gather pace over the coming months.</i></p> <p><i>In relation to staff retention, the Council's Workforce Strategy 2022-26 has started to address this issue, for example with the current work on the Employee Value Proposition (EVP). This will be further developed and actioned.</i></p> <p><i>Where there is a use of agency staff the Council will actively continue to promote "temporary to permanent" appointments, which will also be supported by the ongoing Workforce Strategy as well.</i></p>	Executive	Corporate Leadership Team / Transformation

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		<p><i>The Council will also consider a re-organisation of how services work together cross-functionally, to move away from a ‘siloed’ approach.</i></p> <p><i>These actions will be linked with the Executive’s Efficiency Plan, which includes a Workforce Operating Model workstream, to be delivered over 2025/28.</i></p>		
18	Develop a streamlined approach to performance reporting, aligned with financial reporting, relating to the new Corporate Plan and include benchmarking to enable the comparison of Bedford with similar councils	<p><i>The Council agrees that it needs to build on its current performance reporting, which is rich in data but needs strengthening in relation to analysis and understanding of the drivers of what the data is showing.</i></p> <p><i>With the introduction of the new Corporate Plan, the Council will take the opportunity to not only look at relevant indicators, but also consider how it can enhance its reporting as recommended, including benchmarking.</i></p> <p><i>This action will be implemented alongside the Corporate Plan, with the new approach outlined in the final report to the Executive in September 2024.</i></p> <p><i>This is also linked to Recommendation 3.</i></p>	Mayor/ Deputy Mayor	Corporate Leadership Team /Monitoring Officer
19	Establish the necessary mechanisms and approaches to: a. Enhance the informing and engaging of staff across the organisation	<p><i>The Peer Challenge report is clear that staff want to be more informed and engaged, and that there are mechanisms already in place which can be developed.</i></p> <p><i>The Council will work to increase its dialogue with staff, to both improve how it delivers messaging, but also to ensure it continues listens to staff views and input, and feeds back on</i></p>	Mayor/ Deputy Mayor	Chief Executive /Communications & Communities

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	b. Enable managers at all levels to feel more empowered	<p><i>the actions taken. An example of this is shown in the engagement approach for the Corporate Plan with a number of methods in place to hear views from our staff.</i></p> <p><i>The Efficiency Plan, new Corporate Plan and increased partnership working all offer an opportunity to also work differently.</i></p> <p><i>Options include –</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>• Review of One Team and One Team Hour, ensuring we include all staff and regular updates on projects previously discussed,</i> <i>• Development of the Pulse Survey, led by HR, and how the Council gathers staff views,</i> <i>• Relaunch of Bedford Leaders to create opportunities for improved discussion across services and enable managers at all levels to feel more empowered,</i> <i>• Build on the success of some teams' internal communication plans by Directorate and ensure that a similar offer is found throughout the Council.</i> <p><i>A communications and engagement plan will be developed in consultation with staff to establish the detailed actions for each of the options, to be in place by September 2024 in line with the new Corporate Plan and ongoing Efficiency Plan.</i></p>		/ Corporate Leadership Team
20	Switch the thinking, narrative and approach of the organisation to reflect the huge opportunities for the Borough and engage, enable and inspire others	<p><i>The Council recognises that it has an opportunity to focus on the Borough's potential with the 'reset' offered with new Corporate Plan, the development of a Strategic partnership and development of a strategic vision for the Borough.</i></p>	Cabinet	Corporate Leadership Team

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	to ensure they are capitalised on	<i>Development of this narrative will therefore be part of the work set out above in particular in relation to Recommendations 1, 2 ,4 and 19, in the same timeframe.</i>		