

Bedford Borough Council

LGA Corporate Peer Challenge - Action Plan – SUMMARY OF ACTIONS TO DATE

October 2024

Ref	LGA Recommendation	Action	Executive 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
	May 2024 Update	<p><i>The Council has extended the deadline for development of the Corporate Plan, and timetable is on track for early autumn consideration of the Plan at Executive and then Full Council.</i></p> <p><i>Results of the engagement will be analysed over the next few months for consideration by the Executive and CLT in July/August, to then consider if any changes will be made to the 'Plan on a Page' of the Corporate Plan.</i></p>		
	September 2024 update	<p><i>Following the extended engagement phase the Executive has considered the engagement outcomes and made a number of changes to the Corporate Plan as a result. Details can be found in the report to the Executive for its 11th September 2024 meeting to agree the Corporate Plan for onward referral to Full Council.</i></p> <p>https://councillorsupport.bedford.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?Clid=116&Mid=6494</p> <p><i>See Item 13 for the report and appendices.</i></p>		

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		<i>The Corporate Plan is included in the information pack for the CPC follow up visit.</i>		
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> <p><i>This action is linked to Recommendations 1 and 4.</i></p>	Mayor/ Deputy Mayor	Chief Executive
	May 2024 Update	<i>See notes for Action 1. The integration of vision documents will form part of the analysis and updates to Executive and CLT.</i>		
	September 2024 update	<p><i>The Executive has developed a series of strategies and vision documents over the past year including –</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Town Centre Vision Statement – September 2023</i> <i>Improving the Health Estate of Bedford Borough – October 2023</i> <i>Leisure Vision and Strategy – November 2023</i> <i>Carbon Reduction Delivery Strategy – November 2023</i> <i>Early Years Strategy – January 2024</i> <i>Temporary Accommodation Acquisition Strategy – January 2024</i> <i>Health and Wellbeing Strategy – March 2024</i> <i>Community Safety Partnership Strategic Plan – March 2024</i> 		

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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2024 – 2029 – June 2024</i> <i>A Cultural Vision for Bedford Borough 2025-2030 – June 2024</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><i>By July 2024 the Council will agree a protocol to have a clear standard across all directorates e.g.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Share existing examples of strong evidence-based decision making to embed similar practice across all council services,</i> <i>Ensure best practice from others is sought as part of the process.</i> <p><i>This action is linked to Recommendations 8 and 18.</i></p>	Mayor/ Deputy Mayor	Chief Executive/ Corporate Leadership Team/ Performance
	May 2024 Update	<p><i>A draft data strategy is in development which will be linked with the Council's Technology Strategy.</i></p> <p><i>We are working on developing performance dashboards for key high demand, high budget pressure areas.</i></p> <p><i>A suite of performance indicators will also be developed to track the progress of delivery of the draft Corporate Plan.</i></p>		
	September 2024 update	<i>We have reviewed the reporting method for the Corporate Plan, and a new style delivery report was presented to the Executive in September 2024.</i>		

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		https://councillorsupport.bedford.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?Clid=116&MId=6494 Item 12 <i>Performance dashboards are in development for high spend areas with a focus on Temporary Accommodation and Adult Social Care. Progress has not been as advanced as hoped.</i>		
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"> • <i>Understanding partners' views through the Corporate Plan engagement process,</i> • <i>Co-production with partners on developing a strategic partnership body and to agree its priorities and ways of working,</i> • <i>Subject to partners' engagement, hold an initial meeting with partners to agree the terms of reference and priorities of a strategic partnership body,</i> • <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>	Mayor/ Deputy Mayor	Chief Executive/ CLT/ Community Engagement
	May and September 2024	<p><i>This action was initially paused whilst the Council carried out a longer engagement phase for the Corporate Plan.</i></p> <p><i>Since the LGA Corporate Peer Challenge visit, Universal Destinations and Experiences has been working on its options for</i></p>		

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		<p><i>a possible theme park in Bedford Borough, which is of national significance in its economic potential. The Council has been working with partner authorities in relation to this, and led on organising a letter of support from the six authorities supporting the proposal.</i></p> <p><i>The six Local Authorities in South Midlands Authorities' group have also agreed to put forward an expression of interest in a devolution deal under the new government's devolution policy.</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>To support Recommendations 5, 6 and 7 the Council will -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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. 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. 	Executive	CLT
6.	Ensure the senior political and managerial leaders are providing the required collective, corporate and visible leadership for the borough and the organisation			
7.	Urgently re-clarify respective roles and responsibilities across the senior political and managerial leadership			
	May 2024 update			
		<p><i>We have held a facilitated "away day" with Executive and CLT to focus on priorities and top team development. This includes a work programme of Executive/CLT joint meetings in development based on outcomes from away day.</i></p>		

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		<i>Executive have also been working with mentors, and CLT is also to consider having mentors.</i>		
	September 2024 update	<i>The Executive and CLT has ongoing joint meetings every 6 weeks. Current focus for those meetings has been on budget development for 25/26.</i>		
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><i>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.</i></p> <p><i>This action is linked to Recommendation 3.</i></p>	Mayor/ Deputy Mayor	Chief Executive/ Democratic Services
	May 2024 Update	<i>We are currently developing a scope for an external review, and looking to convene a working group of Members from the O&S Committees to support the development of the review and any actions arising.</i>		
	September 2024 update	<i>Progress has been paused due to commitment to deliver the general election. Work also to be considered in context of other work related to the Constitution.</i>		
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><i>Actions to support this will include development of training and support for all officers who produce reports.</i></p>	Mayor/ Deputy Mayor	Chief Executive/ Personnel/ Democratic Services

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		<p><i>These actions will be delivered by July 2024.</i></p> <p><i>This action is linked to Recommendation 3.</i></p>		
	May 2024 Update	<i>A training programme is to be agreed with Democratic Services to then deliver to officers in service areas.</i>		
	September 2024 update	<p><i>Regular analysis is being undertaken of the reports for Executive and Full Council to establish where the key areas of development and need for consistency is required to inform the training for officers.</i></p> <p><i>There will be sessions at the 'Bedford Leaders' meetings on both report writing and working in a political environment, to raise awareness about the need for improved report writing and good governance in all areas, and specifically in respect of the content of quality reports submitted to all meetings. These sessions will also inform the training programme's focus to ensure it meets the Council's requirements.</i></p>		
10.	In a context of the council's future financial sustainability being at risk, ensure the driving forward of mitigating in-year actions and urgently clarify responsibilities and timescales for determining budget options for 2024/25	<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> <p><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></p>	Portfolio Holder for Finance, Risk and Welfare	Asst Chief Executive (Finance) & CFO
	May 2024 Update	<i>This task is complete, no further actions required. As set out above, the Executive and CLT are working jointly through the process for balancing the budget in year and to develop the 25/26 budget.</i>		

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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	<p><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></p> <p><i>A review will take place which will review the requirements for budget setting for an elected mayor set out in the legislation.</i></p> <p><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></p>	Portfolio Holder for Finance, Risk and Welfare	Asst Chief Executive (Finance) & CFO
	May 2024 Update	<p><i>A revised budget process is in the process of being designed. Discussion has taken place with the LGA on further support that could be provided, particularly in relation to taking a cross cutting approach.</i></p> <p><i>Deadline to have draft outline process for consideration by CLT and Executive is 31 May 2024.</i></p>		
	September 2024 update	<i>A revised budget process is in place which incorporates decision making with the Executive and CLT and regular updates to Bedford Leaders.</i>		
12	Corporately provide training for officers on budgetary responsibility and ownership	<p><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></p> <p><i>This to be started by June 2024.</i></p>	Mayor/ Portfolio Holder for Finance, Risk and Welfare	Director of Corporate Services/ Asst Chief Executive (Finance) & CFO
	May 2024 Update	<i>Corporate Training will be provided in the Autumn. Investigating running joint training with the LGA to provide view of best practice alongside local narrative.</i>		

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	September 2024 update	<i>Training is still outstanding due to vacancies in the team.</i>		
13	Develop a capital strategy, underpinned by a clear understanding of the council's capital assets base	<p><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, which could then develop the capital strategy over a longer term and clarification of the different roles of officers and decision-making processes.</i></p> <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
14	Ensure the council has the expert capacity necessary to leverage appropriate levels of capital funding, including Section 106 monies			
15	Extend the council's horizon of the council's capital programme in a context of the ambitions of the Administration and the borough			
16	Ensure appropriate Executive oversight of the council's approach to capital			
	May 2024 Update	<p><i>The Capital Strategy will be updated in light of the work taking place in relation to the Asset Management Strategy which is currently being refreshed. The aim is to have a refreshed strategy in place for the January Executive meeting.</i></p> <p><i>The horizon for the Capital Programme will be extended to 10 years for the June 2024 Executive report.</i></p> <p><i>Strategic Asset Board has been established which provides corporate oversight of Capital Projects; linked to Informal Executive Asset Strategy meetings.</i></p>		

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		<i>Revised arrangements for 2024/2025 have been put in place to provide renewed focus on monitoring the capital programme.</i>		
	September 2024 Update	<p><i>The extended capital programme and refresh of the Capital Strategy is now planned for implementation for the 2025/206 Budget Set as agreed with Members.</i></p> <p><i>Strategic Asset Board is functioning well, and capital bids will be considered by a task and finish group from the Board in due course.</i></p>		
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> <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>	Executive	CLT/ Transfor- mation
	May 2024 Update	<i>The Council is working on reviewing the structure and resources for the organisation.</i>		

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18				
	September 2024 update	<p><i>The restructure now underway and consultation was launched Sept 24</i></p> <p><i>Information on this is provided separately in the updated information pack for the CPC follow up visit.</i></p>		
	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>		
	May 2024 Update	<p><i>The council has launched a programme to support Data Apprenticeships at Level 3 and 4, which is now underway.</i></p> <p><i>A review is underway to consider how services use performance reports already produced</i></p>		
	September 2024 update	<p><i>The Council has reviewed its reporting of the Corporate Plan, and a new model has been introduced for the most recent update presented to the Executive in September 2024. This includes both performance data and examples of actions and achievements as part of that Plan. This is the format that will continue with the new Corporate Plan reports for the Executive.</i></p>		

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		<i>Services will continue to receive detailed data updates, and those areas of concern will see a 'deep dive' approach to support the analysis of reasons for challenging performance.</i>		
19	<p>Establish the necessary mechanisms and approaches to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Enhance the informing and engaging of staff across the organisation Enable managers at all levels to feel more empowered 	<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 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>	Mayor/ Deputy Mayor	Chief Executive /Communications & Communities /CLT

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	May 2024 Update	<p><i>Since the Peer Review we have had more engagement with staff e.g. a Corporate Plan survey specifically for all staff, meetings with teams at their request, and drop in sessions for questions and feedback.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>One Team has been reviewed and the type of information and content is changing, with more 'behind the scenes' as well as key information being shared to raise awareness across the Council about various services and functions</i> <i>One Team Hour – this will have as in-person event once per year (mini conference format with emphasis on projects) as well as the regular online sessions</i> <i>Staff feedback from Corporate Plan survey will also be used to analyse and flag any key issues e.g. wellbeing</i> <i>Bedford Leaders – we have completed a survey and a plan has been developed from feedback to change the approach e.g. the subjects to be discussed</i> <i>Internal comms by Directorates – we are starting to share between Directorates to show different approaches</i> <i>The Communication and Engagement Plan is on hold because of Universal</i> 		
	September 2024 update	<p><i>Ongoing actions include:-</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Plans being developed for One Team in person</i> <i>HR and comms have made progress with launch of STARS awards to recognise staff internally and share staff stories going forward.</i> <i>Bedford Leaders has changed emphasis and was well received on basis of feedback with more engaging activities, opportunities to feedback and a wider variety of things discussed.</i> <i>Pulse survey delayed until after restructure.</i> 		

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20	Switch the thinking, narrative and approach of the organisation to reflect the huge opportunities for the Borough and engage, enable and inspire others to ensure they are capitalised on	<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> <p><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></p>	Executive	CLT
	May 2024 Update	<p><i>Work has started on this, linked with potential major development project by Universal.</i></p> <p><i>Narrative work is underway, including:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>• Scene setting</i> <i>• A review of the key messages about the Borough to be used when meeting with external partners both locally, regionally, nationally and internationally</i> <i>• Developing a programme of profile-raising about the Borough through local govt media and other forums e.g. trade press</i> <i>• Linking in with One Team programme to talk about both the Council and the Borough overall e.g. 'Sharing Our Successes' theme, with proactive work to highlight good news and best practice.</i> 		
	September 2024 update	<p><i>Narrative work continues, including -</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>• Articles in trades press written around Elections and changes to Housing team with some limited success.</i> <i>• Profile raising work continues around Universal and tying council to the potential delivery of a UKPLC project.</i> <i>• Draft Corporate Plan comms drafted for explaining this clearly to public and our role as 'Place Leader'</i> <i>• Key themes developed for Borough to showcase the best of the Borough to external partners</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>○ A Unique History</i> <i>○ A Growing Place</i> 		

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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>Attracting Investment</i> ○ <i>Exciting Cultural offer</i> ○ <i>Our future</i> • <i>Employee Value Proposition piece also complete between comms, web and HR for how we talk about ourselves to potential employees.</i> 		