



BEDFORD
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Corporate Peer Challenge
Progress Review Update
Briefing Note
October 2024

Introduction

This briefing provides a concise overview of Bedford Borough Council's current progress against the Action Plan following the Local Government Association Corporate Peer Challenge (CPC). It also includes an update on the broader context within which the Council is operating, focusing on its financial situation, Corporate Plan, and the ongoing corporate restructure.

Also provided to the Peer Challenge Team in the weblink are the following -

- **LGA CPC Recommendations Action Plan** – actions and updates on progress since the Peer Challenge in October 2023
- **Financial position - Reports to the most recent Executive, 11 September 2024**
 - Revenue and Capital Budget Trends
 - Treasury Management update
 - Medium Term Financial Strategy refresh
- **Corporate Plan**
 - Report to Executive, 11 September 2024
 - Corporate Plan 2024/25 – 2027/28
 - Engagement Summary Report

Corporate Restructure - Consultation Document will be attached as this is not suitable to included in the weblink.

1. LGA CPC Recommendations and Action Plan

The Council has an agreed Action Plan in place in response to the Corporate Peer Challenge recommendations from October 2023. A detailed table is attached in the information pack.

Some highlights include-

- **Corporate Plan** – the Executive decided to extend the period of engagement with the public and stakeholders. Results from this led to changes in the draft Corporate Plan, which are set out in the papers in the information pack on the Plan. The Executive has also continued to develop its strategies and vision documents to set out in more detail its priorities.
- **Partnership working** – since the Corporate Peer Challenge visit it has been announced that Universal Destinations and Experiences are exploring the option of building a theme park and resort within Bedford Borough. This will be the first Universal theme park in Europe. Bedford Borough Council has been working with neighbouring authorities, central government and stakeholders as this project progresses. The potential theme park and resort will serve as a major draw for tourists, attracting millions of annual visitors, with many projected to come from Europe and overseas. It will also help bolster the UK's profile as a leader in the creative industries, a must-see visitor destination and business investment hub, resulting in growth for the region. More can be seen at <https://universalukproject.co.uk/>. In addition, the Council is one of six authorities in the South Midlands to join together to put forward an expression of interest to the Government regarding a devolution deal.

- **Executive and Corporate Leadership** – the Council’s Executive and the Corporate Leadership team have an established programme of joint meetings in place to take forward the key strategic issues for the Council. The Executive has also been working with the LGA to access development support.
- **Budget processes** – these have been reviewed and updated. A **Strategic Asset Board** is in place in relation to capital projects.
- **Restructure** – a restructure proposal has been put forward in relation to the Council’s directorate structure and roles, and is currently out for consultation. More details are below.
- **Performance reporting** – a new model of delivery report has been introduced, as seen in the most recent report on the Corporate Plan. This can be seen in the most recent Executive papers at Item 12, Appendix A
<https://councillorsupport.bedford.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=116&MId=6494&Ver=4>
- **Communications and Council Vision** – work is progressing on new ways of communicating with staff, including a new ‘Our Bedford STAR – staff recognition scheme to recognise excellence, as well as a new Employee Value Proposition to support recruitment.

2. Financial Position

The most recent report to Executive on 11 September 2024 on the Council’s Revenue Budget position shows that there is a forecast of £5.5m overspend in the current financial year. The report sets out the ways in which these challenges are being addressed.

The Medium-Term Financial Strategy update report shows the central case cumulative funding gap would be £42.2m. The assumptions on which this is based are set out in the report.

3. Corporate Plan

As set out in the Action Plan update, the Executive decided to have a longer period of time for engagement with key stakeholders and the public.

This allowed for online and in-person engagement with our staff and the public. As set out in the report, there were a range of events and activities to provide people with opportunities to hear about the proposed Plan and to provide feedback.

With the extended engagement phase, analysis was provided to the Executive to inform whether it wished to make any changes. As a result, there were changes to both the ‘Ways of Working’ section of the Plan as well as the ‘Plan on a Page’ summarised as follows -

‘Ways of Working’

- Principles – Clarity on “Place Leadership” and “Community Collaboration” to remove duplication,
- Delivery of goals – Emphasis on working with all ages and communities in developing our services,
- Delivery of goals – Stronger reference to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion.

'Plan on a Page' Priorities and Objectives

- Updated the priority to “Supporting Individuals and Families”, clarified the focus relating to school achievement, and focused one objective on Children and Young People and one on Adults,
- In relation to ‘Protecting the Environment’, there is clearer language on climate change,
- ‘Stimulating Economic Growth’ has very clear reference to the entire borough, and has included reference to digital connectivity as one of the objectives,
- ‘Promoting Health and Wellbeing’ has clearer language, and a focus on Council-owned sports and leisure assets.

The draft Corporate Plan will be considered by Full Council on 9th October 2024.

4. Corporate Restructure

The Council has begun consultation with affected staff on proposals for a corporate restructure to address the following challenges that have emerged as a result of previous restructures as well as emerging priorities for the Council -

- Limited strategic capacity
- Weakened ownership and accountability
- Inconsistent structures
- Siloed working.

Six design principles have been developed that underpin this proposal: –

1. Strong Vision and Leadership - Enables Elected and Officer leaders to set, communicate and direct a clear vision.

2. Accountability - Clearly defines roles and responsibilities to enable clear lines of accountability and strengthen ownership taking.

3. Efficiency - Consolidates activities and functions to ensure the Council operates at its optimum efficiency.

4. Local Democratic Legitimacy - Facilitates strong, transparent relationships with Elected Members.

5. Integrated Whole - Ensures all areas work as an integrated whole.

6. Engagement - Enables and supports our Residents, Businesses and Partners to engage with us in a meaningful way.

The organisational structure of the Council needs to be coherent and allow sufficient capacity to ensure:

- Robust and effective governance and assurance
- Support for the delivery of the current and emerging new Corporate Plan
- That the Council can meet the needs of residents and businesses
- Resilience to changing legislation and landscape for local government.

The detailed timeline is:

- Formal consultation with the recognised Trade Unions - 4th September 2024
 - Commencement of formal staff consultation - 4th September 2024
 - Respond to Consultation - 21st October 2024
 - General Purposes Committee - 5th November 2024
 - Full Council approval - 27th November 2024
 - Appointment to posts Commences - December 2024
 - If applicable, redundancies to take effect -31st March 2025
 - Effective date of new structure - 1st April 2025 or earlier with agreement
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