

Corporate peer challenge follow up session



Purpose

This paper captures the main issues and related next actions, which arose from the follow up session after the corporate Peer Challenge Review on 2 November 2016.

Key issues under discussion

A wide ranging discussion was undertaken following a reminder of the key messages from the corporate peer challenge. There was general consensus that the key findings from the peer challenge were accurate. Fourteen members attended the follow up session and the key issues under discussion should be viewed in context. The following specific actions were agreed by the members in attendance to be explored further.

Business rates – enable all members to get a better understanding of the implications of changes to business rates and the impact on the council's future funding model. Members recognized that regular information has been provided on issues connected to the budget. However, a number of members are still clearly not aware of the changes to business rates which are very likely and what this will mean for the council's balance of funding between RSG, business rates and income. A briefing session for all members would probably be useful but this needs to be checked back with Group Leaders.

A more commercial approach – members picked up on the issue of taking a more commercial approach. This recognized some of the work already underway, but fundamentally, there was agreement that more needs to be done. Members recognized that the council's commercial skills were underdeveloped (like many other councils). There is likely to be a need to secure these skills from the market, rather than relying on these being developed within the organization (although there was discussion on the undoubted value in looking to do this as well). Any recruitment of an officer as a Commercial Manager (or similar) should be undertaken on a flexible basis i.e. a fixed term contract, with clear income targets set. Bringing forward a business case for this was supported by members.

Enabling members to be more outward looking – a small amount of discussion focused on members' perception that they are often unable to gain a good understanding of the wider metrics in Fylde, beyond data being reported directly by services. For example, members overall seemed to lack an understanding of the health of the Fylde economy e.g. level of unemployment, number of businesses. In other words, embedding key data in committee reports periodically would enable members to understand the wider picture e.g. health data in leisure service reports, economic data on reports on business etc.

A more 'interventionist' council – members discussed at length that the council often takes a 'passive' role in major areas. This is underpinned by members' own behavior e.g. a desire from many to preserve the borough or for the status quo. Members recognized that this often led to things happening to Fylde, rather than the council playing a role in making them happen or shaping events. For example, housing developers often approach

the council rather than members providing a clear and consistent steer on what they want (what kinds of development and seeking out developers likely to deliver it). The issue was not isolated to development. It was a wide ranging discussion which members agreed more often (but not all the time) that the council should be more 'interventionist' – providing a lead. Precisely what this means and how they would enact this needs greater unpicking and discussion with other members.

Political leadership – some discussion focused on relationships between members. The members in attendance agreed that relationships were often poor, although paradoxically most members found they could agree on specific operational/service issues more often than not with their fellow members. Members agreed they should seek to build better relationships between the Groups. They also acknowledged that some of this was personality driven (on all sides). Changes to the governance system have not delivered some members expectations about the nature of their individual (or Group's) role in the new system. All members need to recognize the political reality of a council with one party who has an overall majority. Before all members recognize the implications of this, there is likely to be little traction in improving relationships.