

Report to: **Overview and Scrutiny Committee**  
Date: **19 November 2019**  
Title: **Peer Challenge - update on Governance**  
Portfolio Area: **Leader – Cllr N Jory**  
Wards Affected: **All**  
Urgent Decision: **N** Approval and clearance obtained: **Y**

Date next steps can be taken: **Immediate**

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**Recommendation:**

**That the Overview & Scrutiny Committee notes the progress to date on delivery of the governance recommendations in the Peer Challenge Action Plan in relation to Recommendation 2 ‘Strengthening the Council’s political governance arrangements’.**

**1. Executive summary**

- 1.1 This report provides an overview of the progress against the Peer Challenge Action Plan but it is limited to Recommendation 2 of the Peer Challenge – ‘Strengthening the Council’s political governance arrangements’.
- 1.2 Appendix A summarises the current position in relation to Recommendation 2.

**2. Background**

- 2.1 The Peer Challenge was a joint review of both Councils carried out in November 2018 by the Local Government Association (‘LGA’) but with individual recommendations for each Council in relation to the Governance and Political issues.
- 2.2 A number of the LGA recommendations related to ensuring effective joint working across the two Councils to ensure their future financial sustainability and to set a clear direction for both Councils. Accordingly, following the Council meetings in February 2019, a Joint Working Group was set up in order to review the recommendations made by the LGA and to develop an Action Plan for the Councils to implement.

- 2.3 A Peer Challenge Joint Working Group comprising three Members of both Councils met on 25 February 2019 in order to consider measures that could be implemented in the coming 12-18 months, and an Action Plan was approved by the Hub Committee in March 2019.
- 2.4 Significant progress has been made in delivering the proposed actions following the elections in May 2019 and a progress report was taken to the Overview & Scrutiny Committee in July 2019.
- 2.5 This report provides a further update on progress since the July 2019 Overview & Scrutiny meeting.

### **3 Outcomes/outputs**

- 3.1 This report relates only to Recommendation 2 of the Peer Challenge Report - 'Strengthening the Council's political governance arrangements' and the agreed actions are set out in the attached Appendix A (Peer Challenge Action Plan Update November 2019).
- 3.2 Following the 2019 local elections, 15 new Councillors were elected to West Devon Borough Council and the Council has appointed a new Leader.
- 3.3 A full Induction Programme was carried out throughout May and June 2019 and available to all Members comprising mandatory and optional sessions. A separate report on the Induction Programme and Member Development will be included on the Committee agenda on 14 January 2020.
- 3.4 Whilst the Joint Working Group has not met since February, joint briefings with South Hams District Council are being considered on a case by case basis where there are common areas of interest.
- 3.5 Joint member sessions were held on the Joint Local Plan, Risk Management (July 2019) and a Climate Change workshop (September 2019). The Political Structures Working Groups (PSWG) of both Councils have recommended holding joint Overview & Scrutiny and Audit Committee meetings on common areas and the Chairmen of these bodies are to discuss how to take this forward. A joint Waste Working Group was held on 13 November and a Joint IT Working Group is to be set up to discuss the Council's future IT platforms which will be key to delivering future efficiencies.
- 3.6 The Senior Leadership Team continue to actively engage with Lead Members to further identify areas for joint briefing and training sessions.
- 3.7 The PSWG met on 8 October 2019 and considered a variety of issues, including a review of the Hub Committee, webcasting, recorded votes and unstarred minutes. A report from the PSWG was taken to the special Council meeting on 5 November 2019 which agreed recommendations on webcasting, skype meetings and recorded votes.

- 3.8 Additionally, the Senior Leadership Team restructure was completed at the beginning of September 2019 with a new Director of Governance & Assurance who has responsibility across both Councils for consistency and transparency and oversight of effective decision-making and committee processes, with a focus on ensuring that processes and procedures are carried out properly, ethically and lawfully.
- 3.9 There is already tighter monitoring of all draft reports by the Monitoring Officer and Chief Finance Officer to ensure that decisions are being taken at the right level and further report writing guidance is planned for early 2020.

### **Summary**

- 3.10 This report demonstrates positive progress in achieving objectives in recommendation 2 of the Action Plan since it was agreed in the spring.
- 3.11 Monthly progress updates will be provided to Senior Leadership Team via the Councils Programme Board (which oversees all corporate projects) and we will provide short updates on further progress through the Member Bulletin.
- 3.12 The Local Government Association best practice is for a smaller team to visit the Council to see what progress is being made. The Council will arrange with the LGA for a review of progress to be undertaken in Autumn 2020.

### **4. Options available and consideration of risk**

- 4.1 The Action Plan has been agreed by Members and as such this report provides an update on delivery of that plan

### **5. Proposed Way Forward**

- 5.1 To agree the progress made to date and confirm when a further update is due along with any areas where the Committee would consider a more in depth update.

### **6. Implications**

Implications	Relevant to proposals Y/N	Details and proposed measures to address
Legal/Governance	N	No direct implications – the report provides an update on an Action Plan previously agreed by Members. Any changes to governance arrangements within the Constitution will require Council approval.
Financial implications to include reference to value for money	N	No direct implications – the report does set out a number of actions being taken to contribute to the future financial sustainability of the Council however no decision is being made on these in this report.

Risk	Y	The main risk is capacity and pace to deliver the actions in line with the action plan. There is a significant amount of work to be undertaken in a short space of time however project plans are in place to manage progress and this will be reported through the programme board to SLT on a monthly basis.
Supporting Corporate Strategy	Y	Overall the Peer Challenge recommendations contribute to the Council Efficiency theme however they cut across all strands of the Corporate Strategy
<b>Comprehensive Impact Assessment Implications</b>		
Equality and Diversity	N	None
Safeguarding	N	None
Community Safety, Crime and Disorder	N	None
Health, Safety and Wellbeing	N	None
Other implications	N	None

### **Supporting Information**

#### **Appendices:**

Appendix A – Peer Challenge Action Plan Update November 2019

#### **Background Papers:**

Peer Challenge Action Plan Hub Committee Report