

Report of the Cabinet Member for Finance & Strategy

Council – 3 March 2015

WLGA PEER REVIEW REPORT AND ACTION PLAN

Purpose:	To advise Members of the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) Peer Review report and to outline the action being taken in response to the report's recommendations.
Policy Framework:	Corporate Plan
Reason for Decision:	To update Members on the finding of the Peer Review and to publish the report, which will form part of the Council's overall improvement plans.
Consultation:	Cabinet Members, Executive Board, Legal, Finance, Access to Services
Recommendation(s):	It is recommended that Council: 1) Notes the WLGA Peer Review report, contained in Appendix A. 2) Notes the action being taken in response to the Peer Review report.
Report Author:	Dean Taylor
Finance Officer:	Mike Hawes
Legal Officer:	Patrick Arran
Access to Services Officer:	Euros Owen

1.0 Introduction: Background to Peer Reviews

- 1.1 The Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) peer review for Swansea took place between 29 September and 1 October 2014
- 1.2 The WLGA offers every council in Wales a peer review once every four years. Whilst not a requirement, there is a clear expectation that all councils will have a peer review.
- 1.3 The decision to have a Peer Review last Autumn was based on a number of benefits:

- To learn from elsewhere and to improve what we do
- We have identified self-evaluation as one of the areas to address as part of the new performance improvement framework
- To assist preparations for the WAO corporate assessment
- To support the overall objective of sector led self-regulation and improvement in Wales

2.0 Focus of the Peer Review

2.1 Three key areas of focus were agreed for the Peer Review:

Delivery	Our capacity and capability to deliver: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improvement Priorities • Policy Commitments • And in particular <i>Sustainable Swansea – fit for the future</i>
Change	Our ability to manage change across the organisation, to communicate & engage staff in change. Especially the Innovation Programme
Governance	The effectiveness of our internal arrangements in providing sound, robust and transparent governance for our changing requirements

3.0 Review Team

3.1 The Council requested a Review Team with experience of leading an English unitary with similar characteristics and challenges to Swansea and of managing a large council through significant change.

3.2 We were fortunate to have an excellent team which fulfilled this requirement. The team members, supported by the WLGA, were:

- Cllr. Graham Chapman, Deputy Leader of Nottingham City Council
- Nick Hodgson, former Chief Executive of Derbyshire County Council
- Ben Spinks, Assistant Chief Executive at the London Borough of Brent
- Rory Borealis, Executive Director (Resources) and Working Smarter Delivery Lead at Walsall Council.

4.0 Review Process

4.1 The Peer Review process involved:

- Review of documentation
- Interviews with 24 Members (Cabinet Members, Group Leaders, Chair of Scrutiny, Chair of Audit etc)

- Interviews with 27 Officers (Executive Board, Heads of Service and senior managers)
- Workshops with 38 Officers
- Interviews with 6 Partners
- A tour of the city

4.2 The Review Team fed back the headlines after the process and the Review Report was received in December 2014.

4.3 The process now is to publish the report, via this report to Council and to outline the action proposed to address the recommendations from the Peer Review Team. A detailed Action Plan will be reported to Cabinet in the next few months.

5.0 Peer Review Report

5.1 The Peer Review report is attached as **Appendix A**. The report has an Executive Summary and is structured around the three themes of Governance, Change and Delivery. It contains 20 recommendations with links to case studies of Councils we can learn from in key areas.

5.2 The report contains both areas of strength and areas for improvement, against the 3 themes. It is pleasing to note that the Team found a clear sense of pride in the city and the council and a commitment to improving the lives of residents. Equally they found a council that provides good services, is aware of the scale of the challenges ahead and has evident talent to lead the transformation required.

5.3 Whilst the Team were positive about the Council's self-awareness and our plans for change, they were less convinced that the vision and detail behind this is in place. A key recommendation from the Review, which is an area where work has already started, is the need for a "Swansea Story".

5.4 The findings on Governance, Change and Delivery equally show areas of real strength as well as areas where we need to improve. The dominant themes from this are:

- Quicker and smoother decision making with a greater focus on action, not meetings
- Working as "one Council" and breaking down service silos, particularly in implementing change, sharing resources and fostering innovation
- Establishing a single and consistent narrative for change, linked to visible and empowering leadership at all levels, shared learning and greater staff engagement
- Develop the Council's role as a city and community leader and a stronger presence for Swansea, working with partners
- Becoming a more commercial organisation, developing skills, developing opportunities for trading and exploiting our assets

- And finally and perhaps most importantly, the theme that is woven throughout the report is that of the need for cultural change to underpin, enable and drive the transformational changes we have to make across the Council in the next few years

6.0 Responding to the Report

6.1 The Peer Review Team acknowledge in their report that the Council is already implementing a number of their recommendations and, in that sense, the report reinforces our direction of travel.

6.2 That said, it is now imperative that we respond positively and swiftly to the report's recommendations. A detailed Action Plan is being prepared and will be reported to Cabinet in the next few months. The Action Plan will contain actions grouped by the three themes of Governance, Change and Delivery, with a link to the relevant recommendations in the Review report.

6.3 Actions will need to include:

- A governance review... how we make decisions as Members and Officers
- Review of the role of the Local Strategic Board... and other city partnerships
- Developing the "Swansea Story"... and how we engage everyone in this narrative
- Redoubling our efforts on employee engagement... as part of the Innovation Programme
- Agreeing a change plan for the delivery of *Sustainable Swansea*... working as one Council
- A plan to deliver our community leadership ambitions. . including city centre regeneration and local area management
- Developing a commercial organisation... to exploit every opportunity to increase income

6.4 In summary the next steps will be to:

- Communicate the key findings of the report to Members, (via Council), staff and partners
- Develop detailed actions to implement the changes, ensuing accountability, clear measures and timescales
- Ensure that the actions integrate with existing major plans, in particular:
 - Revised Corporate Plan
 - *Sustainable Swansea – fit for the future*
 - Innovation Programme
 - Other key plans, such as the Poverty Strategy
- Dovetail the actions with the findings from the Welsh Audit Office Corporate Assessment, which we expect to receive in the next 2/3 months

7.0 Equality and Engagement Implications

7.1 As part of progressing some pieces of work in the action plan consideration will be given to whether the EIA process needs to be utilised including any requirements for engagement.

8.0 Financial Implications

8.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from this report. However, delivery of a number of the recommendations will assist the Council to achieve savings and additional income.

9.0 Legal Implications

9.1 There are no specific legal implications associated with this report.

Background Papers: None

Appendices: Appendix A – City and County of Swansea Peer Review 2014