**REPORT TO CABINET**

**TO BE HELD ON SEPTEMBER 6TH 2016**

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<th>Key Decision</th>
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**Strategic Theme:** Modern Public Services

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<th>Portfolio</th>
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<th>Relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committee(s)</th>
<th>Corporate Services</th>
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**REPORT OF:** Chief Executive

**WARDS AFFECTED:** All

1. **SUBJECT: WAKEFIELD'S CORPORATE PEER CHALLENGE**

2. **PURPOSE OF REPORT**

2.1 To provide an overview of the key findings from the Local Government Association’s (LGA) recent Corporate Peer Challenge at Wakefield Council, including the significant strengths and achievements identified across the organisation.

3. **RECOMMENDATION**

3. That Cabinet notes the feedback provided by the Corporate Peer Challenge Team as enclosed at Appendix A and directs the Chief Executive to develop an action plan in response to that feedback.
4. WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR THE DISTRICT?

4.1 The resounding message from the Corporate Peer Challenge process is that Wakefield is a high performing Council with strong and stable leadership and is very well regarded by partners. It is imperative that these strengths, along with the many others identified by the peer challenge team, continue to translate into positive outcomes for communities across the District. Equally, addressing any recommended areas for improvement will serve to accelerate progress against the issues that matter most to Wakefield residents.

5. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

5.1 From June 7th – June 10th 2016, a peer review team visited Wakefield to undertake the Council’s first Corporate Peer Challenge. The peer review team included:

- Barrie Grunewald (Leader, St Helen’s Council)
- Carolyn Downs (Chief Executive of Brent Council, previously the LGA)
- John Harrison (Executive Director for Strategic Resources, Peterborough Council)
- Jacqui Old – Director for Adults, Children, Education and Health, North Tyneside Council
- Andrew Hughes – Head of Implementation, LGA
- Judith Hurcombe – Programme Manager, LGA (Peer Challenge Manager)

5.2 The Council asked that the peer review team explore the following areas:

- Understanding of the local place and priority setting.
- Leadership of place.
- Financial planning and viability.
- Organisational leadership and governance.
- Capacity to deliver.
- Economic growth.

5.3 The Local Government Association offers all Councils a free Corporate Peer Challenge. It is not an inspection but is in fact a core element of its sector-led improvement offer to local authorities. The process is designed to support Councils to take direct responsibility for their improvement.

5.4 Peers are at the heart of the peer challenge process, helping Councils with their improvement journeys by providing a ‘practitioner perspective’ and ‘critical friend’ challenge. The make-up of the peer review team was designed to reflect the requirements of the Council and the focus of the review was equally tailored to the Council’s needs.

5.5 The peer review team prepared for the Corporate Peer Challenge by
reviewing a range of documents and information in order to ensure they were familiar with the Council and the challenges it is facing. This was followed by four days onsite at Wakefield, during which they:

- Engaged with more than 140 people including a range of council staff together with councillors and external partners and stakeholders.
- Gathered information and views from more than 42 meetings, visited the Hepworth Gallery and the MASH at Normanton, and undertook additional research and reading.

5.6 The key feedback from the Corporate Peer Challenge process can be summarised as follows:

- We are a high performing Council.
- We’re setting the pace nationally on a number of agendas.
- We have strong and stable leadership.
- Councillors are very visible in the Council and communities.
- We are a highly valued and trusted partner.
- Public confidence in the Council has significantly increased.
- We have sustained growth across the district during a time of austerity.
- Finances are managed well.

5.7 Attached at Appendix A is the final letter from the peer review team which provides a detailed breakdown of their reflections and recommendations.

6. OPTIONS APPRAISAL

6.1 OPTION 1:

That Cabinet notes the formal feedback provided through Wakefield’s LGA Corporate Peer Challenge process and directs the Chief Executive to develop an action plan in response to that feedback.

Wakefield’s Corporate Peer Challenge provided positive and constructive feedback providing a valuable insight into the Council’s strengths and achievements. This has provided external validation of the Council’s high performing and ambitious standing.

A Corporate Peer Challenge Action Plan will enable the organisation to build on its strengths and successes to date by focussing activity on identified areas for improvement. Inclusion of SMART objectives, for which there will be clear lines of accountability and strong alignment to service planning, will enable Cabinet to guarantee progress against some of the main challenges for the Council and District.

It is proposed that the Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny
Committee play a critical role in offering the constructive challenge needed to drive progress against the Action Plan.

This is the recommended option.

6.2 **OPTION 2:**

No further action is taken in response to the feedback from the Corporate Peer Challenge.

Failure to utilise the insight offered through the Corporate Peer Challenge process would mean that the Council’s ability to tackle some of its biggest challenges would be hampered and its’ improvement journey would be slower and more fragmented.

7. **STRATEGIC IMPLICATIONS**

7.1 A Council commitment to the implementation of a Corporate Peer Challenge Action Plan would accelerate progress against the strategic priorities for the District and the Council as articulated through the District Outcomes Framework and the Plan 2020. It would equally serve to focus the energies of local, sub-regional and national partners on the issues that will deliver the greatest benefits to the communities of Wakefield.

8. **ENGAGEMENT**

8.1 Following receipt of the final feedback from the peer challenge team, a programme of engagement will ensue to guarantee that stakeholders and residents recognise the Council’s great strengths and understand the efforts that are to be taken to build on these further and faster.

9. **CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS**

9.1 **Financial Implications**

Recommendations within Corporate Peer Challenge Action Plan may have financial implications e.g additional investment requirements as well as the potential to reduce spend and deliver savings.

Specific projects arising from any Action Plan will be the subject of further reports and thus specific financial implications included at that point.

9.2 **Legal Implications**

The Council has many statutes and regulations to comply with concerning its management, including the fiduciary duty on Members to safeguard money and property, on behalf of the council tax payers and the public of Wakefield. This sits alongside the statutory duty to ensure that the Council
is achieving value for money, particularly in the current time when arranging its activities. Parliament has given local authorities many new duties, alongside the Localism Act’s General Power of Competence, allowing a local authority the power to do anything that individuals generally may do, including for “the benefit of the authority, its area or persons resident or present in its area”. It is required to ensure it complies with its new duties under the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act, the Child Poverty Act, and the Modern Slavery Act to name but a few. The Council has a statutory duty under the 1999 Local Government Act to “make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the way in which its functions are exercised, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness”. This Action Plan will assist in fulfilling that requirement.

9.3 **Equality Implications**

Delivery of a Peer Challenge Action Plan would take into account the council’s statutory obligations under the Equality Act 2010 and the Public Sector Equality Duty. Continuing to ensure that the Council does not disadvantage particular communities and remains focuses on fostering good relations between communities and tackling inequality of opportunity will need to be integral to the delivery of the Plan.

10. **RECOMMENDATION(S)**

10.1 That Cabinet notes the feedback provided by the Corporate Peer Challenge Team as enclosed at Appendix A and directs the Chief Executive to develop an action plan in response to that feedback.

11. **REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION**

11.1 Wakefield’s Corporate Peer Challenge provided positive and constructive feedback providing a valuable insight into the Council’s strengths and achievements. This has provided external validation of the Council’s high performing and ambitious standing. Development of an Action Plan will enable the Council to build on its successes to date by focussing activity on identified areas for improvement.

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**Appendix A:** LGA Final Report on Wakefield’s Corporate Peer Challenge
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