

For publication

Sector led improvement – Peer challenge and key residents / tenant satisfaction surveys (DL000)

Meeting:	Cabinet
Date:	26.04.22
Cabinet portfolio:	Deputy Leader
Directorate:	Corporate
For publication	

1.0 Purpose of the report

- 1.1 To provide an update on the key sector led improvement initiatives and progress during 2021/22 including peer challenge and key resident and tenant satisfaction surveys.

2.0 Recommendations

- 2.1 That Cabinet approves the publication of the Peer Challenge report on the Council's website.
- 2.2 That Cabinet approves the Peer Challenge action plan.
- 2.3 That Cabinet approves the STAR action plan.

3.0 Reasons for recommendations

- 3.1 To continue our journey of improvement and provide value for money services for residents and tenants.

4.0 Report details

- 4.1 Local Government Association Peer Challenge

The Local Government Association (LGA) is the national membership body for local authorities. The LGA aims to represent, support, promote and improve local government.

- 4.2 As part of the LGA's 'offer' to its member authorities, it provides a free of charge Corporate Peer Challenge every four to five years. The basis for a Peer Challenge is to allow elected Members and officers from other local authorities to visit a council and provide advice and guidance on current and future work with a view to offering suggestions for further improvement and development. The role of a Peer Challenge has been accentuated since the removal of the Audit Commission inspection system in May 2010. The Peer Challenge provides the kind of external verification and challenge previously offered by the Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) and Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) process (although it should be emphasised that the Corporate Peer Challenge process is not an inspection and is entirely voluntary).
- 4.3 In October 2021, Chesterfield Borough Council took part in Peer Challenge with senior officers and an elected member from different authorities plus a Local Government Association Peer Challenge Programme Manager visiting Chesterfield Borough Council for three days.
- 4.4 Prior to the onsite challenge a range of documents were supplied including a position statement, Council Plan, financial information and key strategies and policies. During the three day visit peers met over 70 people and organisations via one to one interviews, small group discussions and focus groups.
- 4.5 The peer challenge was focused around the following five themes, which form the core components of all corporate peer challenges:
1. Understanding of place and priority setting
 2. Leadership of place
 3. Organisational leadership and governance
 4. Financial planning and viability
 5. Capacity to deliver

In addition to these core areas, the team also provided feedback on organisational development, ICT transformation and community development.

- 4.6 The feedback report is attached at Appendix 1. Key findings include:

Understanding of place and priority setting

- Chesterfield BC's leadership, staff and partnerships understand the needs of its place, the challenges, and the opportunities
- Through our political and organisational leadership, we lead, communicate, and influence others to support our ambitious and passionate growth and transformation agenda
- There are opportunities to strengthen our good work by ensuring measurable outcomes and targets are regularly reviewed to reflect changing demographics and are evaluated for effectiveness

Leadership of place

- Chesterfield BC demonstrates visible evidence of successful partnership working and received wide-spread praise from partners
- Our regional and sub-regional position is firmly established in the Vision Derbyshire initiative and in the D2N2 LEP
- The Chesterfield BC brand is recognised, trusted, and embraced to maximise its 'can do' attitude
- Opportunities for increasing visibility of senior political and officer leadership in key partnership activity

Organisational leadership and governance

- Chesterfield BC is a strongly led, ambitious council with good member/officer relationships and a demanding culture for results and success
- Opportunities to build on the goodwill and commitment strengthened by work during the pandemic including improved communication and visibility of senior leaders

Financial planning and viability

- The Council has a good track record in managing financial performance and growth, consistently operating within set budgets and building a reasonable level of reserves
- Opportunities to increase the understanding of risks in decision making activity
- The External Auditor complimented the Finance team over the preparation of the statement of accounts and related processes
- Opportunities to improve the integration of financial expertise at an early stage in the development of strategies and emerging projects and programmes so that they can influence and guide as appropriate in the decision-making processes

Capacity to deliver

- Chesterfield has a committed and talented workforce who are passionate about making a difference
- All members and staff have been on a journey during the pandemic and naturally there is a question now being asked: “What does the future look like?”
- There is potential to harness new ways of working to transform the purpose and effectiveness of the organisation both internally and within the borough’s communities

Organisational Development and ICT Transformation

- The decisions to bring the ICT service in-house and to make significant investments in enabling technologies have proved to have been far-sighted and have enabled the Council to respond swiftly and successfully to the challenges of the pandemic by enabling staff to safely adopt new ways of collaborative and flexible working
- Opportunities to improve key messaging and engagement around the strategic organisational development with all stakeholders

Community development / wellbeing

- The Council has strong partnerships with voluntary and community organisations
- Key Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) partners feel that the Council’s values are evident, which gives a clear steer and encourages VCS partners to prioritise and reach out to deprived communities
- Although there has been a lot of excellent work done over many years to address issues such as the skills gap, mental health and youth unemployment, the team heard concerns that these interventions have not yet led to tangible improvements for communities, especially in areas of third generation worklessness where aspirations are low

4.7 The peer team developed some key recommendations for our consideration. These are based on what the team saw, heard and read during the challenge period. The team drew on their experience of the sector and knowledge of local government improvement. The following recommendations were made:

Recommendation 1

Continue to establish and communicate to councillors and staff a clear understanding of the Council’s financial position and priorities, including the implications of the Asset Management Plan. Develop a Medium-Term efficiency strategy for CLT to implement and be accountable for. This needs to be progressed at pace to enhance efficiency and productivity

going forward.

Recommendation 2

Evaluate and understand the learning and impact of the Covid 19-response (the accelerated and fast paced digital transformation, overall change of pace, resource realignment, direct and immediate staff communication.) Pause, reflect, and plan a clear organisational development programme and timetable highlighting the drivers and benefits to be realised. Align the programme to those drivers for change.

Recommendation 3

Communicate effectively about the future organisational requirements with all stakeholders, particularly staff and Members. Conversations of this nature will build trust, increase knowledge, and support the effective implementation of the new ways of working.

Recommendation 4

Consider significant decisions regarding structures, capacity, and finances in the light of the uncertainties of the current landscape reflecting on heightened risk and focusing on property and income generation, which are ongoing challenges to your organisation. This includes the economic climate, an increase in homeworking across the economy, and post-Brexit uncertainties. Investment plans could all be affected by these changes.

Recommendation 5

Develop a social investment plan / approach which includes measurable targets on areas such as deprivation and improving outcomes for vulnerable communities to ensure that no-one is left behind as Chesterfield's economy grows.

Recommendation 6

Recognise that following the prolonged and continuing impact of the pandemic your staff are, like many others, suffering from fatigue and therefore highly likely to impact upon your capacity to deliver. Ensure that CBC has robust, sustainable resources in place to deliver across the life of the transformation programme (project and programme management, organisation/job redesign, staff consultation, change management).

Recommendation 7

Recognise and relaunch your visible leadership to engage, consult and deliver, identifying structural, financial, and community benefits for Chesterfield. As well as the Chief Executive and Leader, this should be reinforced and supported by the wider leadership team.

4.8 The LGA recommend that authorities publish the Peer Challenge feedback report on their website to support local government transparency.

4.9 Since the Peer Challenge in October, we have already made progress on a number of the recommendations with further activities planned over the next 12 months. The peer challenge action plan is attached at Appendix 2. The plan will be owned and monitored by the Corporate Leadership Team via the performance management framework.

4.10 'Are You Being Served?' resident satisfaction survey

Understanding resident views is a key element of assessing the effectiveness of an authority, alongside cost and performance information. Furthermore, understanding resident satisfaction can strengthen local accountability and be a key part of the sector's approach to managing its own performance.

4.11 The LGA conducts regular national telephone polling of resident's satisfaction with local government, three times a year. This programme is called 'Are You Being Served?'. In addition to the national telephone survey, a set of resident satisfaction questions that councils can use in their local surveys, and guidance on the conditions that must be met, to enable the results to be benchmarked against these national and regional results have been developed. This is a flexible approach, designed to suit local circumstances and minimise the cost to councils of collecting the data. It allows councils to use only those questions that are of interest locally and fit these questions in with existing survey plans, whilst also helping to maximise the benefit and insight that can be gained from this data by making it broadly comparable.

4.12 The questions were developed in consultation with the sector and with assistance from Ipsos Mori, including cognitive testing. In addition, the document contains additional questions which are not part of the benchmarking, but which councils may find useful to use in their own local surveys.

- 4.13 Chesterfield Borough Council utilised the 'Are You Being Served?' methodology for our resident satisfaction survey in September / October 2021. This is the fifth time we have used this method of community engagement to capture resident feedback, with previous surveys taking place in 2013, 2015, 2017 and 2019.
- 4.14 The methodology specifies that for a population size of Chesterfield Borough, the minimum number of responses required for this survey is 500. The 2021 survey was completed by 740 residents. Receiving this number of responses has enabled us to achieve a confidence interval of 3.3. This means that we can be 95% confident that the results are accurate to within 3.3% if we had asked the entire Borough's population the same questions. For example, if 88% of respondents have said that they are very satisfied with their local area as a place to live, then we can say that we are 95% confident that, if we asked the whole of the Borough's population, the response would be between 84.7% and 91.3%.
- 4.15 The 'Are You Being Served?' resident satisfaction survey report is attached at Appendix 3. Key findings from the autumn 2021 survey include:
- Overall satisfaction with Chesterfield Borough as a place to live has increased from 84% in 2019 to 85% in 2021 and continues to be significantly higher than the national figure of 78%
 - Satisfaction with how Chesterfield Borough Council runs things has also increased from 74% in 2019 to 77% in 2021. Again this is significantly higher than the national figure which for the same time period was 56%
 - The percentage of residents stating that Chesterfield Borough Council offers value for money has increased to 60% from 57% in 2019 and continues to significantly higher than the national figure which is 43%
 - Perception of feeling safe while outside in Chesterfield Borough has increased during the day and night for local neighbourhoods and the town centre
 - Positive satisfaction results for key services maintained during the pandemic including parks and open spaces, Pavements Centre and waste and recycling services
 - Some service satisfaction rates are likely to have been impacted by availability during the pandemic with closures and heavy restrictions in place throughout 2020 and 2021 for example theatres, sports centres and the museum
- 4.16 The findings of the 'Are You Being Served?' survey helped to shape the Council Plan Delivery Plan and Service Plans for 2022/23 and also provides

vital data to help develop the next Council Plan for the period 2023 – 2027.

4.17 STAR tenant satisfaction survey

Every two years the Housing Service undertakes a customer satisfaction survey of its tenants to identify how the service is performing and where improvements need to be made. In order to ensure a robust and comparable satisfaction survey is undertaken, the Council uses the Housemark STAR framework. This ensures that results can be consistently benchmarked over time.

4.18 The use of Housemark STAR is voluntary but is a widely used and recognised tool to measure and benchmark tenant satisfaction within the social housing sector. Housemark have designed a full listing of core, recommended and optional satisfaction questions and the suggested demographic questions, grouped according to theme along with full guidance on the methodology required to enable benchmarking and data confidence.

4.19 In October / November 2021, Chesterfield Borough Council used the latest STAR methodology, questions and guidance for our tenant satisfaction survey. For the size of our housing stock, STAR required between 375 – 566 to meet the statistical validity requirement. 477 of our tenants completed the questionnaire, so we have easily met the STAR requirement.

4.20 Within the 'Are You Being Served?' resident satisfaction survey we saw correlations between services and facilities that had significant provision impacts due to Covid-19 restrictions and decreased satisfaction ratings. The same issue has had an impact on tenant satisfaction. Due to Covid-19 restrictions non-essential housing management and support services were delivered remotely and the focus was placed on emergency responses and managing health and safety risks, therefore the visibility of Council staff in the Housing areas was reduced. Many staff were redeployed during this period to ensure continuity of essential services for example Careline and the Crematorium. In addition, during the pandemic there was a significant upsurge in neighbour disputes, noise complaints and reports of anti-social behaviour, including Covid 19 breaches; this increase in demand and expectation came at a time when staff were being redeployed into priority areas.

- 4.21 The resource pressures and redeployment of staff to support community services for example prescription delivery impacted on response times for the responsive repairs service. The Covid 19 restrictions and our aim to mitigate against transmission of the virus for our customers and staff led to suspension of the internal capital works programme and non-urgent works, this was also impacted by the availability of materials and supplies due to the pandemic. The responsive repairs service focussed resources on compliance, emergency and urgent repairs. Many tenants refused access due to Covid 19 concerns and dynamic risk assessments prevented staff entering homes where people had covid-19 symptoms leading to backlogs. The recovery plans have been implemented but the disruptions to the programmes and non-urgent repairs is likely to have influenced tenant's views on the overall service provision during this period. Many housing organisations have seen falls in tenant satisfaction over the period of the pandemic.
- 4.22 The STAR tenant satisfaction survey report is attached at Appendix 4. Key findings for the autumn 2021 survey include:
- Satisfaction with their neighbourhood as a place to live is significant lower for tenants asked on the STAR survey at 68.9% than the overall residents feedback gathered via 'Are You Being Served?' survey at 85%
 - Satisfaction with the Housing Service has fallen from over 80% in 2017 and 2019 to 68% in 2021
 - Repairs and maintenance and condition of homes were key areas impacted by Covid-19 and these have seen significantly reduced satisfaction levels
 - Concerns about housing repairs were the biggest single issue within the open ended question about what the Housing Service could do better. Other key issues included anti-social behaviour, communications and tenancy support
- 4.23 The findings from the STAR survey have informed the vision for the reshaping of the Housing Directorate. The new structure for phase 1 was approved by Joint Cabinet and Employment and General Committee in February 2022. Phase 1 focused on Housing Management for our 9,000 council homes, the Careline Service and the Council's Statutory Housing Solutions Service. Key investment areas within the reshape include:
- Increased the number of front-line housing officers who will provide the frontline point of contact for tenants
 - Providing direct tenant support to ensure repairs are raised and delivered and capital investment requirements are identified leading

to a reduction in disrepair claims and a reduction in escalated work as problems identified and addressed

- Ensuring that tenancy support issues are identified at tenancy commencement but also in tenancy as customers' needs change, leading to an increase in wellbeing and a reduction in tenancy failure and increased length of tenancy which will result in a reduction in voids, transfers and management moves
- Enabling staff to have the ability to more proactively address the presenting of mental health issues which impact on neighbour disputes and ASB, and provide capacity for increased partnership working with support agencies, health and social care, community safety and the Police
- Increased resources will enable a greater focus on environmental management of the estates and open spaces leading to improved clean, safe and well-maintained neighbourhoods, early identification of environmental risks, increased visibility and reassurance to tenants
- Annual home visits will enable early identification of anti-social behaviour issues and vulnerability and the tenancy enforcement officer resource will enable a reduction in cases escalating and a comprehensive approach to community Safety, joint tasking within Community Safety Team and the ability to respond more effectively to the increased criminal activity and perception of criminal activity in our neighbourhoods
- Promoting a wide range of tenant engagement options and ensuring we keep tenants informed

4.24 Phase 2 of the re-shape will include the housing property services, including integrating in-house housing repairs and capital programmes into a service environment.

4.25 In addition to this housing reshape, a comprehensive STAR action plan has been developed and is attached at Appendix 5. The key focus areas include:

- Repairs and maintenance service – improving speed and quality
- Improved management of green and communal space
- Tackling anti-social behaviour
- Improved customer service and communication channels
- Developing a robust performance management framework to learn from feedback and drive service improvement

5.0 **Alternative options**

5.1 All sector led improvement activity is currently voluntary but is strongly encouraged by Government and industry bodies such as the Local Government Association and Housemark.

6.0 **Implications for consideration – Financial and value for money**

6.1 No specific financial considerations have been identified for this report, however the Peer Challenge review has helped to inform our current medium term financial strategy and will inform future updates. The data gathered via the two satisfaction surveys is invaluable to inform future business cases and service improvement activity.

7.0 **Implications for consideration – Legal**

7.1 No specific legal considerations have been identified for this report.

8.0 **Implications for consideration – Human resources**

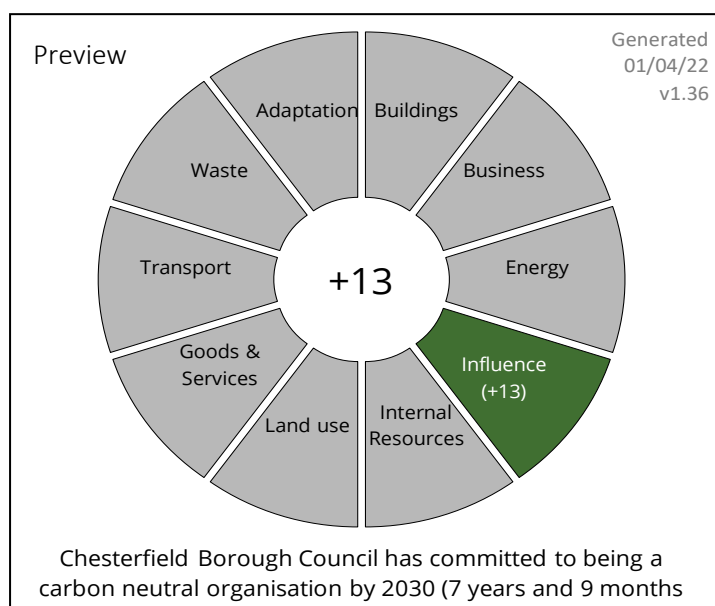
8.1 The Peer Challenge action plan draws upon existing resources and along with the two satisfaction surveys has been used and will be used in the future to help shape the Organisational Development Programme, the new People Plan, service plans and business cases.

9.0 **Implications for consideration – Council plan**

9.1 The Peer Challenge Review and satisfaction surveys have informed the development of the Council Plan Delivery Plan for 2022/23 and will help to shape the new Council Plan for 2023 – 2027.

10.0 **Implications for consideration – Climate change**

10.1 The 'Are You Being Served?' survey was used as an opportunity to find out more about our residents' views and experiences around climate change. This included learning more about current and future climate change impact, knowledge about contributory factors, response to climate change so far, barriers and communication.



11.0 Implications for consideration – Equality and diversity

11.1 Equality and diversity data was collected as part of the two surveys and has been used as part of the analysis and will be utilised to help shape and improve future service provision.

12.0 Implications for consideration – Risk management

Description of the Risk	Impact	Likelihood	Mitigating Action	Impact	Likelihood
Failure to maximise opportunities identified within the Peer Challenge Report.	M	M	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discussions at Corporate Leadership Team Development of an action plan Informs Organisational Development Programme Informs future Council Plan development Informs service delivery 	L	L
Failure to utilise valuable data from the satisfaction surveys to improve services.	M	M	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Data used to inform Council Plan Delivery Plan 2022/23 and development of service plans Data informed Phase 1 and will inform phase 2 of the Housing Directorate reshape Specific action plan developed for the STAR survey results 	L	L

Decision information

Key decision number	1096
Wards affected	All

Document information

Report author
Donna Reddish – Service Director Corporate
Appendices to the report
Appendix 1 – Local Government Association Peer Challenge report
Appendix 2 – Peer Challenge action plan
Appendix 3 – Are You Being Served? survey report
Appendix 4 – STAR survey report
Appendix 5 – STAR action plan