1. Executive Summary

1.1 The report advises Cabinet of the outcome of the Local Government Association’s Corporate Peer Challenge of the London Borough of Redbridge and seeks agreement to the Council’s response to the feedback report.

1.2 The Leader and Chief Executive commissioned the peer challenge to provide an external perspective of the Council’s performance to highlight areas for development and to support improvement in delivering for Redbridge communities.

1.3 A small team of experienced local government peers visited the Borough from 14th to 17th March 2016 and engaged with a range of the Council’s stakeholders, including councillors, officers and local partners. The peer team used their experience and knowledge to reflect on the information presented to them and produced a report to summarise their findings.

1.4 Management Team has developed an action plan in response to the recommendations from the peer challenge. Each action has a named Lead Officer and Cabinet Member responsible for delivery. Progress of the action plan will be monitored by the Senior Leadership Group.

1.5 The Local Government Association has been invited to return to Redbridge in one year’s time to review progress in responding to the recommendations.

2. Reasons For The Recommendations

2.1 It is necessary for the Cabinet to consider the findings and recommendations included in the Corporate Peer Challenge Feedback Report and agree the Action Plan developed in response.

3. Recommendations

The Cabinet is recommended to:-
3.1 consider the findings and recommendations from the feedback report of the Corporate Peer Challenge of the London Borough of Redbridge; and

3.2 agree the Peer Challenge Action Plan developed in response to the report.

THE DECISIONS PROPOSED IN THE RECOMMENDATIONS TO THIS REPORT MAY BE REQUISITIONED

**Contact Point**

Name: Cllr. Jas Athwal  
Position: Leader  
Telephone: 0208 708 2800  
E.Mail: Jas.athwal@redbridge.gov.uk
1. **Background**

1.1 In January 2016, the Leader and the Chief Executive commissioned a Corporate Peer Challenge through the Local Government Association (LGA) to provide an external perspective on the Council’s performance to highlight areas for development and to support improvement in delivering local services.

1.2 Peer challenge is a core element of the LGA's sector-led improvement offer to local authorities, which includes a range of free of charge tools and support. Peer challenge is tailored to meet each individual council’s needs and is designed to complement and add value to a council’s own performance and improvement focus.

1.3 Discussion with the LGA identified the specific needs for Redbridge and agreed the areas of focus for the peer challenge and the make-up of the peer team.

1.4 A reading list of key Council documents was submitted to the peer team, together with a position statement which provided an overview of the Borough and the challenges faced by the Council and local communities. A programme of meetings and events was arranged for their arrival on site.

2. **The Redbridge Corporate Peer Challenge**

2.1 The peer team sought to address the following questions which form the core component of all corporate peer challenges:

- Understanding of the local place and priority setting: Does the council understand its local context and place and use that to inform a clear vision and set of priorities?
- Leadership of place: Does the council provide effective leadership of place through its elected members, officers and constructive relationships and partnerships with external stakeholders?
- Financial planning and viability: Does the council have a financial plan in place to ensure long term viability and is there evidence that it is being implemented successfully?
- Organisational leadership and governance: Is there effective political and managerial leadership supported by good governance and decision-making arrangements that respond to key challenges and enable change and transformation to be implemented?
- Capacity to deliver: Is organisational capacity aligned with priorities and does the council influence, enable and leverage external capacity to focus on agreed outcomes?
As part of this, the Council asked the peer team to consider the following issues:

- The extent to which the Council has the appropriate relationships and influence to enable it to lead the place, deliver the level of savings needed and achieve the outcomes of care required?
- Whether transformation is being delivered at the right pace and if any gaps exist in the programme
- The extent to which decision making processes and the roles and relationships between Members and officers effectively support the achievement of Member priorities

2.2 Between 14th and 17th March 2016, a small team of experienced local government peers visited the Borough and engaged with a wide range of the Council’s stakeholders, including councillors, officers and local partners, to review our strengths and weaknesses.

2.3 All councillors and Management Team members were invited to meet the peer team, either individually or in groups. The peer team also met with and interviewed:

- groups of staff from across all service areas of the Council, at different levels of seniority;
- partners in the statutory, voluntary and community sectors;
- local businesses;
- neighbouring councils;
- the editor of a local newspaper.

3. Feedback from the peer challenge


3.2 Key findings and recommendations from the report are:

- Redbridge, both as a borough and a council, has tremendous opportunities.
- The ‘new’ Administration and the arrival of the Chief Executive are energising the organisation.
- People within the Council are committed, enthusiastic and energetic – they have proved resilient and determined and are keen on a transformed future.
- The Council has a strong balance sheet that offers opportunities and options.
- Housing and physical regeneration are widely accepted as key priorities going forward – with it being important to ensure social regeneration (health, skills, employment etc.) are also to the fore.
- To maximise the opportunities and benefits for the Borough going forward, there needs to be a coherent narrative about Redbridge as a place in the future.
• The development of the narrative needs to involve and engage partners and communities as well as the elected membership of the Council.
• Fundamental in this process is determining what Redbridge’s place in London should be and the priority outcomes that are required for citizens.
• The findings of the Fairness Commission can be taken forward through this work.
• There is a desire within the Borough to see a form of Local Strategic Partnership being re-created, but without the bureaucracy that went before.
• To become a ‘place leader’ requires the Council to let go of aspects of the past and determine its key characteristics for the future:
  o ‘Helping residents to be more resilient’ rather than paternalism.
  o Focusing on the achievement of outcomes rather than delivery.
  o Utilising influence rather than looking to control.
  o ‘Placing communities at the heart of decision making’.
• There is widespread appetite in the organisation for a fundamentally different approach to how the Council utilises its own resources and determines it options.
• Crucial to the success of the Council going forward is establishing core disciplines necessary for any organisation to succeed and creating a situation in which strong and effective directorates are enabled to succeed further by a corporate centre providing the necessary capacity and expertise in a mutually supportive and beneficial partnership.
• The current governance structure is born out of the past but there is very widespread agreement that the status quo is not satisfactory.
• Cabinet and Corporate Management Team are now taking the opportunity to meet and all involved are keen to see this extended and embedded.

4. **Response to the peer challenge feedback**

4.1 Appendix B2 is the Peer Challenge Action Plan, which has been developed in response to the report’s findings and recommendations. The report recognised that some of the feedback reflected issues that the Council was already addressing and progressing; the action plan covers both existing and new initiatives that will drive improvement in the areas highlighted.

4.2 Each action has a named Lead Officer and Cabinet Member responsible for delivery. Progress of the overall action plan will be monitored quarterly by officers through the Senior Leadership Group.

4.3 The LGA has been invited to return to Redbridge in one year’s time to review progress in responding to the recommendations and to identify any additional support needed.

5. **Fairness Implications**

5.1 The Equality Impact Screening shows that the impact of the Peer Challenge Report and Action Plan for groups with protected characteristics is positive.
5.2 The Fairness Screening shows that the impact of the Peer Challenge Report and Action Plan on service users, communities and employees is positive.

5.3 The Corporate Peer Challenge was undertaken to support the Council in improving its performance in delivering for Redbridge communities. The Action Plan developed in response to the findings and recommendations brings together existing and new initiatives that will drive improvement in the areas identified by the peer team. Each action has a named Lead Officer and Cabinet Member who will ensure that equality and fairness considerations are incorporated into all outcomes.

6. Comments of the Corporate Director of Resources

6.1 This report asks Cabinet to consider the findings and recommendations from the feedback report of the Corporate Peer Challenge and to agree the Action Plan developed in response to the report.

6.2 The Action Plan brings together initiatives that will provide improved performance for the Council in delivering services for local communities. The cost of delivering the Action Plan is covered within existing Service Directorate budgets.

7. Comments of the Borough Solicitor and Secretary

7.1 The decisions recommended by the Report are constitutionally matters for the Cabinet.

Contact Name: Sue Parkinson
Position: Head of Corporate Performance
Telephone: 0208 708 2227
E-mail: sue.parkinson@redbridge.gov.uk

BACKGROUND PAPERS
Equality Impact Screening
Fairness Screening
Corporate Peer Challenge
London Borough of Redbridge

14th to 17th March 2016

Feedback Report
1. Executive Summary

The over-arching message to have emerged from our work is that ‘the time is right’ for Redbridge, both as a borough and a council – with tremendous opportunities to be seized and capitalised upon. The ‘new’ Administration and the arrival of the new Chief Executive are energising the organisation. People within the council are committed, enthusiastic and energetic. They clearly understand the need for change and are keen on a transformed future. New senior management arrangements provide the opportunity to forge different ways for the organisation to operate. The council has a strong balance sheet and a range of key services are performing well.

The borough itself has much to offer, including open spaces and green belt, good and improving access to London, existing and increasing diversity, cohesive communities, relatively low crime levels and a young population. Housing and physical regeneration are widely accepted as key priorities going forward.

To maximise the opportunities and benefits for the borough there needs to be a coherent narrative about Redbridge as a place in the future. Creating such a narrative will provide a clear focus that currently is absent. Fundamental in the process of developing the vision is determining what Redbridge’s place in London should be. The priority outcomes required for the citizens of Redbridge also need to be determined. Once the vision has been determined, the council needs to translate it in to what it means for the organisation in terms of its contribution to achieving the vision and the way it needs to operate in order to do so.

The council is unique in Redbridge in terms of the democratic mandate that it holds. This presents a huge opportunity – that of ‘leading the place’ – but it doesn’t currently feel as though this opportunity is being fulfilled. To become a ‘place leader’ requires the council to let go of certain aspects of the way it has traditionally operated. This includes the need to become less paternalistic and to have a focus on the achievement of outcomes rather than necessarily what the council itself delivers. A key aspect of this is about better utilising influence.

The council has a choice going forward regarding its resource planning – to continue a ‘reductionist’ narrative and approach focused on looking to do the best it can with ever-reducing resources on a directorate by directorate basis, or to focus on how to achieve the best possible outcomes from the considerable financial, and other, resources available across the council and the borough.

At present, the purpose of the council’s budget process is solely to set a balanced budget. It is purely a financial mechanism rather than a process to determine resource allocation in line with the priorities of an Administration. The authority is able to demonstrate that it can balance the books for the next three years but we lack confidence in the council’s ability to deliver key aspects of the savings that have been agreed. The council’s budget strategy for the next two years involves utilising significant reserves to underpin the budget. Whilst this will deliver a balanced budget, it loses the council the opportunity to utilise those same reserves in an alternative and more constructive way, such as funding transformation initiatives.
The ethos and culture of the organisation as they currently exist are characterised by silos, unnecessary bureaucracy, low appetite for risk, limited innovation and insularity. Everybody that we spoke to wants to leave the current way of operating behind. The way the new Chief Executive is approaching things and the behaviours he is modelling are being widely noticed and welcomed. To build on this, and given the extent of the culture change required in the council, there is a requirement for a variety of organisational and workforce development initiatives, enhanced internal communications and as wide a range as possible of opportunities for staff to engage and feel involved.

The current corporate transformation programme is too narrowly defined to deliver what is required in the council and is not well enough positioned or empowered by the authority to enable it to succeed. A truly corporate transformation programme is required.

There is very widespread agreement that the council’s current governance model is not satisfactory. The council is not getting a good return on the time, capacity and effort that everybody is investing. There is currently an opportunity for the council to debate what governance arrangements would be most appropriate for the future.

Time and effort needs to be invested in enabling the Cabinet and Corporate Management Team to work more strategically and collaboratively. A key outcome from this should be the Leader being enabled to focus his effort and attention on providing the strategic leadership that people within the borough and the council are seeking.

The extensive change agenda that will follow in the council over the coming months and years needs to balance sufficient pace with appropriate caution. It is entirely right that the council’s leadership is looking to increase the pace at which things are delivered and achieved. This needs to be allied with the necessary deliberation. Achieving this balance will, in turn, enable the fulfilment of the expectations that now exist both within and beyond the council.

It is also important for the senior leadership of the council to recognise that not everything that needs to be achieved on the change and improvement front can be done in one fell swoop!

2. Summary of the Peer Challenge Approach

The peer team

Peer challenges are delivered by experienced elected member and officer peers. The make-up of the peer team reflected your requirements and the focus of the peer challenge. Peers were selected on the basis of their relevant experience and expertise and agreed with you. The peers who delivered the peer challenge in Redbridge were:

- Martin Smith, Chief Executive, LB Ealing
- Councillor Stephen Alambritis, Leader, LB Merton
- Councillor Nick Botterill, former Leader, LB Hammersmith and Fulham
• Marion Kelly, Chief Financial Officer, East Sussex CC
• Richard Williams, Director of Commercial and Business Services, Somerset CC
• Tahira Iqbal, Principal Cohesion and Equality Officer, Calderdale MBC
• Abdul Huson, Centre for Public Scrutiny (shadowing role)
• Chris Bowron, Peer Challenge Manager, Local Government Association

Scope and focus

The peer team considered the following five questions which form the core components looked at by all corporate peer challenges. These are the areas we believe are critical to councils’ performance and improvement:

• Understanding of the local place and priority setting: Does the council understand its local context and place and use that to inform a clear vision and set of priorities?

• Leadership of place: Does the council provide effective leadership of place through its elected members, officers and constructive relationships and partnerships with external stakeholders?

• Financial planning and viability: Does the council have a financial plan in place to ensure long term viability and is there evidence that it is being implemented successfully?

• Organisational leadership and governance: Is there effective political and managerial leadership supported by good governance and decision-making arrangements that respond to key challenges and enable change and transformation to be implemented?

• Capacity to deliver: Is organisational capacity aligned with priorities and does the council influence, enable and leverage external capacity to focus on agreed outcomes?

As part of this, the council asked the peer team to consider the following issues:

• The extent to which the council has the appropriate relationships and influence to enable it to lead the place, deliver the level of savings needed and achieve the outcomes of care required?

• Whether transformation is being delivered at the right pace and if any gaps exist in the programme

• The extent to which decision making processes and the roles and relationships between members and officers effectively support the achievement of members’ priorities
The peer challenge process

It is important to stress that this was not an inspection. Peer challenges are improvement-focussed and tailored to meet individual councils' needs. They are designed to complement and add value to a council’s own performance and improvement focus. The peer team used their experience and knowledge of local government to reflect on the information presented to them by people they met, things they saw and material that they read.

The peer team prepared for the 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. The team then spent 4 days onsite in Redbridge.

This report provides a summary of the peer team's findings. It builds on the feedback presentation provided by the peer team at the end of their on-site visit. In presenting the feedback, they have done so as fellow local government officers and elected members, not professional consultants or inspectors. By its nature, the peer challenge is a snapshot in time. We appreciate that some of the feedback may be about things the council is already addressing and progressing.

3. Feedback

3.1 Capitalising on opportunity

The over-arching message to have emerged from our work is that ‘the time is right’ for Redbridge, both as a borough and a council. There are tremendous opportunities to be seized and capitalised upon. Inevitably, this is generating both excitement and a degree of apprehension but the overall feeling that we got from the people we met was one of positivity.

The ‘new’ Administration (which in reality is nearly half way through the electoral cycle) and the arrival of the new Chief Executive are energising the organisation. Major change has taken place within the authority, with the council moving 22 months ago from no overall control politically to having its first ever Labour Administration. Extremely stable senior management arrangements have also been subject to change, including the retirement of the long-standing Chief Executive.

People within the council that we met are committed, enthusiastic and energetic. They have proved resilient and determined, coping with the organisational changes that have taken place and dealing with the financial challenges being faced. There is clearly an understanding amongst them of the need for change. They are keen on a transformed future, although people will inevitably react in different ways both to the prospect and the reality of this.

New senior management arrangements provide the opportunity to forge different ways for the organisation to operate. The council has a strong balance sheet, including financial reserves, property, land and other assets, which offers opportunities and options.
A range of key services are performing well. This includes adults and children’s services, which is crucial given the risk profile and potential consequences in terms of budget and reputation. Aspects of this good performance include levels of educational attainment, good relationships with schools, an early intervention focus and low cost.

Housing and physical regeneration are widely accepted as key priorities in the borough going forward. However, when looking at regeneration it is important to ensure social regeneration (health, skills, employment opportunities etc.) are also to the fore in the thinking and the planning. Whilst life expectancy both for males and females is higher than the London average, there are significant health inequalities within Redbridge. A higher percentage (18.5 per cent) of people have no qualifications than is the average for the capital (17.6 per cent) and the employment rate is lower (68.7 per cent) than for London (71.7 per cent) whilst the unemployment rate is higher (8 per cent compared to 6.9 per cent).

The borough itself has much to offer already, along with a growing range of opportunities:

- Open spaces and green belt – more than 40 per cent of the borough is open space, providing the opportunity for development without compromising on the natural beauty and advantages of the borough.
- Good access already to London, with four Crossrail stations also to be created in the borough
- Existing and increasing diversity, with over 65 per cent of the population from Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) groups – with the council being mindful of the need to ensure that equality is embedded into its service delivery and that it has, at all levels of the organisation, a workforce reflective of the community that it serves
- Communities within Redbridge are seen to be cohesive
- Crime levels are significantly lower than the average in London (66.8 crimes per 1,000 population compared to 84.8)
- A young population – with the third highest proportion of people aged under 16 in London
- Good quality housing and a median house price (at just over £300,000) that is lower than the London average (£365,000)
- Increasing land values
- Entrepreneurial spirit – reflected in a high level of business start-ups and the number of small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs)

### 3.2 A vision for the borough

To maximise the opportunities and benefits for the borough going forward, there needs to be a coherent narrative about Redbridge as a place in the future. Creating such a narrative – a vision – will provide a clear focus that currently is absent. As a simple example, what is the future employment focus for the borough? Is it one of building on the local entrepreneurial spirit and enabling more local businesses to emerge and succeed, supplemented with trying to attract inward investment to Redbridge and capitalising on the business rate opportunities that come with that? Or is it about enabling local people, through skills development and the transport infrastructure, to capitalise on the employment opportunities provided by one of the world’s leading cities? It may well prove...
to be a balance of the two but at the moment it is unclear and that lack of clarity hinders thinking when it comes to decisions about, for example, land use in the borough.

The development of the narrative for Redbridge, which is widely acknowledged within and beyond the council as being both absent and necessary, needs to involve and engage partners, communities and the elected membership of the council. Such a vision, which by definition will look across the longer-term, needs to be future-proofed. In order to achieve this, it needs to be developed through an inclusive process that enables the views of all those with a stake in Redbridge to be heard.

Fundamental in the process of developing the vision is determining what Redbridge’s place in London should be, which in turn informs what the borough’s ‘offer to’ and ‘ask of’ the rest of the capital is. There also needs to be analysis and discussion of the priority outcomes that are required for the citizens of Redbridge. The findings of the recent Fairness Commission can be considered and taken forward as appropriate through the visioning process.

Once the vision for Redbridge has been determined, the council needs to translate it into what it means for the organisation in terms of its contribution to achieving the vision and the way it needs to operate in order to do so.

There is also the opportunity to broaden horizons through the work in developing the vision. As an example, as part of considering Redbridge’s place in London, there is the chance to look at what the devolution agenda might offer the borough, with discussions already under way (which thus far Redbridge has not been active in) regarding the housing, skills and employment support challenges and opportunities facing the capital. The ‘art of the possible’ in relation to devolution, and the opportunities generated by looking to work across a wider geography in order to secure benefits for the borough, are being demonstrated by what is being looked at with the development of a single Accountable Care Organisation (ACO) covering both health and adult social care across the three boroughs of Redbridge, Havering and Barking and Dagenham.

Another aspect of the theme of broadening horizons is that the council stands to benefit from pursuing opportunities to draw in learning from elsewhere to a greater extent than at present. A lot of people we spoke with explained that they saw the council as having been very insular over recent years and they were keen to see this change. A logical consequence of insularity is missing opportunities to learn about innovation elsewhere, which in turn risks not keeping pace with others. There were lots of sentiments expressed along the lines of ‘the council being behind the curve’ or ‘the authority lagging behind’ so clearly people recognise the issue. In those areas where the authority needs to play ‘catch up’ it makes sense to look first at what others are already doing to see if it is worth tapping into, rather than putting extraneous effort in to developing something that, whilst it could be badged ‘made in Redbridge’, would also risk ‘re-inventing the wheel’. A good example here is the ambition to modernise ICT as a key enabler of internal transformation. Much can be learnt from peer authorities who have already embarked on the ICT modernisation journey.

3.3 Leadership of place
The council is unique in Redbridge in terms of the democratic mandate that it holds. No other organisation within the borough has the legitimacy that the council does to maintain an overview, and uphold the interests, of local people – or to hold to account the organisations responsible for fulfilling them. This presents a huge opportunity – that of ‘leading the place’ – but, based on our discussions, it doesn’t currently feel to us as though this opportunity is being fulfilled.

Moving to a position where the council can fulfil a place leadership role requires the authority to be credible in the eyes of partner organisations both within and beyond the borough. The current experience of partners in the borough, in the main, is that where they are engaged with the council at a service or function level on a bilateral basis, then things are generally good. However, when it comes to partners interacting with multiple parts of the council, or partnership working at a more strategic level, then things become more challenging. This situation would be likely to be eased if a form of Local Strategic Partnership was re-created. There is certainly a desire within the council and amongst partner organisations in the borough to see this happen, provided that, crucially, this is without the levels of bureaucracy that went before. Looking beyond the borough, the insularity of the authority in recent years means that there is a credibility gap with partners operating across a wider geography, including at a London-wide level, and the council will need to invest the necessary time and effort to address this. Doing so, and thus re-positioning Redbridge in the eyes of many, is likely to secure enormous benefit.

To become a ‘place leader’ requires the council to let go of certain attributes and aspects of the way it has operated in the past and both determine and firmly establish its key characteristics and ways of working for the future. Central to this is the taking forward of ‘Ambitious for Redbridge’ – the council’s corporate strategy – which has been established by the Administration. Core tenets of this include:

- ‘Helping residents to be more resilient’ – which will represent a significant shift in mind-set and approach by the council which, by its own admission, has traditionally tended towards a more paternalistic standpoint

- ‘Placing communities at the heart of decision making’ – with it being unclear to us how, currently, it is envisaged this will look, feel and be enabled

It will also be important for the council to shift to having a focus on the achievement of outcomes rather than delivery. What the council delivers directly needs to be less important going forward, with a focus instead on what it needs to commission from others, and how, and the way in which it fulfils the ‘holding to account’ aspect of its place leadership role. A key aspect of this is about utilising influence rather than relying on direct control.

3.4 Finance

The council has a choice going forward regarding its resource planning – to continue a ‘reductionist’ narrative and approach focused on looking to do the best it can with ever-reducing resources on a directorate by directorate basis, or to focus on how to achieve the best possible outcomes from the considerable financial, and other, resources available across the council and the borough. Currently, it is the ‘reductionist’ narrative and
approach that dominates – as reflected both in many of our discussions with people in the council and in the authority’s budget process.

At present, the purpose of the council’s budget process is solely to set a balanced budget. It is purely a financial mechanism rather than a process to determine resource allocation in line with the priorities of an Administration. Currently, directorates are tasked with identifying the means by which their services can deliver a certain level of savings and are expected to find the way themselves of absorbing the cost pressures they are facing. ‘Salami-slicing’ and ‘consuming our own smoke’ were phrases that we heard frequently.

Thus far there has been little encouragement of invest-to-save thinking and nor has there been much exploration of the potential for either achieving savings on a more cross-cutting basis or looking at budget ‘growth’ through such means as income generation, increasing the council tax base and the opportunities around business rates retention. Social care functions have thus far managed to maintain an emphasis on ‘early intervention’ and ‘prevention’ – in order to limit the social and financial impacts associated with more acute interventions – but this is becoming increasingly difficult.

Thus the authority is able to demonstrate that it can balance the books for the next three years. However, we lack confidence in the council’s ability to deliver key aspects of the savings that have been agreed, most notably the ambitions of the transformation programme. The programme includes initiatives relating to customer access, office rationalisation and reform of support service arrangements.

We also lack confidence in the existing budget-setting process. It offers very limited involvement beyond the senior managerial leadership of the council. The experience of elected members is that they are essentially presented with a ‘fait accompli’ for their Portfolios, whilst partner organisations seem to largely be overlooked in the process.

There is also a lack of robustness in the budget-setting process, exemplified by the less than comprehensive options presented to elected members regarding the future of the mobility service. This was exacerbated by an absence of consultation with stakeholders of the service and impact assessments not being undertaken to inform decision-making.

The baseline allocation of resources is also something that is being questioned, including a recent independent financial review commissioned by the council highlighting that “It is possible that children’s services are structurally underfunded”. There is a desire for much greater transparency about the make-up of the budget.

The council’s budget strategy for the next two years involves utilising significant reserves to underpin the budget. Whilst this assists the council in its efforts to deliver a balanced budget, at the same time the council loses the opportunity to utilise those same reserves (some tens of millions) in an alternative and more constructive way, such as funding transformation initiatives which would offer ‘invest-to-save’ potential.

There is widespread appetite in the organisation for a fundamentally different approach to how the council utilises its own resources and determines its budget options. Measures that people would be keen to adopt include a ‘One Council’ approach, where more cross-cutting initiatives can be pursued, cost pressures are considered and
evaluated corporately and internal accounting and charging arrangements offer a transparent and clear view of the cost of internally provided and traded services. This would lessen the risk of both structural underfunding and 'provider capture', and eliminate the 'smoke and mirrors' which many perceive to be prevalent in current decision-making arrangements. There is also a desire to explore income and growth opportunities more, to really push 'invest to save' and, by broadening the council’s horizons, identify opportunities to tap into external sources of funding. There is also a very strong desire to protect, and ideally enhance, early intervention and prevention approaches.

3.5 Managing the organisation

The ethos and culture of the organisation as they currently exist are characterised by silos, unnecessary bureaucracy, a low appetite for risk, limited innovation and, as previously mentioned, insularity. We see little benefit in looking in this report at the reasons behind this. The important thing is to look forward and it was clear from everybody we spoke to that they want to leave the current way of operating behind. It is stifling, debilitating and disempowering.

The way the new Chief Executive is approaching things and the behaviours he is modelling are being widely noticed and welcomed. The various means of communication he has established, including a regular blog, e-mails informing and updating staff on key issues and simple words of thanks for people’s efforts, combined with being visible, personable and approachable and inviting people to submit ideas and make suggestions, are having a positive impact. To build on this and given the extent of the culture change required in the council, there is a requirement for a variety of organisational and workforce development initiatives, enhanced internal communications and as wide a range as possible of opportunities for staff to engage and feel involved.

‘Transformation’ of the council is required. This is much wider than a change in culture and ethos. Central tenets include determining the role and function of the council, devising an operating model appropriate to supporting the fulfilment of that role and function, introducing technology to support alternative ways of working and identifying ways to reduce demand for services. The work on the Accountable Care Organisation provides an example of the potential of transformation.

The current corporate transformation programme is too narrowly defined to deliver what is required in the council and is not well enough positioned or empowered by the authority to enable it to succeed. Whilst it is seen to be well managed in terms of project and programme management, the programme’s narrow scope, the limited investment that has been made corporately in key components of transformation, for example, ICT, HR and organisational and workforce development, combined with the prevailing organisational culture, means the programme lacks buy-in and support from the wider organisation. A truly corporate transformation programme is required – one that is devised to give the whole organisation what is required and, consequently, is valued, owned and led by the Corporate Management Team.

There needs to be the creation of a situation in which strong and effective directorates are enabled to succeed further by a credible corporate centre that is providing the necessary
capacity and expertise in a mutually supportive and beneficial partnership. This situation simply doesn’t exist at present. Again, we see little benefit in looking in this report at the reasons behind this. People within the corporate centre are working hard trying to do the right thing – and are as frustrated as the rest of the organisation that it isn’t working – whilst the directorates have become accustomed to ‘fending for themselves’ for reasons that are understood. Nobody that we have spoken to is satisfied with this position. The time is right to look to move forward.

Crucial to the success of the council going forward is establishing the core disciplines necessary for any organisation to operate to best effect. The council recognises that key aspects of the way it functions need to be put on a fundamentally different footing. The authority, we suggest, should pay particular attention to the following:

- Supporting processes and management information
  - Performance management
  - HR and organisational and workforce development
  - Equality and diversity
  - Research, intelligence and the use of data
  - Strategic thinking and planning
  - The finance function

- Transformation and enablers
  - ICT
  - Customer service – with a real drive on customer service standards being required in order to deliver the major improvement required
  - Communications internally and externally

- Commissioning, commercialisation and contract management
  - The council’s approach to commissioning
  - Investment in and management of property and assets
  - Income generation
  - Procurement and contract management
  - Market management and supplier management

The council is aware of what needs to be done in these areas to get them to the necessary level.

3.6 Leadership and governance

The current Leader/Cabinet governance model, including thematic advisory committees alongside statutory scrutiny, which the council implemented in May 2013, was born out of the situation of the authority being under no overall control politically going in to the last election. A couple of years on, it is clear that there is very widespread agreement that the model that has been adopted is not satisfactory. The council is not getting a good return on the time, capacity and effort that everybody is investing. Nobody is wedded to the
status quo. Thus there is currently an opportunity, half way through the electoral cycle, for
the council to debate what governance arrangements would be most appropriate for the
future. Any changes can then be implemented on an appropriate timescale.

We have not identified any areas of concern regarding standards, conduct or behaviours in
the council and relationships between elected members and officers are generally good.
This provides a good basis to work from. Cabinet and the Corporate Management Team
are now taking the opportunity to meet together and all involved are keen to see this
extended and embedded in order to ensure the senior leadership of the organisation has
the necessary space and time to consider the key strategic issues facing the council.

Time and effort needs to be invested in enabling the Cabinet and Corporate Management
Team to work more strategically and collaboratively, both in their own right as individual
bodies and together. With a management restructure currently taking place, it is unlikely
that the revised Corporate Management Team will be fully established until the Autumn –
but once it is in place then investing in the development of the team and how it works with
Cabinet will be important. Work to support the Cabinet’s development could commence on
a much shorter timescale. A key outcome from this should be the Leader, who is widely
respected, being enabled to focus his effort and attention on providing the strategic
leadership that people within the borough and the council are seeking.

As part of instilling the necessary core disciplines in the organisation, elected members
need to have confidence that officers are bringing forward fully rounded options and
proposals for them to decide upon and that officers are equipped with the necessary
political awareness. We cited earlier elected members experiencing a lack of
robustness in the budget-setting process, reflected in less than comprehensive options
being presented to them, along with an absence of consultation with stakeholders and
impact assessments not being undertaken. Quite simply, the buck stops with elected
members when it comes to taking important decisions, whether that be in relation to the
budget, policy formulation or other key strategic issues. They must be able to operate
with complete trust and confidence in the information presented to them.

In gearing up for the future it is important to review whether the support provided by the
organisation to the overall elected membership is adequate to enable them to fulfil their
various roles. This covers a range of spheres, including organisational responsiveness
to case work issues they are raising, the way the council communicates with them on
issues affecting their wards, the administrative and other support that may be required,
the ‘tools to do the job’ (including ICT) and the identification and meeting of training and
development needs that they may have.

3.7 Taking things forward

The arrival of the new Chief Executive has generated considerable expectation. As we
have already outlined, the way he is approaching things and the behaviours he is
modelling are being widely noticed and welcomed and he is having a positive impact.
This, combined with the sense in the council that the right time is right for change, is
creating the sense of expectation.
We understand the reasons behind moving the management restructure forward at speed and recognise both that some of the key factors are beyond the council’s control and that the authority has been very aware of, and sought to find ways to mitigate, the risks. During our discussions, there have been a lot of references to the ‘pace’ of change that people in the council are now seeing. What seems to be happening is that people are seeing the pace of delivery of the management restructure and assuming that the same pace will be applied in other domains.

The extensive change agenda that will follow in the council over the coming months and years needs to balance sufficient pace with appropriate caution. It is entirely right that the council’s leadership is looking to increase the pace at which things are delivered and achieved. This needs to be allied with the necessary deliberation. Achieving this balance will, in turn, enable the fulfilment of the expectations that now exist both within and beyond the council.

It is also important for the senior leadership of the council to recognise that not everything that needs to be achieved on the change and improvement front can be done in one fell swoop! The resource constraints on the organisation simply won’t allow it and thus there needs to be an appropriate prioritisation and related sequencing of activities. This could be achieved through a corporately owned and driven transformation programme – as referenced above – that sets out the key programmes and projects, their sequencing and utilising programme management tools to monitor and report delivery.

**Following on from the peer challenge**

Through the peer challenge process we have sought to highlight the positive aspects of the council and the area but we have also outlined some difficult challenges and potential ways to address them. It has been our aim to provide some detail on them through this report in order to help the council understand and consider them. The council’s senior political and managerial leadership will therefore undoubtedly want to reflect further on the findings before determining how they wish to take things forward.

Members of the team would be happy to contribute to any further improvement support in the future and/or to return to the authority in due course to undertake a short progress review. Heather Wills, as the Local Government Association’s Principal Adviser for the region within which the council sits, will continue to act as the main contact between the council and the Local Government Association, particularly in relation to improvement and access to the LGA’s resources and packages of support going forward.

All of us connected with the peer challenge would like to wish Redbridge, both as a council and a place, every success in the future.

Chris Bowron
Programme Manager – Peer Support
Local Government Association
Annex – Contents of the feedback presentation delivered to the council on Thursday 17th March 2016

Capitalising on opportunity

- Redbridge, both as a borough and a council, has tremendous opportunities – generating both excitement and some apprehension
- The ‘new’ Administration and the arrival of the Chief Executive are energising the organisation
- People within the council are committed, enthusiastic and energetic – they have proved resilient and determined and are keen on a transformed future
- There is also an understanding of the need for change – with people inevitably reacting to this in different ways
- The council has a strong balance sheet that offers opportunities and options
- A range of key services, particularly adults and children’s services, are performing well e.g. educational attainment, early intervention focus, low cost
- Housing and physical regeneration are widely accepted as key priorities going forward – with it being important to ensure social regeneration (health, skills, employment etc.) are also to the fore
- The borough itself has much to offer already along with growing opportunities:
  - Open spaces and green belt
  - Access to London – and with Crossrail (four stations in the borough) to come
  - Existing and increasing diversity
  - Cohesive communities
  - A young population
  - Good quality housing
  - Significant property and land ownership on the part of the council
  - Increasing land values
  - Entrepreneurial spirit

A vision for the borough

- To maximise the opportunities and benefits for the borough going forward, there needs to be a coherent narrative about Redbridge as a place in the future
- Creating such a narrative will provide a clear focus that currently is absent
- The development of that narrative needs to involve and engage partners and communities as well as the elected membership of the council
- Fundamental in this process is determining what Redbridge’s place in London should be and the priority outcomes that are required for citizens
- The findings of the Fairness Commission can be taken forward through this work
- There is also the opportunity to broaden horizons, looking for example at what the devolution agenda can offer Redbridge and the opportunities to work across a wider geography in order to secure benefits for the borough – with what is being looked at with the Accountable Care Organisation (ACO) offering an example of what is possible
• As part of this, there is also the opportunity to draw in learning from elsewhere much more and tap in to what others are already doing – rather than risk re-inventing the wheel
• Once the vision has been determined, the council needs to translate it in to what it means for the organisation in terms of its contribution and the way it operates

Leadership of place

• The council is unique in Redbridge in terms of the democratic mandate that it holds
• This presents an opportunity that currently doesn’t feel as though it is being fulfilled – that of ‘leading the place’
• Moving to that position, however, requires the council to be credible in the eyes of partner organisations both within and beyond the borough
• There is a desire within the borough to see a form of Local Strategic Partnership being re-created, but without the bureaucracy that went before
• To become a ‘place leader’ requires the council to let go of aspects of the past and determine its key characteristics for the future:
  • ‘Helping residents to be more resilient’ rather than paternalism
  • Focusing on the achievement of outcomes rather than delivery
  • Utilising influence rather than looking to control
  • ‘Placing communities at the heart of decision making’

Finance

• The council has a choice going forward – to continue a ‘reductionist’ narrative and approach focused on looking to do the best it can with ever-reducing resources on a directorate by directorate basis or to focus on how to achieve the best possible outcomes from the considerable financial, and other, resources available across the council and the borough
• At present, the purpose of the council’s budget process is solely to set a balanced budget
• Whilst the council is able to demonstrate it can balance the books for the next three years, we lack confidence in:
  • Its ability to deliver key aspects of the savings that have been agreed – most notably the ambitions of the transformation programme
  • The budget-setting process – involvement, transparency, robustness
  • The baseline allocation of resources
• The council’s budget strategy for the next two years involves utilising significant reserves to underpin the budget – losing the opportunity to utilise those same reserves in a way that enables the transformation of the organisation
• There is widespread appetite in the organisation for a fundamentally different approach to how the council utilises its own resources and determines its options – ‘One Council’, establishing the ‘true budget’, investing to save, more early intervention and prevention, income and growth opportunities and linking to other sources of funding
Managing the organisation

- The ethos and culture of the organisation as they currently exist are characterised by silos, unnecessary bureaucracy, low appetite for risk, limited innovation and insularity
- Everybody we have spoken to wants to leave this way of operating behind
- The way the Chief Executive is approaching things and the behaviours he is modelling are being widely noticed but culture change requires a variety of organisational development initiatives, enhanced internal communications and opportunities for staff to engage and feel involved
- ‘Transformation’ of the council is required but the current corporate programme is too narrowly defined and has not been well enough positioned by the council to enable it to succeed
- Crucial to the success of the council going forward is establishing the core disciplines necessary for any organisation to succeed and creating a situation in which strong and effective directorates are enabled to succeed further by a corporate centre providing the necessary capacity and expertise in a mutually supportive and beneficial partnership
- People within the corporate centre are working hard trying to do the right thing – and they are as frustrated as the rest of the organisation that it isn’t working and that the relationships with directorates, for understandable reasons, are not what they need to be
- The council recognises that, moving forward, key aspects of the way the organisation functions and is supported need to be put on a fundamentally different footing:

Supporting processes and management information

- Performance management
- HR and organisational development
- Equality and diversity
- Research, intelligence and the use of data
- Strategic thinking and planning
- Finance function

Transformation and enablers

- ICT
- Customer service
- Communications internally and externally

Commissioning, commercialisation and contract management

- The council’s approach to commissioning
- Property and assets
- Income generation
- Procurement
• Market management and supplier management

Leadership and governance

• The ‘hybrid’ governance structure is born out of the past but there is very widespread agreement that the status quo is not satisfactory
• Thus there is an opportunity for the council to debate what alternative structure is most appropriate for the future and to then implement it
• We have not identified any areas of concern regarding standards or behaviours – which provides a good basis to work from
• Relationships between elected members and officers are generally good
• Cabinet and the Corporate Management Team are now taking the opportunity to meet and all involved are keen to see this extended and embedded
• Time and effort needs to be invested in enabling the Cabinet and Corporate Management Team to work effectively both in their own right and together
• Within this, the Leader, who is widely respected, will be enabled to focus his effort and attention on providing the strategic leadership that people within the borough and the council are seeking
• As part of instilling the necessary core disciplines in the organisation, elected members need to have the required confidence that officers are bringing forward fully rounded options and proposals for them to decide upon and that officers are equipped with the necessary political awareness
• In gearing up for the future it is important to review whether the support provided by the organisation for the elected membership to fulfil their various roles is adequate

Taking things forward

• The arrival of the Chief Executive has generated considerable expectation
• We understand the reasons behind moving the management restructure forward at speed and recognise the way in which the risks around this have tried to be managed
• There have been a lot of references to the ‘pace’ of change that have arisen from this
• The extensive change agenda that will follow over the coming months and years needs to balance sufficient pace with appropriate caution – and in so doing fulfil the expectations that exist whilst allowing the necessary deliberation
• Not everything can be done in one fell swoop!
### Peer Challenge Action Plan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recommendation</th>
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<th>Timescale</th>
<th>Lead Officer</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1. A vision for the Borough</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>1.1 Agree the vision for the borough</td>
<td>Refresh the Corporate Strategy, including integrating findings from the Fairness Commission</td>
<td>By July 2016</td>
<td>Andy Donald</td>
<td>Cllr Jas Athwal</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Engage the workforce to develop a clear narrative for the future of the borough and the Council. Subsequently test this through the newly established Borough Partnership (see section 2 below)</td>
<td>By July 2016</td>
<td>Andy Donald</td>
<td>Cllr Jas Athwal</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Deliver a clear vision for the future of Ilford Town Centre, which can be used to drive future growth and investment</td>
<td>August 2016</td>
<td>Emma Peters</td>
<td>Cllr Helen Coomb</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Signal to the wider world that Redbridge is ‘open for business’ by communicating our vision of the future and the resulting regeneration opportunities</td>
<td>By April 2017</td>
<td>Andy Donald Corporate Director of Place</td>
<td>Cllr Helen Coomb</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2 Establish Redbridge’s place in London</td>
<td>Fully engage in the London agenda through participation in key networks and building relationships with the Mayor, GLA and other Boroughs</td>
<td>April - July 2016</td>
<td>Management Team</td>
<td>Cllr Jas Athwal</td>
</tr>
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<td>Recommendation</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Proactively engage in the Local London agenda, positioning East London and Redbridge to benefit from devolution opportunities – e.g. Employment, skills, health and housing</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
<td>Andy Donald</td>
<td>Cllr Jas Athwal</td>
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2. Leadership of place

2.1 Establish a new strategic partnership

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Establish a new Strategic Partnership for Redbridge</td>
<td>By September 2016</td>
<td>Andy Donald</td>
<td>Cllr Jas Athwal</td>
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2.2 Focus on outcomes

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Through the new Strategic Partnership, develop a Borough Plan which articulates a clear vision and a set of priority outcomes for the Borough</td>
<td>By April 2017</td>
<td>Corporate Director of Strategy</td>
<td>Cllr Jas Athwal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complete the Local Plan, Housing Strategy and Economic Strategy suite of documents</td>
<td>By April 2017</td>
<td>Emma Peters</td>
<td>Cllr Helen Coomb</td>
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3. Finance

3.1 Review the budget process

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<th>Actions</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Revise the Medium Term Financial Strategy</td>
<td>By October 2017</td>
<td>Maria G. Christofi</td>
<td>Cllr Kam Rai</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Review and refresh the budget process for 2017/18, including piloting outcome based budgeting</td>
<td>By March 2017</td>
<td>Maria G. Christofi</td>
<td>Cllr Kam Rai</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implement outcome based budgeting for the 2018/19 budget process onward</td>
<td>March 2017 onwards</td>
<td>Maria G. Christofi</td>
<td>Cllr Kam Rai</td>
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<tr>
<td>Recommendation</td>
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<td>3.2 Explore income and growth opportunities</td>
<td>Develop income and growth ideas as part of the budget process</td>
<td>By March 2017</td>
<td>Management Team</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>4. Managing the organisation</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>4.1 Develop a corporate transformation programme</td>
<td>Refresh the operational and governance model for the transformation programme</td>
<td>By June 2016</td>
<td>Emeran Saigol</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Prioritise, establish momentum and clarify investment requirements for the three existing strands of the transformation programme</td>
<td>June - October 2016</td>
<td>Emeran Saigol</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Determine the scope and scale of an expanded transformation programme, linked to priorities in the Medium Term Financial Strategy</td>
<td>November 2016</td>
<td>Andy Donald</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2 Establish the core disciplines necessary for the Council to operate to best effect</td>
<td>Establish effective service planning and performance regime and culture in support of delivering the Corporate Strategy priorities</td>
<td>By March 2017</td>
<td>Andy Donald</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Strong focus on improving customer service across the organisation as top priority – including full review of customer standards</td>
<td>Immediate</td>
<td>Management Team</td>
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<tr>
<td>Recommendation</td>
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<td>Timescale</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Establish Corporate Equalities Group to review the organisations approach to equalities, with a view to embedding good practice throughout the organisation</td>
<td>Immediate</td>
<td>Andy Donald</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Establish intelligence hub at the centre of the organisation and use this to drive evidenced based service planning and decision making throughout the Council</td>
<td>By March 2017</td>
<td>Corporate Director of Strategy</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Options appraisal for the future model of ICT provision across the Council, with a view to implementation of preferred option within 2017/18</td>
<td>By March 2017</td>
<td>Maria G. Christofi</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Full review of approach to internal and external communications across the Council</td>
<td>By March 2017</td>
<td>Corporate Director of Strategy</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Full review of the Council’s approach to commissioning, procurement and contract management</td>
<td>By December 2016</td>
<td>Maria G. Christofi</td>
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### 5. Leadership and governance

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<tr>
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<th>Lead Cabinet Member</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5.1 Establish organisational capacity to support the new vision</td>
<td>Implement the senior management restructure, closely managing the transition to ensure there is no performance dip</td>
<td>By December 2016</td>
<td>Andy Donald</td>
<td>Cllr Jas Athwal</td>
</tr>
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<td>Recommendation</td>
<td>Actions</td>
<td>Timescale</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Work collaboratively with staff to develop a clear workforce plan</td>
<td>By December 2016</td>
<td>Maria G. Christofi</td>
<td>Cllr Jas Athwal</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Develop a high quality Leadership Programme</td>
<td>By March 2017</td>
<td>Andy Donald</td>
<td>Cllr Kam Rai</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2 Values</td>
<td>Work collaboratively with all staff to develop and embed new organisational values</td>
<td>By July 2016</td>
<td>Andy Donald</td>
<td>Cllr Jas Athwal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3 Member / Officer interface</td>
<td>Extend and embed Cabinet and Corporate Management Team collaboration – including ‘away’ sessions as part of the budget process</td>
<td>Ongoing Away sessions in July &amp; October 2016</td>
<td>Andy Donald Maria G. Christofi</td>
<td>Cllr Jas Athwal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.4 Governance arrangements</td>
<td>Review the corporate governance arrangements in the light of the new vision for the borough</td>
<td>By December 2016</td>
<td>Maria G. Christofi Head of Legal Services</td>
<td>Cllr Jas Athwal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.5 Member development</td>
<td>Instigate structured development programme to support cabinet members</td>
<td>October 2016 onwards</td>
<td>Corporate Director of Strategy</td>
<td>Cllr Jas Athwal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Review and revise the member development programme</td>
<td>February 2017</td>
<td>Head of Legal Services</td>
<td>Cllr Jas Athwal</td>
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</table>