1. Executive Summary

1.1 The report advises Cabinet of the outcome of the Local Government Association’s revisit of the Corporate Peer Challenge of the London Borough of Redbridge. The Leader and Chief Executive commissioned the peer challenge to provide an external perspective of the Council’s performance compared to the original visit held in March 2016.

1.2 A number of the original team of experienced local government peers revisited the Borough from 20 – 21 June 2017. They engaged with a range of the Council’s stakeholders, including councillors, officers and senior managers. The peer team used their experience and knowledge to reflect on the information presented to them and produced a report to summarise their findings.

1.3 Some of the key messages that were identified within the peer review were:

- The Council needs to continue on the current path, but there is still a lot of work to do
- The five year Medium Term Financial Strategy and the work undertaken to remove historical inaccuracies makes the budget more realistic and transparent, however for this to create a robust baseline the challenge of meeting the 10% in year savings must be met.
- The changes to the Governance of the Council will provide greater elected member involvement, however to ensure that the opportunities are maximised there needs to be more opportunities for Member Development
- Ensure that there is a comprehensive approach to work around culture change (including the role of organisational values) and staff development, with a clear conclusion.
- Take stock at regular intervals of what has been achieved, communicate it and celebrate the progress being made
- The Council is now seen as a credible and serious partner at the sub-regional and regional level

1.4 Senior Leadership Group has developed an action plan in response to the recommendations from the peer challenge. This action plan will be incorporated within the work programme of the Senior Leadership Group to ensure delivery.
2. Recommendations

The Cabinet is recommended to:-

2.1 consider the findings and recommendations from the feedback report of the Corporate Peer Challenge of the London Borough of Redbridge attached at Appendix A; and

2.2 agree the Peer Challenge Action Plan developed in response to the report attached at Appendix B.

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

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3. **Background and Proposals**

3.1 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.

3.2 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.

3.3 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 whom originally visited in March 2016.

3.4 It was agreed that the peers would be invited to return one year later to monitor progress against their original recommendations. This visit was held on 20 – 21 June 2017.

**The Redbridge Corporate Peer Challenge**

3.5 The scope for the returning team was to review the Council’s progress against the original action plan and to revisit the areas that were covered in the original Peer Challenge. The key themes and questions were:

**Financial planning and viability**
- Do we have a financial plan in place to ensure long term viability and is there evidence that it is being implemented successfully?
- We would welcome comment on our revised MTFS, including prioritisation of savings and process.

**Organisational leadership and governance**
- Is there effective leadership?
- Is this supported by good governance and decision making arrangements?
- Does it respond to key challenges and enable change to be implemented?
- We would welcome comment on our recent governance review.

**Equality and Diversity**
- Does the council understand the changing and diverse nature of its communities?
- How is the changing demographic reflected in the way the council engages with local people?

**Organisational Culture**
- Has the culture of the organisation changed since the last visit?
- Are staff aware of the cultural changes?
- How embedded are issues raised and discussed through the Staff Forums and the SMART working events?

3.6 During their visit 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;
- Senior Leadership Group
- Change Champions
- neighbouring councils;

Feedback from the peer challenge

3.8 The LGA’s Corporate Peer Challenge Feedback Report of the London Borough of Redbridge is attached in Appendix A.

3.9 Key findings and recommendations from the report are:

- There has been a huge amount of work that has taken place in the past year including the development of the Medium Term Financial Strategy, a ‘Good’ OFSTED rating on the single inspection framework and progress on the ‘Smarter Ways of Working’
- The Council is now seen as a credible and serious partner at the sub-regional and regional level
- The Council needs to continue on the current path, but there is still a lot of work to do
- Take stock at regular intervals of what has been achieved, communicate it and celebrate the progress being made
- Support the desire for change amongst employees through creating a clearer narrative for Redbridge both as a place and a Council, which encompasses how change will be prioritised in the future
- Ensure that there is a comprehensive approach to work around culture change (including the role of organisational values) and staff development, with a clear conclusion.
- The five year Medium Term Financial Strategy and the work undertaken to remove historical inaccuracies makes the budget more realistic and transparent, however for this to create a robust baseline the challenge of meeting the 10% in year savings must be met.
- Budget planning has improved, however the scale of the financial challenge will mean elected members will need to be ‘steadfast and resolute’
- The future plans for Ilford were considered ‘very impressive’ however this needs to be replicated effectively across the entire borough
- The changes to the Governance of the Council will provide greater elected member involvement, however to ensure that the opportunities are maximised there needs to be more opportunities for Member Development
- It was noted that current responses to Member casework was inconsistent and needed to be more systematic in the future
- The Council has benefited from bringing learning in from outside of the organisation and it should be continued in the future
- There is pride in Redbridge being very diverse, but there is awareness that more needs to be done to be consistent in its approach to equality and diversity, good practice was cited within social work.
• The research identified a need to ensure that ‘managers need to manage’, however to achieve this the Council must ensure that the relevant systems are in place

Response to the peer challenge feedback

3.10 Appendix B 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.

3.11 The Action Plan will be used to inform the work of the Senior Leadership Group in the coming year, ensuring that there is shared ownership of the delivery of the recommendations and consistency across the Council.

4. Fairness Implications, including Equality and Diversity

4.1 The Equality Impact Screening shows that the impact of the Peer Challenge Report and Action Plan for groups with protected characteristics is positive.

4.2 The Fairness Screening shows that the impact of the Peer Challenge Report and Action Plan on service users, communities and employees is positive.

4.3 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.

5. Staffing Implications

5.1 The Action Plan will help to ensure that LBR staff understand the Council’s direction of travel, and most importantly that they understand their own role in helping to achieve the Borough Plan objectives. These plans will be cascaded down via the Performance Management Review (PMR) process to ensure that a key part of staff performance management will be the inclusion of specific objectives into PMR’s that contribute towards achieving the Council’s goals. This in turn will help the staff to feel included and more valued.

5.2 The Peer Review commented that there should be a comprehensive approach to work around culture change, including the role of organisational values and staff development. This will occur through planned staff engagement and staff forum groups, plus establishing a golden thread linking values to outcomes, which again will help staff to feel included and part of the organisations future. This golden thread will also be evident throughout the Performance Management Review process.

5.3 The Peer Review recommended that there should be clear expectations for staff in terms of “managers needing to manage”. The implementation of an Organisational Development strategy and ‘Redbridge Academy’ will ensure that Managers not only have the core skills they need to run their service, but
also to ensure that they feel empowered in their roles as leaders to own the outcomes of their services.

6. **Financial Implications**

6.1 The action plan covers both existing and new initiatives that will drive improvement in the areas highlighted. The cost of delivering the Action Plan will be met from the prioritisation of existing budgets.

7. **Legal Implications**

7.1 The Action Plan outlines the new initiatives in relation to Member Development.

**BACKGROUND PAPERS**

Equality Impact Screening
Fairness Screening