

LGA Peer Challenge 2022 Action Plan

1	Context	The change in the Chief Executive forms part of a crucial juncture for the council over the coming months. This could be deemed as a 'reset point' and is a positive culmination of the efforts and achievement of recent years. The report recommends that the Council capitalises fully upon a 'reset point' that has now been reached, particularly in relation to the following:			
	Recommendation/s	Proposed Actions	Lead	Target Date	Updates
1a	Ensure absolute clarity in relation to what is being sought in appointing a new Chief Executive.	(i) Members have clarified the skills and qualities they are seeking from our new Chief Executive in the job specification and selection process, which is due to be completed by 30 September 2022.	AD of HR & Organisational Development	Complete	Complete.
1b	Ensure the senior political and managerial leadership of the council becomes much more externally focused.	(i) Review external strategic relationships and partnerships including with public, business and voluntary sectors to ensure that they are effective and coordinated to deliver the Council's priorities including health, education and equalities outcomes. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) audit key external partner/partnership relationships b) conduct gap analysis to ensure all relevant sectors are covered and that relationships are held by the right people/at the right level c) clarify purpose/potential of engagement. <i>Linked to 2d below</i>	DEGNS DMT & AD of Corporate Improvement & Customer Services	March 2023	Audit of key external partner/partnership relationships held by DEGNS DMT. DEGNS DMT discussed in January and concluded there was scope for improved engagement with key utilities at more senior levels given their ability to help/hinder delivery of key corporate objectives (e.g., SSEN grid connections enabling net zero, EA approach to flood risk management, strategic water supply and management issues with Thames Water). Leader and Chief Executive meeting with local leaders and stakeholders, including business partners, VCS and university. Tackling Inequality strategy and place-based pilots delivery will be delivered

					<p>through fundamental engagement and collaboration with partners.</p> <p>Berkshire Chief Executives and Leaders are meeting on a monthly basis to discuss common interests.</p> <p>Political regional meetings?</p> <p>A senior Policy Manager has been appointed to develop the council's relationship with the Voluntary and Community Sector and their work has included mapping VCS services, developing the Council's support offer, networking and market building and developing a new Compact with the sector.</p> <p>Further engagement with Government departments has proved successful in grant application such as the recent award of LUF and Future Councils funding.</p> <p>The Exec Director for Adult Social Care & Health is actively engaged in discussions with the local Integrated Care Board as it formulates its strategic priorities and governance. This includes influencing and shaping key decisions that are made at System level versus Place level to ensure the best outcomes for residents. Being at the table ensures that the needs of local Residents are central to decision making and the</p>
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					importance of prevention is not lost amongst the dominant focus of acute hospital pressure.
		(ii) Review the development offer for Members and opportunity to provide enhanced support around strategic place leadership	AD of Legal and Democratic Services	March 2023	The induction programme for 23/24 for new members has been reviewed and enhanced. Further opportunities for Member Briefings on strategic issues have been built into the Council calendar for 2023/24.
1c	Adopt a revised managerial approach which maintains the necessary organisational disciplines but also provides for greater autonomy - as seen during the pandemic.	(i) Further work is needed to identify where decision making can be streamlined throughout the organisation, to enable decisions to be taken at the lowest reasonably practical level. (ii) This also links closely with the Scheme of Delegation review (3a below) and Governance Processes (4a below). (iii) In undertaking this work will be mindful of need for behavioural change in relation to risk appetite and adopting a positive learning-based approach to failure.	AD of HR & Organisational Development/CMT	March 2023 New AD HR & OD starts on 3 April. This should be reflected in the target date	The Constitution review and changes have been agreed by Council. Contract Procedure Rules and Financials Regs are currently being reviewed. These changes will together provide greater levels of financial delegation to officers while maintain financial discipline. This review is now being expanded to include officer decision process and the link to project management. Business processes including authorisation of recruitment has been delegated to appropriate directors removing the previous CEO sign off. SLG are also reviewing the business planning process to ensure organisational priorities are discussed and agreed at the start of the cycle, to help inform budget and service planning and reduce silo-working

2	Context	<p>There is currently a ‘window of opportunity’ to enable fundamental and profound change in the lives of the residents of the borough under the emerging ‘tackling inequalities’ agenda. Elements central to this ‘window’ include the democratic mandate reinforced by the local election; the enhanced community spirit brought about by the pandemic and other major events that have impacted the borough; the positioning of the borough for economic recovery from the pandemic; and the council’s stabilisation. The Council needs to enhance significantly its understanding of its changing communities and sit this at the heart of policy formulation, service design, the way the place is being shaped and the emerging ‘people-based’ agenda.</p> <p>It is recommended that the Council capitalise fully upon the ‘window of opportunity’ that currently exists to enable fundamental and profound change in the lives of the residents of the borough, particularly in relation to the following:</p>			
	Recommendation/s	Proposed Actions	Lead	Target Date	Updates
2a	Developing a politically determined narrative and vision around ‘tackling inequalities’	<p>(i) The Council will develop and adopt a Social Inclusion Strategy setting out its vision, priorities and approach to tackling inequality. The Strategy will be data given with solutions co-produced with and through engagement with our communities.</p> <p>The supporting Delivery Plan will describe how the Council will work with local people, communities, and partners to overcome barriers arising from inequality, and disadvantage so that everyone can share in the economic, political, social and cultural life of Reading.</p>	CMT/SLG	Strategy complete and agreed January 2023.	<p>The Social Inclusion Board has overseen the development of a ‘Tackling Inequality Strategy’ that takes an innovative place-based approach to delivering fundamental and sustainable change through a focus on skills, education and training.</p> <p>The Strategy includes a detailed Action Plan and was agreed at Policy Committee in January 2023.</p> <p>Two place-based pilots in wards with the greatest level of need are being initiated with each multi-disciplinary team led by an Executive Director</p> <p>Recognising that apprenticeships can support our social inclusion</p>

				<p>objectives and our aim to make the council a more diverse and inclusive organisation, each service area is required to ensure that at least 2.3% of their full-time equivalent posts are employed as apprentices. This excludes current staff who are upskilling through an apprenticeship. This will create at least 15 new apprentice posts at the Council by March 2024.</p> <p>HROD team is working with managers across the Council to create a new corporate work experience programme, initially for students in Years 10 and 11. This programme aims to showcase the Council as a future employer of choice for young people and the wide range of career opportunities available, manage work experience placements more efficiently, support more students, and provide a more impactful experience aligned to schools' needs.</p> <p>Through our mentoring scheme, the Team Reading Programme for 2022/23 includes an objective to explore opportunities for RBC managers to mentor young people in the borough, prioritising</p>
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					secondary schools for young people from the lower income or least affluent areas of the borough.
		(ii) The Council’s Corporate Plan sets out its vision “.... to help Reading realise its potential and to ensure that everyone who lives and works here can share the benefits of its success.” The Council will continue to embed this vision so that tackling inequality is a fundamental consideration in all its decision making, and service planning.	CMT	March 2023	<p>An annual refresh of the Corporate Plan was agreed by full Council at its March meeting.</p> <p>The Corporate and Service Planning cycle for 2023/24 was built on the Corporate Plan vision and priorities providing the golden thread through and informing Service Plans and subsequent team and personal objectives.</p>
		(iii) The Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy will be the vehicle for achieving this for the workforce. Work is already underway to commission a partner organisation to assist with the development of the strategy, which aims to create an inclusive organisation where everyone can bring their whole self to work and reach their full potential.	AD of HR & Organisational Development	December 2022	Work on the EDI agenda has been ongoing following a Council Motion in 2020 and the Business in the Community review of 2021. Most of the recommendations have been completed, the remaining will be included in the EDI strategy which is to be produced this summer

2b	Developing a much deeper engagement with, and understanding of, Reading's diverse communities	(i) The Council will review its resident and customer engagement mechanisms to ensure that they are relevant and effective in identifying the needs of local people. Within this work there will be an explicit focus on ensuring that the voices of Reading's diverse communities are properly represented.	AD of Corporate Improvement & Customer Services	December 2022	<p>Understanding of and engagement with our diverse communities is a key component of the place-based pilots being initiated under the Tackling Inequality Strategy. These pilots are being stood-up and data development is in progress.</p> <p>The work on reviewing the Councils approach to resident consultation and engagement is planned for 2023/24.</p>
2c	Establishing a shared understanding and a shared endeavour across a multiplicity of partners and Reading's communities in tackling inequalities.	(ii) The development and implementation of the new Social Inclusion Strategy will include gathering the views and intelligence of local public, private and voluntary sector partners to ensure a comprehensive picture of need and co-ordinated response is developed. This collaborative approach includes key partners as substantive members of the Social Inclusion Board and will be a key feature which oversees the delivery of this agenda.	AD of Corporate Improvement & Customer Services	December 2022	The development of the 'Tackling Inequality Strategy' was overseen by the Social Inclusion board and sets out a delivery approach based on engagement, collaboration and co-production.
2d	Maximising the council's influence locally, regionally and nationally	(i) Linked to 1b i above. The scope of the review will be broadened to include the Council's partnerships, memberships and representation on regional and national forums.			See 1b
		(ii) Review engagement with ADEPT Boards and Working Groups to ensure appropriate input at the right level with a view to maximising influence via this network	DEGNS DMT	December 2022	Complete. DEGNS DMT has audited engagement with ADEPT Boards and Working Groups and made some changes in representation and engagement as a result. We

					have also sought to maximise our influence by, for example, submitting good practice case studies to LGA, Key Cities etc
2e	Collectively determining, with partners and communities, what needs to be undertaken to tackle inequalities and ensuring this is translated into tangible action.	(i) The approach to developing the Social Inclusion Strategy (see 2a above) will include stakeholder engagement to understand the long-term and immediate barriers to inclusion and inform the action needed to overcome these and reduce inequality.	AD of Corporate Improvement & Customer Services	December 2022	The development of the 'Tackling Inequality Strategy' was overseen by the Social Inclusion board and sets out a delivery approach based on engagement, collaboration and co-production. This will be a continuing approach through delivery of the Place-based pilot projects.

3	Context	The review of the Constitution and Delegations Book is very much focused on the refinement and streamlining of what exists - with the aim of making what is laid down in writing easier to navigate - rather than changing any of the fundamentals of how the council is governed. Whilst this work is relatively narrow in scope, it is important that it becomes more widely known about and that opportunity is provided for all key internal stakeholders to input.			
	Recommendation/s	Proposed Actions	Lead	Target Date	Updates
3a	Expedite the work reviewing the Constitution and Delegations Book and, in the process, ensure the opportunity is provided for key internal stakeholders to input fully	(i) Work on the revised Constitution and Scheme of Delegation is underway and members will be consulted in Autumn 2022 with a view to revised arrangements being put in place as soon as possible. Other key internal stakeholders have been engaged during the review and will be fully involved in the roll out of the revised constitution.	AD of Legal & Democratic Services	December 22	Following engagement with stakeholders the revised Constitution was agreed at Council on 18 October 2022. New delegations and a decision-making process were approved. Some further work to update Financial Regulations (with a new financial system coming on-stream) and Contract Procedure Rules (in light of the new Procurement Bill) will be undertaken in 2023. The

					Constitution will be reviewed again by October 2023 to ensure that the objectives of the October 2022 review have been achieved.
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4	Context	There is extensive engagement between the senior leadership of the Administration and senior officers. Such engagement is beneficial in shaping what enters the formal elected member decision-making arena. However, the lead-in times and the ‘number of hoops to jump through’ in Reading as things move towards formal decision-making feel to be greater than elsewhere.			
	Recommendation/s	Proposed Actions	Lead	Target Date	Updates
4a	Develop understanding of, and challenge, the factors that generate the lengthy lead-in times and extensive number of ‘hoops to jump through’ in the council’s governance processes	(i) Following the revision to the Constitution and Scheme of Delegation we will review the workflows for all decision-making processes (committees and officer decisions) to ensure an efficient process which meets the needs of officers and councillors. We will put in place a training programme for officers who are involved in decisions and keep this under review in order to provide refresher training for future cohorts of new managers. <i>Linked to 1c above</i>	AD of Legal & Democratic Services	March 23	See 1c
		(ii) Further engagement with staff and managers will be undertaken through focus group discussion to identify specific examples of where the perceive the challenges to be and inform any further opportunities that can be taken to change governance, process or	AD of HR & Organisational Development AD of Corporate Improvement & Customer	March 23	See 1c above and SLG and wider managers groups have discussed. Work is ongoing to define what further opportunities are available.

		culture and streamline decision making	Services		
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5	Context	A council of the scale and importance of Reading should have a comprehensive elected member development programme that supports councillors in all of their roles. Within this, it is crucial that all elected members are supported to be fully aware of their statutory responsibilities, including in relation to that of ‘Corporate Parent.’			
	Recommendation/s	Proposed Actions	Lead	Target Date	Updates
5a) Establish a comprehensive elected member development programme that supports councillors in all of their different roles and ensures they are fully aware of their statutory responsibilities	(i) Work will be undertaken with CMT and group leaders to agree a programme of development activities which meets the needs of councillors and ensures that statutory responsibilities can be effectively discharged.	AD of Legal & Democratic Services	March 2023	<p>The member induction programme has been reviewed with additional items added.</p> <p>The training programme for members will include use of LGA mentoring for lead members and also developing skills for place leadership at the ward and borough level.</p> <p>A further series of Strategic Briefings for members has been added to the 23/24 committee timetable.</p>

6	Context	It is crucial that children’s services - in the form of senior officers from ‘Brighter Futures for Children’ -- are engaged much more fundamentally at the strategic level of the organisation. There is good working and engagement seen to be taking place at the delivery			
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		level but there is a gap in more strategic-level arenas.			
	Recommendation/s	Proposed Actions	Lead	Target Date	Updates
6a	i) Ensure that children's services have the opportunity to be engaged much more fundamentally at the strategic level of the organisation	(i) DCS's attendance at weekly Senior Management Team Meetings and Leaders Briefing sessions will raise the profile of children and young people's needs and the role of corporate parent which will help embed it within all council services. Strategic engagement in these and wider council forums is building a stronger relationship between the Council and Company and the Council will continue to ensure that this direction of travel is maintained and BFfC are engaged at this senior level.	CMT	Ongoing	<p>Linked to this development, discussions are underway to strengthen the governance between the Council and BFfC including the role of the Contract Management Group.</p> <p>Quarterly meetings are held between the Leader, Lead Member for Children's Services, Chief Executive and DCS.</p> <p>BFfC are embedded in key strategic initiatives with a clear common purpose, for example in the Social Inclusion Board.</p>

7	Context	The council's financial position and management arrangements have recovered and strengthened significantly in recent years. Strategic financial planning is now more mature and supported by an appropriate level of analysis, with robust budget setting and monitoring procedures. However, the council's financial base, whilst sound, remains vulnerable.			
	Recommendation/s	Proposed Actions	Lead	Target Date	Updates
7a	ii) Ensure the continuation of the rigour and disciplines necessary to deliver the agreed savings and income generation plans	<p>(i) Maintain rigour of financial management and oversight so that all senior leaders and cost centre managers take responsibility for delivery within the approved budget.</p> <p>(ii) Development of new longer-term model for tracking key risks in the MTFS with regular report to CMT and Lead Members</p>	<p>CMT</p> <p>Financial Planning & Strategy Manager</p>	<p>Ongoing</p> <p>Complete</p>	<p>This is an ongoing task but on track to deliver within budget in 2022/23 and balanced budget set for 2023/24 without calling on reserves.</p> <p>This model is now in place. Next update due to CMT in May 2023 and to Lead Members in June 2023.</p>

<p>and maintain wider financial controls - in a context of the council's sound financial base remaining vulnerable and the pressures and risks around this</p>				
	(iii) Roll-out of budget holder training across RBC	Director of Finance (with support from CIPFA)	Summer 2023	This is currently under development and will be delivered during 2023 to coincide with the roll out of the new financial system.
	(iv) Continuation of monthly financial reporting to CMT and Lead Members with quarterly reporting to Policy Committee with greater focus on key risk areas.	Financial Planning & Strategy Manager	Dec 23	This is ongoing. The Quarter 2 and Quarter 3 reports were presented to Policy Committee in December 2022 and March 2023 respectively.
	(v) Rollout of a new financial system that will improve Budget Holder access to financial information.	Director of Finance	Summer 2023	This is currently under development and will be rolled out Autumn 2023.
	(vi) All financial controls assessed as at least Reasonable Assurance by Internal Audit	Director of Finance	TBC	There are 2 remaining financial controls that have not reached at least Reasonable Assurance. Both of these will be reassessed during 2023/24.
	(vii) The audit of the Statement of Accounts to be brought up to date	Chief Accountant	Summer 23	<p>The national issue concerning disclosure and accounting for Infrastructure Assets has delayed the conclusion of the 2019/20 audit until March 2023.</p> <p>The audit of the 2020/21 Statement of Accounts is currently in progress and the Council is planning to publish draft accounts for 2021/22 in June 2023. Auditors have indicated they will be on site in August to commence work. we are currently exploring how we might be able to twin track work with 2022/23.</p>

					<p>The Council's finance team meets weekly with External Auditor's to manage the audit process. Continual progress and improvements are being made and evidenced through audit testing which shows the Council is on track to bring the accounts up to date.</p> <p>The 2022/23 process has a statutory deadline of 30 September 2023 for the publication of audited accounts. This target is unlikely to be met.</p>
		(viii) Ensure robust arrangements are in place to ensure the financial viability of RBC's wholly owned companies	Director of Finance	Ongoing	<p>The Director of Finance has monthly meetings with the FD's of Reading Buses and Brighter Futures for Children. In addition, the Bus Sub Group oversees the relationship with Reading Buses and the Contract Monitoring Group oversees the relationship with BFfC. Shareholder reports for both companies are presented to Policy Committee in its' role as shareholder.</p> <p>The recent announcement of £26m funding for the Bus Service Improvement Plan will help with the long-term viability of Reading Buses.</p> <p>A review of Homes for Reading has</p>

					been commissioned to put in place a long-term plan for the company.
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8	Context	The TEAM Reading values have a high profile in the organisation and are well understood. The focus on them must be maintained and pushed harder in order to ensure they become fully embedded and support the increase in cross-organisational working that is required.			
	Recommendation/s	Proposed Actions	Lead	Target Date	
8a)Continue the work to fully embed the TEAM Reading values	<p>(i) This is partly captured in the Team Reading Programme Plan for 2022/23. Significant work has been completed recently to embed the values within the performance management process. The values are also now being embedded in all job descriptions and will be considered as part of the recruitment and selection process for new employees. Furthermore, the Team Reading Leadership Development Programme was designed to ensure that leaders and managers across the organisation role model the values in their day-to-day interactions.</p> <p>(ii) The Staff Survey in April this year has identified further areas where improvement is needed to fully embed cultural change across the organisation. These include concerns about behaviours' including bullying, senior leadership and workload and priorities. Further discussion is needed with CMT and SLG to determine how these will be addressed.</p>	AD of HR & Organisational Development	Ongoing	<p>The Team Reading Programme Board oversee the implementation of plans to progress the embedding of Team Reading values.</p> <p>Phase 2 of the Team Reading Leadership Development Programme began in September 2022 with a greater focus on supporting managers to role model Team Reading Leadership Behaviours. The revised Annual Review and performance management process has been rolled out for all staff which assesses staff against the Team Reading values, highlighting the organisational importance of 'how' we do our roles as well as 'what' we do</p> <p>An SLG away day was held on 1 December 2022 to discuss and seek commitment to creating more opportunities for collaboration and role modelling positive leadership. There was also commitment to</p>

					<p>reviewing the business planning process to ensure organisational priorities are discussed and agreed at the start of the cycle, to help inform budget and service planning and reduce silo-working.</p> <p>The EDI Strategy (see above) is being developed for publication Summer 2023.</p>
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