



POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Wednesday, 19 March 2025

REPORT TITLE:	LOCAL GOVERNMENT ASSOCIATION CORPORATE PEER CHALLENGE
REPORT OF:	DIRECTOR OF LAW AND CORPORATE SERVICES

REPORT SUMMARY

The Council invited the Local Government Association (LGA) to undertake a Corporate Peer Challenge (CPC) in November 2024. This was a condition of the Independent Assurance Panel, stepping down earlier in the year following its support for the Council in delivering its improvement plan.

Councils are recommended to undertake a CPC every 5 years to demonstrate their commitment to improvement. The CPC process is not an inspection, but a peer-led review of organisational health. The peer team, led by the LGA was invited in to review the Council's improvement progress focusing on a standard set of five core themes:

- Local priorities and outcomes,
- Organisational and place leadership,
- Governance and culture,
- Financial Planning and Management,
- Capacity for improvement.

The LGA CPC feedback report is provided as Appendix 1 to this report and highlights the improvement progress the Council has made in the last two years. It also sets out 11 recommendations for the Council's improvement priorities going forward. An improvement action plan has been developed which responds to the recommendations and this is included as Appendix 2.

This report supports Council improvement and therefore all themes of the Council Plan: Wirral Working Together 2023-27. This is not a key decision.

RECOMMENDATION/S

The Policy and Resources Committee is requested to

1. Accept the findings of the LGA Corporate Peer Challenge Feedback Report, and
2. Endorse the action plan included as Appendix 2 to this report.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

1.0 REASON/S FOR RECOMMENDATION/S

- 1.1 The Corporate Peer Challenge is a critical element of the Council's commitment to continuous improvement. The report included as Appendix 1 provides a detailed review of recent progress and the key improvements the Council now needs to prioritise. Members of the Policy and Resources committee are required to consider this report and its implications for Council improvement.

2.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 2.1 The Corporate Peer Challenge process is a standard requirement for Councils and was a condition of the Independent Assurance Panel when it stood down its support for the Council in March 2024. As such, no other options have been considered as part of this report.

3.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 3.1 As a result of the Council's request for Exceptional Financial Support in 2020/21 and 2021/22, the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) commissioned an assurance review of the Council's governance and finance. Two reports were published in November 2021 setting out 23 recommendations which included the appointment of an Independent Assurance Panel (December 2021), the move to a four yearly Council election cycle (March 2022) and an LGA Corporate Peer Challenge (March 2022).
- 3.2 The Independent Assurance Panel met regularly over 2 years between January 2022 and March 2024 providing support and guidance to the Council in delivering its Improvement Plan. The Panel reported on progress both to the Council (via Policy and Resources committee) and MHCLG. In March 2024, the Chair of the Panel, Carolyn Downs, wrote to MHCLG advising of the intention to stand the Panel down. This was on the basis that there was sufficient confidence in the Council being able to oversee its own improvement progress. The Panel recommended the Council request a further Corporate Peer Challenge later in 2024 to support its continued improvement progress.
- 3.3 The Peer Challenge was undertaken 4-7 November 2024 and included a team of 3 Peer Members, 3 Peer Officers and 2 experienced LGA staff. The feedback report at Appendix 1, highlights the progress the Council has made since the last Peer Review in 2022, but highlights significant financial challenges the Council is facing in response to increasing demand for services and its lack of financial resilience. The report includes 11 improvement recommendations which have informed the improvement action plan included as Appendix 2.

4.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The Corporate Peer Challenge feedback report notes the severity of the Council's financial position. It recommends the Council to fully understand and prioritise the need to address the Council's financial resilience and put in place a financial recovery plan as quickly as possible.

5.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 There are no legal implications arising directly from this report.

6.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: STAFFING, ICT AND ASSETS

6.1 There are no resource implications arising directly from this report.

7.0 RELEVANT RISKS

7.1 The Corporate Peer Challenge feedback report highlights the risks presented by the Council's financial position, specifically the risk of a need to declare a section 114 notice in the event the Council is unable to balance its budget.

8.0 ENGAGEMENT/CONSULTATION

8.1 The CPC process involves a considerable amount of engagement and consultation with Council stakeholders including elected members, staff and partners in the public, private and voluntary sector. Between 4 and 7 November, the CPC team conducted 50 interviews and focus groups with approximately 180 stakeholders to inform their findings, report and recommendations.

9.0 EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

9.1 Wirral Council has a legal requirement to make sure its policies, and the way it carries out its work, do not discriminate against anyone. An Equality Impact Assessment is a tool to help council services identify steps they can take to ensure equality for anyone who might be affected by a particular policy, decision or activity. An equality impact assessment will be developed alongside the Council's improvement action plan that will be reported back to this committee.

10.0 ENVIRONMENT, BIODIVERSITY AND CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS

10.1 There are no environment, biodiversity or climate change implications arising directly from this report.

11.0 COMMUNITY WEALTH IMPLICATIONS

11.1 There are no community wealth implications arising directly from this report.

REPORT AUTHOR: Mike Callon
(Head of Corporate Office)
email: michaelcallon@wirral.gov.uk

APPENDICES

Appendix 1 – LGA Corporate Peer Challenge Feedback Report
Appendix 2 – LGA CPC Council Response/Action Plan

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Independent Assurance Report: Governance - Ada Burns (November 2021)

Independent Assurance Report: Finance - CIPFA (November 2021)

Corporate Peer Challenge (March 2022) Feedback Report

Wirral Council Improvement Plan (July 2022)

Council Plan: Wirral Working Together 2023-27 (December 2023)

SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)

Council Meeting	Date