

LGA Peer Challenge 2022 Action Plan

1	Context	The change in the Chief of 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
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
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 buy 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
		(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

1c	Adopt a revised managerial approach which maintains the necessary organisational disciplines but also provides for greater autonomy - as seen during the pandemic.	<p>(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.</p> <p>(ii) This will be informed by focus groups with staff and managers to identify what the disempowering factors are (e.g. behaviours, culture etc), the processes/decision areas to be reviewed and the opportunities for change.</p> <p>(iii) This also links closely with the Scheme of Delegation review (3a below) and Governance Processes (4a below).</p> <p>(iv) 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.</p>	AD of HR & Organisational Development/CMT	March 2023
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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>The recommends 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
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</p>	CMT/SLG	October 2022

		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.		
		(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
		(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
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
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 which oversees the delivery of this agenda.	AD of Corporate Improvement & Customer Services	December 2022
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 included the Councils partnerships, memberships and representation on regional and national forums.		

		(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
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

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
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

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
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
		(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 culture and streamline decision making	AD of HR & Organisational Development AD of Corporate Improvement & Customer Services	March 23

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
5a	Establish a comprehensive elected member development programme that supports councillors in all of their	(i) Work will be undertaken with CMT and group leaders to agree a programme of development activities which meets the needs of councillors and also ensures that statutory responsibilities can be effectively discharged.	AD of Legal & Democratic Services	March 2023

	different roles and ensures they are fully aware of their statutory responsibilities			
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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 level but there is a gap in more strategic-level arenas.		
	Recommendation/s	Proposed Actions	Lead	Target Date
6a	Ensure that children's services have the opportunity to be engaged much more fundamentally at the strategic level of the organisation	(i) The DCS's attendance at weekly Senior Management Team Meetings and Leaders Briefing sessions has enabled children and young people's needs and the role of corporate parent to be embedded 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

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
7a	Ensure the continuation of the rigour and disciplines necessary to deliver the agreed savings and income generation plans and maintain wider financial controls - in a	(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.	CMT	Ongoing
		(ii) Development of new longer-term model for tracking key risks in the MTFS with regular report to CMT and Lead Members	Financial Planning & Strategy Manager	Complete

context of the council's sound financial base remaining vulnerable and the pressures and risks around this	(iii) Roll-out of budget holder training across RBC	Director of Finance (with support from CIPFA)	March 23
	(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
	(v) Rollout of Budget Holder access to financial information through the implementation of the new financial system.	Director of Finance	April 23
	(vi) All financial controls assessed as at least Reasonable Assurance by Internal Audit	Director of Finance	April 23
	(vii) The audit of the Statement of Accounts to be brought up to date	Chief Accountant	Summer 23
	(viii) Ensure robust arrangements are in place to ensure the financial viability of RBC's wholly-owned companies	Director of Finance	Ongoing

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</p>	AD of HR & Organisational Development	Ongoing

		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.		
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