

LGA Corporate Peer Challenge – Progress Review

South Gloucestershire Council

11th October 2024

Feedback



Corporate Peer Challenge



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1. Introduction

The council undertook an LGA Corporate Peer Challenge (CPC) in November 2023 and promptly published the full report with an action plan.

The Progress Review is an integral part of the Corporate Peer Challenge process. Taking place approximately ten months after the CPC, it is designed to provide space for the council's senior leadership to:

- Receive feedback from peers on the early progress made by the council against the CPC recommendations and the council's RAG rated CPC Action Plan.
- Consider peer's reflections on any new opportunities or challenges that may have arisen since the peer team were 'on-site' including any further support needs
- Discuss any early impact or learning from the progress made to date

The LGA would like to thank South Gloucestershire Council for their commitment to sector led improvement. This Progress Review was the next step in an ongoing, open and close relationship that the council has with LGA sector support.

2. Summary of the approach

The Progress Review at South Gloucestershire Council took place (onsite) on Friday 11th October 2024

The Progress Review focussed on each of the recommendations from the Corporate Peer Challenge:

- Use the development of a 10-year overarching plan to reflect the place you want South Gloucestershire to be.
- Continue work to develop an evidencebased Council Plan.
- Continue collaborative organisational focus on financial management approach.
- Consider how to celebrate the successes of South Gloucestershire.

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Chair: Councillor Louise Gittins

Chief Executive: Joanna Killian

President: Baroness Grey-Thompson

- Develop a clear vision and approach to resident engagement.
- Review how governance arrangements are documented.
- Develop a strategic approach to internal communications.

For this Progress Review, the following members of the original CPC team were involved:

- Councillor Joanne Harding – Executive Member for Finance, Change and Governance – Trafford Council (Labour)
- Marcel Coiffait – Chief Executive, Central Bedfordshire
- Shefali Kapoor – Director of Communities, Manchester City Council
- Emily McGuinness – LGA Peer Challenge Manager

3. Progress Review - Feedback

The council's Action plan reports that all recommendations made in the original CPC have been progressed. In advance of the progress review, South Gloucestershire Council provided an update on progress to date on all the CPC's recommendations, this is attached at Appendix 1 to this Progress Review report. Following conversations with the Chief Executive, Leader and Co-Leader and the wider council senior leadership team, as well as consideration of additional background information provided by the council (including staff survey results and analysis and current financial monitoring and forecasting information) the Peer Team are confident the progress reported by the council is an accurate reflection of how they have responded purposefully to the original CPC recommendations.

As was the case when the Peer team visited in November 2023, South Gloucestershire Council remains a well-led council with members and officers responding well to continually changing national landscape for local government. Since the original CPC, there has been a change in Leader of the Council due to the former leader being elected to Parliament in May 2024.

The Peer team found the new Leader to have developed an effective working relationship with the Co - Leader (South Gloucestershire operate a partnership

administration between the Liberal Democrat and Labour Groups) which extends to the whole Cabinet. In addition to the new Leader, there are also new Cabinet members for Children's Services and Communities and it was encouraging to note that an Away Day had been held recently to foster a sense of 'team' and establish principles collective accountability. Maintaining focus and cohesion in a partnership scenario will continue to be important for the political leadership of the council and the peer team heard senior members felt well supported by the council's Chief Executive in doing so.

Good progress has been made on developing a new Corporate Plan with a final version being approved by Council in May 2024 and reporting against agreed priorities already underway.

During the original CPC, the Peer Team gave particular consideration to the 'Community Conversation' aspirations of the incoming administration. At that point, the Peer Team noted that whilst the intentions of enhanced community engagement were laudable, there was more work to be done to better articulate plans to both allay staff concerns around capacity and set reasonable community expectations. As part of this Progress Review, it is clear that plans are now much more clearly formulated and staff have appreciated the 'evolutionary rather than revolutionary' approach that has been taken, with a focus on testing and learning. This more considered approach is allowing the council to better identify the skills and capacity needed. Whilst the Peer Team heard that some community engagement sessions had been challenging - especially in regards to planned increases in car parking charges – those involved had genuinely welcomed the opportunity to engage. It is also clear that the benefits of improved resident engagement are valued by members and officers and there is a commitment to continue to support work in this area – especially in terms of the plans being developed to move beyond conversations to community co-design and collaboration.

Since the original CPC there has also been change in the Senior Officer team including the appointment of a new Chief Finance Officer. The council appears to have navigated this change well. One of the CPC recommendations was for the council to review how internal governance arrangements are documented – this was intended to ensure any change in senior officers would not negatively impact on

organisational assurance. In the intervening period there has been a new s151 officer and the transition was managed successfully.

Another key recommendation of the CPC was to develop a more strategic approach to internal communications. Again good progress has been made in this area with the recent staff survey showing a positive direction of travel and the impact that investing in additional capacity in this service is having.

During this Progress Review, the team heard that the council continues to play an important role in shaping the place that is South Gloucestershire. There are plans in place to strengthen a partnership vision in line with the original CPC recommendation, using the 10 year horizon of the new council plan as a starting point. Since those recommendations were made, the council has worked with the West of England Combined Authority (WECA) to produce a truly collaborative Industrial Strategy. It would seem that relations with WECA are improving with both officers and members reporting more productive relationships which is encouraging to hear as the CA works with an Improvement Board to address the concerns identified in a Best Value Improvement Notice.

As well as pursuing economic growth programmes such as the Innovation and Tech arcs, South Gloucestershire Council plays an effective and influential leadership role across the health and care system particularly as they work to establish shared commitment to the council's prioritisation of prevention and early intervention. Whilst the ICB/ICS landscape is not without its challenges, South Gloucestershire Council advocates passionately and positively for all their resident's, particularly the most vulnerable. Something which their recent OFSTED rating of 'Good' is testament to. The inspection outcome represents a sustained period on council wide support and focused improvement activity and is something the council is rightly proud of.

The opening paragraphs of the final CPC report stated:

“South Gloucestershire Council (SGC) is well led. It has strong, stable, political and managerial leadership and a track record for delivering its priorities. The future ambitions for their area and more broadly the West of England benefit from its leadership – it is proactive, focused, confident and collaborative.” **LGA Corporate Peer Challenge 2017.**

It is testament to the current Chief Executive, partnership administration and senior leadership team that the Peer Team in 2023 still hold this view of the council – despite a change of Chief Executive and political control in the intervening 5 years, (the latter being in May 2023), and this achievement should not be underestimated.

At the conclusion of this Progress Review, the Peer Team would reiterate these sentiments. Like all councils in the sector, South Gloucestershire is facing challenging times – they are all too aware of the continuing pressures in Adults and Children’s Services and the increases in temporary accommodation costs. However, the Peer Team heard that whilst there will be some difficult choices to be made, sound planning and accurate forecasting means the council continues to be well placed to navigate these challenges.

4. Final thoughts and next steps

South Gloucestershire Council continue to be well engaged with the LGA’s regional team and positively embrace all aspects of sector led improvement.

The LGA would like to thank South Gloucestershire Council for undertaking an LGA CPC Progress Review.

Under the umbrella of LGA sector-led improvement, there is an on-going offer of support to councils. The LGA is well placed to provide additional support, advice and guidance on a number of the areas identified for development and improvement and we would be happy to discuss this.

Paul Clarke (Principal Adviser) is the main point of contact between the council and the Local Government Association (LGA) and his e-mail address is paul.clarke@local.gov.uk

APPENDIX 1: Corporate Peer Challenge - Recommendations Action Plan and Progress Summary



This action plan has been developed in response to the key recommendations for continuous improvement following the LGA Corporate Peer Review which was carried out in November 2023. Portfolio Management Office in the Transformation team will monitor the achievement of these actions and report progress on a monthly basis to the Executive Director of Resources & Business Change, the Senior Managers Network and the Senior Leadership Team. The action plan includes a summary of progress made for each of the recommendations.

Ref	Recommendation	Action	Outcome	Responsible Officer(s)	Target Date	Summary of Progress
2.1	Use the development of a 10-year overarching plan to reflect the place you want South Gloucestershire to be.	Establish a set of shared objectives with strategic partners that provides a framework for shared resources and capacity where appropriate.	A 10 year overarching plan with a set of shared objectives with our strategic partners to reflect the place that South Gloucestershire wants to be.	Lead: Chief Executive Service Director Strategy & Innovation Strategic Planning & Partnership Manager SLT	31/03/2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The new council plan sets out a 10-year overarching vision. We are currently reviewing our wider partnership arrangements and this will be key to further developing our vision at partnership level.
2.2	Continue work to develop an evidence-based Council Plan.	Develop an evidence based council plan by.	An evidenced based council plan developed in collaboration with external and internal stakeholders that ensures clarity of purpose and ambition.	Lead: Executive Director Resources & Business Change Service Director Strategy & Innovation Strategic Planning & Partnership Manager SLT, SMN	31/05/2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A series of engagement events were held with residents and members as part of the public consultation. Partners were engaged via the LSP, the Safer and Stronger Communities Partnership, consultation sessions with town and parish councils and meetings with the VCS and equalities groups. Full Council approved the new Council Plan in May 2024 and the first performance report is being prepared for October.
2.3	Continue collaborative organisational focus on financial management approach.	Continuation of our approach in a collaborative organisational focus on financial management.	The council continues to retain control of our financial future by ensuring the delivery of our existing MTFP savings programme while robustly developing new saving proposals in response to constantly emerging budget pressures.	Lead: S151 Officer Transformation Manager Head of Finance SMN	28/02/2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strong progress continues on delivery of the current savings programme. Q1 reporting against the current £40.3m existing savings plan shows the current year target of £13.9m is on track to deliver 85%. The established process for resource planning continues for 2025/26 with engagement from senior managers in setting our further savings proposals, support and leadership from SLT and executive member engagement.
2.4	Consider how to celebrate the successes of South Gloucestershire.	Develop a strategy/plan to both internally and externally promote the work of the council.	The internal and external profile of the council is positively raised.	Lead: Executive Director Resources & Business Change Head of Strategic Communications SLT, SMN, Cabinet	30/09/2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Internal council channels are being used to regularly share key council successes with staff. Easily recognisable 'Celebrating Success' theming highlights these stories on the council's intranet and teams are coming forward with examples that they are keen for us to share. Externally, we are using the hashtag #CelebratingSouthGlosSuccess in our own content and when amplifying success by partners, communities, residents and businesses, positioning both the council and the South Glos area as successful, innovative and leading the way Service areas are being encouraged and supported to enter relevant awards and take up keynote speaker opportunities at conferences to capitalise on opportunities for wider external recognition and validation for projects and work areas. Examples of success in these is being shared on SGC Connect to encourage other teams to follow suit
2.5	Develop a clear vision and approach to resident engagement.	Review our current and proposed arrangements for a clear vision and approach to resident engagement including 'what good looks like'	Our clear vision and approach to resident engagement is owned by senior leadership and is embedded as a way of doing things, not a thing you do.	Lead: Executive Director Resources & Business Change Service Director Strategy & Innovation Service Director Community Development Insights & Engagement Manager SLT, SMN	31/10/2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A Community Conversations Strategy has been developed in partnership with town and parish councils and the VCS. A partnership launch event for the programme was held in May. The Strategy is on the forward plan for Cabinet early October 2024 for adoption. Adoption is the starting point for implementation and continual review / improvement following testing in practice.
2.6	Review how governance arrangements are documented.	Document our internal informal governance arrangements that provides holistic oversight and ensures clarity of understanding and transparency, especially for external audiences and/or new starters	Enhanced robust assurance to the council which avoid the risk of a single point of failure should any key/statutory officers leave.	Lead: Executive Director Resources & Business Change S151 Officer Transformation Manager Service Director Legal & Democratic Services	30/09/2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> External guidance on the council decision making process published on the Council's public website. Senior Managers Network engagement on internal governance arrangements and how decisions are made. Development of a decision making self-serve toolkit for Officers.

Ref	Recommendation	Action	Outcome	Responsible Officer(s)	Target Date	Summary of Progress
2.7	Develop a strategic approach to internal communications.	Develop strategic approach to internal communications to include introducing the Core Brief for council-wide communications.	All staff are receiving consistent messages and there is parity across all services.	Lead: Executive Director Resources & Business Change Head of Strategic Communications	30/09/2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •New internal communications approach has been launched to improve and expand internal channels that help embed organisational strategy, drive employee engagement and ensure consistent messaging for all, including non-IT enabled staff. •A new staff intranet, SGC Connect, has launched on SharePoint, supporting staff to self-serve to find the information they need and enabling two-way communication with and between colleagues, by incorporating Viva Engage feeds into relevant pages. •A monthly Staff Briefing presentation now supports managers to communicate key messages, ensuring a consistent monthly update for all staff, covering a topics linked to the council's strategy and priorities • A series of SLT staff briefings have been introduced, to hear directly from members of the strategic leadership team and ask questions – these are available both face-to-face and online and are planned to happen twice annually •Regular monthly CEO videos emailed out to all staff and added to the staff intranet. A poster series of the transcript of each video ensures non IT-enabled colleagues also receive these important updates • Increased internal comms presence on Viva Engage via dedicated internal comms feed •A council-wide staff newsletter is in production with publication of the first edition planned for October. We've also added a corporate internal comms section in the local StreetCare and libraries staff newsletters.