

LGA Governance Review Proposal

Context

Slough Borough Council undertook their first corporate peer challenge in February 2019. Throughout the challenge staff and senior management spoke with commitment and energy about delivering an exciting future for Slough following a period of significant instability. Alongside this there was also a recognition that in order to successfully deliver their ambitions the council should spend time exploring its current governance arrangements and identify a roadmap for future governance that will provide a strong grounding for transparent decision-making and ethical standards.

During the corporate peer challenge there was an acknowledgement amongst all parts of the council that in recent year's governance had not always been as strong as it should be and behaviours and decisions have in some instances not met required standards. This had at times frustrated decision making and led to a propensity for 'workarounds' to be developed to ensure that services continue to be provided. The council undertook an internal governance review in 2018 and has made steps to ensure that governance standards are now functioning more effectively. It was not clear to the peer team to what degree a corporate commitment to improving governance to model the highest standards is either a) fully embedded or b) driving forward improvements in governance and behaviours.

Governance within the organisation appears to be largely transactional with a focus on decisions being taken in the appropriate fora, minuted and actioned. The peer team recommended that the council commission a governance review to explore the extent to which decision making is supported by effective, streamlined, strong and ethical processes. The governance review will provide the council with an independent view on how they can establish a clear roadmap for future governance arrangements which will allow the council to continue its improvement journey and deliver on its transformation and regeneration agenda.

Process:

- To maximise the peer team's time onsite it is proposed that the council undertake a **self-assessment** of its current governance model. This will be shared with the peer team in advance and can help guide the peer team's lines of enquiries whilst onsite.
- The self-assessment will be undertaken in June or July 2019 and will be a light touch process utilising governance toolkits previously used by the Improvement and Development Agency – the pre-cursor to the LGA's Improvement Support team.

- The LGA and lead peer for the governance review will undertake a scoping meeting with senior colleagues at Slough BC, including the Leader, Deputy Leader, Chief Executive and Monitoring Officer in September 2019.
- The onsite period for the governance review will be November or December 2019.

Proposed Timetable

<i>Activity</i>	<i>Timeframe</i>	<i>Responsible</i>
Proposal for review shared with Slough BC and review commissioned	May 2019	Josie Wragg, SBC
Peer team formation	May 2019	Clare Hudson, LGA
Self-assessment undertaken	June or July 2019	Josie Wragg, SBC
Scoping meeting with LGA and lead peer	September 2019	SBC and LGA
Peer team onsite	November or December 2019 – 3 days onsite	LGA
Final report	December or January 2019	LGA
Action Plan	February 2020	SBC
Corporate Peer Challenge Follow Up	September 2020	LGA

The Review will be delivered at no additional cost to the council.

Proposed content:

Good governance is the means by which a public authority shows it is taking decisions for the good of the people of the area, in a fair, equitable and open way. It also requires standards of behaviour that support good decision making – collective and individuals' integrity, openness and honesty. The review's exact focus and format will be tailored to reflect the council's self-assessment and key challenges and is likely to consider questions such as:

- How well are the benefits of good governance understood across the authority?
- How is good governance and ethical standards in behaviour managed and driven forward in the council?
- How well defined and understood are the respective roles of the Council, the Leader, the Executive/Cabinet, backbench Councillors and the Statutory Officers (HoPS, MO and S151) in (i) policy and decision making, and (ii) operational management?

- Does the council have appropriate controls, frameworks and support in place to support members and officers to make decisions in an accountable and transparent way?
- Are Codes of Conduct in place for, and respected by, elected Members and staff?
- Is a sufficiently robust standards regime in place, with a recognition of member and officer roles and responsibilities?
- Does Scrutiny provide effective challenge to the Executive, which improves policy and decision making?
- How is the council accountable for the decisions it takes, and how it does report on this?
- Does the council adopt leadership styles which are open, inclusive, and engender trust from staff, other partners, and the public?
- How does the council connect with residents and partners in its decision making, and do councillors and senior officers act as effective ambassadors for the council with residents and partners?
- How does the council ensure it is listening to all voices in the community?
- How does the council ensure it is a learning organisation and able to adapt its governance and decision making process to changing circumstances whilst ensuring continuous service improvement?

Peer team

The LGA will identify a team of expert peers with experience of governance challenges from across the sector. The team will likely comprise:

- Chief Executive from a unitary authority
- Monitoring Officer
- Head of Democratic Services
- Member peer – an experienced leader or deputy leader from a Labour led council
- Member peer – an experienced group leader from a Conservative group
- LGA Peer Challenge Manager

The team is anticipated to be onsite for 3 days and will provide a feedback presentation at the end of this period followed by a report and recommendations for the future.

LGA Contacts

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