

Meeting:	Executive Decision-Making Session
Meeting date:	17/07/2024
Report of:	Ian Floyd, Chief Operating Officer
Portfolio of:	Cllr Claire Douglas, Leader, Portfolio Holder Policy, Strategy, Partnerships

Decision Report:

Corporate Improvement Action Plan

Subject of Report

1. In February 2024, a Local Government Association (LGA) Peer Challenge took place at the City of York Council. The LGA Peer Challenge set out to understand how the council operates, exploring the council’s leadership at place and organisational level, governance, culture, financial management and capacity to improve, with a focus on improving customer service and working closely with regional partners to best represent York’s interests.
2. Informed by the LGA Peer Challenge, and already planned in response to the Council Plan strategic theme “how the council operates”, the council prepared a corporate improvement framework setting out the activities that will address the recommendations of the peer review. This framework builds on existing strengths with a view to continuous improvement being very much a part of how the council operates.
3. The council has prepared a detailed draft Corporate Improvement Action Plan, developed in consultation with officers, residents and partners to implement the framework, which is now presented for Leader approval.

Benefits and Challenges

4. The Corporate Improvement Action Plan sets out the actions the council will take in response to the Council Plan strategic theme “how the council operates”. By developing the action plan through consultation with officers, trade unions, partners, Scrutiny and residents, delivering the plan will address issues raised by different stakeholders and ultimately better support officers through our journey of continuous improvement.
5. The action plan will be monitored through the Corporate Improvement Board and is a “live” plan. It will be refreshed annually as more information is shared, particularly as central government requirements of local authorities change, or staff share information in staff surveys that require action.
6. By setting out the scale of change to support continuous improvement, there will be a challenge of too much change, or change that is not sufficiently managed. The Corporate Improvement Board has been established to monitor and steer improvements and will be mindful of managing officers capacity for improvement actions.

Policy Basis for Decision

7. The Corporate Improvement Action Plan has been informed by the Corporate Improvement Framework and responds to the Council Plan priority theme - *How the Council Operates*.
8. The four core commitments are inherent throughout the proposed Action Plan (see **Annex A**), specifically:

Equalities and Human Rights: The role of staff networks to support the organisation continuously improve, together with the role of the workforce to champion equalities and human rights is key to successful delivery of the corporate improvement action plan.

Affordability: The balance between vision, priorities and what is realistically affordable within the financial strategy and reducing council finances has been addressed through the action plans.

Climate and environment: By delivering actions to embed greater shared responsibility for council action will better embed climate action throughout other areas of council delivery.

Health: Valuing the contribution of the council's workforce and continuing to support staff's health and wellbeing is a key action of the Council Plan. The development of the action plan has given staff the opportunity to share their views, with a focus on capacity and financial constraints.

Financial Strategy Implications

9. There is no additional funding available to support the delivery of the Corporate Improvement Action Plan. Where additional resources to help deliver action is needed, posts will be redeployed, or roles repurposed. Additional change resources if required will be incorporated into the Working as One City Programme business case, with investment made to achieve savings later.

Recommendation and Reasons

The Leader is invited to approve the City of York Council's Corporate Improvement Action Plan, informed by the LGA Peer Challenge and the Council Plan 2023-2027, *One City for All*.

- The action plan has been developed following extensive consultation. It sets out those actions that respond to issues raised through the LGA Peer Challenge with action, action owners and timescales clearly set out.

Background

10. Six months into the new administration, the council invited the LGA to conduct a peer challenge to consider strengths to celebrate and areas of improvement to best deliver the ambitions set out in the Council Plan, *One City for All*, 2023-2027 whilst balancing ever-increasing financial pressures.
11. In response to the LGA Peer Challenge recommendations and reflecting the Council Plan strategic theme "how the council operates", Executive approved a Corporate Improvement

Framework which reflects a more strategic corporate approach as recommended by the peers (**Annex B**).

12. The framework maps activities to four themes and identifies which of the 15 recommendations the activities respond to.
13. The four themes provide structure and guide the council's journey of continuous improvement. They are:
 1. Strengthen strategic leadership
 2. One City, One Council
 3. Harness the commitment to the city to deliver ambitions
 4. Build a strong foundation
14. The framework was designed to provide opportunity for officers, partners and residents to share their expertise and commitment to the city and contribute to the success of the organisation by informing the development of actions to support continuous improvement.
15. The Corporate Improvement Framework was consulted on throughout May and June with feedback published on Open Data (<https://data.yorkopendata.org/dataset/corporate-improvement-framework-consultation-2024-25>) and summarised in **Annex C**.
16. Feedback from residents, together with workshops with officers, Trade Unions and Partners has informed the draft action plan which aims to deliver the activities set out in the Corporate Improvement Framework.
17. The Corporate Improvement Action Plan (**Annex A**) lists actions by theme, with action owners and timescales identified. Delivering several of the actions is already either way or completed.
18. Governance arrangements are set out in the Corporate Improvement Action Plan. A new internal governance board, the Corporate Improvement Board chaired by the Chief Operating Officer, will steer and monitor progress, the LGA will meet council officers in December to review progress to date, with Executive receiving a progress report in May 2025.
19. The action plan will be refreshed annually as more feedback from staff surveys, inspections or complaints informs how the council can continue its journey of improvement.

20. The Leader is invited to approve the Corporate Improvement Action Plan tasking officers to deliver the actions.

Consultation Analysis

21. The Corporate Improvement Framework was developed in consultation with the council's Corporate Leadership Group and Executive.
22. Throughout May and June, it was shared for consultation with residents, with actions they recommended reviewed and included in the action plan if appropriate. In tandem, workshops were held with officers, trade unions and partners to inform the development of the action plan and the equalities impact assessment.
23. Corporate Services Climate Change and Scrutiny Management Committee reviewed the draft Action Plan on 8 July 2024 and their recommendations further informed the development of the action plan. Recommendations included:
 - Ensure the actions are encourage cross-council working
 - Provide more regular updates to Executive about progress
 - Show how officers will build relationships with communities
 - Show how becoming a trauma-informed council is a continuous journey
 - Develop the managing customer relations policy with resident engagement
 - Set out how to support senior managers learn more about financial management systems
 - Refresh the council's communications channels
 - Provide opportunity for scrutiny oversight of city developments
 - Make clear member induction is ongoing and informed by member feedback
 - Clarify the ask of Scrutiny Chairs when reviewing scrutiny practices

Options Analysis and Evidential Basis

24. The options presented are for Executive Member Decision are to either:
 - Approve the Corporate Improvement Action Plan; or

- Commission the council's Chief Operating Officer to revise or strengthen aspects of the Corporate Improvement Action Plan.

The Corporate Improvement Action Plan sets out a series of actions to deliver the activities described in the Corporate Improvement Framework. The framework was developed in consultation with the Council Management Team and therefore is deemed to be those activities the council has the capacity and capability to take forward, without introducing additional financial pressure.

Organisational Impact and Implications

Financial The Council has a clear and robust Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) that has outlined the need to save a further £30m over the next 3 years. The MTFS is under constant review and the assumptions used within it, such as inflation, are updated as and when required. Delivery of Corporate Improvement Action Plan should help to make the MTFS even more robust and therefore will support the Council in the need to deliver an ongoing savings programme.

No additional specialist resource has been identified at this time to deliver the recommendations, but the requirement to control day to day spending remains a high priority to ensure the Council remains on track to deliver the required savings. The work outlined in Annex A will support the Council in managing the organisation through the financial challenges ahead.

Human Resources (HR) There is already a workforce plan in place to support the workforce, this will be strengthened and focused by adding in the actions from the Corporate Improvement Action Plan. Actions will be co-produced with employees ensuring that the journey of celebrating successes and addressing improvements is owned and acted on at all levels and is reasonably and realistically resourced. Various engagement activities are already in place to work with employees around this shared journey. This activity will sit alongside the existing plans and priorities to ensure that staff have the conditions and tools available to them.

Legal Under Section 3 of the Local Government Act 1999, the Council is under a duty to make arrangements to “secure **continuous improvement** in the way in which its functions are exercised, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness”. The duty, being one to make arrangements, has been

interpreted as operating at a fairly high level and free standing of the exercise of functions themselves. In each case, where a local authority proposes to make such arrangements, it must consult appropriate representatives, and take account of certain matters (prescribed in the Act), before doing so. The corporate improvement framework is likely to constitute such arrangements and has been the subject of relevant consultation. Statutory guidance¹ sets out the Government's expectation that councils make their own arrangements to secure continuous improvement. This includes being open to external challenge and scrutiny, including peer challenges.

Procurement there are no direct procurement implications.

Health and Wellbeing: The Corporate Improvement Framework has either a direct or indirect impact on the health and wellbeing of staff, residents and visitors to our city. Having a clear vision, narrative and understanding will help support workplace mental health by building trust, cooperation, accountability and equity – all of which inform the Council Plan *One city for all*.

Environment and Climate action Recognition of climate change delivery as an area of strength and innovation, with opportunities to explore and embed it's approaches throughout other areas of council delivery would support the Council's net zero and climate ready ambitions. Whilst no immediate direct implications, the actions outlined within the attached action plan will help the Council deliver on those issues the Council considers most important.

Affordability Aside from the benefits in terms of managing the council finances, the recommendations in this report and peer review will help maximise the benefits, efficiency and effectiveness of all council services and partnership working to all residents of York.

Equalities and Human Rights as per the above legal comments, we have undertaken consultation and this has been taken into consideration our human rights and equalities assessment and the council's Public Sector Equalities Duty.

¹ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1999/27/contents/>
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/64a2e57606179b000c1aea03/Best_Value_guidance_subject_to_consultation.pdf

Data Protection and Privacy Data protection impact assessments (DPIAs) are an essential part of our accountability obligations and is a legal requirement for any type of processing under UK data protection and privacy legislation. Failure to carry out a DPIA when required may leave the council open to enforcement action, including monetary penalties or fines.

DPIAs helps us to assess and demonstrate how we comply with all of our data protection obligations. It does not have to eradicate all risks but should help to minimise and determine whether the level of risk is acceptable in the circumstances, considering the benefits of what the council wants to achieve.

The DPIA screening questions were completed for this report and as there is no personal data being processed for the options set out in this decision report, there is no requirement to complete a DPIA at this point. However, this will be reviewed where required, following the decisions from this report for example the supporting action to improve customer experience and preparation for regional opportunities.

Communications support will be required in delivery of the corporate improvement action plan.

Economy No impact

Risks and Mitigations

25. **Financial Pressures** Given the increasing financial pressures experienced by the council, the action plan could be undeliverable. The actions consider available capacity and capability. In addition, the Corporate Improvement Action Plan will help the organisation become more efficient and effective.
26. **Capacity to improve** There are a number of actions to deliver in a relatively short period of time. Corporate capacity could easily become more stretched, leading to insufficient pace to drive through the change required. The Corporate Improvement Board will monitor progress, including establishing priorities to focus on.
27. **Reputational** Failing to deliver the action plan could invite a reputational impact that will negatively impacting future recruitment, retention and relationship with key funders. The strength of the strategic leadership required to lead and deliver the Corporate Improvement Action Plan and remain focused on

addressing the issues the report presents will be crucial to mitigating the longer-term reputational impact.

Wards Impacted

All

Contact details

For further information please contact the authors of this Decision Report.

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Report approved:	Yes
Date:	9 July 2024

Background papers

Executive approves Corporate Improvement Framework [Agenda for Executive on Thursday, 9 May 2024, 5.30 pm \(york.gov.uk\)](#) item 129

Corporate Improvement Framework
<https://democracy.york.gov.uk/documents/s176281/Annex%20B%20DR%20AFT%20IMPROVEMENT%20FRAMEWORK%20FINAL%20FOR%20CONSULTATION.pdf>

Corporate Services, Climate Change and Scrutiny Management Committee [Agenda for Corporate Services, Climate Change and Scrutiny Management Committee on Monday, 8 July 2024, 5.30 pm \(york.gov.uk\)](#) item 4

Annexes

- Annex A: Corporate Improvement Action Plan
- Annex B: Corporate Improvement Framework and LGA Peer Challenge Recommendations (February 2024)
- Annex C: Consultation feedback summary
- Annex D: Equalities Impact Analysis