

Corporate Services Climate Change and Scrutiny Management Committee

8 July 2024

Report of the Assistant Director Policy and Strategy
Leader, Portfolio Holder for Policy, Strategy and Partnerships

Corporate Improvement Action Plan

Summary

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 Scrutiny consideration, prior to consideration by the Leader Executive Decision Making Session on 17 July 2024.

Background

4. Six months into the new administration, the council invited the Local Government Association (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.

5. 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.
6. The framework maps activities to four themes and identifies which of the 15 recommendations the activities respond to.
7. 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
8. 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.
9. Resident feedback, together with workshops with officers, Trade Unions and Partners informed the draft action plan which aims to deliver the activities set out in the Corporate Improvement Framework.
10. 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.
11. A new internal governance board, the Corporate Improvement Board chaired by the Chief Operating Officer, will steer and monitor progress. In December, the LGA will review progress to date, with Executive receiving a progress report in May 2025.
12. The action plan will be refreshed annually as feedback from staff surveys, inspections or complaints informs how the council can continue its journey of improvement.

13. Scrutiny are invited to discuss the draft action plan and provide recommendations for the Leader to consider in the Executive Decision Making Session on 17 July 2024.

Consultation

14. The Corporate Improvement Framework was developed in consultation with the council's Corporate Leadership Group and Executive.
15. Workshops were held with officers, trade unions and partners to inform the development of the action plan and the equalities impact assessment.
16. 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>

Residents were consulted as a result of the Government's recently published ¹Best Value Guidance which sets an expectation that councils should be open to challenge and are clearly accountable to residents. Inviting residents to consider the council's continuous corporate improvement journey assures the council that the areas to focus on are supported by residents, together with providing additional feedback to inform further actions..

17. Actions suggested by residents have been considered, and incorporated into the action plan where appropriate. A summary of the feedback is attached in Annex C.
18. Comments generally followed up further expansion on any of the four questions asked under a theme. There was a strong feeling of negativity towards the consultation itself, with the main view being the council should "get on with it" (ie. managing the organisation). Actions suggested by residents have been considered and incorporated into the action plan where appropriate.

Council Plan

19. 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.

¹ [Best value standards and intervention: a statutory guide for best value authorities - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/best-value-standards-and-intervention-a-statutory-guide-for-best-value-authorities)

Implications

20. **Financial** The Council has a clear and robust Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) that has outlined the need to save a further £29.5m 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 the 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 Corporate Improvement Action Plan, 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.

21. **Human Resources (HR)** There is already a workforce plan in place to support the workforce, which will be strengthened by adding and aligning actions from the Corporate Improvement Action Plan. Actions have been 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.

22. **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 proposed corporate improvement framework is likely to constitute such arrangements and will be the subject of relevant consultation. Statutory guidance² sets out the Government’s

² <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1999/27/contents/>
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/64a2e57606179b000c1aea03/Best_Value_guidance_subject_to_consultation.pdf

expectation that councils make their own arrangements to secure continuous improvement.

23. **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.

Risk Management

24. **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.
25. **Capacity to improve** There are several 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.
26. **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.

Recommendation

27. The Scrutiny Committee is invited to discuss the draft action plan and make recommendations for the Leader to consider at the decision session in July 2024.

The Corporate Improvement Action Plan sets 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.

Contact Details

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report:**

Ian Floyd
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**Report
Approved**



Date 27/06/24

Specialist Implications Officer(s)

Helen Whiting, Chief Officer HR

Wards Affected:

All



For further information please contact the author of the report

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%20DRAFT%20IMPROVEMENT%20FRAMEWORK%20FINAL%20FOR%20CONSULTATION.pdf>

Annexes

- Annex A: Corporate Improvement Action Plan
- Annex B: Equalities Impact Analysis
- Annex C: Consultation feedback (summary)