

**CORPORATE PEER CHALLENGE 10-13 SEPTEMBER 2019
FEEDBACK REPORT**

**RECOMMENDATIONS
AND SUGGESTED ACTIONS**

Recommendation 1

Work with partners and the community to co-produce and co-deliver a longterm vision for Halton which is underpinned by an agreed set of specific priorities to achieve it. This should be informed by qualitative and quantitative resident insight and led by a place based system.

Proposed Action

The action will pick up the first three recommendations from the Peer Team. It is proposed that a series of activities be initiated across a number of partners and the public between now and the new Council being in place in May.

The activity would be focused on three things:

- Checking/validating that the Council priorities that have been so far for some considerable time are still the right ones.
- Informing public/partners about the ongoing financial challenges facing the authority and the tough choices it is facing (austerity has not ended for local government).
- To identify what partners and the public can do to help make those choices together and what the public and partners can do to help mitigate some of the potential lack of resources.

Those activities would involve various techniques to achieve these outcomes, including:

- Seminars
- Using existing groups and relationships
- Public survey work to gain a representational view from the public
- Inside Halton Borough Council
- Other

The results of that work would then be used by the new Council to develop its programme over the next five years.

This should dovetail in with the results of the Local Government Spending Review when the Council might receive classification as to its future Government grant position, beyond a single year settlement.

Recommendation 2

Engage with partners about the roles the Council and they can take in delivering these priorities and where responsibility, resource, capacity and/or capability can be shared to achieve the priorities for Halton sustainably.

Proposed Action

Recommendation 3

Use this to identify and articulate a new corporate operating model for the Council. This should state the specific behaviours and values required of officers and members in making the new operating model work.

Proposed Action

Recommendation 4

Review the amount of corporate capacity available at the Council. Examples of this include transformation, policy, performance and data analytics, organisational development, finance, bid writing, project and programme management. Look at how and where these functions and activities can be strengthened or more closely aligned to support the sustainable delivery of your priorities.

Proposed Action

The Council is being recommended to establish a fund to enable the Council to strengthen its corporate capacity as part of the 2020/21 budget development process. Particular emphasis being placed on its own internal review processes. It currently has little capacity to initiate change and review the way it operates. To look at alternative ways of doing things requires resources and a particular skill set, that the Council once had through its Efficiency Programme. Any access to the fund would have to be supported by a clear business case to be considered by Management Team and then Elected Members.

The Council is being asked to set aside £500,000 for this purpose as part of its 2020/21 budget considerations. There are already skills available across the organisation and part of the process would be to bring those skills and capabilities together in a 'virtual team'. However, care would be needed not to place further burdens on already stretched individuals so the practicalities of backfilling gaps would need examining.

Recommendation 5

For at least a fixed period, add additional senior capacity which will support the Council to transform from its current operating model to the new, more sustainable model. This additional, senior capacity should work alongside members, officers and partners and be supported by an alignment (virtually or otherwise) of the key functions required to bring about a successful and sustained transformation to the new operating model. This additional senior capacity should be aligned to the functions required to make the transformation required happen.

Proposed Action

It is suggested that such a position(s) should report directly to the Strategic Director, Enterprise, Community and Resources and that any resources to be appointed in this was follow the process outlined in the recommendation above.

Recommendation 6

Review the existing workforce profile in detail both as it is now and how it needs to be in light of the new operating model. Use this to set out a strategic approach to organisational development which seamlessly connects officer development and the resources available for this with the development needs of the new organisation.

Proposed Action

This work is already underway and being undertaken through the Policy, People, Performance and Efficiency Division.

Recommendation 7

Review the budget setting approach linked to an updated medium term financial strategy to enable more, longer term, strategic and sustainable savings proposals to be developed, staged and implemented. This process must be closely linked to the vision and priorities for Halton and should inform the Council's new operating model.

Proposed Action

It is suggested that this piece of work takes place once the long term position of local government finance is known. That is, when the Council hopefully receives a financial settlement lasting more than one year. It is proposed that the review be undertaken by the Budget Working Group, who would consult all members of the Council as part of the process. The Council's existing budget process has been successful in managing significant budget reductions, although not without consequences; any new arrangements need to be carefully considered.

Recommendation 8

Following the forthcoming boundary review and subsequent local elections, review local governance arrangements to ensure that the Council is getting the most benefit it can from the current model of governance in enabling and supporting all members to perform their roles.

Proposed Action

This work is to be picked up by the Structures Working Group following the local elections in May. This was agreed at a recent meeting of that Group.

Recommendation 9

Review the model of local community engagement in place. Included within this is the role that all members can play in drawing on the insight of local residents, building capacity and helping the community to both find and develop solutions.

Proposed Action

This will be picked up as part of the work identified against recommendation no 1.

Recommendation 10

Bring together the due diligence, evidence and options appraisal information into a consistent, robust, singular business planning process for all investments or savings proposals. This is crucial for the Council and will help ensure all decisions are consistently assured against key questions and criteria. This will help document a robust evidence base for future decisions which states the risks, issues, performance and policy implications of decisions made. It will clearly articulate any risk mitigation and monitoring arrangements.

Proposed Action

It is proposed that a single template be produced by the Finance Team which would be used to complement the existing reporting process. It should assist the decision making process for both Management Team and Elected Members. Thresholds would need to be set as to which projects/investments the template should be applied to.

Recommendation 11

Review the Performance Management Framework to ensure the right type and amount of information is available to support effective decision making and accountability. Asking where performance information goes, for what purpose it is produced, how it is currently used and how could it be provided differently will help to ensure a performance management framework is in place which is of most benefit to the Council.

Proposed Action

The existing framework has served the Council well but it is accepted that it could do with a review and would benefit from being simplified. Those performance reports are the principal tools used by the PPBs to hold the executive to account. It is suggested that the Chairs' Group carries out this piece of work, presenting its recommendations to the rest of the Council.