**Local Government Association Corporate Peer Challenge Revisit**

**Action Plan**

***Progress Update - September 2022***

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|  | **RECOMMENDATION** | **ACTIONS** | **PROGRESS UPDATE (SEPTEMBER 2022)** |
| 1. | **Embed and extend the emerging culture of empowerment across the organisation:** The way in which Councils, including Knowsley, have had to respond to the pandemic has inevitably resulted in staff and communities feeling more empowered to act and do what they see as the right thing to do. It is important for the Council to build on the progress made prior to, and during, the pandemic, but recognise that this work is iterative, and will require time, effort and energy to avoid the risk of reverting to previous approaches. The success of this culture will be dependent on the continued visible support of Councillors and Senior Officers. This progress was supported by new ways of working developed in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, and these should be carefully considered as the Council looks to define their “new normal” as part of the approach towards organisational development. | Work is well under way on the second iteration of “The Journey” (i.e. the Council’s organisational culture training and induction experience). The new version will incorporate how new ways of working and the empowerment of staff, residents, and community/voluntary groups will be further enhanced.  Additional training will also be provided to Elected Member and Council managers on how to maintain, encourage, and support these new ways of working.  Policies, procedures, and processes will also be reviewed to ensure that these new ways of working continue to be supported and developed.  **Lead:-** Chief Executive  **Timescale:-** Ongoing | The second iteration of “The Journey” has now been launched – the updated version brings the content up to date, talks about the COVID-19 pandemic and how the principles of Knowsley Better Together were shown in action through the Council, partners, communities, and individuals pulling together to manage the impact across the Borough. This version of The Journey is now part of a standardised and mandatory induction process for new employees and Members and any employees who missed it the first time (i.e. those who joined the Council during the pandemic) are also being taken though it.  A slightly amended version is being developed in partnership with Knowsley’s Health Place Director for use with the NHS Cheshire and Merseyside staff and senior managers who work in Knowsley.  The broader Knowsley Better Together culture change is continuing with the development of the Knowsley Offer.  The aim of the Knowsley Offer is to turn the Knowsley Council Plan’s Vision into a reality – “ensuring that residents and communities are supported to thrive”. Some elements will be universal (e.g. vibrant town centres, high quality parks), and other elements will be targeted (e.g. Knowsley Works, family support). A number of the elements will be delivered by partner agencies (e.g. primary care, social housing) – but may need to be driven/facilitated/encouraged by the Council as the “shaper of the place”.  The Knowsley Offer must be based on what people need (not what the Council thinks they need). There are four key strands to the development of the Knowsley Offer:-  1. Community Engagement – engaging with and listening to Knowsley’s communities on what support they need to thrive.  2. The Practical Offer – the development of a Borough “Directory” including a wealth of information to support residents and communities, and involving the design and redesign of services to meet any gaps.  3. The role for communities and residents:-   * Look after yourself; * Look after each other; and, * Look after your place.   4. Communication – this underpins all the other strands and will be fundamental throughout the development and life of the Knowsley Offer.  The engagement work commenced in August 2022 and is continuing through September 2022. Responses will then be analysed, and any service gaps and changes will be identified and implemented.  The Knowsley Offer will change over time, but the first iteration is due to be launched publicly in January 2023. |
| 2. | **Develop, launch and monitor the delivery of a comprehensive Community Development Plan aligned to Knowsley Better Together:** The Council has invested in their relationships with staff and partners through the Knowsley Better Together programme. The ambition to extend these principles to how the Council works with residents to integrate new communities, as well as the opportunities presented through economic growth and regeneration in the Borough, will require the Council to set out a consistent and structured approach to community Development. This includes consideration of the resources required for this work and the monitoring of delivery, impact and outcomes. | Work is well under way to develop the Stronger Communities Strategy and Delivery Plan, which at its heart is a “Community Development Plan”.  A Stronger Communities Partnership has been established to co-design this work, and the aim is to have a fully developed Plan by September 2022.  **Lead:** Executive Director (Communities and Neighbourhoods)  **Timescale:-** September 2022 | Work has continued at pace over the last few months to develop the Stronger Communities Delivery Plan, including clear actions on community development and supporting and building the community and voluntary sector. A Stronger Communities Steering Group has been established and is working to shape the Delivery Plan, which will include clear actions, owners, outcomes, and impact monitoring.  To ensure that we capture the insight and learning from the engagement work on the Knowsley Offer (see Action 1 above), the Stronger Communities Delivery Plan will be presented to the Cabinet at its November 2022 meeting. |
| 3. | **The Council has been presented with the opportunity to play an active role in “place leadership” and can bring together and build relationships directly between voluntary, community and faith organisations to build on their joint responses to COVID-19:** The joint work that has taken place in this context has embodied the principles of Knowsley Better Together, and these groups should be supported through a continued enabling, rather than a transactional, relationship with the Council. There is a significant opportunity for these groups to contribute towards the development of the Stronger Communities Strategy. | This is a key element of the Stronger Communities Strategy and Delivery Plan, which the Council is developing in partnership with One Knowsley.  The voluntary and community sector is a key partner in co-designing the Stronger Communities Strategy and Delivery Plan.  The Council is also working with the other Liverpool City Region local authorities to assess whether a shared leadership development module can be implemented, including “Place Leadership”.  **Lead:** Executive Director (Communities and Neighbourhoods)  **Timescale:-** September 2022 | The Stronger Communities Steering Group has been established and meets regularly to shape and oversee the direction and delivery of the Stronger Communities Delivery Plan, which includes the Knowsley Better Together principles at the heart of its development and links directly to the Knowsley 2030 Strategy and the Knowsley Council Plan 2022–2025 (which are both underpinned by an ethos of “Stronger Communities”).  Membership of the Steering Group includes key leaders from One Knowsley, the faith sector, leisure service (Volair), Merseyside Youth Association, Livv Housing Group, Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service, the Cheshire and Merseyside Integrated Care Board, Healthwatch, Merseyside Police, the Merseyside Police and Crime Commissioner’s Office, and the Council's refugee/asylum seekers and Business Growth teams. Collectively, the Group has added significant value to the approach and development of the Delivery Plan.  A Steering Group at a Liverpool City Region level has been established and is working with Liverpool John Moores University to establish a single place leadership programme for the six local authorities in the City Region and the Combined Authority. It is hoped that this will be in place by the end of the 2022/23 financial year. |

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| 4. | **Use the development of a new Council Plan to provide clarity on political priorities in a “post pandemic” Knowsley:** This Plan will enable the Council to provide clarity to staff, partners and residents on the priorities in the context of available resources and the recovery from the pandemic. This Plan also presents the opportunity to illustrate the relationship between the values of Knowsley Better Together and the political priorities and principles of the administration. This Plan will also enable the Council to set out milestones and actions associated with their improvement plans for Children’s Services. | The new Knowsley Council Plan was agreed at a full meeting of the Council on 9 March 2022, and set outs the Council’s priorities as:-   * Supporting those most in need; * Inclusive Skills and Growth; and, * Climate Emergency – Achieving Net Zero.   These priorities, which are underpinned by clear enablers and the principles of Knowsley Better Together, will provide clarity to all stakeholders and will be delivered through, and supported by, departmental and service plans, including the Children’s Services Improvement Plan.  **Lead:-** Chief Executive  **Timescale:-** Ongoing | Following approval of the Knowsley Council Plan, robust Departmental and service planning has been undertaken – all Departments and services are clear on their priorities for the year and how these have translated into milestones and actions.  Departmental Plans are being actively monitored on a quarterly basis by Executive Directors in consultation with the respective Portfolio Holders. |
| 5. | **Bring together existing performance reports to create a single overview of services for Elected Members:** The Council would benefit from increased transparency and accountability by bringing together existing performance reports into a single public place. This should include a proportionate number of measures being selected to reflect the content of the new Council Plan, the development of challenging and realistic targets for services, as well as any comparator information which will support understanding of relative performance. | The Council’s Performance Management Framework will be refreshed following the adoption of the Knowsley Council Plan and the 2022/23 Departmental and Service Plans. The Performance Management Framework will be monitored by the Cabinet alongside the Knowsley Council Plan.  Quarterly Departmental/Portfolio performance dashboards and reports are already available for review by Scrutiny Committees. From July 2022, this information will be made available to all Elected Members.  **Lead:-** Executive Director (Resources)  **Timescale:-** Ongoing | Service and Departmental planning was completed during Summer 2022, ensuring alignment with the new Council Plan. Following this, the Council’s performance management framework has now been fully revised.  New quarterly performance reports are now being produced and, following their initial presentation to Portfolio Holders, are being made available to all Elected Members.  The implementation date for this recommendation (July 2022) was delayed to ensure that a robust Departmental planning process was completed, and was also impacted by annual leave commitments across Departments over the summer. |
| 6. | **Complete the transition in the approach and methodology to “reviewing” services which builds on the principles of Knowsley Better Together, rather than being a financially led exercise:** There is still an organisational legacy of the previous approach that was necessary to secure financial resilience. This will support the Council to maximise the wider contributions of services towards outcomes beyond traditional costs and output models and will further support and empower middle managers to improve their service offers and develop new ways of working through new approaches. | Due to the Council’s strong medium-term financial planning, reviews of services are now driven by improvement in quality and performance rather than having to focus on savings requirements. The driver of the existing service review toolkit is service excellence. All reviews will incorporate consultation and co-design with stakeholders in line with Knowsley Better Together principles.  A communications exercise will be undertaken with Council employees (through existing mechanisms, including the Chief Executive’s Blog) to explain this process better. In addition, the toolkit will be revised to ensure early engagement with those employees who are in scope of any review so that they understand fully the ethos behind such reviews.  **Lead:-** Executive Director (Resources)  **Timescale:-** June 2022 | Revisions to the service review toolkit to recognise the need for consultation and co-design have been completed and identify the need for early engagement with employees involved.  The communication plan was paused pending further clarity on the Council’s budget position and the associated budget process for 2022/23. There is significant financial uncertainty at present due to the cost of living crisis, the change of Prime Minister, and an absence of Government financial policy. The Council may need to consider considerable budget cuts and communicating that the service review process is driven purely by “service excellence” could create a confusing message. It may become necessary to amend the service review toolkit further to place more of an emphasis on savings and efficiencies. Any communications on the toolkit will be delayed until there is clarity in this respect. |

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| 7. | **Build on, and extend, the communication channels and tools which have been developed to support managerial leadership to provide more visibility to political leadership:** There is an opportunity to implement a Leader’s Blog or questions and answers sessions with the Leader which mirror those which are in place for the Chief Executive. This will provide the opportunity for messages regarding political priorities to be delivered directly and will support officers to better understand prioritisation and build more effective relationships with Elected Members across all tiers of the Council. | The Chief Executive will explore opportunities in consultation with the Leader of the Council to implement an engagement programme so that political priorities are being delivered to the appropriate audiences.  **Lead:-** Chief Executive  **Timescale:-** Ongoing | A review of the political communication channels was undertaken and concluded that the existing arrangements, which does include some individual, and joint communications with the Chief Executive, are effective in ensuring that political priorities are communicated to officers. The relationship and engagement between Elected Members and officers is strong at all levels across the Council. The Council will, however, ensure that communications continue to be clear around political priorities. |
| 8. | **Extend engagement processes which have been developed through the Council’s response to COVID-19 and as part of the Knowsley Better Together programme:** The success of this programme going forward will be strongly linked to the embedding of consultation and engagement methods, which build on the current pulse surveys completed with staff and members, alongside service specific consultations. The Council could consider, as an inclusive employer, if it has sufficient insights into the experience of different groups of staff (for instance working carers, LGBTQ+ staff, and other groups) that will enable it to respond to their specific needs in the future. This will strengthen the “you said, we did” feedback to staff about how they have influenced the organisation. | The Council recognises, and values, the insight gained from engaging with all Elected Members and employees during the period of the COVID-19 pandemic and will continue to engage regularly with these internal stakeholders to inform future organisational policy.  These large-scale consultation processes will be repeated on a regular cycle so that responses can be tracked, thus highlighting areas of concern or notable improvement. Proposals are currently being developed to enhance the approach to engagement with the operational workforce on relevant specific issues, including ongoing challenges of engagement over digital platforms. This work is expected to conclude in September 2022.  Senior officers from the Council’s Executive Management Team attend the Operational Working Groups of protected employees as invited guests, and this is seen as an effective means of ensuring that issues relating to such group can be communicated and supported at the highest levels of the organisation.  **Lead:-** Executive Director (Resources)  **Timescale:-** Ongoing | Chief Officer representatives continue to attend all Operational Workers Group meetings with an immediate feedback loop via the weekly Executive Management Team and Corporate Management Team Planning meetings. Operational Groups are also consulted on significant areas of change (e.g. a new Hybrid Working Policy) and are consulted on an ongoing basis on specific requirements in relation to the proposed new Council Headquarters.  Current consultation is ongoing with all elements of the community and partner agencies regarding the development of the Knowsley Offer and what support residents, communities, and businesses need to thrive.  All employees will be consulted in the coming weeks with regard to post-pandemic working practices. This will builds on the Chief Executive’s regular Blogs and online Q&A sessions.  Ongoing regular trade union engagement continues and is based on a strong joint working approach.  A Scrutiny Member survey for 2021/22 was completed and the findings are included in the Annual Scrutiny Review, which will be presented to a full meeting of the Council in October 2022.  Council-wide consultation processes for employees and Members will be repeated on a regular cycle so that responses can be tracked, thereby enabling the highlighting of trends, areas of concern, or notable improvements. |

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| 9. | **The Council should work on communicating their progress and success with different audiences, including the development of a wider organisational narrative:** It is important for the Council to consider how they communicate their vision and progress with different audiences, including external partners, internal staff, and the wider sector. This will help the Council to get better at “telling their story”. This will bring the benefits of supporting internal co-ordination, whilst also enabling external audiences to better understand both priorities and progress. There are things that Knowsley are doing that other Councils could learn from, and the Council should consider how it can tell its story to the sector. | Considerable work is already done to communicate the Council’s progress and achievements to a variety of audiences. This work will continue to be developed and shared through existing channels (both internal and external).  To date, this has been specifically targeted to priority “internal Knowsley stakeholders” (residents, businesses, Elected Members, Council employees, and partner agencies).  To ensure that the Council’s achievements are more widely known within the sector, a co-ordinated Council-wide effort will be considered through a variety of routes, including targeted trade public relations (sector journals), award submissions, speaking opportunities, attendance at local government association events etc.  **Lead:-** Head of Communications  **Timescale:-** Ongoing | Extensive communications continue in order to ensure that Knowsley’s story is shared beyond the geographical boundaries of the Borough and to other stakeholders beyond the usual primary targets (e.g. residents, local businesses etc.).  During the last three months alone, these efforts have resulted in local, regional, and national coverage for Knowsley Council across print, online, and broadcast media. This includes (but is not limited to) coverage on ITV News at Ten, BBC Breakfast, Sky News, The Times, The Guardian, The Daily Telegraph, The Financial Times, BBC Panorama, The Daily Mail, and the Local Government Chronicle. This level of positive national exposure for Knowsley is not in common with might usually be expected for similar sized places or local authority areas. Specifically, this coverage has highlighted a number of key initiatives in the Borough including the opening of the Shakespeare North Playhouse, the Council’s Liverpool City Region Borough of Culture events, and recent Levelling Up Fund submissions.  In facilitating and securing this coverage, it has also been possible to develop contacts with additional key media which can be used for future opportunities.  To build further on this work, and provide future opportunities for positive coverage, a report will be shared with the Council’s Executive Management Team in late September 2022 regarding a proposed plan for award submissions in 2023. |