Corporate Peer Challenge
Brighton and Hove City Council

25th to 28th April 2017

Feedback Report

1.   Executive Summary

Brighton and Hove is a national and international coastal and cultural destination, with a unique heritage, environmental and cultural offer. It is a diverse, cosmopolitan and vibrant city, with deep-rooted shared values of tolerance, compassion and respect. It has a highly engaged population and is an educated and entrepreneurial city, with strong economic growth. However, the city is also a place of increasing inequality, there is entrenched deprivation in some communities and there is increasing demand for public services. A twin-track economy exists and housing is becoming increasingly unaffordable for local people. There are significant constraints to development for both housing and business space.

The council has experienced No Overall Control continuously since 2003 and, in that time, has seen the three main political parties each lead a minority Administration. The authority has also experienced both the Cabinet system and the committee system during this time. Brighton and Hove, both as a council and as a place, prides itself on the level of local engagement and involvement in democracy, placing major importance on openness and transparency and local people and elected members being able to contribute to debate and discussion. The fundamental question that we see emerging out of this is:

- In a continual context of fine political balance, where the council operates a committee system, the approach to democracy is unusual, and trust and confidence is variable, how does the council ensure it can deliver in an increasingly challenging and changing environment?

A huge amount of hard work has gone in to establishing the firm foundations necessary for the council to function to maximum effect going forward. A medium term 4 year financial strategy (MTFS) is now in place covering the period to 2019/20. We offer a couple of cautionary notes here, however, given assumptions that are included around elements where there are no guarantees and the detail of what will constitute some of the agreed savings amounts for 2018/19 and 2019/20 still needing to be decided upon by elected members.

There is a lot of excitement about, and satisfaction with, the 'Modernisation' agenda in the council and significant investment has been made. We were impressed by the calibre of management that we met and capacity generally in the council, in terms of having sufficient people available to deliver what is required, is felt to be reasonable. The council is self-aware about the level it currently performs at, with a mixed picture in relation to both service delivery and customer experience. A new performance management framework has been established to drive improvement within the council.

The complex environment that the council operates in throws up tensions and creates polarities. These tensions are holding things back. The council is undoubtedly achieving and progressing but arguably the progress is in spite of, rather than because of, the climate that exists. We recommend that those people in the greatest positions of influence within the organisation accept that without a 're-set' of the fundamental relationships within the council, progress will always be slowed and can only ever be incremental.

The democratic mandate of the council is fully recognised and respected by partners and stakeholders and they want to see the council fully utilising this unique position in order to provide the strong leadership of the city that is required. That leadership entails clarifying the vision for Brighton and Hove as a city. The vision must be capable of transcending political cycles in order for the council to generate the necessary confidence amongst its stakeholders.

The approach to democracy in Brighton and Hove is tailored to trying to maximise the potential for local people and elected members to be able to contribute to debate and discussion. The council needs to consider whether current practice is going to serve sufficiently well going forward. How does it best operate in the future in a way that satisfies the desire for engagement and involvement but also ensures it is not the 'loudest voices' that dominate and that decision-making processes operate effectively and efficiently? The issue of council governance needs to be settled once and for all and everybody then needs to move on.

We see the potential for an enhanced role and support for councillors in their ward role going forward. Part of this links to the issue of place leadership – elected members being able to play a more influential role helping to shape their localities. Also, in their representative capacity, it feels to us that ward councillors require more support from the council.

It is vital to ensure that roles and responsibilities within the council are clear and that they are then respected and adhered to. The role of elected members is to set policy. Officers are then responsible for implementing it. Elected members also need to provide a climate that allows managers to manage. As part of this, we recommend that elected member involvement in HR operational matters should cease. Blurring of respective roles and accountabilities is unhelpful.

Trade unions within the council could play a valuable role in the future. However, this requires dramatically improved relationships between all concerned. The current set of relationships is recognised by all as being dysfunctional. Progress can only be made if there is agreement that the relationship needs to be 're-set'.

2. Key recommendations

There are a range of suggestions and observations within the main section of the report that will inform some early practical actions, in addition to the conversations onsite which provided ideas and examples of practice from other organisations. The following are the peer team's key recommendations to the council:

- Clarify the shared vision for Brighton and Hove as a city and the role of the council in delivering it

- Accept that without a 're-set' of the fundamental relationships within the council, progress can only ever be incremental

- Consider whether current practice is going to deliver strong, consistent and stable leadership for the city

- Settle the issue of council governance and move on

- The Executive Leadership Team should establish and articulate a clear organisational narrative for staff which supports the shared vision

- Ensure roles and responsibilities within the council are clear and that they are then respected and adhered to

- Elected member involvement in HR operational matters should cease

- External facilitation should be brought in and agreement reached by all to 're-set' the council's relationship with its trade unions

- Provide an enhanced role and support for councillors in their ward role

3.   Summary of the peer challenge approach

The peer team

Peer challenges are delivered by experienced elected member and officer peers. The make-up of the peer team reflected your requirements and the focus of the peer challenge. Peers were selected on the basis of their relevant experience and expertise and agreed with you. The peers who delivered the peer challenge with Brighton and Hove City Council were:

- Tracey Lee, Chief Executive, Plymouth City Council
- Councillor Peter Marland, Leader, Milton Keynes Council (Labour)
- Councillor Elaine Atkinson, Poole Borough Council (Conservative)
- Councillor Mike Bell, North Somerset Council (Liberal Democrat)
- Polly Cziok, Head of Communications, Consultation and Commercial Services, London Borough of Hackney
- Claire Porter, Corporate Head of Legal and Democratic Services, Shropshire Council
- Tanya Khatun, Programme Support Officer, LGA (shadowing role)
- Chris Bowron, Peer Challenge Manager, LGA

Scope and focus

The peer team considered the following five questions which form the core components looked at by all corporate peer challenges. These are the areas we believe are critical to councils' performance and improvement:

1. Understanding of the local place and priority setting: Does the council understand its local context and place and use that to inform a clear vision and set of priorities?

2. Leadership of place: Does the council provide effective leadership of place through its elected members, officers and constructive relationships and partnerships with external stakeholders?

3. Organisational leadership and governance: Is there effective political and managerial leadership supported by good governance and decision-making arrangements that respond to key challenges and enable change and transformation to be implemented?

4. Financial planning and viability: Does the council have a financial plan in place to ensure long term viability and is there evidence that it is being implemented successfully?

5. Capacity to deliver: Is organisational capacity aligned with priorities and does the council influence, enable and leverage external capacity to focus on agreed outcomes?

In addition to these questions, the council asked the peer team to consider, review and provide feedback on:

- Governance - there is a view that the council's committee system is not fit for purpose and does not allow for timely decision-making. The council are keen for the peer team to comment on the current arrangements and outline potential options. Any changes to governance would be for the next Administration, with all out elections in 2019.

- Reputation and relevance - does the council need to do more on communications and marketing?

The peer challenge process

It is important to stress that this was not an inspection. Peer challenges are improvement focussed and tailored to meet individual councils' needs. They are designed to complement and add value to a council's own performance and improvement. The process is not designed to provide an in-depth or technical assessment of plans and proposals. The peer team used their experience and knowledge of local government to reflect on the information presented to them by people they met, things they saw and material that they read.

The current LGA sector-led improvement support offer includes an expectation that all councils will have a corporate peer challenge every 4 to 5 years.

The peer team prepared for the peer challenge by reviewing a range of documents and information in order to ensure they were familiar with the council and the challenges being faced. The team then spent 4 days onsite with the council.

This report provides a summary of the peer team's findings. It expands on the feedback presentation provided by the peer team at the end of their on-site visit. In presenting

feedback to you, they have done so as fellow local government officers and elected members, not professional consultants or inspectors. By its nature, the peer challenge is a snapshot in time. We appreciate that some of the feedback may be about things you are now already addressing and progressing.

4. Feedback

4.1 Brighton and Hove – an exciting and proud place

Brighton and Hove is a national and international coastal and cultural destination, with a unique heritage, environmental and cultural offer. It is a diverse, cosmopolitan and vibrant city, with deep-rooted shared values of tolerance, compassion and respect. It has a highly engaged population and a strong voluntary and community sector. It is an educated and entrepreneurial city, with strong economic growth, two highly respected universities, a local economy built on small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and a growing profile of digital and creative industries.

4.2 Brighton and Hove - challenges

The city is a place of increasing inequality and there is entrenched deprivation in some communities. There is increasing demand for public services. A twin-track economy exists in the city, with two of the largest sectors, tourism and hospitality, dependent on low skill and low wage jobs. At the same time, the pressures of the housing market in London are bringing new and highly affluent residents (some 4,000 people are reported to relocate to the city from the capital annually). Local housing is becoming increasingly further out of reach, in terms of affordability, for local people. There is a huge undersupply of housing of all tenures but there are significant constraints to development for both housing and business space.

4.3 Brighton and Hove City Council – key context

Brighton and Hove City Council operates in a highly complex environment. We were extremely mindful of this during all of our discussions. The fundamental question that we see emerging out of this is:

- In a continual context of fine political balance, where the council operates a committee system, the approach to democracy is unusual, and trust and confidence is variable, how does the council ensure it can deliver in an increasingly challenging and changing environment?

The council has experienced No Overall Control continuously since 2003 and, in that time, has seen the three main political parties each lead a minority Administration. The authority has also experienced both the Cabinet system and the committee system during this time.

Brighton and Hove, both as a council and as a place, prides itself on the level of local engagement and involvement in democracy, placing major importance on openness and transparency and local people and elected members being able to contribute to debate and discussion. The 'City Tracker' (an annual survey undertaken by the council in order to help it better understand the views of local residents regarding the city, their neighbourhoods and council services) shows the level of 'local activism' in the city as being more than double the national average. A phrase that we heard regularly during our discussions was 'everybody in Brighton and Hove likes to have their say'.

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The complex environment throws up key considerations and challenges for the council. One of these is how the democratic process continues to operate in a way that satisfies the desire for engagement and involvement but ensures it is not the 'loudest voices' that dominate and that decision-making processes operate effectively and efficiently. Another is how the fine political balance and the politics don't inhibit effective leadership of the city and the council and negatively impact the reputation of the council. A further consideration is how elected members ensure they balance their attentions between the local interests of their ward and communities and the strategic priorities and considerations of the whole city.

We have sought to capture this in the following diagram, which is essentially posing the question of where elected members, at any given point in time or in any given situation, apply their focus.
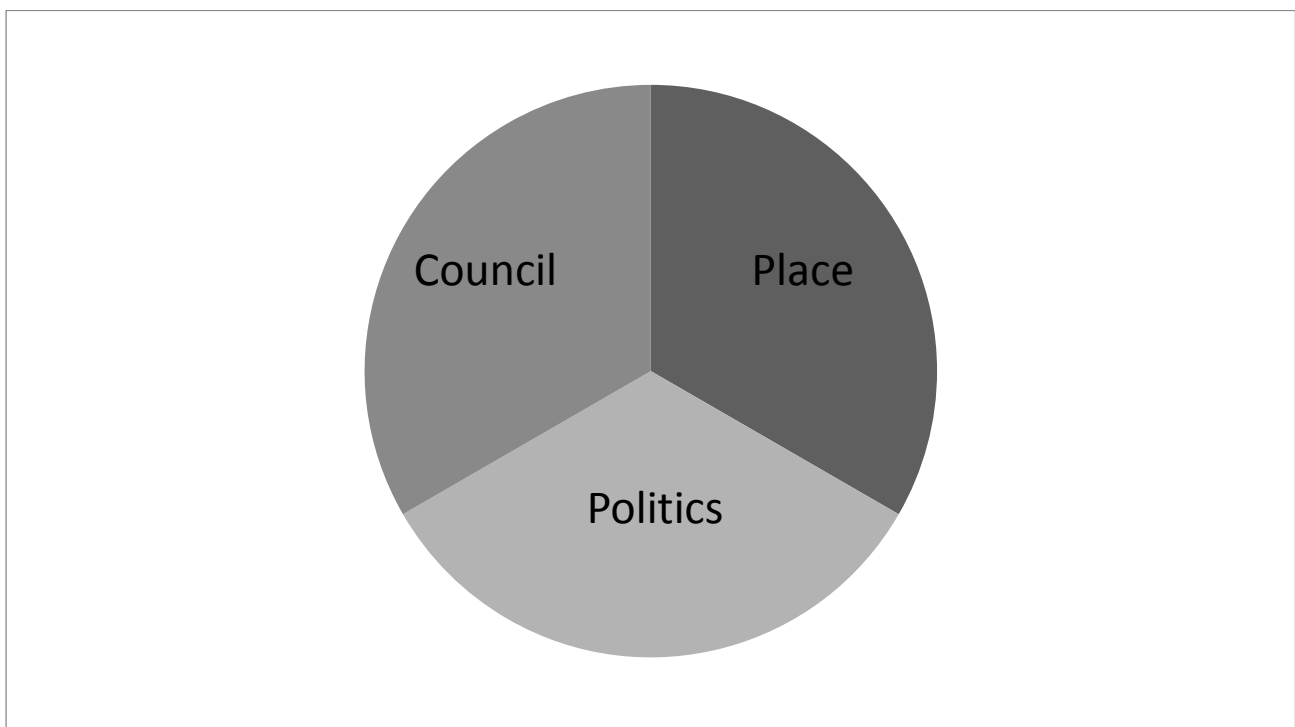
The focus will obviously change depending on the context and circumstances. The question is whether the balance is always appropriate.

4.4   Where you are

A huge amount of hard work has gone in to establishing the firm foundations necessary for the council to function to maximum effect going forward.

A medium term 4 year financial strategy (MTFS) is now in place covering the period to 2019/20. The council needs to achieve savings of £21m in the current year and a total of £47m by the end of the MTFS period. Various people expressed the view that the MTFS is both robust and realistic, with it seen to accurately reflect the pressures that the council can be expected to face over the next few years. We offer a couple of cautionary notes here, however, given assumptions that are included around elements where there are no

guarantees and the detail of what will constitute some of the agreed savings amounts for 2018/19 and 2019/20 still needing to be decided upon by elected members.

There also needs to be caution in relation to the budget set for this year, with the detail of what will constitute some of the agreed savings amounts still needing to be decided upon by elected members. Some of these decisions will be difficult. These cautionary notes are highlighted in a context of the level of earmarked reserves in the council being exceptionally low.

There is a lot of excitement about, and satisfaction with, the 'Modernisation' agenda in the council. Significant investment has been made, including the internal re-development of Hove Town Hall which has facilitated new ways of working for staff there. 'Workstyles' forms a key strand of modernisation, aimed at providing a flexible working environment and savings of over £1million. Another modernisation project is 'Libraries Extra' which, through the use of technology, enables customer access to libraries when they are not staffed. Savings of over £300,000 per annum have been achieved through this. The council is also joining a partnership (Orbis) that already exists between Surrey County Council and East Sussex County Council to deliver back-office functions in a way that provides both greater resilience and reduced costs. For Brighton and Hove, it is anticipated that delivering corporate services through Orbis will reduce costs by 30% by 2020.

The council enjoys generally good relations with partners and has a number of strong partnerships in place. Central to this is Brighton and Hove Connected (BHC), which includes the City Management Board (CMB) comprising the main public service organisations within the area. Key strategies and initiatives being taken forward under the auspices of the CMB include health and social care integration and the 'One Public Estate' programme. BHC also has a range of thematic partnerships and facilitates discussions and events/initiatives looking at key issues facing the city, such as rough sleeping and community safety. At the sub-regional level, the council has played an integral role in the establishment of, and on-going progress made by, the Greater Brighton Economic Board. We observed a meeting of the Economic Board and were impressed both by the way partners across local government and other sectors are engaging with one another and the scale of ambition and delivery in relation to economic development and regeneration projects.

We met a good proportion of the senior managers in the council through focus groups with the Executive Leadership Team and the Corporate Management Team and we were impressed by the calibre of management. Capacity generally in the council, in terms of having sufficient people available to deliver what is required, is felt to be reasonable. A new performance management framework has been established to drive improvement within the council. This is in the process of being further refined in order to make it easier for managers to understand, through a simple summary 'dashboard-style' document, how things are functioning in their areas of responsibility. This is a step in the right direction in terms of more closely linking performance, finance and risk information, but the council is keen to move this further forward still. A new 'behaviours' framework has been established within the council and this has been made central to the appraisal process and used to inform recruitment. The frameworks that have been put in place are very clearly about

positioning managers to be better able to manage and the expectations being placed upon them are increasing accordingly.

The council is self-aware about the level it currently performs at. There is a mixed picture in relation to both service delivery and customer experience and this is reflected in the findings of the City Tracker and anecdotally. Areas that are less good include public satisfaction with street cleaning (it is below the national average and has declined slightly further over the last year) and with waste collection (which is very significantly below the national average – 64 per cent locally compared to a level of 80 per cent nationally). The council has worked hard to improve the Planning function and key performance indicators show significant progress but the 'customer experience' is felt by the council itself still to require further improvement. The council scores very highly when compared to others in relation to the extent to which local people feel they can influence decisions in their local area but does less well comparatively with regard to people feeling they are kept well informed by the authority. Local people also have comparatively low levels of trust in the council and the council performs below the national average in relation to being seen by local residents to act on their concerns.

As we outlined earlier in this report, there are key characteristics of both the place and the way the council operates that make it a complex environment. It is a highly politically contested city. The definition and practice of democracy is very different to many places, which is born out of the way in which opinions abound in the city and people, whether that be citizens or elected members, like to be involved. We have already highlighted the findings from the 'City Tracker' regarding the level of local activism in the city and the very significant extent to which, comparatively, local people feel they can influence decisions in their local area. The tracker also highlights the fact that local people attach significantly higher levels of importance to being able to influence decisions than the national average.

This complex environment throws up tensions and creates polarities. It leads to a lot of conjecture and a range of narratives have evolved – 'decisions take too long', 'you can't get agreement', 'agreements are over-turned', 'everybody wants an input', 'who runs the council?'. It is impossible to know how much of what is said is myth and how much of it is reality. What is clear is that the tensions that have emerged are holding things back. The council is undoubtedly achieving and progressing but the way in which this is being done is incremental and tactical. Arguably, the progress the council is making is in spite of, rather than because of, the climate that exists. We recommend that those people in the greatest positions of influence within the organisation accept that without a 're-set' of the fundamental relationships within the council, progress will always be slowed and can only ever be incremental.

4.5   A changing environment

The environment in which the council is operating is changing dramatically. The financial pressure continues. The demography of the city is changing, housing pressures (the quality and range of housing-type as well as affordability) are increasing and economic growth at scale is happening across the Greater Brighton area. Public services are becoming increasingly complex and the demands upon them are growing, not just in terms of what and how much is being demanded but also the way they are expected to be delivered. As the council's Corporate Plan highlights:

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- "We must make sure the public services collectively provided for the city are right and fit for modern, digital expectations: built around the individual, accessible when and how people want them"

This changing environment, and all that it entails, represents both opportunity and risk. The Greater Brighton Economic Board is clearly 'on the front foot' in relation to economic growth – working together to identify opportunities and capitalise upon them. The council is doing the same in relation to housing with its 'New Homes for Neighbourhoods' programme (building new homes on council land and regenerating existing council estates to ensure they meet the requirements of the local community) and the 'Living Wage' joint venture which is delivering 1,000 new homes. However, the council needs to decide whether its current approach as a corporate body is sufficiently geared, in a similar vein, to maximising opportunity and minimising risk.

4.6   Capitalising upon opportunity

The democratic mandate of the council is fully recognised and respected by partners and stakeholders and they want to see the council fully utilising this unique position in order to provide the strong leadership of the city that is required. That leadership entails clarifying the vision for Brighton and Hove as a city and the role of the council in delivering it. Partners are seeking clarity and consistency from the institution that is Brighton and Hove City Council in the form of a vision that will withstand the test of time and changes in the political context. The vision must be capable of transcending political cycles in order for the council to generate the necessary confidence amongst its stakeholders.

The process of developing the vision is as important as the vision itself – something to be facilitated by the council rather than developed by itself, involving communities, partners and staff. The full breadth of the elected membership must also be involved. It is not realistic to expect complete agreement on everything across the political spectrum within the council but the fact that only 0.2 per cent of the budget set by the council for 2017/18 was the source of tension suggests there is much more that the political groups have in common than they disagree over. We think that much of the vision is already there – it just isn't articulated by everybody in a consistent way. In that context, it should be feasible to achieve a position in which the 80/20 rule can be met – finding the common ground that is the 80 per cent on which the vision can be founded, with the remaining 20 per cent being the 'political flavour' each Administration applies to the vision without re-directing or disrupting it. In that way, political cycles are transcended.

Capitalising upon the opportunities for the city at present is being made harder by the absence of a commonly shared and understood vision and uncertainty around how the range of concepts and 'firm foundations' being implemented by the council form a whole. Currently it feels like lots of pieces of a jigsaw that people are having to piece together for themselves. What would help is it all being put together for them. The council will wish to oversee that process itself, but we thought it might be helpful to come up with our own interpretation of the jigsaw in order to try and help crystallise what we are saying.

Putting it all together
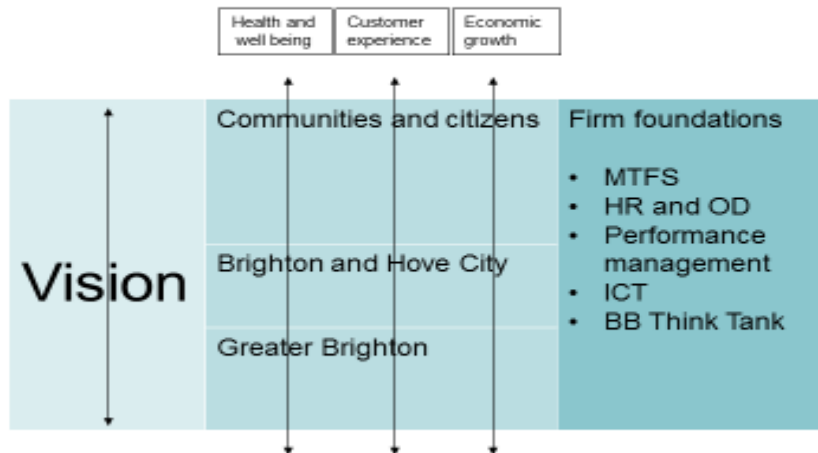
This essentially shows the need for a vision that has meaning and applicability across different geographies, ranging from individual communities or wards to the whole of the Greater Brighton area and even beyond. Key areas of focus, examples of which include health and well-being, economic growth and customer experience, need to be translated into what they mean and how they are applied in different places and contexts. As an example, health and well-being priorities will differ across communities as will the way those priorities are addressed and services are delivered. The firm foundations are the means by which the council supports delivery of its key areas of focus and the vision.

4.7   The future

The future requires enduring and on-going place leadership from the council as an institution that needs to deliver for the benefit of the people of Brighton and Hove. The vision, the process of developing it and the certainty it will provide are central to this.

As we have already outlined, there is very active citizenship in Brighton and Hove. The approach to democracy is tailored accordingly in an attempt to maximise the potential for local people and elected members to be able to contribute to debate and discussion. The council needs to consider whether current practice is going to serve sufficiently well going forward. How does it best operate in the future in a way that satisfies the desire for engagement and involvement but also ensures it is not the 'loudest voices' that dominate and that decision-making processes operate effectively and efficiently? The issue of council governance needs to be settled once and for all and everybody then needs to move on.

We see the potential for an enhanced role and support for councillors in their ward role going forward. Part of this links to the issue of place leadership – elected members being able to play a more influential role helping to shape their localities, working symbiotically with the active citizenship, highly engaged populace and strong voluntary and community

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sector that stands Brighton and Hove in such good stead. The 'jigsaw' that we showed above reflected a space for translating what key areas of focus, such as health and well-being and customer experience, might mean at the community and citizen level. Ward councillors could be seen as very much having a role to play in that. Also, in their representative capacity, it feels to us that ward councillors require more support from the council. At present, endeavouring to progress casework issues within the council on behalf of their local residents is, at best, experienced as 'hit and miss' by those we spoke to – which seems to be symptomatic of the 'customer experience'. In the absence of an established system, councillors are left to navigate their way through the organisation as best they can.

It is vital to ensure that roles and responsibilities within the council are clear and that they are then respected and adhered to. The role of elected members is to set policy. Officers are then responsible for implementing it. Elected members also need to provide a climate that enables the Chief Executive to perform his role – to be able to operate 'without fear or favour' – and allows managers to manage. Blurring of respective roles and accountabilities is unhelpful. One example is the sentiment expressed by some backbench councillors we met that decisions delegated to officers (in line with the Constitution) should come back to them for review. Elected members either need to revise the Constitution (in this case in relation to the Scheme of Delegation) in order to satisfy whatever it is they are seeking or respect what has already been agreed. There can be no 'second-guessing'.

As another example, there have been experiences on the part of managers of uncertainty and ambiguity being brought into the equation through elected member involvement in HR operational matters. This has left them questioning their approach to future HR issues. Managers were very clear with us that they rightly expect to be held to account by the Chief Executive and elected members for the way they manage their people but that this only works where accountabilities are absolutely clear. We recommend that elected member involvement in HR operational matters should cease.

Trade unions within the council could play a valuable role in the future. However, this requires dramatically improved relationships between all concerned. The current set of relationships is recognised by all as being dysfunctional. Progress can only be made if there is agreement that the relationship needs to be 're-set'. We recommend that external facilitation is brought in to enable such a 're-set' to take place.

We see the council as needing to move from 'tactics to strategy' in order to provide the necessary leadership into the future – leadership that is strong, consistent and strategic. A key part of this is clarifying the shared vision for Brighton and Hove as a city and the role of the council in delivering it. To underpin this, we recommend that the Executive Leadership Team establishes and articulates a clear organisational narrative for staff supporting the shared vision – at the heart of which would be the principle of 'one council serving the city'. The narrative is essentially about outlining what type of organisation the council is going to be in the future.

Another aspect of from 'tactics to strategy' entails the shift from managing lots of individual projects to managing sets of programmes. As an example, considering the activities regarding 'customer experience' and 'digital' alongside those for 'Modernisation' will enable

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greater benefits to be realised, avoid duplication, minimise the risk of 'pinch points' in terms of demands being made on the organisation generally and on expert capacity. The same principle applies in a partnership working context. Where funding pressures being felt by different organisations are leading to changes in service delivery or financial contributions they are making, being able to anticipate the cumulative impacts of this on residents and service users will better enable risks to be mitigated and the best use made of the available resource.

Moving from 'data to intelligence' is another key element of the shift from 'tactics to strategy'. There was a lot of reference made during our discussions to the council being rich in data but the leap often still needing to be made to translate it into intelligence. Examples include the 'City Tracker' survey results, the annual 'customer insight report' which gathers information on the customer experience of using council services, performance data and financial information. These produce lots of information but that doesn't necessarily get translated into a clear understanding of issues and how to respond. A very positive step has been made in setting up the 'Better: Brighton and Hove' joint venture, with the aim of 'advancing excellence and innovation in public service delivery to benefit the city's residents'. It was launched around six months ago and is intended to look at a wide range of issues, conducting research in collaboration with the council, universities, local social enterprises, local businesses and the Local Enterprise Partnership. This was in response to a realisation that the council's own research and intelligence capability was constrained. Internally, there is seen to be benefit in looking to more closely link performance data and financial information. Whilst they are now both reported together to key council forums, which is seen as a very positive step, their closer integration is felt to offer increased benefit in the form of delivering intelligence that currently is either being missed or is difficult to draw out.

Finally in this section of the report, we want to re-iterate a message that we heard loudly and clearly from partners, crucially including the voluntary and community sector, who want the opportunity to contribute more to making the city a success and helping make the best use of the diminishing resources available to the council. Providing consistency and clarity to partners through the shared vision for the city and the strategic leadership that is being sought from the council will make it easier for partners to determine how they can best contribute.

4.8   Communications and engagement

The council were keen for us to explore during the course of the peer challenge whether it needs to do more on communications and marketing. It is widely recognised within local government that communications can play a key role in improving a council's reputation and resident satisfaction.

There is strong new leadership in the communications function and this is having a positive impact both in terms of renewing the council's focus on communications and developing the strategic approach that is required. This leadership is supplemented by sufficient resource, in the form of staffing, within the function. The existence of strong leadership and adequate resource provides the opportunity to meet the challenge of delivering the necessary radical improvement in the council's communications.

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A new communications strategy is in the process of being agreed. This puts a much needed focus on internal communications, as well as external. Internal communications has been improving in recent months but still needs significant focus. The development of the organisational narrative that we referred to earlier in this report will assist greatly with internal communications. Developing ways of sharing success and promoting a 'one team' approach across the council should also provide a major focus of internal communications.

The council has very limited external communications channels of its own, relying on both a local media with declining levels of readership and social media. At present, the organisation generally is perceived as very reactive and often being overly influenced by the 'loudest voices'. Communications, effectively linked in to the strategic leadership of the council, can assist greatly in addressing this. Examples include being able to develop a better join up between communications and customer service and developing an increased focus on the provision of basic service information to residents. Another example is looking at the branding of core services, which is inconsistent currently, in order to enhance reputation. Currently, where the council is doing things well, that inconsistency generates a risk that people don't know who is providing the service.

Whilst the council demonstrates areas of excellence in relation to consultation/engagement and communications, as has been seen with the work looking at the future of some Special Schools in the city, there is no corporate join-up between these aspects. This presents both missed opportunities and organisational risks. Linked to this, given it is a major social landlord, there is an opportunity for the council to develop tenant communications and engagement much more, ensuring a 'whole citizen' approach to how it communicates and assisting, at least in part, with the challenge faced by all councils of reaching out into some harder to reach groups.

To build on the findings we have outlined here, the council are keen to undertake a communications peer review and initial discussions on this have already started.

5   Next steps

Immediate next steps

We appreciate the senior managerial and political leadership will want to reflect on these findings and suggestions in order to determine how the organisation wishes to take things forward.

As part of the peer challenge process, there is an offer of further activity to support this. The LGA is well placed to provide additional support, advice and guidance on a number of the areas for development and improvement and we would be happy to discuss this. Mona Sehgal, Principal Adviser, is the main contact between the council and the Local Government Association (LGA).

We are keen to continue the relationship we have formed with the council throughout the peer challenge.

Follow up visit

The LGA Corporate Peer Challenge process includes a follow-up visit. The purpose of the visit is to help the council assess the impact of the peer challenge and demonstrate the progress that has been made against the areas of improvement and development identified by the peer team. It is a lighter-touch version of the original visit and does not necessarily involve all members of the original peer team. The timing of the visit is determined by the council.

Next corporate peer challenge

The current LGA sector-led improvement support offer includes an expectation that all councils will have a corporate peer challenge or finance peer review every 4 to 5 years. It is therefore anticipated that the council will commission their next peer challenge by 2022.

Annex – Contents of the feedback presentation delivered to the council on Friday 28th April 2017

Brighton and Hove – an exciting and proud place

- National/international coastal and cultural destination
- Diverse, cosmopolitan and vibrant
- Deep-rooted shared values – tolerance, compassion and respect
- Highly engaged population
- Educated and entrepreneurial city with strong growth

Brighton and Hove - challenges

- Increasing inequality
- Entrenched deprivation in some communities
- Increasing demand for public services
- Twin-track economy
- Significant constraints to physical growth

Brighton and Hove City Council – key context

- In a continual context of fine political balance, where the council operates a committee system, the approach to democracy is unusual, and trust and confidence is variable, how does this council ensure it can deliver in an increasingly challenging and changing environment?

Where focus is applied
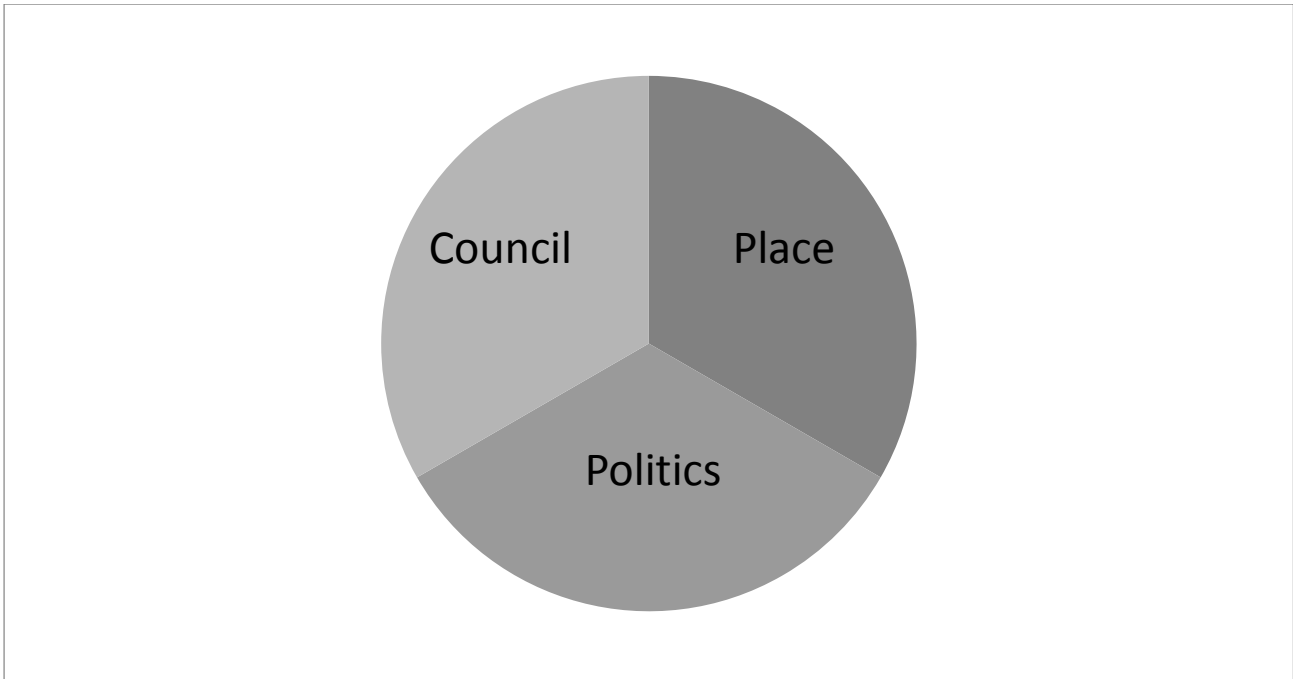
Where you are

- A huge amount of hard work has gone in to establishing the firm foundations necessary for the council to function to maximum effect going forward:

  - Medium term financial strategy in place – but with difficult decisions still needing to be taken
  - Modernisation agenda – and investment
  - Relationships with partners and strength of partnerships
  - Performance management framework
  - Behaviours framework
  - Calibre of management
  - Capacity
  - ICT – identified the issues and making investment

- The council is self-aware about the level it currently performs at – services and customer experience
- There are key characteristics of both the place and the way the council operates:

  - Politically contested
  - Opinions abound and people like to be involved
  - Definition and practice of democracy
  - Polarity and tensions – who runs the council?
  - Myth or reality? – decisions take too long, you can't get agreement, agreements are over-turned, everybody wants an input

- The council is undoubtedly achieving and progressing but the way in which this is being done is incremental and tactical – achieving despite rather than because of
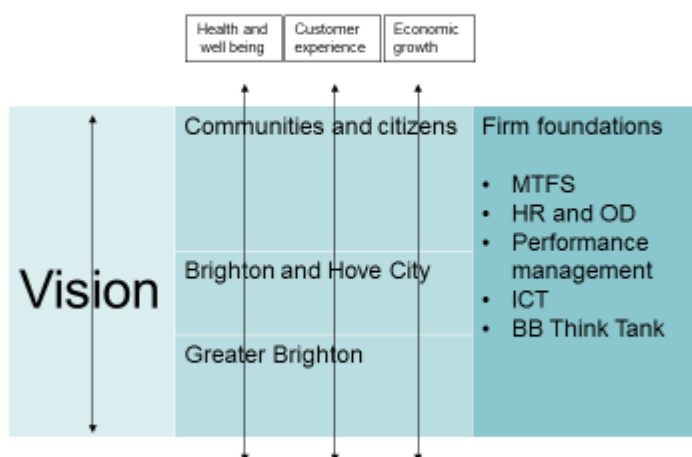
A changing environment

- The environment in which you are operating is changing dramatically:

  ➢ Continued financial pressure
  ➢ Economic growth at scale – Greater Brighton
  ➢ Demography – ebbs and flows
  ➢ Complexity of public services and the way they are changing
  ➢ Housing pressures
  ➢ Changing expectations of residents

- This represents both opportunity and risk
- You need to decide whether your current approach is geared to maximising opportunity and minimising risk

Capitalising upon opportunity

- Stakeholders recognise and respect the democratic mandate of the council
- They are seeking strong leadership from the council - clarity and consistency from an institution in order to provide certainty and confidence
- That leadership entails clarifying the vision for Brighton and Hove as a city and the role of the council in delivering it
- The process of achieving this is as important as the output
- 80/20 rule – transcending political cycles
- Jigsaw – the key pieces are there but people are having to piece it together for themselves:

Putting it all together

Health and well being	Customer experience	Economic growth

Vision	Communities and citizens	Firm foundations
	Brighton and Hove City	• MTFS • HR and OD • Performance management • ICT • BB Think Tank
	Greater Brighton	

The future

- Enduring and on-going place leadership from the council as an institution that needs to deliver for the benefit of the people of Brighton and Hove
- Active citizenship and democracy – consider whether current practice is going to serve you sufficiently well going forward
- Ensure roles and responsibilities within the council are clear and that they are then respected and adhered to:

  ➢ Elected members setting policy
  ➢ A climate amongst the elected membership that enables the Chief Executive to perform his role
  ➢ Trade unions – could play a valuable role with improved relationships but the current relationship is recognised by all as dysfunctional
  ➢ Managers being able to manage
  ➢ Enhanced role and support for councillors in their ward role

- The need to move from tactics to strategy:

  ➢ Leadership from the council that is strong, consistent and strategic
  ➢ Clarify the shared vision for Brighton and Hove as a city and the role of the council in delivering it
  ➢ The Executive Leadership Team should establish and articulate a clear organisational narrative for staff which supports the shared vision
  ➢ One council serving the city
  ➢ Projects to programmes – including cumulative impacts
  ➢ Data to intelligence

- Partners want to contribute – providing consistency and clarity will make this easier

Communications and engagement

- Communications can play a key role in improving the council's reputation and resident satisfaction
- The opportunity exists to radically improve the council's communications
- There is strong new leadership in communications
- The newly agreed communications strategy puts a much needed focus on internal communications, as well as external
- Communications is sufficiently resourced, from a staffing perspective
- Internal communications is improving but needs significant focus, with a clear organisational narrative, sharing success across the council and promoting a 'one team' approach
- The council has very limited external communications channels of its own, relying on declining local media and social media
- There is insufficient focus on the provision of basic service information and no join up between communications and customer service
- Branding of core services is inconsistent - when the council is doing things well, people don't know who is providing the service
- There is no corporate join-up between consultation/engagement and communications, which presents both missed opportunities and organisational risks

- The organisation is perceived as very reactive and often overly influenced by the 'loudest voices'
- As a major social landlord, there is an opportunity to develop tenant communications and engagement as a 'whole citizen' mechanism for reaching out into harder to reach groups