

Gap analysis summary - March 2016

The Birmingham Independent Improvement Panel asked the Council to assess its own progress against the key themes in our improvement plan.

Political leadership

The Leader has been clear that members should lead the council, while officers should focus on the running of it. His open and collaborative approach to partnership has been received very positively by partners citywide. This approach is starting to bed in across the political leadership of the council, including enhanced cross-party working and more cross-cutting work by cabinet members. Nevertheless, we recognise that there is a perception that this cultural shift is not yet fully ingrained.

In six months' time, this new leadership approach will see cabinet members focused on a collective vision and shared priorities with partners, while all three group leaders will be seen together frequently at key events and platforms, adopting a more systematic approach to cross-party working. Partners will feel words have translated into action.

To achieve this, we must ensure our systems can support and embed a new way of working – for example, we are reviewing and changing the way members are involved in internal and external structures. Monthly meetings between the Chief Executive and three group leaders started in March 2016. Members will be supported through a new member induction programme, peer mentoring and bespoke training.

Managerial leadership

The Corporate Leadership Team (CLT) now has the right people in place and a clear sense of purpose, urgency, focus and direction needed to drive forward the required improvement. However, while there has been progress in breaking down silos, there is still room for improvement in operating as a strategic corporate unit. Staff feedback suggests the wider workforce does not yet see CLT as a unified team.

In six months' time, CLT will have a clear vision to guide the workforce, and a grip on performance across all service areas. Reducing red tape will help staff feel it is easier for them to work effectively and efficiently. CLT and senior officers will be working together as an extended leadership team. CLT members will consistently and visibly demonstrate the organisation's values and behaviours.

To achieve this, CLT is investing in time to develop as a team, starting with a development session on March 22. The team will use its time together effectively to focus on key strategic and corporate issues. It will also work on improving its visibility and work collaboratively with the wider senior leadership group, including sharing best practice. CLT has taken collective ownership of monitoring the council's performance.

Strategic planning, performance and financial management

For the first time, the council has prepared and consulted on a four-year business and financial plan, agreeing a 2020 vision that informs the plan. Our proposed plan for 2016/17 has a much sharper focus on a targeted set of priorities and measures agreed with portfolio holders. Business cases have been developed for savings proposed.

By the summer, a new operating model will be agreed and staff will understand how it operates, what their roles are and how they can help amend it to improve how we work. CLT will monitor and manage performance, with accountability to portfolio holders. The council will be on track to achieve its 2016/17 savings, while sound planning for 2017/18 savings will be in place.

To achieve this, we will focus on developing our new operating model, identified as a top priority by CLT, which will hold monthly performance meetings. A more radical overhaul of the business plan will take place in 2017/18, with portfolio holders, service areas and key stakeholders engaged throughout the spring and summer.

City partnerships

The Leader's open approach to partnerships and recognition of their role in the success of the city has been positively received, although there is still a perception that there has not been a significant shift in the wider council's behaviour and approach to partnering. However, a recent LGA peer review found growing confidence in council leadership of the education system and evidence of improving relationships with schools, while there has also been positive feedback from key public sector partners such as acute health trusts and police. The council also showed leadership without being the lead in establishing the West Midlands Combined Authority. There is evidence that more effective partnership working is leading to better outcomes for the city, including a two per cent reduction in the number of young people not in education, employment or training.

In six months' time, the majority of our partners will confirm a positive change in the way council members and officers engage with them.

To achieve this, we need to address behaviour and our approach to partners, which in turn links in with the way we promote and implement our values and behaviours throughout the council. The council is committed to being an active and supportive partner, engaging with them to develop a city vision which is more resident and community driven.

Local leadership

The council is actively working on a sustainable new model for local leadership at ward level, with councillors responding very positively to the opportunity to further develop their role in relation to the communities they represent. Sutton Coldfield Town Council was established on March 1. The Neighbourhood Challenge approaches have resulted in innovative new ways of holding public services to account.

In six months' time, more councillors will feel able to play an enhanced community leadership role, including engaging with other community leaders to shape effective public service delivery and all public spending in their areas. More cross-party working will take place at local level. We will also have a model for devolution which focuses on getting basic services right, while a community cohesion strategy for the city will have been agreed with partners.

A clear plan has been agreed for local leadership up to 2022, working across neighbourhood, city and regional levels, identifying key milestones along the way and how these will be delivered. In 2016/17, the Local Innovation Fund will be introduced, along with a new approach to building up

infrastructure plus capacity for sustainable delivery from the voluntary and community sector. This new approach to local leadership has been one of our early successes.

Organisational culture

Cultural change is not a stand-alone work programme for the council and fits into several other strands of what we are doing, including political and managerial leadership, partnerships and local leadership. We recognise we have not yet made the progress in organisational development that we need to, with staff and partner feedback revealing a perception that this change has been slow. There is also a need for members and officers to develop more effective ways of working together. On a positive note, the council placed 28th on Stonewall's 2016 Index of the Top 100 Most Inclusive Employers, up from 59th place in 2015.

In six months' time, the council's values and behaviours will be visible and referenced as part of its core business, experienced across the organisation at all levels and by partners. We will pursue greater clarity about the roles of members and officers and the most effective ways of interaction. Positive behaviours will be recognised and negative ones challenged promptly, while staff will feel more trusted and better empowered.

The first phase of a campaign promoting the council's values and behaviours was launched across the organisation in February 2016. Recommendations from the wider senior leaders' group on 'quick wins' that would allow them to work more effectively are now being implemented, including cutting red tape and making changes to delegations. Workshops in the spring will bring members and officers together in a cross-party setting to look at how we work more effectively. The council will foster a culture of learning and exchange, particularly through staff development. We will continue to look at ways to break down silos.

Communications and transparency

Some good progress has been made in improving corporate communications over the past year, including LGA support for an independent communications review. A new internal communications strategy is now in place with new channels being set up to ensure better staff engagement. Events designed to encourage greater external and internal engagement, such as the Big Conversation 3, Pop Up Council and Community Workshops, have been well received. There is a shared ambition from the Leader and Chief Executive for the council to be 'transparent by default'.

In six months' time, the council will have a new, improved website. Priorities set out in the business plan will be used to drive a new communications and campaigns plan for 2016/17. All social media and digital communications channels will have been reviewed and a new strategy put in place. There will be greater control and consistency across all communications channels and resources, resulting in increased reach and focusing on two-way engagement, internally and externally.

CLT agreed the LGA's communications review findings in February and these are now being implemented. The structure of corporate communications is being undertaken and options for broader communications activities across the council will be considered. A permanent Assistant Director for communications will be recruited.