1. Background and purpose for the peer challenge

1.1 This report provides a summary of the Local Government Association Corporate Peer Challenge process which will be taking place across both Chiltern and South Bucks Councils later this year.

1.2 The Corporate Peer Challenge is an opportunity to pause and reflect on what the Partnership between the two councils has achieved so far and to consider where it goes next. The purpose of the peer challenge is to inform further improvement and learning. It is designed to be forward looking, facilitative and problem solving. While it can be used to provide an external ‘health-check’, the peer challenge is not a form of inspection, and will not deliver a detailed diagnosis or scored assessment.

1.3 The principal areas of focus will be:

- How effective are the shared arrangements between the councils and what is the future direction of the Partnership?
- How fit is the Partnership to deliver on the future challenges faced?
- What is the direction of SBDC and CDC’s work with external partners? How effective are these relationships/partnerships?

1.4 In light of the context outlined above, the challenge will also consider:

- Are the governance structures within the councils conducive to delivering Partnership priorities?
- Do the councils have the skills, capacity and expertise within the workforce and Membership to deliver the Partnership’s agenda?
- Have the councils identified the right strategies, and are they executing them effectively?
1.5 In delivering this focus the peer team will also consider the core components that all corporate peer challenges cover:

- Understanding of local context and priority setting: Do the councils understand their local context and have they established a clear set of priorities?
- Financial planning and viability: Do the councils have financial plans in place to ensure long term viability and is there evidence that it is being implemented successfully?
- Political and managerial leadership: Do the councils have effective political and managerial leadership and is it a constructive partnership?
- Governance and decision-making: Are effective governance and decision-making arrangements in place to respond to key challenges and manage change, transformation and disinvestment?
- Organisational capacity: Are organisational capacity and resources focused in the right areas in order to deliver the agreed priorities?

2. Dates of the peer challenge

2.1 The peer challenge team will be onsite at Chiltern and South Bucks for four days week commencing 17th to 20th November 2014.

3. Peer team make-up and roles

3.1 The full peer team will comprise:

- Chief Executive Peer: a chief executive from a shared arrangement, someone who has probably had a peer challenge in their own council
- Elected Member Peer: a Conservative Leader from a shared management council
- Senior Local Government Officer peer: a senior Director who has worked at a strategic level within councils undergoing significant transformation
- Senior Officer peer from a partner agency: a senior officer who can bring relevant experience, knowledge and expertise to the challenge. It is hoped this person would be from an organisation which works with the sector and can bring some external perspective and thinking
- Optional - LGA Shadow – the LGA has found it valuable to offer the opportunity to senior staff to shadow the peer challenge to gain
4. **Onsite activity**

4.1 The peer team will be based at both the Amersham (King George V House) and Denham (Capswood) council offices during the four day review. They will be supported by the Policy, Performance and Communications team before, during and after the review.

4.2 There will be an initial ‘scene setting’ and ‘checking the brief’ discussion with the Chief Executive and Leader. Meetings and discussion sessions will then take place with a range of officers, Members and other stakeholders (including citizens and partners if relevant) enabling the peer team to explore the issues relevant to the purpose, scope and suggested terms of reference for the peer challenge.

5. **Feedback from the peer challenge**

5.1 A feedback session will delivered by the peer team at the end of the on-site activity. This will involve everyone who has participated in the peer challenge process.

5.2 This will be followed by a short written feedback letter, within three weeks, summarising the peer team’s feedback, and providing signposting to places and practice to support the key findings and recommendations of the peer team.

5.3 An improvement planning session/workshop will be held sometime after the on-site visit. This will provide an opportunity to consider the feedback from the peer challenge after a short period of reflection, and enable some initial high level consideration and prioritisation of the next steps.

*Background papers: None*