

Corporate Peer Challenge Bracknell Forest Council

5th-8th March 2013

Report

1. Background and scope of the peer challenge

It was a pleasure and privilege to be invited into Bracknell Forest Council to deliver the recent Local Government Association (LGA) corporate peer challenge. The team very much appreciated the efforts that went into preparing for the visit and looking after us whilst we were on site. We also appreciated the participation of elected members, staff and partners in the process.

It is important to stress that peer challenges are improvement-focussed and tailored to meet individual council's needs. They are designed to complement and add value to a council's own performance and improvement focus. Peers use 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 peer team provides feedback as 'critical friends', not as assessors, inspectors or consultants.

Peer challenges are managed by the LGA and delivered by experienced elected member and officer peers. The peers who delivered the peer challenge at Bracknell Forest Council were:

Gavin Jones - Chief Executive of Swindon Borough Council
Councillor Michael White (Conservative) – Leader of London Borough of Havering Council
Rory Borealis – Executive Director, Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council
Chris Lee – Director of Environment & Regeneration, London Borough of Merton Council
Cecilia Tredget – Managing Director of East of England LGA and Improvement East
Will Brooks – Head of the Conservative Group Office, LGA (shadow)
Paul Clarke – LGA Peer Challenge Manager

The make-up of the peer team reflected the specific requirements of the council and the focus of the peer challenge. Peers were selected on the basis of their relevant experience and expertise and agreed with you.

In terms of the scope of the peer challenge, you asked the peer team to provide an external 'health-check' of the organisation by considering the core components looked at by all corporate peer challenges, namely:

- Understanding of local context and priority setting: Does the council understand its local context and has it established a clear set of priorities?
- 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?
- Political and managerial leadership: Does the council 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?

You also asked us to look at your thinking and emerging plans and proposals for sustaining the economic growth and development of the borough. We provide feedback specifically on that at the end of this report, along with some ideas and suggestions for your consideration.

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 it is facing. The team then spent 4 days onsite at Bracknell Forest, during which they:

- spoke to more than 70 different people including a range of council staff together with councillors and external partners and stakeholders
- gathered information and views from more than 30 meetings, visits to key sites in the area and additional research and reading
- collectively spent more than 200 hours to determine our findings – the equivalent of one person spending nearly 6 weeks in Bracknell Forest

This report provides a written summary of the peer team's findings. It builds on the feedback presentation provided by the peer team at the end of their on-site visit (5th – 8th March 2013).

2. Summary of feedback

Bracknell Forest is a good council. A long period of stable political and managerial leadership has helped install an effective way of doing business (described to us as the 'Bracknell Forest Way') that has served the borough well. The area is considered a good place to live with relatively low levels of unemployment and is reasonably affluent. Your recent resident's survey suggests there are high levels of satisfaction, both in terms of the borough as a place to live and the way in which the council are running things. You are keen to ensure these remain the case – something that is articulated clearly through your long term vision and medium term priorities.

There are several key characteristics and hallmarks of the 'Bracknell Forest Way' which have contributed to your success to date and established a culture of continuous improvement. A systematic and well established performance management approach embedded cross the organisation has helped ensure good service performance across the board. Prudent financial management including an efficiency programme and track record of making savings have put you in a relatively sound fiscal position, particularly in comparison to many other local authorities.

Within the authority, staff are clearly motivated to do their best for local people. They enjoy and value working for the Council, and have confidence in the ability of the organisation to respond to challenges. There is a culture of internal collaboration and a notable desire and commitment to go the extra mile. There appear to be good officer-elected member relationships based on mutual trust, respect and understanding. Other components of good governance are in place, such as a strong overview and scrutiny role. There is a commitment to ensuring all members have an opportunity to contribute to key debates, decision making and policy development.

Externally, the council has a good, and improving, reputation with partners and other stakeholders. They view the organisation as reliable and well managed, and committed to consultation with service users. Aspects of partnership working the council is leading or involved in are generally strong. These provide a good foundation on which to develop external collaboration to maximise the capacity and potential of others to deliver the priorities and outcomes identified.

All in all, the council is in a good place. You are good at what you do. Most importantly you are not complacent about the future and are aware of the key challenges and risks. Priorities for Bracknell Forest are changing and evolving. As the severity of financial challenges increase you are rightly questioning whether the established and successful 'Bracknell Forest Way' of doing things will remain fit for purpose. You are keen to ensure the council continues to deliver the best outcomes possible for the borough. You have recently introduced the 'good to great' programme within the council to engage staff about what will take the council to the next level, and commissioned this peer challenge to provide some external perspective, challenge and insights to inform your thinking.

The 'Bracknell Forest Way' has without doubt helped you get to the strong position you are in. It has helped create a good council for today. But ironically it is potentially holding you back from becoming a great council for tomorrow. In essence there is a step-change in the challenges facing the council that may not be best served by further incremental change and improvement which have been a hallmark of your success to date. Whilst the Council has continually improved, there has to date been no 'burning platform' or driving imperative for major transformational change. There is a risk that waiting for one may mean you are unable to respond quickly or agile enough to the challenge. Conversely creating one may unhinge the stability in the authority you have worked hard to create.

The stability you have achieved has been built on taking an evidence-based, well informed and considered approach to decision-making. This of course is sensible and prudent, as is your conventional approach to risk. But moving forward you may need to consider whether your philosophy moves from 'risk mitigation' to 'opportunity risk' in order to fully seize and exploit the opportunities or to moderate the challenges facing the council and borough. We suggest there will need to be as much focus on 'doing things differently' as well on 'doing things better'. This will challenge the traditional way of doing things at Bracknell Forest.

There are current examples of working in different ways to deliver services such as through partnerships. Nonetheless the ways in which outcomes are delivered may need to develop more radically as the challenges facing Bracknell Forest evolve. You will need to further consider how you become more systematically co-productive in the way issues, challenges and problems are tackled and include a wider variety of key stakeholders. This is particularly the case for new priorities such as sustaining the economic prosperity of the borough where you will need to maximise the potential of key economic partnerships, both in terms of building on existing ones and creating new ones to increase your influence.

Maximising the internal capacity across the organisation to better harness the creativity, talent and energy for change will be essential. This in part is about ensuring the organisation is geared up to deliver transformation that may be needed. Current ways of working have been very successful in supporting continuous incremental improvement by whatever means work and seizing opportunities as they arise. The future approach to leading, managing and delivering change, including programme and project management, may need to be more cohesive and co-ordinated.

3. Detailed findings

3.1 Understanding of the local context and priority setting

The council has a clear set of priorities. These are politically driven, are evidence based and appear relevant for Bracknell Forest given the challenges facing the borough. Elected members play an active part in setting the strategic direction and shaping the plans and activities to deliver that. Your policy framework comprising six strategic priorities and eleven medium term objectives plainly set out your aspirations for the borough and the key things you plan to do as a council to deliver your vision. Service Plans are linked directly to the delivery of the priorities meaning there is a visible 'golden thread' from vision to service delivery.

You have a good understanding of the area the Councils serves, and reality check what you are planning and doing through a range of service based consultation and engagement. Key priorities such as the town centre regeneration have been informed by consultation and research with residents and businesses. A biennial Resident's Survey helps you to understand wider resident satisfaction with the council and its services. The most recent survey (December 2012) also seeks to collate intelligence on the usage of services, preferences for communication channels and the extent of volunteering in the borough. All of these we suggest are useful in helping to inform the future development of the organisation and how it does business.

In addition to the town centre regeneration plans, we think you are right to have a priority focussed on economic development. You have identified the borough needs a resilient, sustainable and growing economy. You recognise future plans need to be developed and evolved. Indeed this peer challenge was commissioned partly to help reality check and stretch your thinking further. Given the economic health of the borough will have a direct bearing on most other council priorities we wonder whether sustaining economic prosperity should be the number one priority for the council (a

first among equals). Most other authorities are trying to encourage, stimulate or sustain economic growth, and many consider it 'the only show in town'.

There is a good awareness of the council's vision and priorities across the organisation. Staff understand what is important to Bracknell Forest. Your staff survey suggests a high degree of understanding about how individual roles contribute to the council's objectives. There is undoubtedly good internal communication of these. Less clear is the vision for the future organisation and how it may need to develop to respond effectively to the evolving challenges facing the borough and maximise the opportunities it faces. There is some emergent thinking, but it is not yet fully formed or articulated.

In essence this is about defining a new 'Bracknell Forest Way' of doing things. As priorities change and evolve, so too do the ways that outcomes are achieved need to develop, and arguably more radically than they have in the past. Currently the council is predominantly a service delivery or directing organisation. Future effectiveness and success may mean less direct delivery and directing, and more enabling and empowering. In short, the priorities and outcomes sought are clear. The means by which to realise those may need further consideration.

3.2 Financial planning and viability

There is clearly strong financial management and control at Bracknell Forest. An impressive track record of proactive management based on sound assumptions and a service efficiency programme has helped to achieve significant savings and keep the council on a sound financial footing. Compared to many other authorities you are in good place. Nonetheless this is relative given the future unknowns in terms of the severity of financial challenges facing the sector beyond the medium term. Ensuring financial resilience will need to remain a priority for Bracknell Forest just as it will for most other authorities.

Notwithstanding the unknowns, you look to have a good understanding of the challenges and opportunities ahead. You are aware of the likely key pressures. You have earmarked what appear to be reasonable reserves to respond to key changes and developments such as loss of business rates income during the town centre regeneration. Your 'glide path' approach to reducing spending year on year, and the culture of making savings as and when opportunities to do so arise, make sense. They are part of a prudent and considered approach and one that has obviously served you well to date.

However, given the challenges, risks and unknowns it is difficult to predict the base level and point at which your 'glide path' will end. There may of course be 'turbulence' along the way too that could disrupt the glide path. For example, if levels of savings required increase significantly beyond current expectations. We saw or heard little evidence of a financial strategy should the benefits of the town centre regeneration not be realised, albeit we know you are planning to monitor carefully and are taking this into account in determining the level of financial balances and reserves required. . Whilst a medium term strategy was articulated to us there is no published Medium Term Financial Plan. We suggest this is worth re-considering.

Publishing your strategy will help create a wider understanding and awareness of the future financial challenges, constraints and risks. And it may attract others to help you respond to challenges in the medium term.

The process by which resources are allocated to priorities could be more explicit we think. Currently service planning and financial planning is not as connected as it could be. The processes are done in parallel so are not completely unconnected, but there is scope for further integration that will strengthen financial planning and management further we feel.

We also raised the question of whether in light of future unknowns the pace of improvement, change and efficiencies may need to increase. And if so does the approach to service improvement need to be different? For instance does there need to be more 'step change' rather than a reliance on the continuous incremental improvement which has been successful to date? We noted that your Service Efficiency Programme has run its course. There is now an opportunity to consider how the approach now evolves.

3.3 Political and managerial leadership

There is stable and well regarded political and managerial leadership at Bracknell Forest. The stability is a genuine strength for the council. It has helped create the conditions for a well performing organisation by establishing, encouraging and enabling a culture of continuous improvement. The political leadership is experienced and is fully engaged in setting the strategic direction of the authority.

Elected member and officer relationships are good and based on mutual respect and understanding. Respective roles and responsibilities are clear and we got a sense there are solid, productive working relationships built on regular dialogue, communication and trust. You are committed to ensuring non-executive members have a greater role to play in key debates, decision making and policy development and have established member 'champion' positions for key issues and topics such as older people, voluntary sector and small businesses. This seems to be well-regarded and a useful mechanism. Overview and scrutiny is another effective way by which non-executive members are provided opportunities to inform and influence.

You clearly understand the importance of elected member development to support effective political leadership. The offer to members at Bracknell Forest is strong and well resourced. Members shape and inform the development programme through a member led panel. Your approach is recognised externally through the South East Member Development Charter and a subsequent 'Charter Plus' award last year. We were impressed with the introduction of 360 appraisals for members which has been positively received by members engaging with it.

There is also a strong structured approach to management development and a range of engagement activity, for example the new the 'good to great' programme. Managers and staff feel encouraged and enabled to contribute ideas and suggestions for change. You have developed a competency framework setting out the skills and competencies of the Bracknell Forest manager. All of this is good practice. Moving

forward we encourage you to ensure learning from the various activities is well used, and that development for both members and managers is in line with the future organisational development.

In terms of future organisational development, we asked what the ambition of the leadership is. You are rightly questioning whether the established 'Bracknell Forest Way' of doing things will remain fit for purpose as a means by which to deliver the best outcomes possible for the borough. This is a tough but necessary debate we think. There is nothing broken or failing that provides a 'burning platform' or driving imperative for major transformational change. There is a risk, though, that waiting for one may mean you are unable to respond effectively to maximise the opportunity or mitigate the threats. Conversely we appreciate that by creating one you may disturb the stability and culture in the authority you have worked hard to create.

We encourage you to continue the thinking on this so that the vision for the future organisation role, function and shape drives the organisational development. In doing this you will undoubtedly wish to consider your risk management philosophy and whether it needs to move from 'risk mitigation' to 'opportunity risk'. A measured approach to risk is clearly sensible and prudent. But the focus is on assessing the risks of doing something new (the 'what if'). An increased emphasis on the missed opportunity of not doing something ('what if we don't') may better support and enable the dynamic and innovative organisational culture you are striving for. This will require an increased focus on 'doing things differently' as well 'doing things better'. There will undoubtedly be a need to more proactively seek and leverage external capacity to help deliver your priorities. You may wish to consider articulating the characteristics and features of the current 'Bracknell Forest Way' and how these might develop in the future (i.e. to move from 'good to great'.)

Externally the council is well regarded. It has a good, and improving, reputation with partners and other stakeholders. Aspects of partnership working the council is leading or involved in are strong. These we think provide a good foundation on which the council can further develop its' external collaboration and seek to maximise the capacity and potential of others to deliver the priorities and outcomes identified. This may require a willingness to lead and directly control less within partnerships. We think this will become more relevant and required as inevitably there will be further budget cuts and an increasing need to build capability in others. Many councils are doing this by investing in enabling and empowering others such as businesses and the community.

3.4 Governance and decision-making

The key components of good governance look to be in place at Bracknell Forest. There are relevant protocols for member-officer relationships, an audit committee, recently revised standards committee, an appropriate scheme of delegation, and an active scrutiny function. Governance is taken seriously at the council. There is an established culture of taking an evidence-based, well informed and considered approach to decision-making, underpinned by robust performance management.

We understand there are relatively high numbers of decisions made at Planning Committee that are contrary to officer recommendations and not based on Council policies. This may of course not necessarily be an issue in itself and needs to be considered in the context that the vast majority of planning decisions are made by officers using delegated authority. However, given it is the most significant and potentially controversial applications that are referred to Planning Committee we flag it as something that could have an adverse impact on economic investment in the borough, should for instance this regularly occur on decisions that are critical to town centre regeneration or the delivery of the Economic Development Strategy. The planning function (including the committee) will more than ever need to be geared up to provide a 'planning for growth' service to facilitate economic growth and demonstrate why development is good for the borough, moving beyond the traditional role of a regulatory planning service. Investors and developers will be more willing to engage and commit scarce resource where they have confidence in the decision making processes.

There is a strong and effective overview and scrutiny function. There is a role that stretches beyond routine monitoring and holding to account, with an increased emphasis on pre-decision involvement and contribution to policy development. Work programmes are determined by scrutiny members in conjunction with lead officers and members, and taking account of the Executive's Forward Plan. This helps Overview and Scrutiny Panels make a relevant and timely contribution to policy development. There are several examples of this, such as the work on localisation of council tax benefits, early intervention, and the Community Infrastructure Levy. It will of course be essential to regularly review the operation of scrutiny to ensure opportunities to participate in terms of meeting times and commitment required enable all members to engage in the task and finish group work.

In terms of key external partnerships that help determine the plans for the borough, we noted that the Health and Well Being Board appears very health led at the moment. We appreciate it is early days in its evolution but we questioned whether there should be more involvement of other key service areas such as leisure and housing which obviously have a key role in ensuring health and well-being. You have recently reviewed the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) and decided that it should continue, albeit as a mechanism for sharing information and communicating across partners and the individual strategic partnerships (Health & Well Being, Children & Young Persons, Community Safety, and Economic & Skills Development) which will have accountability and decision-making responsibilities. This role and status in light of the development of other strategic partnerships may need articulating further to those not directly involved in it.

3.5 Organisational capacity

Staff we met at Bracknell Forest are very committed. This is evidenced by your most recent staff survey. They evidently value working for the council and have a high degree of confidence in the organisation's ability to respond to challenges. An evidence-based, well informed and considered approach to decision-making, and a conventional approach to risk has meant no major 'knee jerk' reactions which can often

undermine this confidence. There is a culture of internal collaboration and a desire and commitment to go the extra mile. Officers feel empowered to suggest ideas and suggestions for improvement. All of this is impressive, and are key features of the 'Bracknell Forest Way' of doing things.

Another feature is a robust and well-embedded approach to performance management. Regular monitoring and reporting (to both members and senior officers) of performance against the Medium Term Objectives and Service Plans reinforces the performance culture at Bracknell Forest. To develop the approach further we suggest a greater focus on the customer outcome as the determinant of qualitative measures. We saw examples of a new approach being developed for housing benefits performance measures where the outcome of 'helping to maximise income and independence' was used to then determine performance measures. We think this might be the basis of an approach that can be rolled out across other service areas.

There are other examples of new practice and innovation that can be developed and rolled out too. For instance in contract management (highways), and the interesting approach to handling welfare reform changes. There are some good examples of collaborative working as demonstrated for instance by the Bracknell town centre regeneration work. It is important the authority learns from these approaches and mindsets as part of its organisational development.

You will wish to consider how the organisation builds on its current collaborative approaches to become more systematically co-productive in the way it tackles issues, challenges and problems. Our observation is that whilst there is collaboration, the organisation tends to work across silos rather than 'bust' them. The current structures and ways of working encourage solutions to be delivered through multiple functions in silos. Solutions tend to be formulated in response to issues presented with a focus on issue resolution. The 'organisational mind-set' needs to evolve, we think, so that the default is that solutions are co-produced with internal and external stakeholders.

We have mentioned already the scope to better utilise external capacity that is potentially available, using your positive external relationships and building on some good partnership working, and also through the parish/town councils, voluntary sector, and the community. This is in part about evolving the council role in the relationship, from a deliverer to an enabler. We know you are starting to work on this.

As your vision for the future organisation develops, there will of course be a need to ensure capacity and capability is available to deliver the change required. This includes how you can better tap into the creativity, talent and internal energy for change. Given the stability of the organisation and its relatively low staff turnover, it will be important to make sure there are valued opportunities for staff to realise potential and develop their range of their skills and experience. This will help provide the 'agents of change' from within the organisation. Some authorities do this through a talent management strategy and it may be worth considering something along these lines at Bracknell Forest.

More clarity about the future shape and style of organisation will help guide how you invest in future shared services, further collaboration, and shape the elected member

and workforce development activity required. Organisational values can help enable the organisational change, and the process of co-creating new or revised values could be a good way of unleashing talent.

Current ways of working have been very successful in supporting continuous incremental improvement by whatever means work. This has served you well, and has enabled you to respond to opportunities as they arise. But is ultimately an ad hoc approach, and the future approach to leading, managing and delivering change may need to be more cohesive and co-ordinated to most effectively utilise capacity, knowledge and skills.

More immediately, given the operating model for support functions, we questioned whether there a need for central programme management expertise and capacity. If more is to be done in collaboration, co-production or enabling others then programme and project based activities are likely to increase. Therefore consistency in approach will be important in ensuring quality across the organisation and enabling a new 'Bracknell Forest Way'. A small team of people at the corporate centre of the organisation equipped to support a consistent approach to major changes projects is worth considering. An approach similar to that which you took to develop specific capacity and expertise of staff in corporate support functions as part of the Vanguard project might be a way of doing this.

3.6 Your priority to sustain economic prosperity and growth: Our views and suggestions

Developing your already strong economic base will provide the resilience for future financial challenges facing local government. You have recognised this and rightly have it identified as a key priority for the borough. It is articulated in your Medium Term Objectives and you have started to develop your thinking, plans and proposals, for example a local medium term Economic Development Strategy is in place informed by a comprehensive Local Economic Assessment. You have acknowledged that the supply of housing (and affordable housing) will be essential to economic growth. It won't be possible without it.

Some resources have been allocated, for example a dedicated economic development financial reserve and the appointment of a new Economic Development Officer. These along with the creation of a new executive member portfolio and an elected member task group to explore how the council can more effectively promote economic prosperity all make for a good start, and provide a genuine statement of intent. But our observation is that there is currently insufficient capacity to deliver such a large agenda, especially in light of the regeneration plans in place.

Notwithstanding this, you have made some notable progress on delivering against this important priority. There has for example been some headway on developing skills for jobs, albeit you know this needs more attention to ensure that Bracknell Forest residents are able to benefit from the job creation in the borough. Your procurement practice to promote SMEs is good we think. It could provide the basis for an SME growth strategy perhaps. You have a good track record on developing the green economy, and you should consider how this features in the future growth strategy.

You have made a positive start on tackling what is a relatively new priority for Bracknell Forest. This along with the current stability and performance of the authority and its previous track record of improvement, means you should be confident about responding to the agenda. There is potential to work and deliver more sub-regionally, and you are in a strong position to lead this.

Engagement with Bracknell based businesses is a key area for development, and is critical to realising your plans for sustaining economic prosperity and growth in the borough. Knowing your businesses and their needs, and what attracts them to and keeps them in Bracknell is essential. You know this and have started to address this. We have made some suggestions below about some of ways in which engagement could be further developed.

We have already mentioned the Planning Committee in terms of decisions contrary to officer recommendations. Beyond that there are also some perceptions of the planning process being a potential blockage and inhibitor to growth. We have mentioned the need for the planning service to be positioned and perceived as a facilitator and enabler of economic growth, not merely an enforcer and regulator of development. We know you are aware of this and are considering accordingly.

Suggestions to consider

The following are some suggestions made by the peer team. They are not intended to be a blueprint for success or a prescriptive model. They are ideas put forward by fellow practitioners informed by their experience and knowledge of local government and its role in economic development. You will need to consider and decide whether they are fit for purpose for Bracknell Forest.

Engaging with business:

- Introduce an ‘account management approach’ – whereby senior officers (top two tiers) from across the council are assigned a small number of businesses to liaise with to build and maintain an on-going mutual relationship to better understand needs and requirements. It will also help the council become more business savvy and friendly.
- Establish a Business Forum – perhaps inviting the top 50 businesses (the account management approach above may help identify the businesses) to participate in a networking event, perhaps run as a business breakfast type gathering hosted by Chief Executive and Leader (possibly running it twice annually, and also considering an Expo event too).
- Facilitate and support the creation of a ‘Bracknell Business Voice’ group involving a range of stakeholders (see **figure 1** below) including council, LEP, Chamber of Commerce, and businesses to consider themes (see **figure 2** below) critical to economic prosperity of Bracknell Forest (e.g. town centre

regeneration, inward investment, skills for jobs, etc.) Ultimately this group should be chaired and facilitated by a local business leader.

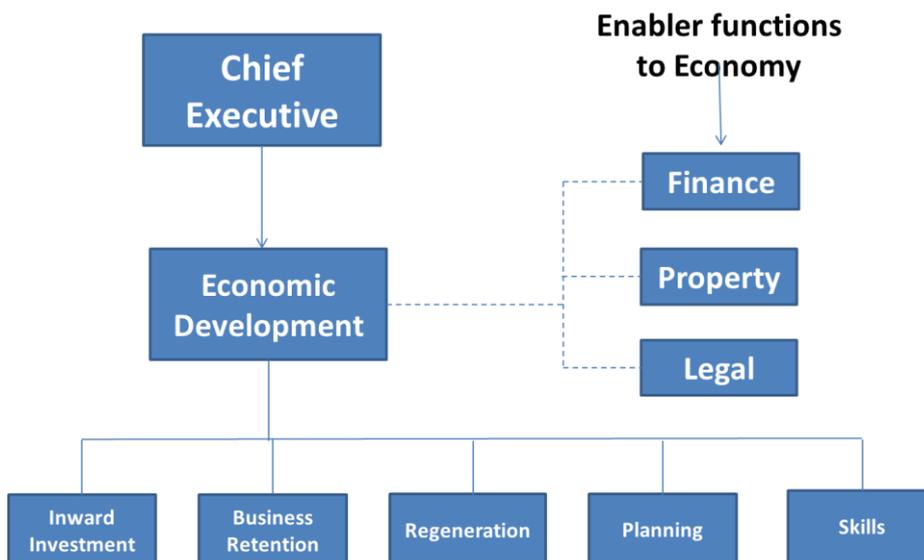
- Consider how the role of the Town Centre Partnership might develop – perhaps so it becomes more like the town centre partnerships found in other areas. Consider a more corporate approach including a dedicated website.
- Introduce a Developers Forum to improve the relationship with the planning function, and raise mutual understanding and awareness. This will help position the Councils’ planning service as an enabler of economic growth.

Capacity and resources for economic growth:

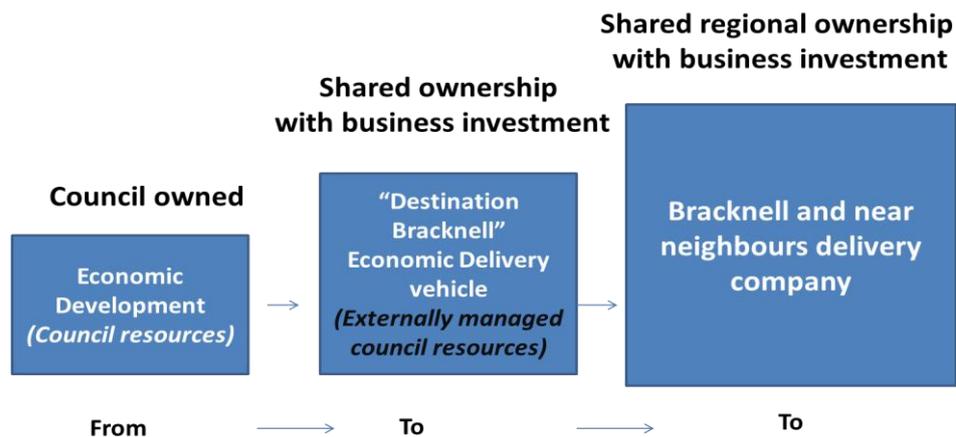
We suggest the following are the core components as regards the capacity and capability needed to drive and support economic growth:

- Inward investment – i.e. new investment in Bracknell Forest
- Business relationship and engagement to retain the current business presence in the borough
- Planning service that enables economic growth
- Skills for business – as access to these is a key driver for businesses decision-making about where they invest and locate

In terms of how the council might organise its resources and capacity to deliver its priority to sustain economic prosperity and growth, we suggested the following model. We would stress that this is as much about mind-set as it is about hard structures:



In terms of leveraging more capacity into economic development you might consider an evolving model as set out below, obviously with the pace and extent of change depending on your appetite:



Figures 1 and 2 below set out some further ideas about the Bracknell Business Voice mentioned above – in terms of themes for engagement and the stakeholders who might be involved:

Figure 1: The themes where business can contribute

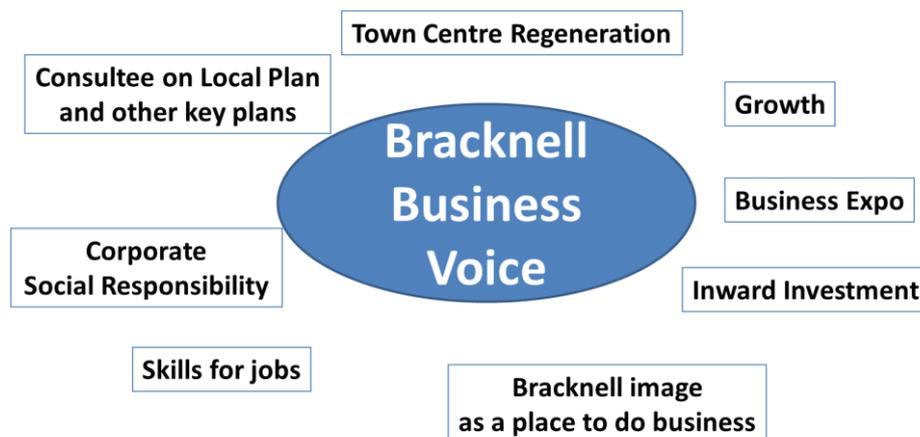
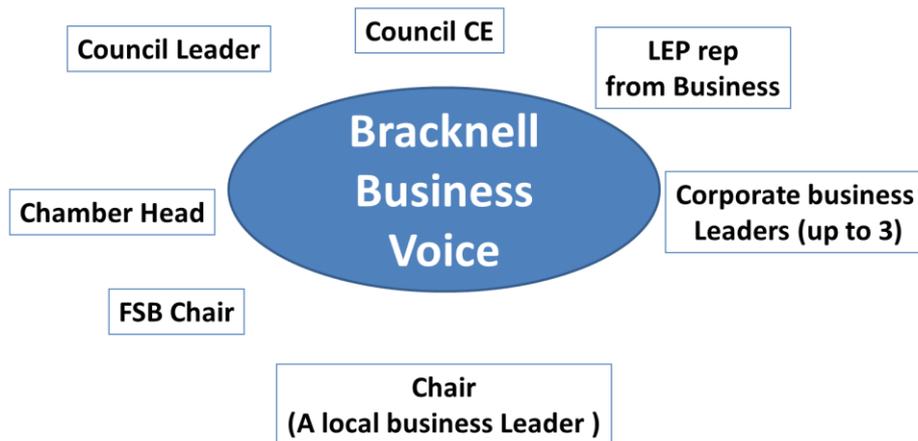


Figure 2: Possible stakeholders to be involved in a 'Bracknell Business Voice'



4. Recommendations

The peer team developed some key recommendations for you to consider. These are based on what we saw, heard and read. Drawing on our experience of the sector and knowledge of local government improvement, the following are things we think will help you to make best use of your skills and experience, deliver some quick wins, and develop the strengths you will need to see your change agenda through:

1. Articulate your vision for the future organisation in order to deliver your medium term objectives as effectively as possible (and go from good to great)
2. Review approaches to service improvement, learn from what works well and use this to develop a more explicit and cohesive approach to change.
3. Given the operating model for support functions, consider the value of central programme management expertise and capacity
4. Continue to develop your approach to performance management to include more qualitative measures that enable you to deliver better for your communities.
5. To continue and mainstream organisational development, use the 'good to great' engagement to capture the creativity, talent and internal energy for change
6. Publish a Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) so that there is a wider understanding and awareness of the future financial challenges, constraints and risks.
7. Consider the ideas and suggestions put forward by the peer team about engagement with business, and creating and leveraging capacity and resources into economic development (section 3.6 above).

5. Next steps

We have sought to highlight the many positive aspects of the council through the peer challenge process but we have also outlined some challenging messages. The councils' senior managerial and political leadership will undoubtedly want to reflect further on the findings before determining how they wish to take things forward. There is also the need to consider communication of the findings of the peer challenge and your response to them, both internally and externally.

Mona Seghal, as the Local Government Association's Principal Adviser for your region, will continue to act as the main contact between the council and the LGA, particularly in relation to improvement. We hope that this provides you with a convenient route of access to the organisation, its resources and packages of support. All of us connected with the peer challenge would like to wish the council and the borough every success in the future.