

NORTH LINCOLNSHIRE COUNCIL

CABINET

LGA CORPORATE PEER CHALLENGE REPORT

1. OBJECT AND KEY POINTS IN THIS REPORT

- 1.1 To present the report of the Local Government Association (LGA) Corporate Peer Challenge, following their review in January 2018.
- 1.2 The key points in this report are:
- This tool is a core element of sector-led improvement that the LGA offer to local authorities and the process is designed to support councils to take responsibility for their own improvement.
 - The LGA Corporate Peer Challenge took place 23 – 26 January 2018.
 - The outcome of the Challenge has been summarised in the attached report.

2. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 2.1 The LGA Corporate Peer Challenge is a well-established sector led improvement tool that the LGA offer to all Local Authorities.
- 2.2 The LGA Corporate Peer Challenge consider the following core components and high level questions:
- 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?
 - Leadership of Place: Does the council provide effective leadership of place and the wider place – e.g. economic and other partnerships beyond the Council's boundaries and the wider place (e.g. Humber, Lincolnshire, role in looking at the pros and cons of a working together devolution deal) through its elected members, officers and constructive relationships and partnerships with external stakeholders?
 - 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?
 - 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 opportunities and enable change and transformation to be implemented?

- Capacity to deliver: Is organisational capacity aligned with priorities and does the council influence, enable and leverage external capacity to focus on agreed outcomes?
- 2.3 As part of ongoing organisational learning, inviting the LGA Peer Challenge at this time was to provide external feedback as to whether the recent changes in the Council structure and transformational journey have been productive; whether the direction is clear; that the leadership from the Council is enabling all to be striving towards the same goals, and that outcomes for people in the area are maximised.
- 2.4 The peer team were also asked to consider a specific focus on our approach to safer, greener, cleaner as the most visible aspect of the Council focusing on governance, strategy and strategic impact.
- 2.5 The peer team was made up from a range of experienced council officers and elected members, supported by the LGA and the visit took place 23 – 26 January 2018. During the four days in North Lincolnshire, the team spoke to more than 119 people including a range of council staff, elected members, external partners and stakeholders. The team gathered information and views from more than 45 meetings, visits to key sites in the area and additional research and reading.
- 2.6 At the end of the visit, the team provided a presentation of their initial findings to elected members and senior leaders. A full report outlining the findings of the Peer Challenge has now been received and is presented to Cabinet for consideration.
- 2.7 The executive summary identifies the following:
- “North Lincolnshire Council is a well performing organisation with highly visible and engaging leadership at both political and management level.
 - It has a track record of delivering good quality local services.
 - There is a strong shared ambition between Members and senior officers to make North Lincolnshire Best Council, Best Place....”
 - “The peer team saw evidence of the vision and the transformation programme being translated to the frontline.
 - There are numerous examples of good and innovative practice that is making a real difference to people’s lives.
 - The baseline in certain areas is already high with high performing Adult Services and, recently, Ofsted judged Children’s Services as *outstanding*
 - It was also heartening to see this extension of quality, innovation and change being adopted in the Council’s approach to its safer, greener cleaner services too.”
- 2.8 The report also outlines a range of suggestions and observations to inform some ‘quick wins’ and practical actions that the peer team have summarised into some recommendations for the Council to consider including: ‘You are a ‘good’ council so ‘tell your story’ and ‘Continue to manage the risks inherent both in local government and in the major change programme in hand.

2.9 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 it has made against the areas of improvement and development identified by the peer team. The timing of the visit is determined by the Council. Our expectation is that it will occur within the next 2 years. It is anticipated that the Council will commission its next full Corporate Peer Challenge before 2023.

2.10 The full report is attached.

3. OPTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

3.1. It is recommended that Cabinet receive the LGA Peer Challenge Report and agree to its publication on the Council's website.

4. ANALYSIS OF OPTIONS

4.1 Not applicable

5. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS (FINANCIAL, STAFFING, PROPERTY, IT)

5.1 There are no specific resource implications associated with this report.

6. OUTCOMES OF INTEGRATED IMPACT ASSESSMENT (IF APPLICABLE)

6.1 Not applicable.

7. OUTCOMES OF CONSULTATION AND CONFLICTS OF INTERESTS DECLARED

7.1 The LGA Peer Challenge process involved a wide range of stakeholders. The outcomes of this engagement is included in the LGA report.

7.2 There are no conflicts of interest associated with this report.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

8.1 It is recommended that Cabinet receive the LGA Corporate Peer Challenge report and note the findings and recommendations made by the LGA Team.

8.2 It is recommended that progress against an action plan is reported at a future Cabinet meeting.

8.3 The Cabinet may wish to consider the LGA offer of a follow up visit as outlined in the report.

CHIEF EXECUTIVE

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Background Papers used in the preparation of this report: None

Corporate Peer Challenge **North Lincolnshire Council**

23 – 26 January 2018

Feedback Report

1. Executive Summary

North Lincolnshire Council is a well performing organisation with highly visible and engaging leadership at both political and managerial level. It has a track record of delivering good quality local services. There is strong shared ambition between Members and senior officers to make North Lincolnshire Best Council, Best Place and they have a clear vision to enable this to happen. This is backed up with enthusiasm and team working between Cabinet Members and the senior leadership team. This strong shared ambition and vision is also evident among Council staff and its strategic partners - everyone is focused on making a real difference to people's lives.

Delivery of the vision is planned, supported and enabled through a Council-wide organisational development and transformation programme that drives Council functions to work together to create new pathways and solutions. The peer team saw evidence of the vision and the transformation programme being translated to the frontline. There are numerous examples of good and innovative practice that is making a real difference to people's lives. The baseline in certain areas is already high with high performing Adult Services and, recently, Ofsted judged Children's Services as *outstanding*. It was also heartening to see this extension of quality, innovation and change being adopted in the Council's approach to its safer, greener, cleaner services too.

It is evident that North Lincolnshire has passionate, committed managers and that staff are clear about their purpose and the people they serve. The peer team found this passion in all parts and at all levels of the organisation and across services. There is a real 'buzz' and an air of focussed, purposeful and efficient working in the Council. Staff came across as happy and enjoyed working in the new environment. Work streams are all carefully aligned to the overall transformation programme and ownership is very good. The Council firmly believes in having strong assurance and being safe as a firm foundation from which to enable creativity and flexibility in service design. As part of this approach enhanced governance and accountability structures have been put in place to support the transformation programme and the peer team found them to be appropriate and robust.

There is very good partnership working in North Lincolnshire and the Council's partners are universally supportive and complimentary about the strategic direction it is taking. They too are buzzing with the changes. It was good to see challenges being tackled through effective partnerships. Significant elements of the local health economy are particularly challenging and pose risks and it was good to see North Lincolnshire Council seizing opportunities, particularly through the new local leadership within the health and wellbeing system which is open to new ideas and strengthening collaborative working. The impressive health & wellbeing integrated care facility which the peer team visited is a great example of how the Council is working with its health partners to address delayed discharges and avoid hospital admissions for elderly people.

The new approaches the Council is implementing are beginning to deliver results whilst ensuring that North Lincolnshire is on the map and is in control of its destiny. The peer team believe there is a good story to tell and the Council has a lot to offer by sharing its learning more widely across the local government sector, particularly in relation to its work around demand management.

The Council is going through a complex transformation, organisational development and change process which could be difficult for those outside of the detailed planning processes ongoing within the council to understand. Members and officers need to continue to find ways to simplify the narrative and make sure that it resonates with the wider stakeholders, particularly frontline staff, partners, local communities and service users. The language used to explain what the Council is trying to do needs careful thought so as to continue to ensure how the transformation is going to impact on services and hence the quality of life for local people.

It is recommended that the Council should continue its story from the positive impact and outcomes articulated within the draft council plan and associated documentation in what it is trying to achieve and then work backwards to how those outcomes can be facilitated through the new ways of working that the Council has introduced. The peer team would also encourage the Council to ensure that as its transformation processes matures and confidence increases then there should be robust challenge and diverse thinking built into the system such as this Corporate Peer Review to enable continuous learning and development.

Furthermore, as the Council moves forward it will need to use its community engagement and enabling work to ensure everyone is on board with the changes taking place. This includes not only Parish Councils but also front line Members so that they are clear about their roles and responsibilities, the support they can expect, and the contribution they can make.

In any period of great change risk must be carefully managed. As things change and the transformation embeds across the organisation the Council will need to measure and manage any risks that may derail the delivery of good services. Inspections in children's and adults' services demonstrate that the Council has, historically, managed its risks well and the Council will need to continue to do so across the whole organisation as it rolls out its challenging transformational agenda, This will ensure operational resilience is in place to mitigate the risks inherent in the change so that the Council remains fit for the future.

There is a lot of good practice that has been developed over the years and this should be maintained insofar as possible so that the future changes do not derail this good work.

The emerging Council performance management framework built on existing good practice is being developed to enable this. As it evolves it needs to ensure the tracking of progress against the Council's vision and strategic objectives so that the 'golden thread' from policy to impact and outcomes is clearly visible. It should also demonstrate purpose and outcomes so that the Council is able to demonstrate impact.

2. Key recommendations

There are a range of suggestions and observations within the main section of the report that will inform some 'quick wins' and practical actions, in addition to the conversations onsite, many of which provided ideas and examples of practice from other organisations.

The following are the peer team's key recommendations to the Council:

1. **Ensure the council vision and its internal and external plans are written in clear plain language** that is understandable by the local community and stakeholders. Test this with relevant focus groups before publication.
2. The council has been "good" for many years and this should continue to be celebrated while using it as a base to aim for excellence across the board. **There is a need to continue to change to remain sustainable and to meet local needs and ambitions effectively. Ensure such necessary change is not interpreted as a negation of everything that went before** as this may alienate some staff groups who have worked for the council for a long time.
3. **Continue to pay attention to robust performance management and financial controls throughout the transformation and manage the risks.** This will ensure that the 'golden thread' is visible and that the Council can keep track of progress, demonstrate what it is achieving and how it is managing risks.
4. **Be alive to and embrace different perspectives.** This will enable to the Council to benefit from a broader field of creative problem solving and finding solutions to the challenges of serving a geographically diverse community.
5. **Continue to manage the risks inherent both in local government and in the major change programme in hand**
6. **You are a 'good' council so 'tell your story'.** There is a lot to celebrate in North Lincolnshire and a lot that can be helpful to learning across the local government sector – this should be shared locally, regionally and nationally through a well-developed and simplified narrative.
7. **Accelerate and cement enhanced partnership working:** Develop upon the sound basis evidenced of expanding and increasingly influential partnership working with communities, business and public sector organisations.

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 the Council's requirements and the focus of the peer challenge. Peers were selected on the basis of their relevant experience and expertise and agreed with the Council. The peers who delivered the peer challenge at North Lincolnshire Council were:

- **Cheryl Coppell OBE** (Former Chief Executive, London Borough of Havering)
- **Councillor Teresa O'Neill OBE** (Leader, London Borough of Bexley)
- **Joanna Ruffle** (Director of Transformation, Southend-on-Sea Council)

- **Andy Vaughan** (Corporate Director for Commercial and Operations, Nottingham City Council)
- **Jamie Cross** (NGDP graduate, LGA)
- **Satvinder Rana** (Programme 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 cover. 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 provide feedback on its approach to safer, cleaner, greener with a particular emphasis on the operational aspects of cleaner and greener.

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. North Lincolnshire Council invited the Peer Review Team in to primarily assess the trajectory and pace of its approach towards transformation. 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 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 North Lincolnshire, during which they:

- Spoke to more than 119 people including a range of council staff together with councillors and external partners and stakeholders.
- Gathered information and views from more than 45 meetings, visits to key sites in the area and additional research and reading.
- Collectively spent more than 225 hours to determine their findings – the equivalent of one person spending more than 6 weeks in North Lincolnshire Council.

This report provides a 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 (23rd – 26th January 2018). In presenting feedback, they have done so as fellow local government officers and 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 the Council is already addressing and progressing.

4. Feedback

4.1 Understanding of the local place and priority setting

There is a clear understanding of place, opportunities, gaps and how to fill them in North Lincolnshire. There is also strong deep knowledge of local communities, their needs and their assets. The Council makes good use of strategic tools such as the JSNA to prioritise activities and officers had all the background information and analysis that is needed to develop and drive policy. Everyone the peer team spoke to have a good understanding of what was needed for the area and the communities within it.

There is also good understanding of some of the big enablers to improving the quality of life for residents. For example, Members and officers were well aware that people cannot really help themselves if they do not have work. The need to enable individuals to have increased resilience, communities to be independent and the authority itself to be a sustainable place leader sits at the heart of what the Council is trying to achieve and is reflected in the organisational wide model of being an “Enabling Council” This includes helping to develop some of the new skills that may be needed to help fill the jobs in the future, as well as existing jobs; looking at some of the gaps in higher education and how they can be filled; and considering how the Council’s own resources can be used to pump-prime regeneration.

There is a refreshing reengagement of staff and managers in owning and delivering for the community. This feeds into the Council’s reputation for not closing services but rather finding new innovative ways to deliver them differently.

The peer team was very impressed with the visit to Westcliff Hub where multi-agency work is being carried out with a deprived community by the Council's community development staff, ONGO Homes, and the Police to turn lives around, particularly young lives. Locally devolved managers responsible for this project were inspirational and felt truly empowered; and local Ward Councillors and members of the community were very complimentary about this work.

Plans are also in place to address the different needs of local communities and demographics whilst maximising the available assets. The peer team saw the work being done to remodel the 'Barton Campus' to create a community space by bringing together a wide range of information, advice, leisure, health, wellbeing and lifelong learning opportunities around the customer. By providing this type of integrated service the Council expects people to help themselves and access preventative services to avoid escalating needs. This was a good example of leveraging assets to develop the right things for the right communities in an area that has very disparate range of urban, rural towns and villages.

In going forward, the peer team would recommend that the council should be careful to ensure that it articulates its vision and priorities clearly so that they can be understood and owned by the wider partnership, as well as by local communities. Getting a clear message across on what the Council is trying to achieve and how it is going about it is particularly important in the context of North Lincolnshire's disparate communities in urban, rural towns and villages.

The peer team did not find the draft corporate plan easy to understand on first reading, though it did make sense once the team had learned much more about the council and the change programme. Consequently, it is suggested that the corporate plan and any plans that are intended for the wider community should articulate more clearly what the council is intending to achieve and how it will measure its success.

4.2 Leadership of Place

The Council is ambitious for the place and is driving forward a number of initiatives to grow the local economy and make North Lincolnshire the 'best place'. For example, the Humberside Airport and Engineering Hub which boasts a business park of 11.62 acres and forms part of the Humber Enterprise Zone; Normanby Enterprise Park which acts as a major cluster for distribution, manufacturing and food sectors in North Lincolnshire; Scunthorpe Town Centre Urban Core to support the £60m plus investment to transform the town centre – including moving the Council's headquarters there; and the Water's Edge Visitor Centre and Normanby Hall Country Park designed to capitalise visitor potential and increase participation in outdoor activities. In addition, the Council is working with a range of partners, including local communities, the Environment Agency, South Ferriby Parish Council and CEMEX Cement Works to deliver enhanced flood defences to the area. All these schemes demonstrate the Council's leadership role in 'place shaping'.

Local business leaders consider the Council to be a critical partner in the development of the south bank of the Humber and are very complimentary about

the changes that have taken place over the last 18 months, particularly the strategic and economic thinking that is now developing in the Council. They find the Council to be approachable and engaging, and feel that the development of the North Lincolnshire Place Marketing Board was a very constructive move. Everyone is proud of the Ambassador Scheme which is asking businesses to sign up to a scheme to become advocates for the region. They were excited and heartened by the fact that 260 people attended the launch event and another 100 attended the follow up event.

Nevertheless, business partners were clear that the Council has to deliver its stated ambitions (i.e. housing), otherwise it will lose credibility with partners. They would appreciate an overarching vision for the area (perhaps, an Industrial Strategy focused on the estuary) backed up with delivery targets. This is because whilst they are aware of the regeneration projects in North Lincolnshire, they are not necessarily aware of the broader strategic vision for the area. Business partners also questioned whether the Council has the capacity and capability in place to drive the growth agenda, compete for regional and national resources and deliver on all the regeneration projects. There is, therefore, a need for a wider and focussed conversation with business partners around capacity and delivery of the wider sub region vision.

Other statutory partners such as the Police, Fire & Rescue Service and the Health sector had only praise for the Council, in particular for its partnership instinct and solution-focused style of working, reinforcing previous comments regarding how best practice is permeating across all of the authority- *“can do, will do was the culture in adult social care and children services, but now it’s everywhere”*. Statutory partners are looking forward to using some of the Council’s problem-solving approaches and techniques better so they can help to turn people’s lives round. They appreciate the senior management stability and corporate memory at North Lincolnshire and think relations with North Lincolnshire Council are the best they have across the sub-region. These relations will be important to maintain as the Council and its partners tackle some of the challenges ahead and develop opportunities for young people.

Similarly, the Voluntary and Community Sector also valued partnership working with the Council and described it as *“having a listening ear and being an open, transparent and engaged local authority”*. The peer team saw evidence of the political and managerial team reaching out to communities and trying to engage with them in a proactive way. The new work with Parish Councils was helping to facilitate this. Because the Council is trying to do complex and different things in local communities it needs to ensure that it is open to differing approaches so that everyone in the community can be involved. The need for a diverse approach is heightened because of the varied nature of the area which consists of rural, urban towns and villages with their own unique identities and priority needs. This presents a challenge in itself between ensuring a common corporate wide organisational model being reflected in workable functional operating models and their evolution.

4.3 Organisational leadership and governance

The Council's management structure is designed to be interdependent. The aim of this is to create a one council team to maximise efficiency and effectiveness and to focus a one team approach to goals, ambitions and outcomes. There are no directorates in the Council and instead it operates on high levels of trust with agreed sets of behaviours (i.e. being excellent and innovative, being authentic and real, being caring and kind, and being curious and adult). The new approach is focused on collaboration, maximising strengths, constructive challenge, doing it once, doing it well and agility. At the Cabinet level Member portfolios are cross-cutting and mirror the Council's priorities.

The peer team spoke to virtually all Members of the Cabinet, the senior leadership team, a wide range of staff, most of the Council's strategic partners, as well as other stakeholders and what emerged very clearly was universal buy-in to this new ways of working. People found the Council to be open, engaged, outcome-focused and well-led through clear, strong and passionate leadership from leading Members and senior officers.

There are positive, respectful and trusting relationships between Cabinet Members and officers. Governance arrangements between the Cabinet and officer delegations have been clarified to reflect new ways of working and are now *"tight and disciplined"*. The new contract between the Cabinet and the senior leadership team was a huge step forward and is working well. It has enabled the Cabinet to be clear about what it wants to achieve and senior officers to be trusted to deliver and being held to account for what they were delivering.

There is a strong sense of collaborative working and ownership across the Council; and staff are fully engaged. Frontline staff are being empowered to shape the delivery of services around the customers. For example, the 'Work-Well Stream' where the senior leadership team is trying to ensure that staff have got the right infrastructure to deliver services through the 'one organisation' ethos is impressive. This included the three heads of service coming together to make sure that things like office lay-out and links to the digital strategy actually facilitated staff working together across teams in the right way. Staff from across the different teams were coming together to support each other and thereby freeing up capacity that could be deployed to work directly with people in community settings. There was a real sense of all staff, regardless of professional background, engaged and responsible for the people of North Lincolnshire; and a strong vision to make the Council a good and purposeful place to work. Whilst attention is being given, quite rightly, to the needs of staff, the focus remains that of the citizen and what makes sense for them in terms of service delivery and location.

The new outward looking, enabling and outcome-focused approach is starting to take hold in the organisation. It was impressive to see a positive outlook among the Council's staff across all service areas where they feel part of the way forward - *"the Council is trying to move from pockets of excellence to one big pocket of excellence"*. Frontline staff in particular appreciated the six staff roadshows where the senior leadership team went out to introduce the transformation themes and interacted directly to them. Continuing with that kind of staff engagement and

visibility by the senior leadership team will help to solidify the Council's desired organisational culture.

Scrutiny arrangements in the Council function through the three scrutiny panels. They have work programmes in place and hold public enquiries into matters of local concern. In going forward, it is recommended that scrutiny panels should consider the benefits of aligning and coordinating their work plan with the corporate and place plans, in becoming outcomes based. This will enable them to scrutinise the delivery and impacts of the strategic priorities contained in these plans on behalf of the public.

Work is in hand to develop a more outward looking role for ward Councillors to enhance their representative role in their community and help deliver the Council's vision for local people. This will require everyone to be on board and to understand the new ways of working, and the peer team would suggest that the Council's Member development programme should provide opportunities for ward Councillors (and perhaps Parish Councillors too) to explore how best they can exercise community leadership in their communities within the new environment.

4.4 Financial planning and viability

The Council has a strong and stable financial position and has spent within budget in recent years. Non-ring-fenced reserves, whilst below the median for unitary authorities, are at a reasonable level and have remained stable over the past three years.

The Council is in the process of revising its approach to its medium term financial plan, which will be built around delivering the Council's priorities using various levers including reducing dependency, service transformation, expanding shared service arrangements, commercial activity and delivery of efficiencies. A key part of it is also growing external income from council tax and business rates.

Due to the fragility of the financial environment local government generally is operating in, it is good to see that there is a strong vision for sustainability within the Council and for living within its means. The peer team was impressed with the Council's thoughts around sustainability and its focus on maximising assets, commercialisation, growing the economic base and empowering service users to help themselves. This is commendable because as Revenue Support Grant (RSG) stops over the next few years the Council will be very dependent on its National Non-Domestic Rates (NNDR). Therefore developing strategies around economic development will be vitally important - not only for the critical reason to make sure that people are employed but also because it's going to give the Council the money to help it to deliver on its priorities for the area.

Developing the economic base for the area and improving the delivery of local services will require the Council to continue linking its Capital programme to the Corporate/Place Plan and delivering it to achieve the expected outcomes.

The Council has a strong track record for managing demand, especially in children and adult services, and housing which is significant in enabling the council to be sustainable. This is an area which many local authorities are grappling with and it was good to see the Council making headway through some innovative approaches to prevention and early interventions through a very people focused approach. The peer team was encouraged by the Council's plans to roll this approach out into the wider health and wellbeing system.

The Council's commitment to using its resources for the best possible outcomes for its residents is exemplary, and there is a growing culture of commercialism within the Council. It is evident that the Council's commercialisation approach is directed at being as efficient as it can so that it can spend money on areas where it needs to spend. The peer team would suggest that this approach is continued to be communicated widely so that everyone understands that commercialisation within the North Lincolnshire context is less about income growth and more about a business-like mind set to service delivery which is designed to enable people to help themselves so that resources can be directed to those in most need.

The Council is in the process of developing a new approach to budget planning which places greater responsibility on heads of services to manage within defined limits. The peer team note that North Lincolnshire Council could have a more open, consultative, approach to budget savings, as they are being developed. The peer team would therefore ask the Council to think about performance management arrangements given this approach, coupled with in-year pressures as well as openness in the budget setting process. It may also be beneficial to consider whether there are opportunities for wider consultation in the budget planning process throughout the year.

4.5 Capacity to deliver

The initial phases of the transformation and organisational development programme are starting to deliver improved outcomes; and there is a clear plan for the continued roll-out across the organisation. It is evident that the transformation programme is taking the Council forward very strongly. The peer team was impressed in the way which the Council has resisted the need to talk about making savings and turned the conversation around to focus on opportunities and doing things differently by working together in a more collegiate way, both within the Council and with its strategic partners.

The Council is building on its strengths by transferring learning and experience more widely across the organisation. Good practice is being shared across the Council and the transformation is owned and led collectively by heads of service and directors. There is energy and enthusiasm for the new ways of working and staff feel extremely positive about the future and are empowered to make a difference. *"I feel privileged to work for the Council everyday". "This is a Council with no walls"* were the kind of messages the peer team heard from staff. This is very positive and encouraging.

There is therefore significant support for the Council's planned journey among both Members and officers/staff, but more work needs to be done to convince those not yet brought in by continuing to create a narrative that everyone can engage with.

The peer team would strongly encourage the Council to pay attention to the language it uses to express its planned journey so that managers resist using 'management speak' and instead focus on the outcomes to be achieved and then break those down to what needs to be done and how those outcomes can be delivered more effectively and efficiently.

4.6 Comment on other specific focus areas

The Council asked the peer team to particularly look at place-based service to see how far the new ways of working were embedded in this part of the Council.

The peer team found place-based services to be well led and responding to new leadership and innovation and have embraced the transformation programme, along with all staff, being relatively new to its introduction. Staff in Clean and Green team clearly demonstrated their commitment and enthusiasm in the new ways of working and they were delivering some really impressive work on the ground within local communities. They were all aligned in their commitment to collaborative working and talked about examples of where this collaborative spirit had resulted in operational improvement, such as the multi-skilling of front-line staff.

There are examples of collaborative working such as the pilot in Scunthorpe North, which included joint working across the Council as well as with external partners such as the Police and housing officers to tackle engrained issues and challenges in quite a complex community. The approach they are taking is thoughtful and open by trying to understand how they can engage with people and how they can bring all service providers together.

In addition, plans are in hand to engage communities in volunteering to support the cleaner and greener agenda through, for example, friends of parks and open spaces. There was a great sense of taking on board the new ways of working and making things happen on the ground so that the environment is good for everyone.

Therefore in the peer teams' view operational services are becoming stronger and largely performing well within a positive working environment that is aligned to the Council's overall strategic direction and ways of working. As this becomes more embedded it is anticipated that the council's approach to safer, greener and cleaner will in itself become more strategic and innovative in its own right.

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. Mark Edgell, Principal Adviser is the main contact between your authority and the Local Government Association (LGA). His contact details are: Tel: 07747 636 910 and Email: mark.edgell@local.gov.uk

In the meantime we are keen to continue the relationship we have formed with the Council throughout the peer challenge. We will endeavour to provide signposting to examples of practice and further information and guidance about the issues we have raised in this report to help inform ongoing consideration.

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 it has 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. Our expectation is that it will occur within the next 2 years.

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 its next Peer Challenge before 2023.

Satvinder Rana

Programme Manager (LGA)

(On behalf of the peer challenge team)