

Corporate Peer Challenge **Cherwell District and South Northamptonshire Councils**

14th -17th November 2017

Feedback Report

Final

1. Executive Summary

Cherwell District Council (CDC) and South Northamptonshire Council (SNC) are well placed to address the challenges they face, due to a number of interrelated factors. They are both currently in a strong financial position with few debts and significant reserves that have been achieved through careful management. The quality of elected members is good: the peer team met a large number of councillors from the leaders, the Cabinet and Executive, those involved in scrutiny to backbenchers across both Councils. There is significant experience of business and leadership in these groups that gives them a set of useful perspectives and skills that adds real capacity throughout the political process. The peer team also met hard-working officers capable and willing to address the future with their political colleagues.

There was positive feedback from a wide variety of partners across both districts who rated the strategic engagement they have with the Councils as good. At an operational level, relationships with partners are good and there is effective delivery of local services and, because of this, partners see the political and officer leadership of CDC and SNC in a positive light. The workforce the peer team heard from were motivated, engaged and appeared to have a high morale, even at a time when a staff re-organisation is taking place, to achieve the goal of having one organisation working for two Councils.

There is a clear awareness of the growth agenda illustrated by the publication of the National Infrastructure Commission (NIC) report in November 2017 and the Councils' understanding of the opportunities it affords. The self-assessment written for this corporate peer challenge was very open, indicating a willingness to learn from within the organisation and also from outside - from such sources as partners and stakeholders. There are a number of examples of good practice on growth in the districts that should be shared more widely to benefit both Councils and which would be of interest to other councils : these were at Bicester, Graven Hill, Heyford Park, Silverstone Circuits and Heritage and Moat Lane.

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:

Growth and Place Shaping

1. Continue to recognise and respond to a significantly changing environment by:

- Seeking to further develop the councils' approach to place making and the delivery of growth; coordinating approaches to housing and community development.
- Shape the opportunities for both districts presented by the creation of an Oxford-Milton Keynes-Cambridge corridor.

2. Clarify your vision and values - Place and Authorities

- Set out a clear approach to how the councils will deliver their place shaping agenda. Ensure that joint priorities are effectively set out and where the two districts have different needs set out how these will be delivered.

3. Identify fewer, clearer priorities

- Within the councils' strategic documents set out specific and clear priorities and ensure that the councils' teams (e.g. finance, community development, planning policy, development management, housing, asset investment etc.) effectively coordinate to deliver.

4. Create the Strategic Plan for your Place and Communities

- This plan should include a proactive approach to planning and development management which the local plan will deliver by shaping growth strategies, working with local communities and business.

5. Seek to create strong and cohesive communities

- Within the strategic plan for place and communities set out how growth will be managed, infrastructure secured and community building/development will be undertaken, include strategies for both new and existing communities and their integration.
- Set out how community and voluntary sector engagement will be undertaken to support this process and balance the impact of growth and development on local communities.
- Continue to build proactive relationships with the parish and town councils to ensure the delivery of strategic growth and community development plans.

6. Broadcast your story both internally and externally:

- As part of a renewed approach to communications ensure strategic marketing and communications plans clearly articulate the councils' priorities to all stakeholders.

CDC and SNC have a clear driver and a pressing need to overtly recognise and respond to a significantly changing environment. This is reflected in the timely publication of Lord Adonis's NIC report. To do this, the peer team recommend the two Councils jointly clarify their vision and values in terms of both Place and as independent authorities. Some aspects of this future direction will differ between Cherwell and South Northamptonshire as areas as well as Councils. This would very likely result in the identification of fewer, clearer priorities that would then create the Strategic Plan for 'Your Place' and 'Your Communities'. It is vital that through this process there is a focus on seeking to create strong and cohesive communities, both new and established. Then there is a need for clear and consistent broadcasting of this story both internally and externally to all partners and stakeholders so that everyone knows what you are about, what you are doing and where you are going.

Organisational

7. Create a plan for the next phase of transformation and organisational change:

- Ensure that shared staffing arrangements are underpinned by shared business systems and processes, delivering the vision of 'two on the outside one on the inside'.
- Set out plans for a programme of service reviews to ensure the ongoing effectiveness of operational delivery arrangements.
- Continue to explore opportunities for income generation and partnership working to further drive down the costs of service delivery and improvements through collaboration.
- Implement new service delivery arrangements to deliver strategic priorities around growth, regeneration and place.

8. Understand and address capacity issues:

- Deliver and embed the new senior management structure and ensure services are resourced effectively through a review process.

9. Make governance arrangements fit-for-purpose

- Review set up and governance arrangements for council owned companies, setting out clear and effective roles for Members, (including whether Members should sit on company boards) and the client/'shareholder' functions.

- Following the completion of the shared services programme undertake a review of corporate governance, constitutional arrangements and committee structures to ensure arrangements are modern, fit for purpose and streamlined and where possible aligned across the two councils.

10. Identify additional resources in order to deliver change at pace, including:

- Corporate resources to support the delivery of major programmes and projects.
- Service specific resources to deliver the councils' priorities, particularly around growth, economic and community development and place.
- A review of finance to ensure the right resources are in place to deliver against

11. Develop a shared organisational culture

- Following the completion of the shared services programme renew the councils' approach to organisational development including activities to embed a shared culture, improve employee engagement and development of the workforce to ensure resilience and deliver long term objectives.

12. Be prepared to spend money to create added value:

- Ensure that where required the right specialist expertise is sought to support the delivery of key programmes, initiatives and major projects.
- Ensure there are resources in place to deliver the councils' ambitious plans around the commercial agenda, including assets, property and investment.

13. Improve performance management and accountability by:

- Reviewing the councils' performance management framework to ensure that there are streamlined arrangements for performance reporting, enhancing accountability to Members and the senior management team and ensuring there are clearer lines of responsibility for the delivery of outcomes.
- Ensure the councils' business plans are more closely aligned with the medium term financial strategy, efficiency and transformation plans.
- Streamline the process for reviewing and developing plans and strategies and ensure effective risk management is in place.

14. Re-focus internal and external communications by:

- Undertaking a review of corporate communications, with a focus on improving internal communications and ensuring there are effective strategic communications plans in place to support the councils' priorities.

- Ensure the councils consider their place based approach (e.g. growth, regeneration, community development) in communication strategies and work with the senior management team to deliver this.
- Continuing to develop local campaigns to support service delivery.

The Councils should create a plan for organisational change that demonstrates your understanding of the issues and addresses how increased capacity is going to be created to deliver them. The governance issues, particularly around a delegated framework for decision-making, need to be discussed, agreed and adopted so it is fit-for-purpose to enable the Councils to respond quickly and innovatively to future challenges.

To do this there will need to be the identification of necessary additional resources in order to deliver change at pace, particularly in areas relating to growth - such as planning, economic development, community building and asset investment. In particular, the senior team will need to be supported by additional resource to create capacity to change at pace.

Senior politicians and officers recognise that the next step on the journey of transformation is to develop a shared organisational culture that drives consistent behaviours by staff that should create a resilient and sustainable officer group. The peer team also recommend you be prepared to spend money to create added value.

To support the 'Transformation 2.0' programme it is necessary to create a meaningful performance management system with clear lines of accountability so staff, particularly service managers, understand what they have been tasked with, what the success criteria are and what they are to be measured against. To ensure all members, staff, partners and the wider stakeholder groups understand the vision and priorities and how the Councils are going to achieve them, there should be a re-focus of the internal and external communications to ensure they tell a straightforward compelling story.

3. Summary of the Peer Challenge approach

The peer team

Peer challenges are delivered by experienced elected member and officer peers. The make-up of the peer team reflected your requirements and the focus of the peer challenge. Peers were selected on the basis of their relevant experience and expertise and agreed with you. The peers who delivered the peer challenge at Cherwell District and South Northamptonshire Councils were:

- **Trevor Holden**, Chief Executive, Luton Borough Council
- **Peter Fleming**, (Conservative) Leader of the Council, Sevenoaks District Council and 2017 Leader of the Year
- **Caitlin Bisknell** (Labour) ex-Leader, High Peak Borough Council
- **Jason Vaughan**, Strategic Director and Chief Finance Officer; Dorset Councils Partnership serving North Dorset, West Dorset and Weymouth & Portland Councils
- **Graeme Kane**, Assistant Director, Public Space, London Borough of Merton
- **Georgia Rudin**, Programme Support Officer, Local Government Association
- **Marcus Coulson**, Programme Manager, Local Government Association

Scope and focus

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

1. Understanding of the local place and priority setting: Does the council understand its local context and place and use that to inform a clear vision and set of priorities?
2. Leadership of place: Does the council provide effective leadership of place through its elected members, officers and constructive relationships and partnerships with external stakeholders?
3. Organisational leadership and governance: Is there effective political and managerial leadership supported by good governance and decision-making arrangements that respond to key challenges and enable change and transformation to be implemented?
4. Financial planning and viability: Does the council have a financial plan in place to ensure long term viability and is there evidence that it is being implemented successfully?
5. Capacity to deliver: Is organisational capacity aligned with priorities and does the council influence, enable and leverage external capacity to focus on agreed outcomes?

In addition to these questions, CDC and SNC outlined their two key drivers which are outlined below that they asked the peer challenge team to consider and provide feedback on.

1. Maximising our strategic advantage

CDC and SNC are located within the government proposed Oxford - Cambridge corridor. The National Infrastructure Commission (NIC) has published evidence suggesting one million extra houses and 700,000 new jobs are required in this corridor whose economy has the potential to rival Silicon Valley.

With economic potential of this magnitude we must ensure we have the collaborative capacity and strategic foresight to maximise the benefits this may bring, manage the impact of growth and development upon communities and ensure that the most vulnerable also reap the benefits.

To achieve this would require the delivery of a level of housing growth not seen in the area before. It will require new collaborative partnerships across councils and LEPs, new governance arrangements and new approaches to the delivery of infrastructure. The impact on existing communities will be significant and the ability to balance the needs of local communities with the strategic national interest will represent a significant challenge for leaders, both elected and officer.

2. Transformation '2.0'

Having reached the end of the first phase of our organisational change programme, the time is right to take stock and set out the next steps on our journey. Together the councils have completed a significant period of transformation. Nearly all services are now shared and the financial efficiencies from this programme have been significant.

However, it is a truism that change has become a constant; and now is the time to ask how we can further realise the benefits of our transformation. Our challenge is to embed joint working, becoming one high-performing organisation that serves two councils.

Our future plans are around developing a new culture to maximise the capacity and breadth that our shared workforce offers. This includes all of the challenges of process and business systems harmonisation, efficiencies and improving the way we interact with our customers. But, more fundamentally, there is also a cultural change and organisational development challenge. Are we working effectively to align our people, financial and partnership resources to deliver our strategic priorities, and realise the strategic opportunities that are open to us?

The peer challenge process

It is important to stress that this was not an inspection. Peer challenges are improvement focussed and tailored to meet individual councils' needs. They are designed to complement and add value to a council's own performance and improvement. The process is not designed to provide an in-depth or technical assessment of plans and

proposals. The peer team used their experience and knowledge of local government to reflect on the information presented to them by people they met, things they saw and material that they read.

The peer team prepared for the peer challenge by reviewing a range of documents and information in order to ensure they were familiar with the Councils and the challenges they face. The team then spent four days onsite at Cherwell District and South Northamptonshire Councils, during which they:

- Spoke to more than 200 people including a range of council staff together with councillors and external partners and stakeholders.
- Gathered information and views from more than 65 meetings, visits to key sites in the area and additional research and reading.
- Collectively spent more than 262 hours to determine their findings – the equivalent of one person spending more than 7 weeks in Cherwell and South Northamptonshire.

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 between the 14th -17th November 2017. 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 you are already addressing and progressing.

4. Feedback

4.1 Understanding of the local place and priority setting

Strengths

Both CDC and SNC conduct resident surveys on a number of different criteria and last year's results were in line with previous years. They told a story of high levels of satisfaction from residents on the services they receive from the Councils. There was a good understanding of the settled community which was essential as both Councils face the challenges and opportunities presented by significant and sustained new growth.

Strategic plans demonstrate the understanding of the need to make sure that there is growth in high quality jobs in the local economy by building on the enviable reputation provided by the high number of Formula 1 high performance technology motorsport businesses and their related supply chain organisations located in the area. This awareness is coupled with the recognition of the need to balance new developments - which are mostly housing related - with the needs of existing communities to ensure they are sympathetic with the existing landscape yet make the best use of opportunities. To this end there are key plans and strategies in development that take account of the need for growth, the wishes of business and developers and the needs of local people.

The joint working between both Councils works well; there is a common purpose that supports both Councils and the staff say they are committed to delivering good services for the communities within which they work and live. The peer team heard from a range of community stakeholders and groups who found the authorities to be supportive and engaged; it was clear that strong relationships had been built between community groups and the district councils.

Opportunities

It was clear to the peer team that CDC and SNC are well placed to go from 'strong to stronger' in the immediate future. In the present climate of high demand for growth and reduced government funding this should be seen as a significant strength in itself. To do this the peer team recommend that there is a renewed focus that recognises and responds to this significantly changing environment. **The publication of the NIC report is an essential part of the future development of the areas and to maximise this opportunity the Councils should clarify the vision and values of the organisations that emphasises what the place will look like and how the authorities will act to deliver it.**

This would very likely entail the identification of fewer, clearer priorities that would then create the Strategic Plan for 'Your Place' and 'Your Communities'. It is vital that the Councils seek to create strong and cohesive communities through this change process that involves, on the one hand local people and elected members in dialogue, and on the other, those who will deliver this infrastructure.

With Silverstone and high performance technology motorsport businesses nearby, the focus will be on this type of business to grow the required number of jobs which should also continue the growth and promotion of innovation in both the physical landscape and the way that business is done.

To do this well it is necessary to engage with members and staff on the development of the revised vision and resulting strategies and to ensure everyone has a voice and understands the direction of travel. Once this has been achieved there is the need to broadcast your story both internally to members and staff and externally to all partners and stakeholders. This could be achieved in the form of a concise narrative that makes sense of where you are now and where you wish to go.

4.2 Leadership of Place

Strengths

In the view of the peer team and from the evidence read, heard and seen there is strong political leadership at all levels that includes the Council Leaders, Councillors Barry Wood (CDC) and Ian McCord (SNC), their respective Executive Board (CDC) and Cabinet (SNC) groups and the many backbenchers the peer team heard from. Both Councils have a strong reputation for service delivery and are developing a stronger 'place shaping' narrative. All reflected on the importance of representing the views of communities and balancing them against the needs of the growth agenda. It was clear that each Council presently retains the individual identity of the communities it serves and should continue to do so.

There are good relationships with partners in the business community, the voluntary sector, regional and sub-regional bodies and with most other local authorities. These partnerships demonstrate effective engagement in that they facilitate the creation and agreement of strategic priorities on a number of different agendas, not least of which is growth. The new Chief Executive has been welcomed by these groups as 'a breath of fresh air', creating positive feedback and a feeling that there are opportunities to develop the existing good relationships and build better ones where it is necessary.

With good member capacity and significant experience of business there is potential to further develop the recognition of the growth agenda and where it needs to occur. The first steps have been taken on innovative investment, bringing both financial and wider

community benefits, including the Towcester offices at Moat Lane where district council services are provided alongside county council library services. The development(s) at Castle Quay (Banbury) and in Bicester are examples of how the Councils are driving regeneration whilst enhancing access to services.

Opportunities to deliver services in partnership with other agencies and local government bodies should be further explored to enhance access to services through co-location and integrated service delivery at lower costs for the taxpayers of both areas. The relationships with Parish and Town Councils are good, which affords the chance for elected representatives to include the voice of their communities in the discussions on growth throughout the ongoing process.

Opportunities

As the senior leadership at CDC and SNC are aware, and along with key stakeholders and partners, there is now the opportunity to shape significant growth in the area by building strong communities with great facilities and the necessary infrastructure to support existing and new communities.

Going forward, the approach needs to consider how to carefully balance the needs of local communities and how to support economic growth. Both Councils would benefit their respective areas by creating and embedding a proactive planning framework which is transparent and can be easily understood and advocated, to avoid a developer led environment. This is key both in terms of capacity to deliver and to regulate.

There are a number of very positive examples of good Place Shaping projects that can be learnt from and replicated. In Bicester, the development funded by the Department of Communities and Local Government is part of the garden town initiative. Here the BUILD team are doing innovative and creative work to promote self-builds, affordable homes and integrated mixed use developments which could be effectively shared across the two Councils without having to break up the team or dilute their current focus.

It would also be valuable to facilitate greater collaboration between internal teams such as planning policy, development management, asset investment, finance and community development to ensure planning and investment decisions are coordinated and able to meet the needs of new and established communities and support them through change.

It should be possible to maximise the value of the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) through a co-design approach that will help to ensure activity involves local communities.. The VCS representatives voiced the desire and willingness to be further involved in the design and decision-making processes and would be a powerful advocate for the aspirations and priorities of CDC and SNC. The authorities also have

the opportunity to harness the skills and energy of the VCS to support their communities by developing a commissioning model to ensure Council funding is delivering against the authorities' priorities.

4.3 Capacity to deliver

Strengths

As 'one organisation, two Councils' the position of CDC and SNC and the ability to deliver the growth agenda are in a good place.

Whilst the peer team were onsite many senior staff were at risk of redundancy and are applying for posts in a new single structure that will service both Councils. Despite this situation the peer team were impressed to see that morale was high and staff appeared well engaged and motivated in their common purpose. This is supported by the organisation's appraisal system and competency framework that effectively supports personal and career development.

An innovative and positive approach has been developed towards staff training that included opportunities such as the Institute of Directors course and the Succeeding in a Commercial Environment (SIACE) programme that enables employees to develop their understanding of the new direction the organisation is moving in.

There has also been a cohort of staff who have completed the LEAN academy which is seen as a success. The LEAN methodology has been used to re-design the Human Resources function that has significantly improved the way it works.

There would appear to be fertile ground upon which to develop innovative thinking and entrepreneurial activity as both Councils have a good track record of successful external funding bids.

There were a number of examples of effective programme and project management across the two Councils in such places as the Graven Hill self and custom build initiative in Bicester, the Heyford Park development of a decommissioned airbase and the creation of the Silverstone Heritage initiative that is a stepping stone to a more sustainable Silverstone site. A further positive example is the regeneration of the historic Moat Lane area of Towcester town centre and the delivery of a new civic building (plus ancillary facilities) for the Council.

Opportunities

CDC and SNC have a clear driver and a pressing need to overtly recognise and respond to a significantly changing environment, which is reflected in the timely

publication of Lord Adonis's NIC report. To do this the peer team recommend the two Councils jointly clarify their vision and values in terms of both Place and as independent authorities. Some aspects of this future direction will differ between Cherwell and South Northamptonshire as areas as well as Councils. This would very likely result in the identification of fewer, clearer priorities that would then create the Strategic Plan for 'Your Place' and 'Your Communities'. It is vital that through this process there is a focus on seeking to create strong and cohesive communities, both new and established.

To be able to deliver the Strategic Plan the organisation that supports both Councils will need to produce a structured and resourced plan for change that outlines how the officers are going to deliver the political vision. This will require good internal communication and visible managerial leadership. The ongoing management restructure is well designed to address the skills and capacity issues that the organisation has at present and through this the Chief Executive can drive the change needed to deliver in a changing environment. Once senior officers are in place this needs to be cascaded to all staff to create enhanced corporate working to ensure delivery of positive outcomes.

4.4 Organisational leadership and governance

Strengths

As has been mentioned previously there is significant capacity and skill in the executive and non-executive members across both CDC and SNC, which is a strength.

The senior members and the new Chief Executive outlined their awareness of the current opportunity to build a strong senior officer team through "Transformation 2.0" to be able to deliver on revised priorities which will be aided through an ongoing desire of the Councils to invest in and develop the staff.

The voice of the staff is heard through the staff forum, which is an evolving group with potential to communicate the issues of re-organisation to the change agents as it progresses. The organisation also has a clear intention to use internal audit more effectively through regular attendance at the Senior Leadership Team meetings to hold individuals to account.

Opportunities

With the growth agenda and the ongoing transformation of staffing structures, the peer team suggest that a review of the Councils' governance structures is required in the light of this changing landscape and the resulting need to make decisions in a different way. To do this the policy and strategy framework requires reviewing to speed up the decision-making on financial investments by delegating decisions to portfolio holders

and senior officers. This could be achieved by giving all members an opportunity to take part in a conversation about a revised financial policy framework that delegates increased powers to specific people. This would enable the Councils to make decisions more quickly and efficiently and thus be more able to respond to a changing environment. This should be balanced through effective overview and scrutiny of those decisions.

This will require a cultural change that needs to be embraced by both members and officers and could be achieved through the cultural change plan that was indicated to the peer team. As the organisation goes through Transformation 2.0 it is necessary to be clear what the change is meant to achieve and what culture is being created.

At present the organisation generates a lot of performance management data with excellent graphs and charts. However the current system lacks clarity of purpose and could be seen as a bureaucratic overload with limited connection to outcomes. It is recognised that this information is not linked to organisational priorities and thus does not presently drive useful behaviours.

As a result of this state of affairs it is vital that the transformation approach introduces an appropriate performance management system that collects data relevant to fewer, clearer priorities. There should also be a review of performance targets to ensure they remain sufficiently stretching and these could then be used to effectively monitor and manage the performance of staff. There should also be a review of accountability so that managers can see the accurate measurement of relevant behaviours and drive the achievement of the fewer, clearer priorities.

The aforementioned change would add further value to the scrutiny function which could be improved both by the clear plan, priorities and indicators along with the wider engagement of Members in 'pre scrutiny' developing wider ownership and engagement in the Councils' policy framework. There is the opportunity to use the enthusiastic and skilled elected members across both Councils who are willing to hold the Councils' Executive and Cabinet members to account in a constructive and thoughtful manner.

4.5 Financial planning and viability

Strengths

The level of reserves puts the Councils in a strong position to address future challenges. Both CDC and SNC have successfully created income streams from business rates and New Home Bonus. The peer team heard that financial decision-making follows individual Councils' and communities' priorities.

In the recent past there have been some good investment decisions linked to property and regeneration which will provide future income to the Councils.

There is a phrase used by the Leaders of CDC and SNC that summarises their present and future approach to collaboration and the present staff re-structure of: “one on the inside, two on the outside” and so far it has delivered significant financial savings and is expected to deliver more in the future.

Opportunities

The Councils should better link their medium term financial plans to their investment strategy and the commercialisation and transformation agendas. By doing this it should ensure that all of the plans are focused on the key items and deliver the required savings in order to achieve financial sustainability.

With reference to the issues of delegation and accountability the peer team suggest consideration of an approach known by some of the peer team as “Tight and Loose”, whereby the boundaries of any decision are clearly defined (tight) and then staff are empowered to get on with it (loose) as long as they stay within the boundaries.

The peer team understand that CDC and SNC councillors were involved as company directors which, in part, could leave them open to suggestions of a conflict of interests. Whilst there is no easy answer to this issue, it would be good practice to adopt best practice with regard to members as directors of companies and the LGA is providing advice on this regard separately.

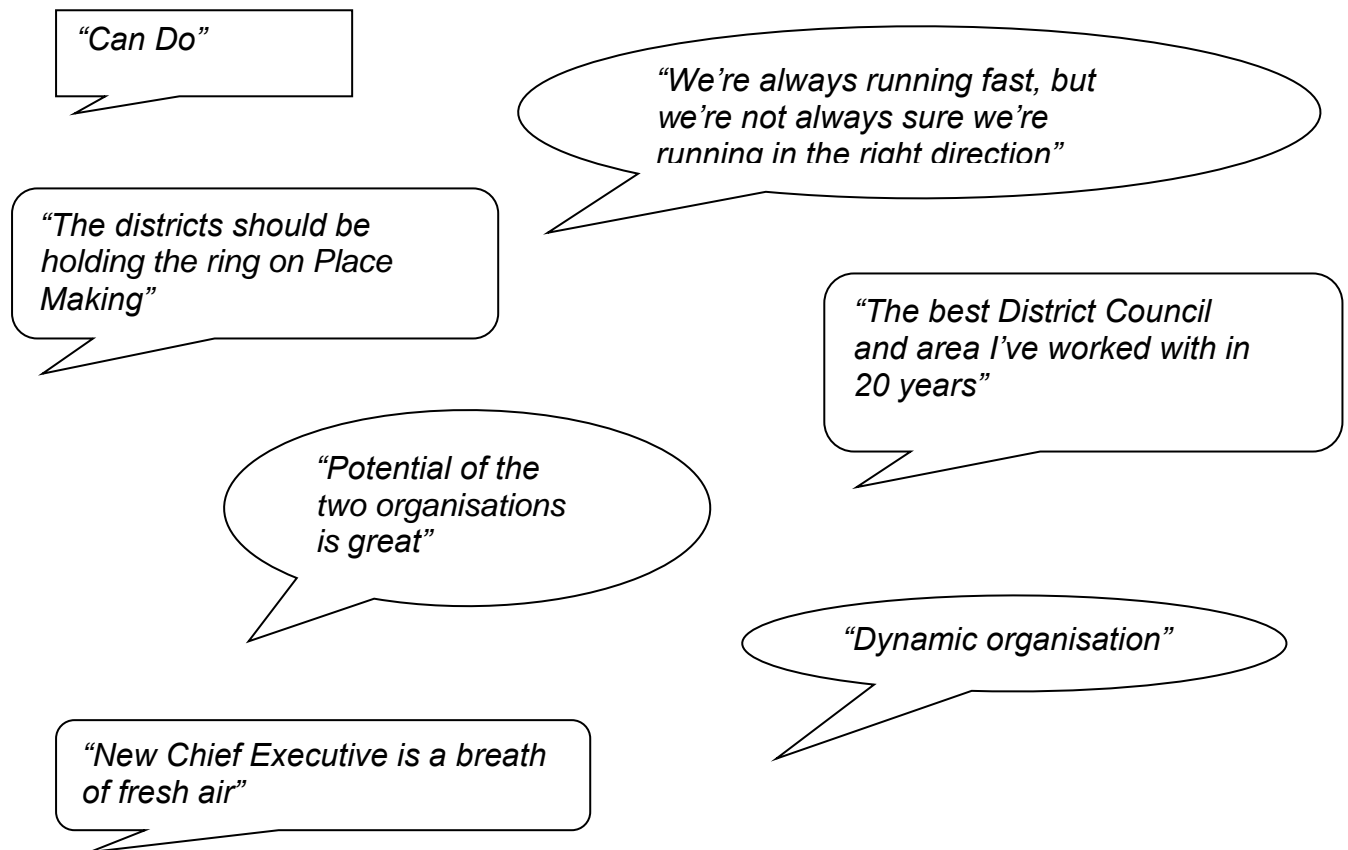
There are a number of interconnected recommendations from this corporate peer challenge, such as having fewer clearer priorities, an effective performance management system, a review of the capacity of the finance team and a review of the financial system to ensure it is used efficiently and effectively. One of the desired outcomes from this work would be that there is clear accountability for budgets and savings. As one organisation is created it will still be important to demonstrate transparency and value for money to ensure members and officers are able to show their stakeholders and communities where and how they are using their resources.

Whilst the Councils are offering staff training on commercialisation through the SIACE work it would be beneficial for all elected members and staff to fully appreciate what this means. This will help to ensure that there is a uniform approach to commercialisation and that opportunities are identified across different areas and the basis for future decisions are understood.

There is some significant slippage on the capital programme and better control over this will improve accountability and also produce savings from improved cash-flow management which was acknowledged in the self-assessment for this Corporate Peer Challenge.

4.6 Quotes from those with whom the peer team spoke.

In any peer challenge it is important to hear from the fully variety of people with whom we meet. Included here are a number of quotes that the team felt summarised some of the past, present and future of CDC and SNC.



5. Next steps

Immediate next steps

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

As part of the peer challenge process, there is an offer of further activity to support this. The LGA is well placed to provide additional support, advice and guidance on a number of the areas for development and improvement and we would be happy to discuss this. Mona Sehgal, Principal Adviser is the main contact between your authority and the Local Government Association. Her contact details are, email: Mona.Sehgal@local.gov.uk, Telephone: 07795 291006.

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 two 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 four to five years. It is therefore anticipated that the Council will commission their next Peer Challenge before 2021.

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On behalf of the Corporate Peer Challenge Team.