

Peer Challenge 2017



South Northamptonshire Council

Cherwell

DISTRICT COUNCIL
NORTH OXFORDSHIRE

Cherwell District and South Northamptonshire Councils

Peer Challenge **Position statement**

1. Introduction

Named after the river which flows through it, Cherwell is located between London and Birmingham, at the most northern point of the South East region, where it meets the West Midlands and East Midlands. Cherwell borders Oxford City, South Oxfordshire, Vale of White Horse, West Oxfordshire, Aylesbury Vale, South Northamptonshire and Stratford on Avon districts. The district has strong strategic transport connections such as the M40 which provides quick access to the west midlands on one side and London on the other. The district also benefits from direct rail connections to London, Birmingham and Oxford all within an hour

The district is growing with over half of the population living in the principal centres of Banbury, Bicester and Kidlington. The remainder live in more than 70 smaller settlements. Cherwell's population (141,868 - 2011 Census) has increased significantly over the past 20 years and this trend is set to continue with the population predicted to reach 201,156 by 2031 (Oxfordshire Infrastructure Strategy). In terms of the social and economic mix Cherwell is relatively affluent, but there are pockets in the main urban centres where households struggle; the knock on impacts of proximity to a world class city include affordability, enabling local people to stay and thrive and ensuring our towns are not limited to Oxford satellites.

Superbly located, South Northamptonshire is a mainly rural district, with a thriving economy. The A43 links the M1 and M40, passing the Silverstone Racing Circuit, and ensuring a strategic location for high tech and engineering industries. The district covers an area of approximately 245 square miles (27% of the area of the county) and with a growing population projected to reach around 110,700 by 2029, up from 85,200 in 2011. The district consists of two historic market towns – Brackley and Towcester, 96 villages and 78 parishes.

Natural and cultural attractions have helped the district's tourism industry to grow. There is low unemployment, high participation in the workforce, and many small entrepreneurial businesses as well as major employers including the Silverstone Circuit and surrounding science parks with its high performance technology and motor sport companies. As a reflection of this, over the last few years the district has consistently been placed in the top 20 best places to live in the UK (Halifax Bank of Scotland Annual Survey). This mix of high economic activity and workforce participation and a high-quality environment has resulted in a district with low levels of socio-economic deprivation; however, housing affordability is an issue and for young families and key workers finding the right housing can be a challenge.

Cherwell District (CDC) and South Northants Councils (SNC): the story so far

CDC is, by any definition, a large business with more than 500 employees and turnover of around £75m. It has a strong balance sheet with significant assets, reserves and only short term debt. The focus on becoming financially self-sustainable has already seen a significant increase in revenue returns from its assets and it is considering ways to develop this further.

SNC is a mid to large sized business with more than 250 employees and a turnover of around £30m. It has a more traditional Local Authority balance sheet with fewer assets but strengthened by its reserves and debt free position. The focus on financial sustainability has seen the Council look to be more innovative in how it invests to drive greater revenue returns from its assets - and these are now starting to deliver.

In 2011, CDC and SNC members embarked upon a joint working partnership that saw the implementation of a shared Chief Executive and joint management team. Following that decision further joint working opportunities were realised with back office services such as IT, finance and democratic services in 2012.

In 2013 the councils successfully secured around £1m of TCA funding to work with Stratford-on-Avon District Council. A joint transformation team was established, with plans to consider opportunities for joint working in front and back office services, management and key projects. After significant work to develop a robust three-way shared service governance model, three-way joint work on legal and IT services and the joint procurement of a new financial management system Stratford members decided that they no longer wished to pursue joint working.

In 2015 (after 'the split' from Stratford) CDC and SNC took the opportunity to consolidate the learning from their own experiences and committed to a full joint working programme, recognising that where a successful partnership exists it needs to be nurtured. Over the following two years the councils have succeeded in joining up all services, supported by both the CDC Executive and the SNC Cabinet and led by the councils' Joint Commissioning Committee (JCC). During this period we have used alternative models of service delivery to explore new ways of working, partly to open up opportunities to generate income and partly to hold open the door for additional partners to join our shared service partnership.

A risk for all organisational transformation programmes is their propensity to encourage an internal focus. But during this period of change both councils have also succeeded in shaping and developing a clear vision; setting out and delivering strategies for economic growth, supporting local businesses, moving towards financial sustainability and the delivery of housing. Whilst growth and housing have been priorities (and we believe showcase some of the best practice in the sector) the savings delivered through joint working have ensured that frontline services have been protected.

It is important to recognise that during 2016 the devolution and local government reorganisation agenda became live with different permutations of devo deals and various configurations for new unitary organisations.

Options for re-organisation tend to create concern at local levels, and the various proposals frequently cut across SNC and CDC as they are located in different counties, LEP areas and regions. However throughout discussions the partnership between CDC and SNC has not wavered and in recent months engagement with county councils (Oxfordshire and Northamptonshire) has improved.

So, why a peer challenge and why now?

Two key drivers:

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 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?

2. Strategic Positioning – maximising our opportunities

The councils have recognised the strong correlation between the delivery of economic growth and housing, the acquisition and management of assets, efficient, well-run services and financial sustainability. Over the last five years this relationship has been at the heart of the joint working partnership and has led to a focus on planning policy and economic development, retention of frontline services and an increased focus on innovative projects to generate income.

This approach requires new competencies and knowledge,; exceptional collaborative skills, commercial awareness and both political and managerial leadership across sectors. We have recognised that to capitalise on the opportunities that our geographical position affords us we need to be able to do the following:

- Really understand the nature of the opportunity, and have the skills to move at pace to deliver.
- Build relationships with our customers and communities to better understand their requirements and the impacts upon them.
- Build exceptional partnerships across the public, private and voluntary sectors to ensure social infrastructure and community development keeps apace with economic growth.
- Ensuring that when we champion growth, we build communities and not just places.

As peers we invite you to help us understand how best to position ourselves to deliver against these opportunities.

This document sets out our current position. Each section addresses one of the core components and identifies our perceived strengths, our current issues and what we have termed ‘green shoots’- opportunities to be cultivated. We hope it sets the scene!

3. Understanding of the local place and priority setting

The councils have ambitious visions for their districts and have recognised the importance of a deep understanding of the wants, needs and aspirations of the local communities that they serve both in terms of the place agenda, but also in terms of the services they deliver. Members have used the business planning and budget processes to set out a clear direction for the future: to deliver a financially sustainable future for both authorities, maximising the benefits of the growth agenda and developing thriving communities.

Information management and big data remains an on-going challenge. Collecting, managing, protecting and processing data to inform decision-making sits alongside good local community 'on the ground' awareness, they are all key to successfully understanding the local picture and shaping priorities.

Issues

- Our customer insight needs to drive our corporate planning, and we recognise that our approach to business planning needs modernising and aligning with budget and resource planning - as well as our transformation and efficiency plans.
- We need to find technology solutions to improve our customer awareness and use this information to underpin service and business planning more directly. This includes using the data from our customer contact centre to improve service delivery.
- We have an emerging place-based approach and many strengths in terms of planning policy and development. We need to ensure our focus on planning and development is matched by community development and our placed-based approach is based on robust local knowledge and used throughout the districts; Silverstone, Banbury, Bicester, Kidlington, Brackley and Towcester.

Green shoots and Opportunities

- We have established a joint Intelligence and Insight team, building the capacity to deliver against our gaps.
- Our vision and understanding of local opportunities is good, but it needs a clearer articulation in our plans, and we need to ensure our values and resources are aligned to deliver against our ambitions and vision.
- We recognise that insight should drive activities and this includes an understanding of the issues facing local businesses as well as residents. To this end we have engaged with the Better Business for All (BBfA) programme, which brings together businesses and local regulators to consider and change how local regulation is delivered and received. CDC and SNC were early adopters leading by initially setting up the Northamptonshire partnership with the Northants Enterprise Partnership and then later with the South East Midlands partnership. Our track record has attracted external funding to deliver organisational awareness for regulators; exploring a single point of contact and development of an environmental health/economic development

toolkit. A £9,260 grant was provided from the Regulatory Innovation for Growth fund, (aimed at projects that pioneer new ways for regulators and businesses to work together to support growth) to set up a ratings scheme for the campsites providing accommodation for events at Silverstone Circuits.

Strengths

- We have a strong record in customer surveys and high quality data about residents' priorities.
- We believe our evidence base for strategic planning policy and development management work is excellent.
- We have a strong network of community engagement events and activities, including voluntary sector forums, health and wellbeing boards, Connecting Communities events, parish liaison, the CDC Local Strategic Partnership Board, Brackley and Towcester youth partnerships, a seniors forum at CDC and the Cherwell Young People, Play & Wellbeing Partnership. These have all helped to develop an-going dialogue with communities.
- We run an innovative programme of events called 'Knowing our Communities' which aim to ensure our organisations and partner organisations have the opportunity to come to events to learn about different aspects of our communities, including tackling modern slavery, safeguarding and community safety.

4. Leadership of Place

Both districts of Cherwell and South Northamptonshire are experiencing major growth in a location on the edge of Northampton, Milton Keynes and Oxford. Both districts have sought to ensure that growth is shaped and each district respects ‘what is special’. Shaping the opportunities and challenges of growth are a major priority for both councils and forms a significant part of our approach to leading and shaping place. As such we have set out more detailed overview of our approach in [appendix A](#). The strategic partnerships we are active within to deliver against this agenda are set out in [appendix B](#).

Issues

Our challenge remains, ensuring we balance the needs of community development and growth whilst protecting the rural nature of both districts. Expanding our focus on wellbeing as well the delivery of leisure and community services is key to supporting thriving communities. There are good examples of activities to support communities, such as the provision of a welfare and debt advisory service at SNC and the Brighter Futures in Banbury programme, and our focus on developing Bicester as a Garden Town has enabled us to develop a holistic place-based approach; however, this is not yet rolled out across both districts.

Green shoots and Opportunities

Over the last year or so the opportunities for devolution deals and the potential for local government reorganisation have resulted in a complex and very different landscape of opportunities and risks across both counties. In some ways this has put pressure on relationships, but in recent months there has been a renewed emphasis on collaboration, exploring opportunities such as co-location, business rates pooling and ongoing working on growth deals, place shaping in Bicester and community projects such as supporting the retention of services at the Horton General Hospital. Relationships with both county councils have improved and collaborative working continues in both areas.

Strengths

- Both CDC and SNC have worked together to campaign for the retention of services at the Horton General Hospital in Banbury. Recognising the cross district impact, SNC and CDC worked (alongside community and town council partners) to fund the campaign. Similar approaches were also deployed with work to mitigate the impacts of HS2 on the districts. This represents a mature approach to political leadership, cross-county working on issues that are of relevance to the community but not necessarily ‘business as usual’ services for district councils.
- Parishes – both councils hold regular parish liaison meetings, ensuring a direct link between localities and communities. Officers and the members of the councils meet in both formal and non-formal settings and there have been clear decisions to use new homes bonus to support local communities that have seen growth in both districts.

- There is a strong track record of working to support the health and wellbeing agenda; Bicester is one of the governments Healthy New Towns, SNC has a Health and Wellbeing Forum. The councils have a dedicated safeguarding officer and clear approach ('see it, report it'). Discretionary services in leisure and community development have been retained through our shared service partnership at a time when many councils have reduced expenditure in these areas.
- Currently CDC is working in Banbury to establish a business improvement district (BID). Our approach to business engagement is outlined in Appendix B, covering our activities in both Cherwell and South Northants.
- For SNC the regeneration programme in Moat Lane (Towcester) has transformed an underused area of the town, delivered opportunities for additional housing and retail in the town, whilst enhancing the quality of the local environment. CDC is seen as a vanguard for self-build housing (with the ambitious Graven Hill development as well as the Build!® programme) and works to support other local authorities by sharing this knowledge.
- Community capacity building: SNC have ensured that a significant sum of funding has been made available for a community grants scheme, ensuring that communities that have seen growth are able to access funding via the new homes bonus and, retaining a community grants fund, SNC has an exceptional track record supporting local communities. CDC is pursuing a community lottery scheme to provide a funding platform for the voluntary sector and both councils support community infrastructure groups.
- In terms of system influence the councils punch above their weight, with the leaders of both councils being members or subs on the (LGA) Innovation Board. The CEO is a member of the South East Strategic Migration Partnership, is an LGA Peer and works closely with SOLACE, the DCN and as a contributor to leadership development programmes. She is also a representative on the CEX Group and the Health and Wellbeing working group for the DCN.

5. Financial planning and viability

As for all district councils, CDC and SNC have had to rapidly adapt to a new financial landscape, where funding is squeezed and there is an expectation that councils reduce their running costs and reliance on grant funding. CDC and SNC have been successful at both. An early adoption of two-way joint working ensured savings and a move away from reliance on grant funding facilitated by a focus on commercialisation, investment and income generation, have ensured a strong financial position for both councils.

Issues

We believe our strategy and focus on financial viability is strong, however we have some challenges:

- Implementation issues with regards to our new financial management system have affected closedown and mean that the process of budget monitoring needs improving. The original procurement and implementation of this project was part of the three-way working with Stratford and the subsequent break-up of the partnership, along with issues with the three-way IT service, have meant that the system is not performing as intended. The system needs improvement in terms of reporting functionality which, in turn, will provide budget managers with better information. A relaunch is planned with support from IT.
- There have been issues with regards to retaining capacity within the finance team. This is due in part to the decision to not permanently replace senior staff (for a significant period of time), pending joint working with Stratford, and furthermore recruitment has been an issue. Support has been given to train up in-house staff but there has been reliance on agency staff that has not helped stability and resilience.
- Alignment of business planning, budget and wider plans (such as the transformation, audit and efficiency plans) needs to be tighter, with a single, coherent process. This includes the due diligence process, consideration of financial risk when planning and agreeing projects and major programmes.
- Programme management and slippage in capital projects remains an issue and the councils are beginning to explore ways of managing these programmes more effectively. This includes establishing a corporate joint assets and investment team to lead the work across both authorities.

Green shoots and Opportunities

As a previous winner of the LCG entrepreneurial council of the year (2016), we have identified opportunities and have new projects in sight. Both councils have begun to understand the nature of commercial and investment opportunities.

A strategy has been set out which identifies three areas of focus: investment in major assets, trading services and developing new chargeable services which provide opportunities to generate a return. Good work has been done establishing the framework to deliver against this strategy, although we

recognise that the projects have not yet been aligned to a prioritised plan and the right capacity to deliver against major projects is not yet built in.

Strengths

- Both councils have had a strong vision and strategy for addressing financial challenges for some time. From moving towards shared services post recession to a vision for becoming financially sustainable, the long term strategy is to ensure the councils use assets and resources to create and maximise sustainable sources of income. The relationship between housing and economic growth, regeneration, asset management, appropriate commercial development and the long term financial health of the councils is well understood.
- This approach has driven a renewed focus on housing and economic growth, whereby resources have been strengthened to support delivery. Our business cases for shared planning policy, economic growth, housing and development management teams have increased capacity and expertise (such as transport planning) to ensure the districts can deliver against their strategic growth objectives. New homes bonus funding has been used effectively to combine support to communities who have seen growth and a further investment in economic development.
- In recent years members at both councils increased their risk appetites to ensure delivery against the plan for financial sustainability. The Graven Hill Village Development Company, creating a new community of 1900 self and custom built homes in Bicester, will generate a significant return to CDC with the UK's largest self-build site. SNC members have taken the decision to establish a local development company which will focus on family-sized rental homes, addressing a gap in housing availability in South Northants.
- These major investments will generate significant returns, and they sit alongside a portfolio of activities which include bringing empty homes back into use, the Build!® programme, regeneration (e.g. Moat Lane in Towcester) and a new focus on assets (e.g. Crown House and the acquisition of strategic sites).
- There is now a clear focus and drive to use capital funds to generate income and assets which are of value to the community. Taken alongside the clear strategic decision to deliver sustainable housing and economic growth, (and utilise returns to manage council services), this strategy aims to ensure long term financial viability and self-sufficiency.

6. Organisational leadership and governance

The councils have developed a collaborative approach to leadership. The decision to embark upon an extensive joint working partnership has been stewarded by the Leaders, and from 2011 there has been a single joint management team in place with close officer-member relationships. Oversight of the joint working agenda has been undertaken by a group of senior members (the Transformation Joint Working Group - TJWG) who have steered a path through the compromises and complexities of bringing two organisations into one.

These mature member/officer leadership arrangements have successfully shaped an ambitious agenda for local development and delivered a major organisational transformation programme.

Issues

Any long term change programme is challenging, and our journey is not yet complete. We believe the next phase of our transformation programme must address the following issues in terms of leadership and governance:

- Strengthening and clarifying scrutiny functions, ensuring they are aligned to strategic and community priorities.
- Reducing the complexity of officer - member relations (streamlining/harmonising governance across two councils).
- Addressing our current lack of planned leadership development (for both officers and members).
- Ensuring our performance and risk management frameworks are modernised and aligned with business plans and priorities.
- Completing the process of harmonisation of terms and conditions.
- Improving our internal communications and working to clarify our values, using them to drive our organisational development and customer strategies.
- Strengthening our capacity to manage new leadership requirements with regards to alternative models of service delivery (i.e. governance of council owned companies and ensuring there is an effective client side and shareholder support).

Green shoots and Opportunities

Governance and leadership solutions for joint working, commercial projects and alternative service delivery models are emerging:

- The joint commissioning committee (JCC) has been established to lead joint working and act as the personnel committee. A joint scrutiny committee has also been established.
- The Leaders have recently established a joint business planning committee for the CDC Executive and the SNC Cabinet to align and explore opportunities for joint policy development and joint project working.

- Member development – the budget for member development has been increased and group leaders have been empowered to address the development needs of their members.
- Staff engagement – a new staff forum has been established.
- A management review has been completed and plans are in place to address senior capacity issues. In the interim capacity has been enhanced.
- Combined officer and member leadership of council-owned companies has been established; training on ethical walls and conflicts of interest has been delivered.
- An update of some of the councils’ democratic arrangements is taking place and a further review of governance has been commissioned to enhance the councils’ oversight of their companies and alternative service delivery vehicles.
- We have begun to explore opportunities for a future leaders programme and have identified a cohort to support.

Strengths

Our leadership of innovation is a strength and examples can be found across all service areas - both in terms of major projects, service improvements and the use of alternative models of service delivery, supported by an embedded culture partnership working amongst senior members:

- A mature and flexible approach to joint working, including rotation of meetings, reciprocal arrangements in terms of chairing meetings, a case by case agreement on how joint services should be funded (and savings shared) recognising the difference in size of the councils.
- Member oversight of transformation activities is robust, with working groups to review the transformation programme and the development of commercial activities.
- The councils have established a jointly-owned services company which has enabled the insourcing of an externally delivered revenues and benefits service and the establishment of a joint team. We believe it is the first revenues and benefits company of its type and we have taken the opportunity to develop a more innovative approach to human resources. The board of the company includes members and officers from both councils.
- The councils have established an exciting leadership, innovation and commercial skills programme to support staff development and act as an innovation pipeline. Members are involved in the evaluation of participants.
- We run the Institute of Directors’ Certificate in Company Direction as an onsite programme for officers and members involved in alternative service delivery vehicles. To fund it we offer places to other local authorities at a competitive rate.

7. Capacity to deliver

In terms of our challenges we recognise that capacity is one of our key areas to address. The focus on joint working has driven out savings and efficiencies; however, we need to ensure the focus of change moves towards harmonising our business systems and processes, ensuring we have the arrangements in place to lead and develop the organisation and the workforce to deliver against strategic priorities. We have identified three areas to address, which will form the next phase of our transformation agenda:

1. Building senior capacity
2. Realising the benefits from our joint working programme
3. Ensuring there is the right capacity and competency in place to drive new projects and initiatives, keeping capacity aligned with ambition.

Issues

Over the last two years senior management capacity has been reduced. Two factors have delayed a long planned for management restructure: the potential for local government re-organisation over the last year and the hoped-for joint working with Stratford-on-Avon prevented management changes prior to this. However, the management restructure is now underway and a key objective of the new Chief Executive. The focus on joint working has delivered our ambitions in terms of shared working but the benefits of business systems and process harmonisation are yet to be fully realised. The next phase of our transformation plan will need to ensure these efficiencies are delivered.

We believe our priorities to improve are:

- Implementing the management review, investing in strategic and leadership capacity.
- Modernising our human resource and organisational development activities, including workforce and succession planning, learning, leadership and management development.
- Completing the task of harmonising our terms and conditions.
- Setting out a clear strategy for digital transformation, which puts customers at the heart of what we do and maximising our IT assets to deliver it.
- Ensuring there is sufficient organisational capacity in place to support new or enhanced activities such as assets and investment strategies, alternative models of service delivery and programme/project support for major projects (such as delivery of the Eco-innovation centre). We recognise that to deliver major changes programmes and key projects capacity must follow strategic intent.

Green shoots and Opportunities

As set out above, we believe we have recognised where we have some outstanding issues and there are many 'green shoots' and opportunities on which to capitalise:

- The management restructure is underway, addressing the senior capacity issues and stabilising the staffing structure.
- The first phase of our transformation programme has been delivered. The outcomes of the peer challenge will directly inform the next phase and change management capacity has been retained to deliver this.
- We have recognised that our organisational development, HR and learning and development activities have not kept pace with our transformation objectives and have taken action to address the gap. Actions include support for future leaders and setting out the competencies and behaviours required for the future.
- This year we have established a LEAN academy, training staff to lead and own business process improvement, helping to drive out the benefits of joint working
- Member development budgets have been increased and groups have been given resources to address the development needs of members.
- Through joint working, our transformation programme has resulted in savings of around £3.75m. But as part of this programme we have increased resources in our shared planning policy and economic growth teams, demonstrating that shared services can protect and enhance areas of priority.

Strengths

Capacity is about more than the sum of resource, and the councils have a demonstrable track record where decisions have directly supported the alignment of resource and/or activity to address strategic priorities. Where we have identified issues, members have been involved in supporting the solutions:

- Our IT strategy and transformation programme has delivered demonstrable improvements and savings, effectively recovering from a three-way shared service that was not held in high regard, overseen by a member led transition board.
- We recognised staff needed new skills and learning opportunities to work in a new world and have co-created with a local firm an innovative (and ILM endorsed) – Leadership & Commercial Skills programme that also serves as an innovation pipeline.
- Delivery of innovation: both councils have a track record in landing innovative projects. A strength has been housing (where LGC awards have been won for entrepreneurship and innovation), but planning is also a key area: England’s largest local development order, master planning, design guides, pre-planning advice are all established practices. We run an innovation seasons programme, and recent projects have included local authority self-build mortgages and new leisure opportunities.
- We have embraced the opportunities that alternative models of service delivery provide and have set up council-owned companies to deliver housing, new assets and services, transforming capital resources into sustainable sources of income.
- To support officers and members we have formed a partnership with the Institute of Directors to ensure that those asked to work in new ways have the skills to do so, we have opened our training programme to wider public sector colleagues.

8. Summary

We hope that this overview has captured a slice of both councils, their strategic priorities and our ambitions for the organisation that serves them.

Our drivers for the peer challenge are two-fold, setting the roadmap for the next phase of our transformation journey and ensuring we have the understanding, capacity and competence to maximise the strategic opportunities available to us.

As a partnership we are keen to be challenged:

- What can we do to streamline and modernise governance, minimising the complexity of working across two county areas?
- We have a strong vision around creating a financially sustainable organisation, transforming capital into sources of long term income. Are we doing enough?
- We have worked to develop a strong placed based approach. Are we doing enough to support community development?
- Are we on the right track in terms of the next phase of organisational transformation?
- We have identified some areas for development. Are we missing anything?
- How best can change and stability be balanced?
- We have prioritised innovation. Are we doing enough to support our workforce and engage/leverage external partners to deliver?
- Are our resources (people, budgets, process and projects) effectively aligned to deliver against our ambitions?
- Do we have the collaborative competency and clout to capitalise on the economic and growth related opportunities afforded to the areas?
- Are we managing risk effectively?

Appendix A: Leadership of Place – additional information.

Both councils as planning authorities have taken a comprehensive, integrated policy-led approach to shaping the future of each district. This has been strategy-led through an adopted Local Plan for each district setting the policies and establishing major growth locations. Consequently, the planned growth is largely focused on the market towns as locations best able to absorb growth, with significantly less for the villages, and investment in infrastructure secured to support the planned growth.

Both councils have taken a balanced approach to growth, that seeks to ‘place-shape’, emphasising the quality of development and bringing together considerations of planning, housing choice, transport and economic development. By setting a clear strategy, with detailed policies and working closely with developers and investors, our approach has secured a significant uplift in delivery - to one of the highest rates of house building in the UK.

Each council is led by planning strategy and policy:

- The planning framework for each district is set through the adopted Local Plan for each area: CDC in July 2015 for 2011 – 2031; SNC (as part of the West Northants Joint Core Strategy) in December 2014 for 2011-2029.
- Town Masterplans have been adopted for Brackley, Towcester, Banbury and Kidlington to provide a more holistic, detailed view of the growth of each town, supplemented with SPDs for specific development areas including NW Bicester, and West of Watling Street in Towcester.
- A Masterplan for Bicester is in preparation to reflect its Garden Town and Healthy New Town designations.

Delivery has significantly increased:

- Housing allocations total circa 38,000 houses across the two districts.
- Year on year delivery levels in each district taken together are amongst the highest in the UK.
- Four sites are running at plus 200 units built per annum.
- Land supply has risen to 10.1 years for SNC (up for 2.1 years in 2009) and 5.7 years at CDC, providing local control and community certainty.
- Employment growth has significantly increased with 350 hectares of new employment land allocated to reduce the high out-commute.
- A high % of affordable housing is provided in CDC.

	Built in CDC	Built in SNC
2011/12	356 houses	304 houses
2012/13	340	226
2013/14	410	333
2014/15	946	343
2015/16	1425	514
2016/17	1102	658

Key projects and investment that has been supported includes:

- The expansion of Croughton base for the MoD and the USAF.
- The relocation, expansion, and inward investment to secure business growth, including Amazon, Barras, Karcher & John Lewis.
- Major retail centre expansions in our market towns including the Gateway & Castle Quay 2 in Banbury, plus the expansion of Bicester Village by 30% to increase visitor numbers from current 6.4m to over 10m in five years' time.
- Area regeneration including Moat Lane in Towcester with housing, an ancient monument and historic parkland.

Our delivery is based on:

- A buoyant local economy which the districts have and ready access to mortgages.
- A range of housing sites being allocated and approved, providing choice of location and housing type.
- The adopted Local Plans providing certainty to developers and the community as to what will be built where; enabling developers to forward plan their building with planning permission in place.
- Infrastructure investment being in place, including improvements to the A43 at Towcester, junction 9&10 on the M40, new rail services from Banbury and Bicester to London and the new East-West rail service from Oxford to Bicester.
- Proactive engagement with developers by Development Management and Planning Policy, including the use of pre-application engagement and performance agreements.
- Community investment being in place with a range of new schools and the Studio school at Bicester built and open; with a new hospital consented for Brackley.

Both councils emphasise build quality in their approach to planning. Major initiatives include:

- A design code and site Masterplan for major and village schemes to ensure layouts lead to balanced communities.
- SNC has completed a review and update of all 53 Conservation Areas with a review programme underway in CDC.
- Working with HS2 to ensure design of line take account of the landscape in each district.

Each council uses growth to support a culture of planning innovation, including:

- Support for the largest self-build site in the UK at Graven Hill, Bicester.
- Approval for advanced sustainable homes at NW Bicester.
- Support for the growth of Silverstone, through approved Masterplans to support the track-based leisure pursuits and a major business park for the High-Performance Engineering (HPE) sector centred on Formula 1 and its supply chain across the UK.
- Support for the F1/HPE sector in the district including Mercedes Petronas and its wind tunnels.

Our approach to growth generates resources:

- Through employment growth we have increased our business rate income. This includes consents for distribution centres at M40 & M1 junctions and higher value business uses on the edges of the four towns and particularly at Silverstone.

- With housing growth leading to significant New Homes Bonus income (£25 million to date), part of which has funded extending the BDUK superfast broadband programme to rural communities, providing a community gain across each district. SNC also pays a proportion of the bonus to parishes experiencing growth for new community projects.

Looking to the future, we:

- Are assisting our neighbours to meet their unmet housing needs; including Northampton through our Local Plan part 2 and Oxford through the Cherwell Partial Review which includes an expansion of London Oxford Airport and University of Oxford research centre at Begbroke.
- Have introduced Single services for i) Strategic Planning and Growth Strategy, and ii) Development Management. We aim to learn from the best of each council and be more resilient, with a 'can do', 'business friendly' approach.
- Are planning for additional growth to take advantage of the Cambridge to Oxford corridor as a high economic and housing growth area.

Appendix B: Strategic partnerships and collaborative working

Peer Challenge: Partnership working on planning and growth matters

Much of the work by CDC and SNC to take forwards growth is through partnerships. The key ones are outlined below.

1. Cherwell

- **Bicester Strategic Delivery Board** – A partnership group that brings together different agencies, CDC, County, HCA, Town Council and others to co-ordinate matters relating to the growth of Bicester.
- **Bicester Vision** – A partnership of private companies and business organisations which works together to promote Bicester as a place to invest and work in. It brings together Bicester Village, Bicester Heritage, Bicester Chamber of Commerce, CDC and local companies.
- **Banbury Shadow BID Board** – A group of interested companies that is leading, with CDC support, the development of a BID (Business Improvement District) for Banbury to help strengthen the economy of the town and its wider promotion. The result of the BID ballot will be announced on 15 November 2017.
- **The Oxfordshire Growth Board** – A Joint Committee of the five districts, County Council, OxLEP and the two universities that co-ordinates matters relating to the growth of Oxfordshire. It was established as a consequence of the Oxford City Deal, to which each council was a partner. It is supported by a CEX/Leaders and Executive Officer Group. Recent work has included the development of the Oxfordshire SHMA (2014) and the apportionment of the unmet housing need of Oxford; the preparation of the OXIS infrastructure assessment up to 2040; co-ordination of HIF bids; engagement with the National Infrastructure Commission on the development of the Oxford-Cambridge corridor; the development of a Joint Spatial Plan for Oxfordshire and is currently negotiating a Growth Deal with DCLG/BEIS for new freedoms and flexibilities together with a funding package to support infrastructure investment across the county.
- **Oxfordshire LEP (OXLEP)** – The LEP for Oxfordshire has the Council Leader of each district and County Council as a Board member, which ensures a close alignment of economic/productivity issues with planning and transport matters that are led by the districts and the County Council. Recent engagement has included the refresh of the Strategic Economic Plan (SEP) to align it with the Local Plans, the operation of the Local Growth Fund and a co-ordinated response to the Industrial Strategy Green Paper. It is supported by an Economic Development Officers Group.

2. South Northants

- **West Northants Joint Planning Committee** – Established by Statutory Instrument, it draws membership from the districts of South Northants, Daventry, Northampton and Northamptonshire County Council. It has overseen the development of the Joint Core Strategy for West Northants (the Local Plan) adopted in December 2014 and its forthcoming review. Plans are underway to replace the WNJPC with a more flexible Planning and Infrastructure Board. It is supported by a Programme Board.
- **West Northants Transport Group** – This brings together the districts and County Council, with Highways England, to co-ordinate planning and transport matters around Northampton. This group has secured agreement to pool CIL contributions to a Transport Management Strategy to improve capacity on the A45 and co-ordinated HIF bids and assisted the joint working between SNC, Northants County and HE on the development of the Towcester Relief Road.

3. Both Cherwell and South Northants Councils are members of:

- **South East Midlands LEP (SEMLEP)** – Both councils are members of SEMLEP and participate in Leaders, Chief Executives and Economic Development Officers meetings to shape policy and co-ordinate funding bids and implementation. Recent work has included the refresh of the Strategic Economic Plan (SEP) to align it with the Local Plans and support the development of the Cambridge-Oxford Corridor; Further Education Review and Operation of the Velocity Business Support Programme.
- **Oxford-Cambridge Corridor Central Area Growth Board** – Based on the SEMLEP footprint, both councils are involved in the development of an emerging Growth Board, based on the Oxfordshire model, for the central part of the Corridor. This will cover Northants, Milton Keynes, Aylesbury, Cherwell, Luton and the two Bedfordshire councils. It is supported by an officer working group. Recent work has included agreeing a joint response to the National Infrastructure Commission (NIC) on Governance; joint presentations with DCLG/BEIS on corridor growth; alignment with the work being undertaken by England's Economic Heartland to develop a corridor wide transport strategy and the potential for establishing a Common Planning Area.
- **East-West Rail Partnership** – Both councils are active members of the partnership and LEP promoting the new railway link from Bicester to Cambridge. A final funding decision to build the line is awaited in the Chancellor's budget on 22 November 2017
- **Oxford-Cambridge Expressway stakeholder group** – Both councils are engaged directly with the DfT on the evaluation of the proposed new expressway. A final funding decision is awaited in the Chancellor's budget on 22 November 2017 to complete the evaluation of three route options eastwards from Bicester, Arncott or Thame to Junction 13 of the M1. All options impact on strategic highways in CDC and SNC and will lead to new settlement growth in Aylesbury Vale.

4. Both councils have close links to:

- **Government departments** – Both councils work closely with DCLG, BEIS and DfT on growth matters.
- **Agencies** – Both councils have close working arrangements with Highways England, HCA, Historic England, HS2, Natural England and the Environment Agency on Local Plan making, Development Management and the wider Growth agenda.
- **Neighbouring councils** – Both councils systematically engage with all neighbouring councils at the various stages of Local Plan consultations under the ‘Duty to Co-operate’. A series of ‘Statements of Common Ground’ have been agreed on matters relating to each council’s Local Plan development. A joint growth project includes West Oxfordshire, Aylesbury, Oxford City, Cherwell and South Northants considering how the Cambridge-Oxford corridor western section might be shaped through the planning processes.

Particularly close links are in place between CDC and Oxford City which underpin the development of the Local Plan Partial Review, which sets out the contribution by CDC to meeting the identified unmet housing need of Oxford, on seven sites in the south of the Cherwell district. Oxford – close co-ordination on the development of the Local Plan Partial Review.