

Cherwell and South Northants District Councils Corporate Peer Challenge

14th -17th November 2017

The Peer Challenge Team

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

Pre-on site

- Agreeing scope
- Document and data analysis

On site

- A range of meetings
- Collation of information and triangulation
- Feedback presentation

Been made very welcome

Very well supported throughout our work

The peer challenge model and approach

Peer challenges support local government improvement and are tailored to meet individual council priorities and needs, while taking account of local circumstances. They are designed to complement and add value to a council's own performance and improvement priorities. The peers use their experience and knowledge of local government to reflect on the information presented from the people they meet, from what they have heard and material read.

Themes for all corporate peer challenges

- Local Context and Priority Setting
 - Leadership of Place
 - Organisational Leadership and Governance
 - Financial Planning and Viability
 - Capacity to Deliver
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Scope and purpose of the peer challenge

1. Maximising our strategic advantage

- NIC Oxford - Cambridge corridor
- Capacity and strategic foresight to manage the impact of growth and development upon communities and ensure that the most vulnerable also reap the benefits
- Housing growth and its impact

2. Transformation '2.0'

- 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?

Quotes

“Can do”

“The districts should be holding the ring on Place Making”

“We’re always running fast, but we’re not always sure we’re running in the right direction”

“New Chief Executive is a breath of fresh air”

Key messages

- Both councils are well placed to address the challenges
- Currently in a strong financial position
- Good quality members and officers
- Positive feedback from partners (strategic & operational)
- Leadership seen in a positive light
- Motivated and engaged workforce
- Growth agenda
- Open self-assessment
- Examples of good practice that can be learnt from
 - Bicester, Graven Hill, Heyford Park, Silverstone Heritage, Moat Lane

Key messages - opportunities

Growth and Place Shaping

- Recognise and respond to a significantly changing environment
- Clarify your vision and values - Place and Authorities
- Identify fewer, clearer priorities
- Create the Strategic Plan for your Place and Communities
- Seek to create strong and cohesive communities
- Broadcast your story both internally and externally

Key messages - opportunities

Organisational

- Create a plan for organisational change
- Understand and address capacity issues
- Make governance arrangements fit-for-purpose
- Identify additional resources in order to deliver change at pace
- Develop a shared organisational culture
- Be prepared to spend money to create added value
- Meaningful performance management and accountability
- Re-focus internal and external communications

Local context & priority setting – strengths

- High levels of satisfaction from residents
 - Understanding the need to make sure there is growth in high quality jobs in the local economy
 - Recognition of the need to balance new developments with existing communities
 - Key plans and strategies in development
 - The joint working between both councils works well
 - Staff are committed to delivering good services and positive outcomes for communities
 - Examples of good community engagement and support
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Local context & priority setting - opportunities

- Recognise and respond to a significantly changing environment
 - Clarify your vision and values - Place and Authorities
 - Identify fewer, clearer priorities
 - Create the Strategic Plan for your Place and Communities
 - Seek to create strong and cohesive communities
 - Continue the growth and promotion of innovation
 - Engage with members and staff on the development of your vision and strategies
 - Broadcast your story both internally and externally
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Leadership of Place – strengths

- Strong political leadership of place at all levels
 - Each Council retains the individual identity of the communities it serves
 - Good relationships with partners
 - Effective engagement with strategic partnerships
 - Positive feedback about new Chief Executive
 - Good skills and capacity amongst members
 - There is a clear understanding of where growth needs to go
 - First steps taken on innovative investment bringing both financial and wider community benefits
 - Members recognise the growth agenda
 - Relationships with Parish and Town Councils are good
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Leadership of Place – opportunities

- Opportunity to shape significant growth
 - Building strong communities with great facilities
 - Embed a proactive planning framework to avoid a developer led environment
 - Examples of good Place Shaping that can be learnt from
 - Facilitate greater collaboration between teams to ensure planning and investment decisions are coordinated to support new and established communities
 - Maximise the value of Voluntary and Community Sector to deliver – co-design
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Capacity to deliver – strengths

- Good quality members with significant business and commercial skills
 - High staff morale who are engaged and motivated
 - Effective appraisal system and competency framework
 - Innovative and positive approach to staff training eg. Institute of Directors, Succeeding In A Commercial Environment (SIACE)
 - LEAN academy has had early success
 - Good track record of successful external funding bids
 - Effectiveness of programme and project management, e.g. Bicester, Graven Hill, Heyford Park, Silverstone Heritage, Moat Lane
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Capacity to deliver – opportunities

- Need to clarify Councils' purpose and vision
 - Establish a clear and focused set of priorities
 - Produce a structured and resourced plan for change
 - Ensure internal communication and visible managerial leadership
 - The management restructure will address the skills and capacity issues
 - This approach needs to be cascaded
 - Engender enhanced corporate working
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Organisational leadership and governance - strengths

- Clear, visible and engaged senior political leadership
 - High level of capacity within exec and non-exec members
 - Awareness of the current opportunity to build a strong senior officer team
 - The organisations invest in and develop the staff
 - The staff forum is evolving
 - Plan to use internal audit more effectively
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Organisational leadership and governance – opportunities

- Review governance structures in light of changing landscape and the need to make decisions in a different way
 - Review policy and strategy framework
 - Speed up the decision-making on financial investments by delegating decisions to portfolio holders and senior officers
 - Give all members an opportunity to take part in early policy formulation
 - Cultural change needs to embrace both members and officers
 - Introduce an appropriate performance management system including a review of accountability
 - Tight and Loose: statement of accounts
 - Add further value to the scrutiny and audit functions
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Financial planning & viability – strengths

- The level of reserves puts the Councils in a strong position to address future challenges
 - Successfully created income streams from business rates and New Home Bonus
 - Financial decision-making follows individual Councils' and communities' priorities
 - Good investment decisions have been made, which will provide future income to the Councils
 - “One on the inside, two on the outside” has delivered significant financial savings
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Financial planning & viability – opportunities

- Link medium term financial plans to investment strategy, commercialisation and transformation agendas
 - Adopt best practice with regard to members as directors of companies
 - Review the capacity of the finance team to address the challenges ahead
 - Review the financial system to ensure it is used efficiently and effectively
 - Establish clear accountability for budgets and savings
 - Clarify what commercialisation means for all
 - Capital slippage is an issue
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...and finally...

“Dynamic organisation”

“The best DC and area I’ve worked with in 20 years”

“Potential of the two organisations is great”

Follow-up activity

- Written report
- Follow-up discussions with LGA Principal Adviser
- Signposting regional and LGA support
- Additional bespoke support

Contact details

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www.local.gov.uk/peer-challenge