

NORTH NORFOLK DISTRICT COUNCIL CORPORATE PEER CHALLENGE – DRAFT ACTION PLAN

Executive Summary	The District Council is required to develop an Action Plan in response to recommendations made through the recent Corporate Peer Challenge of the authority. This draft Action Plan seeks to meet this requirement.
Options considered	This report and the Corporate Peer Challenge Action Plan details the Council's proposed response to recommendations made within the Peer Challenge Report. Development of the draft Action Plan has involved consideration of potential options / actions in response to the recommendations made.
Consultation(s)	Preparation of the draft Action Plan in response to the recommendations made in the Corporate Peer Challenge report has involved consultation with Corporate Leadership Team, Management Team and the Leader of the Council. This report and the draft Action Plan is presented to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for comment as an item of pre-scrutiny business before presentation of the Action Plan for agreement by Cabinet.
Recommendations	The Overview and Scrutiny Committee is invited to comment on the draft Action Plan as a pre-scrutiny item of business before the Action Plan (as amended through any proposals made by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee) is presented to Cabinet for agreement and adoption.
Reasons for recommendations	To ensure the objectives of the Council are achieved and to support the Council in its future development, learning and continuous improvement.
Background papers	LGA Corporate Peer Challenge report conducted 12 th – 15 th September 2023

Wards affected	All
Cabinet member(s)	Cllr Tim Adams, Leader of the Council
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Links to key documents:

Corporate Plan:	<p>Theme:- A Strong, Responsible & Accountable Council</p> <p>Objective:- We will ensure the Council maintains a financially sound position, seeking to make best use of its assets and staff resources, effective partnership working and maximising the opportunities of external funding and income.</p> <p>Action:-</p> <p>We will:-</p> <p>1. Produce an Action Plan in response to the recommendations made by the recent LGA Corporate Peer Challenge by end December 2023 and thereafter deliver the Action Plan objectives over the period to June 2025.</p>
Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS)	<p>There are a number of comments made within the Corporate Peer Challenge which seek to support and strengthen the Council's MTFS and strategic financial position given the changing context of local government finances and, as appropriate, these are responded to through the Action Plan</p>
Council Policies & Strategies	<p>All – the Corporate Peer Challenge process promotes sector-led improvement and is intended to support the Council in its objectives in the provision of quality services which meet the needs of the district's residents, communities, businesses and visitors and of our ambitions around continuous improvement</p>

Corporate Governance:	
Is this a key decision	No
Has the public interest test been applied	Yes – there is no private or confidential information to be considered by this report.
Details of any previous decision(s) on this matter	N/A

1. Purpose of the report

- 1.1 This report presents a draft Action Plan and programme of work in response to conclusions drawn and recommendations made as part of the Corporate Peer Challenge process undertaken by the authority in September 2023.
- 1.2 The report and Action Plan is presented to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee as an item of pre-scrutiny business for comment before being presented for agreement and adoption by Cabinet at its 5th February meeting.

2. Introduction & Background

- 2.1 North Norfolk District Council had a Local Government Association Corporate Peer Challenge undertaken in the week of the 11th September 2023. The Peer Challenge process is a sector-led improvement programme intended to provide a snapshot of the Council's performance and make comments and recommendations drawn from experience elsewhere across the local government sector as to how the Council might look to develop and improve the way it conducts its business and delivers services to its residents, communities, businesses and visitors. The process is voluntary and is not a formal process of inspection such as OFSTED or Care Quality Commission.
- 2.2 Our Corporate Peer Challenge was undertaken in the second week of September and involved a team of seven "peers" (officers and elected members from other local authorities and the LGA) visit the District Council and conduct meetings with key stakeholders and partners, focus groups of staff and elected members, undertake a document review, observe meetings of the Council and undertake site visits to some key projects – The Reef, Sheringham; Cromer Pier and seafront; and the North Walsham Heritage Action Zone programme and related town centre investments.
- 2.3 At the end of the four-day visit to the District, the Peer Challenge Team provided a summary presentation of their key findings and conclusions before making four key recommendations to the Council as to where focus should be given moving forward to strengthen the Council's capacity and processes moving forward. The Review Team then provided a written report of their key observations and recommendations and this is attached for the Committee's information as an Appendix to this report.
- 2.4 The headline findings of the Peer Review team were that North Norfolk District Council *"is a council which performs well, cares for and is delivering for its residents. Officers and elected members have a clear understanding of the needs, wants and challenges in the district and are passionate about delivering for their communities"*.
- 2.5 The report went on to state that the Council had strong partnership working arrangements, had invested significantly in new facilities such as The Reef, Cromer Pier, North Walsham Heritage Action Zone programme and the public convenience investment programme and had a historically strong financial position, but that this was changing due to the wider context in which local government finances operated, which would present challenges moving forward.
- 2.6 The report also made four key recommendations to support the Council in its ambition to continually improve, develop and grow and the Peer Challenge process requires the authority to develop and publish an Action Plan detailing how it proposes responding to those recommendations over the next two years. The following section of this report provides more information on the four recommendations and the Council's proposed actions / response.

3. Proposals and Options

- 3.1 The four recommendations made by the Peer Review report are as follows:-

3.2 Recommendation 1:- The Council needs a stronger focus on strategic finance (given the financial challenges the sector is facing):-

- This recommendation acknowledged the historically strong financial position of the authority (being debt-free, with a healthy level of reserves and lowest quartile Council Tax charge) but recognising recent inflationary pressures; increasing demands for some frontline services such as homelessness services and Temporary Accommodation; and the ambitious Corporate Plan.
- The report therefore proposed the authority develops a more detailed Medium-Term Financial Strategy; develops more robust budget monitoring and reporting and aligns financial capacity with Corporate Plan priorities.

3.3 Recommendation 2:- The Corporate Plan needs to drive the delivery of new priorities alongside the provision of core services:-

- This recommendation recognised the ambitions and aspirations outlined in the recently adopted Corporate Plan 2023-27 but stated that we needed to ensure that finances and staff resources were aligned to deliver on these aspirations;
- and that Service Team Plans and individual personal objectives were aligned to support delivery of the Corporate Plan objectives and maintain the provision of high-quality core services.

3.4 Recommendation 3:- There is a need to develop a comprehensive Organisational Development Plan:-

- The Council has a good level of knowledge in respect of the local labour market and workforce planning and a strong record of support for workforce development but needs to demonstrate this understanding more clearly through a People or Workforce Plan which could assist with the recruitment, development and retention of staff at a time of increasing workforce challenges.
- The Council should undertake a Staff Survey to inform the development of an Organisational Cultural Plan to support the council be more agile and responsive to future service demands.

3.5 Recommendation 4:- To continue to improve the Council needs to re-think the following:-

- Identify who is responsible for leading change and transformation within the authority.
- Provide more clarity around the strategic leadership role of the Corporate Leadership Team and the operational management of services by Management Team.
- Develop a new digital vision and strategy to drive improved outcomes and cost efficiencies
- Use data to inform better decision-making with smarter, more targeted performance measures to drive service improvement and better report writing with clearer recommendations.

- 3.6 Comment was also made in the Peer Review report that “there appears to be a view that scrutiny has a focus on criticism and blame” and that an opportunity existed to articulate more clearly the distinct roles and responsibilities of Cabinet, Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Governance, Risk and Audit Committee and an externally facilitated workshop will be arranged to explore new ways of working. The outcome of the member/officer workshop will be reported back to a future meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for agreement and subsequent review by the Constitution Working Party for inclusion within the revised Constitution with the objective of any revised arrangements commencing from the June meeting after the Annual Meeting of Council.

4. Corporate Priorities

- 4.1 The actions arising from this report support the following Corporate Plan priorities and objectives:-

Theme:- A Strong, Responsible & Accountable Council

Objective:- We will ensure the Council maintains a financially sound position, seeking to make best use of its assets and staff resources, effective partnership working and maximising the opportunities of external funding and income.

Action:- We will:-

Produce an Action Plan in response to the recommendations made by the recent LGA Corporate Peer Challenge by end December 2023 and thereafter deliver the Action Plan objectives over the period to June 2025.

5. Financial and Resource Implications

- 5.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from this report or the development of the Action Plan in response to the Peer Review recommendations.

- 5.2 A number of the proposed actions will have direct and indirect costs and consideration is being given to those issues currently – for example the Staff Survey will have a financial cost of approximately £8000 which can be met from the Delivery Plan reserve. However, the recommendations are intended to improve processes and outcomes for the authority and should therefore realise greater efficiencies and savings moving forward and will be progressed on that basis.

5.3 **Comments from the S151 Officer:**

It is acknowledged that there may be some budgetary implications from implementing this action plan, but members will be informed of any expenditure incurred when provided with updates within the progress reports.

6. Legal Implications

- 6.1 It is not considered that there are any significant legal issues raised by this report or the Peer Review Action Plan.

7. Risks

- 7.1 It is not considered that there are any significant risks to the council raised by this report or the Peer Review Action Plan itself, but the premise of the recommendations is to strengthen the performance of the authority and therefore there are some risks if action isn't taken to consider the recommendations and develop an appropriate response in terms of the council's medium-term financial position, ability to attract and retain staff etc.

8. Net Zero Target

- 8.1 There are no Net Zero issues arising from this report or Action Plan.

9. Equality, Diversity & Inclusion

- 9.1 Issues of equality, diversity and inclusion will be considered in the development of the Organisational Cultural Plan, new and revised workforce policies and service delivery improvements as appropriate.

10. Community Safety issues

- 10.1 There are no community safety issues arising from this report or Action Plan.

11. Conclusion and Recommendations

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee is invited to comment on the draft Action Plan as a pre-scrutiny item of business before the Action Plan (as amended through any proposals made by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee) is presented to Cabinet for agreement and adoption.