

**NORTH NORFOLK DISTRICT COUNCIL CORPORATE PEER CHALLENGE
ACTION PLAN – PROGRESS REPORT**

Executive Summary	<p>Following the Corporate Peer Challenge conducted in September 2023, the District Council developed an Action Plan, as a response to the Peer Challenge recommendations, for delivery over the period to June 2025.</p> <p>This report details the progress made in delivering against the actions in the Action Plan over the period January – June 2024.</p>
Options considered	<p>This report details the progress the Council has made in implementing actions detailed within the Peer Challenge Action Plan over the period January – June 2024.</p> <p>The Council could have chosen not to develop an Action Plan in response to the Peer Challenge recommendations, but this would not have been in the spirit of the LGA Corporate Peer Challenge process and would not reflect the Council's positive approach to continuous learning, development and improvement.</p>
Consultation(s)	<p>Development of the Peer Challenge Action Plan involved consultation with Corporate Leadership Team, Management Team, the Leader of the Council and the Overview and Scrutiny Committee (at its 24th January 2024 meeting) before adoption by Cabinet at its 5th February 2024 meeting.</p>
Recommendations	<p>The Overview and Scrutiny Committee is invited to note the report and, as appropriate, comment on the progress made in the first six-month period of the Action Plan delivery.</p>
Reasons for recommendations	<p>To ensure the objectives of the Council are achieved and to support the Council in its future development, learning and continuous improvement.</p>
Background papers	<p>LGA Corporate Peer Challenge report conducted 12th – 15th September 2023 and Corporate Peer Challenge Action Plan adopted by Cabinet at its 5th February 2024 meeting</p>

Wards affected	All
Cabinet member(s)	Cllr Tim Adams, Leader of the Council
Contact Officer	<p>Steve Blatch, Chief Executive Email:- steve.blatch@north-norfolk.gov.uk Tel:- 01263 516232</p>

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 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)	A number of actions detailed within the Action Plan seek to support and strengthen the Council's MTFS and strategic financial position given the changing context of local government finances.
Council Policies & Strategies	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

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 details the progress made towards delivering actions proposed as a response to the recommendations made by the LGA Corporate Peer Challenge team following their visit to the District Council in September 2023, over the period January – June 2024.

2. Introduction & Background

- 2.1 North Norfolk District Council had a Local Government Association Corporate Peer Challenge undertaken in 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.

- 2.2 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”*.
- 2.3 The Peer Review Team then made four key recommendations to support the Council in its ambition to continually improve, develop and grow and the Peer Challenge then required the Council to publish a response in the form of an Action Plan detailing how it proposed responding to the recommendations made over the following two years.
- 2.4 The District Council therefore developed an Action Plan in response to the Peer Challenge recommendations in the period October – December 2023 and presented a draft of the action Plan to the 24th January 2024 Overview and Scrutiny Committee for comment, before the Action Plan was adopted by Cabinet at its meeting of the 5th February 2024.
- 2.5 This report to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee details the progress made towards delivering against the actions detailed in the Action Plan over the first six months of 2024, as per the Cabinet decision of 5th February 2024.

3. Progress made over the period January – June 2024

- 3.1 The progress made against the objectives developed under each of the four recommendations made by the Peer Review report as detailed in the agreed Action Plan are now reported in the table in Appendix 1 to this report.
- 3.2 Overall it is believed that good progress has been made in respect of the objectives and actions detailed in the Plan. Some organisational capacity to progress actions has been taken up by the Council being advised on 22nd November 2023 that its Levelling Up bid for the Fakenham Leisure and Sports Hub proposal had been approved by Government meaning that the council had to act swiftly in agreeing a project governance structure for the project, engaging with key local partners, responding to the Government’s pre-approval questionnaire and commencing procurement processes in order to meet the Government’s expectations that the project will be delivered by Spring 2026. Further, at the time of writing this report the Prime Minister has called the General Election to be held on 4th July, which again will involve some focus and resources being directed to this important event reducing capacity to progress some of the Peer Review actions / workstreams.
- 3.3 In respect of comments made within the Peer Review Report on the effectiveness of the Council’s scrutiny arrangements, the Council engaged a consultant resource from the Local Government Information Unit (LGiU) to undertake a review of the Council’s scrutiny function who conducted a series of workshop discussions with members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Cabinet, senior officers and officers from the Democratic Services Team and then presented his findings, conclusions and recommendations back to the Council in a report dated 12th April 2024. The Overview and

Scrutiny Committee subsequently held a workshop on 22nd May to discuss the report and make recommendations to Cabinet and management, but how any recommendations are to be taken forward are yet to be agreed due to the calling of the General Election.

4. Corporate Priorities

- 4.1 The actions arising from this report support the Council's Corporate Plan theme of a **A Strong, Responsible & Accountable Council**; where "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".
- 4.2 In anticipation of the Corporate Peer Challenge process in agreeing the Corporate Plan Action Plan for 2023/24 the Council agreed that we would – **"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 Delivering a number of the actions detailed in the Peer Challenge Action Plan has involved committing staff and financial resources as part of the Council's corporate improvement journey. The majority of staff time committed to delivering actions within the Action Plan have been met within existing budgets.
- 5.2 There have then been some direct costs incurred in taking forward some of the recommendations made by the Peer Review team such as the conduct of the Staff Survey, commissioning some external consultancy support to support the development of an Organisational Cultural Plan, and in undertaking some of the service reviews where bringing experience in from beyond the Council with a degree of external challenge and additional capacity has been seen as beneficial in terms of our corporate learning and improvement journey. These costs have been met through in-year underspends of some budgets (eg the Staff Survey and development of the Organisational Cultural Plan being met from the HR budget) and some of the external consultancy support, procured through the East of England Local Government Association Talent Bank resource being funded from the Organisational Development Reserve.

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. However, the premise of the Corporate Peer Challenge process is to strengthen the performance of the authority and therefore it is considered that there would be some risks to the

authority if action isn't taken to develop an appropriate response to the Peer Review team's recommendations 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 note the report and, as appropriate, comment on the progress made in the first six-month period of the Action Plan delivery.