

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

<p>Executive Summary</p>	<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 to December 2024 when the Peer Review Team returned to the District Council to assess the progress made against the recommendations made in their original report.</p>
<p>Options considered</p>	<p>This report details the progress the Council has made in implementing actions detailed within the Peer Challenge Action Plan over the period January – December 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>
<p>Consultation(s)</p>	<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>
<p>Recommendations</p>	<p>The Overview and Scrutiny Committee is invited to note the report of the Peer Review Team’s follow up visit conducted on 12th December 2024 and, as appropriate, comment on the progress made in delivering against the agreed Action Plan throughout 2024.</p>
<p>Reasons for recommendations</p>	<p>To ensure the objectives of the Council are achieved and to support the Council in its future development, learning and continuous improvement.</p>
<p>Background papers</p>	<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 and the Peer Review Team’s follow up visit of 12th December 2024 and associated report.</p>

<p>Wards affected</p>	<p>All</p>
<p>Cabinet member(s)</p>	<p>Cllr Tim Adams, Leader of the Council</p>
<p>Contact Officer</p>	<p>Steve Blatch, Chief Executive</p>

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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 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 – December 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 in September 2023 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 Council developed an Action Plan in response to the Peer Challenge recommendations, a draft of which was presented 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 The Peer Challenge process then involves a follow-up visit to assess progress made – usually 10-12 months after the initial review. Arrangements were made for the follow-up visit to be conducted on 31st July 2024 but this was cancelled shortly before the visit due to one of the Peer Team being taken unwell. As the General Election called for early July then saw a number of scheduled conference events re-organised to the autumn and the new Government making a number of policy announcements in September and October, it was not possible to re-arrange a follow-up visit by the Peer Review Team until 12th December 2024.

3. The Peer Review Team's follow up visit

- 3.1 The Peer Review Team undertook their follow-up visit to the Council on 12th December 2024 – made up of the Lead Chief Executive, two elected member peers and our LGA Relationship Manager. In advance of the visit the Council provided details of the progress made against the Action Plan – attached as Appendix 1 to this report (with some minor amendments) and supporting "evidence" and this was tested and validated on the day through a series of meetings with officers and members – including Cabinet, Opposition Group Leaders, Chairs and Vice Chairs of Overview and Scrutiny and GRAC, CLT, Management Team, and some groups of officers / staff focus group.
- 3.2 The Peer Review Team provided positive verbal feedback at the end of the day's visit and have subsequently provided us with a written report of their assessment of our progress and made some recommendations for further actions in support of the previously agreed actions as detailed in the Action Plan.

4. Progress made over the period January – December 2024

- 4.1 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.
- 4.2 It is believed that good progress has been made in respect of most of the objectives and actions detailed in the Plan, particularly given the demands of servicing the General Election on 4th July, which takes up corporate capacity beyond planned work, and the focus given to progressing the governance arrangements for the Fakenham Leisure and Sports Hub proposal which secured funding through the Levelling Up Fund programme.
- 4.3 The Peer Review Team particularly praised the progress which had been made in improving the Council's Medium-Term Financial Strategy; the high level review of services to realise savings and increased income; greater capacity in finance and governance through realigning responsibilities within the Resources Directorate to create more "space" for the Monitoring Officer and appointment of a new Assistant Director of Finance and Assets; strengthening the Council's scrutiny arrangements; the Staff Survey; external review of the IT service and development of the new performance management system.
- 4.4 Comment was made that there was still scope to develop and improve the report writing template and structure of reports to allow members to gain a better understanding of key issues and decisions; to strengthen the "golden thread" between the Corporate Plan, Annual Action Plan and Service Plans and individual objectives and to complete work on the Workforce Development Plan and stronger recognition and celebration of achievements through considering relaunching some form of Staff Awards scheme or event. The Cabinet and CLT recognise that further work should be progressed on these issues and will seek to allocate some resource to these issues in the coming months as part of our ongoing learning and improvement journey.

5. 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"**.

6. Financial and Resource Implications

- 6.1 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.
- 6.2 Some direct costs have been 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 through the East of England Local Government Association to support the development of an Organisational Cultural Plan and review of our IT and Temporary Accommodation services, where bringing experience in from beyond the Council has provided a degree of external challenge alongside providing additional capacity to undertake these tasks.

7. Legal Implications

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

8. Risks

- 8.1 It is not considered that there are any significant risks to the council raised by this report or the Peer Review Action Plan.

9. Net Zero Target

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

10. Equality, Diversity & Inclusion

- 10.1 Issues of equality, diversity and inclusion have been considered in the development of the Workforce Development Strategy new and revised workforce policies and service delivery improvements as appropriate.

11. Community Safety issues

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

12. Conclusion and Recommendations

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee is invited to note the report of the Peer Review Team's follow up visit conducted on 12th December 2024 and, as appropriate, comment on the progress made in delivering against the agreed Action Plan throughout 2024.