# LGA Corporate Peer Challenge

## Wokingham Borough Council

**9th-10th November and 15-17th November 2021**

## Feedback report

# 1. Context

Wokingham Borough Council is a unitary council formed in 1974 and covers a semi-rural area with three main towns: Wokingham, Woodley and Earley. The Borough is situated in central Berkshire, and benefits from excellent transport links to Reading and London. The population of the Borough is 173,971 in 70,810 households, an increase of over 4,000 households since 2016. The Borough is expecting to continue to grow at a similar pace with the population projected to reach 192,000 by 2043.

The Borough benefits from a strong local economy, with some major high skilled employers choosing to locate themselves in the area. Quality of life is high, and Wokingham's residents can expect to live two years longer than average. Deprivation levels are some of the lowest in the country, but the Council recognises that pockets of deprivation exist, and it is working to better understand these.

The Council operates elections in a cycle of thirds with the next election being May 2022. The Council is Conservative controlled with 31 seats and an Executive led by Cllr John Halsall, who has been leader since 2019. The remaining 23 seats on the council are controlled by Liberal Democrats (18 seats), Independent (3 seats) and two Labour councillors. At the time of writing the Local Government Boundary Commission for England has just announced a review into the electoral arrangements at the council.

The Council operates a revenue budget of approximately £147m and has a sound financial position with a reasonable level of reserves. The Council has been able to weather the financial impacts of the COVID pandemic without it negatively impacting on its financial sustainability. The Council has a strong record of delivering budgets without the need to rely on using reserves to balance the budget. Based on its current position and previous experience of managing within its financial envelope the Council is confident it can continue to deliver a balanced budget going forward.

This is the second Corporate Peer Challenge commissioned by the Council, followed the peer challenge delivered in February 2016 and follow up visit in 2017. It is intended as a basis for future improvement.

# 2. Summary of the peer challenge approach

## 2.1.    Scope and focus

The peer team considered the following five themes which form the core components of all Corporate Peer Challenges. These areas are critical to councils' performance and improvement.

1. **Local priorities and outcomes** - Are the council's priorities clear and informed by the local context? Is the council delivering effectively on its priorities?

2. **Organisational and place leadership** - Does the council provide effective local leadership? Are there good relationships with partner organisations and local communities?

3. **Governance and culture** - Are there clear and robust governance arrangements? Is there a culture of challenge and scrutiny?

4. **Financial planning and management** - Does the council have a grip on its current financial position? Does the council have a strategy and a plan to address its financial challenges?

5. **Capacity for improvement** - Is the organisation able to support delivery of local priorities? Does the council have the capacity to improve?

In addition to these questions, Wokingham Borough Council asked the peer team to consider the following questions

- How do we improve the relationship and the image of the Council with our residents?
- How can we further foster a data and insight driven organisation and improve our horizon scanning capability?
- How can we make our Overview & Scrutiny function more meaningful and effective?
- Is our approach to change sufficiently agile to meet our ambitions?
- How do we move organisationally to a culture of higher support and higher

challenge?

Feedback on these is provided in the main body of the report.

All the findings and recommendations proposed by the peer team are set within the challenge of responding to the COVID-19 pandemic. The peer team recognise that the Council is still investing significant resource in managing the impacts of the pandemic and working with its community to help promote recovery and renewal. It is also important to acknowledge the very significant impact that the pandemic has had on the organisation's capacity and resilience and that the longer-term impacts of this are not yet fully understood.

## 2.2.    The peer challenge process

Peer challenges are improvement focused; it is important to stress that this was not an inspection. The process is not designed to provide an in-depth or technical assessment of plans and proposals. The peer team used their experience and knowledge of local government to reflect on the information presented to them by people they met, things they saw and material that they read.

The peer team prepared by reviewing a range of documents and information to ensure they were familiar with the council and the challenges it is facing. The team then spent time over a period of two weeks, both virtually and onsite at Wokingham Borough Council, during which they:

- Gathered information and views from more than 200 hours of meetings, in addition to further research and reading.
- Spoke to more than 100 people including a range of council staff together with members and external stakeholders.


This report provides a summary of the peer team's findings. In presenting feedback, they have done so as fellow local government officers and members.

This report sits alongside the presentation shared with the council on 17th November 2021.

## 2.3.    The peer team

Peer challenges are delivered by experienced elected member and officer peers. The make-up of the peer team reflected the focus of the peer challenge and peers were selected based on their relevant expertise. The peers were:

- Paul Najsarek – Chief Executive, LB Ealing
- Jon Bell - Director of HR, LB Barnet
- Claire Foale - Assistant Director Policy and Strategy, City of York Council
- Cllr Kevin Bentley – Leader, Essex County Council
- Clare Hudson – Peer Challenge Manager, LGA
- Suraiya Khatun – Programme Support Officer, LGA

# 3. Executive Summary and Key Recommendations

The Council delivers valued, well performing services that provide a high quality of life for residents. The Council achieves good outcomes for its residents, despite receiving no central government grant funding and notwithstanding the recent pressures of COVID is financially stable.

Over the last three years, the Council has made significant improvements in key areas, such as:

- Developing a clear vision for the Borough and recognised Corporate Plan that is delivering the key priorities
- Development of meaningful partnership relationships, including Health, Voluntary and Community Sectors, and Thames Valley Police with an ambition to deepen these
- Renewed focus on data and insight to inform Demand Management and improve decision making
- Commitment to enhance and improve the customer experience
- Significant service improvements within the Adults and Children's Directorates as

recognised by regulators

This is recognised as a journey of continuous improvement for the Council, there are further plans in place that will continue to develop, deliver and shape the future aspirations for the Borough.

During the last 3 years the Council has focussed on achieving much improved services and outcomes for residents.  Additionally, the Council has clear ambition, leadership and direction and this combination of strengths will enable the Council to continue its positive trajectory. The Council should be proud of its achievements in particular throughout the COVID pandemic. The peer team feel the council displayed organisational strength, resilience, and played a pivotal role in ensuring that the local community had the support it needed. This pulled together voluntary and community capacity under the council's leadership. The staff the peer team spoke to feel valued and supported to come up with new ideas and approaches and understood the council's ambition to improve. There has been a strong focus on promoting staff wellbeing led by senior officers.

The Council has focused on delivering a robust response to COVID whilst also delivering significant service improvement in people services in the last three years and delivering complex change and demand management programmes. Additionally, the Council's investment in service improvement in Children's and Adults Services is reflected in recent inspection results. There has been a focus on deepening collective leadership between the Executive and Corporate Leadership Team and this provides a strong foundation for the Council to build on. Officers and members have worked together to enhance the Council's strategic capacity. As it moves towards recovery from the pandemic the Council should restate how members and officers can most effectively work together and articulate its current narrative to change.

Leaders voice a clear political aspiration that residents should be 'at the heart of everything' that the Council does. The Council's corporate narrative and resulting priorities on people and place towards residents, towards staff, and partners needs deeper engagement, further articulation, and communication. A compelling narrative is being developed to support this.

The Council now needs to further continue to deliver great outcomes for all of its

residents in a way that promotes fairness, equality and diversity through the Equalities strategy and action plan, economic and community resilience. To progress this these are the key recommendations from the peer team:

**Key Recommendations**

1. Restate and bring to life a narrative about the Council's ambitions for its residents to deliver the future vision for Wokingham - the place, the people, and the opportunities.
2. Recognise the role the council plays in community and place leadership – and sometimes that means taking criticism and tough decisions.
3. Ensure that there is adequate capacity in core corporate services to drive forward change where needed – HR, Finance, change…
4. Continue to embed Equality, Diversity and Inclusion for members and officers, and through the delivery of services.
5. Ensure there is a commitment to a long-term vision for the Borough co-designed and co-delivered with partners to become the focus for the entire community.

# 4. Feedback on core themes of Corporate Peer Challenge

### 4.1. Local priorities and outcomes

*"We are here to serve the residents"*

The Council is very focused on making it clear they are here to serve the residents. How the council serves the other elements of the Borough that impact on its ability to deliver the best outcomes for residents needs further consideration by senior leaders.   The council has ambitions to ensure it engages more widely, including with key partners such as town and parish councils, building on the collaborative approaches that have been successful with other partners.

This is a healthy borough with a high quality of life but with some pockets of persistent deprivation. The Council is seeking to deepen its understanding of where those pockets of deprivation exist, and why. It is working closely with partners to do this and plans to engage parts of the community who might not naturally approach the Council. This is why continuing to enhance the Council's approach to engagement is critical.

The Council is keen to address the big challenges its community faces. It was one of the first councils to declare a 'Climate Emergency' and has committed to 250,000 trees being planted to help tackle $CO_2$ emissions. The Council has invited in external expertise to help guide them in their response and understands that this is a wide-ranging issue it must tackle with differing policy responses needed for different problems.

The Council wants to improve its understanding of what residents' value and has invested in greater use of residents' surveys to help inform decision making. The Council is now working through how to make best use of this to inform policy development and service improvement. The Council has invested in greater use of data and insight to drive performance and recognises there is more work to do to embed and interpret this across the organisation.

The Council has already introduced co-production as part of the development for new strategies e.g. Domestic Abuse, Voluntary and Community Strategy, Anti Poverty with clear ambition to further strengthen this engagement.

The Council has a strong track record in housing delivery, and in recent years this has included building 300 council owned social houses a year with a clear ambition to build more high-quality affordable housing. The Council is committed to driving and delivering this and recognises that new housing as well as upgrading existing housing is needed. The Council is delivering significant town centre regeneration including new retail, hospitality and leisure offers to improve the public realm and promote the town centre as a destination for leisure and independent business, including the Peach Place and Carnival Hub developments.

The Council has a range of strategies to tackle the key challenges it is facing – anti poverty strategy, climate change strategy, equality and diversity strategy. However, it needs to be able to reconcile the potentially competing priorities between these

strategies and develop an understanding of the impacts of this on lower-priority activities.

Housing growth and affordability remains a huge challenge and difficult to navigate. This will form an important element of the Council's future vision and how it manages resident engagement.

### Recommendations – Local priorities and outcomes

6. Further embedding of the Council vision to act as a golden thread throughout all the strategies & consider future opportunities there are for building citizen pride through place making

7. Identify the impact the adopted strategies have on the council's priorities and delivery plans and what a priority and non priority means. Also invest in identifying how the outcomes of the adopted strategies will be evaluated, analysed and reported against

8. The Council has already introduced co-production as part of the development for new strategies e.g. Domestic Abuse, VCS strategy, Anti Poverty. It is recommended that this partnership approach continues and to further enhance it, use of the new WBC Engagement Platform should be exploited to support early opportunities to seek the voice of the customer and partners in strategic planning

### 4.2. Organisational Leadership

*"We have come together as a team and want to make this a great place to work"*

The Council's senior leadership has demonstrated real commitment to promoting employee wellbeing and has been honest about their own mental health, which has been valued by colleagues. Senior leaders are visible and relatable which helps staff feel supported. Staff recognise the organisation as a "place for growth" and were able to share with the peer team examples of their own continuous professional development, as well as a widely held commitment to continual organisational growth. The organisation is taking significant steps to promote its role in equality,

diversity and inclusion and these are forming future organisational development plans which will embed promoting equality, diversity and inclusion throughout the Council – for both members and officers.   Steps to deliver this are being guided by the Equalities and Diversity strategy which is sponsored by the Corporate Leadership Team as a core priority.

The Council has introduced a new change framework that delivers effective change at an organisational and directorate level, this methodology has replaced the previous approach of traditional, large scale transformation programmes.  The Council made the strategic decision following the last large change programme, which ended in 2019, as this approach had significant ramifications on back-office service delivery which the Council is still working through. The Council has built its strategic change capacity to help shape and deliver change and the Council may want to consider taking this as an opportunity to recommunicate to staff that the previous large-scale change programme is closed down and the Council is now working to promote recovery from the pandemic.  The Council continues to be agile it is approach to change needs and resource is built into the financing of new initiatives.

Members have confidence in financial and performance reporting provided by officers and can speak clearly about the organisation's financial position and future challenges. There is a sense of ownership amongst senior leaders that they will work together to tackle challenges, whether they be corporate or within service areas. Senior leaders have come together to advance strategic policy discussions and build strategic capacity. As this progresses members and officers will need to ensure that there is clarity over the distinct roles of members and officers in tackling these challenges to ensure the roles of political direction and operational management are understood.

A strong sense of team was demonstrated in the Council's response to the pandemic and took many forms. For instance, the Communications team worked across Berkshire councils to provide coherent responses to the COVID response and provided clear advice and support to residents. The Council also appears to have responded well to the move towards agile working and is embedding new ways of working.

The Council recognises the critical role that its staff play in delivering its ambitions. However, it has some distance to travel with some of its key workforce strategies and developments, including embedding its values, having a systematic approach to talent management, and in its overall approach to organisational development (OD).

**Recommendations – Organisational Leadership**

9. Build on the Council's ethos as a "place for growth" by developing a strategic approach to organisational development, including talent management, leadership development, organisational culture and through continuing to promote its role in equality, diversity and inclusion

### 4.3. Governance and culture

***"We need to articulate more clearly what kind of culture we are aspiring to"***

The peer team heard on many occasions that the Council operates a mutually supportive culture where staff feel valued, encouraged to progress and people enjoy working. In recent years the Chief Executive and Leader have demonstrated a stable, united front, setting direction and driving aspiration, innovation and partnership working for the council whilst valuing staff as the Council has navigated COVID alongside delivering significant service improvements[1] and significant regeneration. This stability has been valued by staff and partners.

Staff are proud to work for a Council that has overseen a strongly community led response to COVID and are keen to take forward some of the experiences into business as usual. The single front door approach to supporting residents during the pandemic with Citizens Advice was cited as a model that should be further developed (by staff and partners) and there have been significant steps in advancing integrated health and social care system leadership.

As it builds on those bonds that have been strengthened with residents during the last 20 months the Council is taking forward the agreed strategy and action plan to promote equality, diversity and inclusion and is actively working on engaging with the

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[1] Ofsted said improvement in social care was 'remarkable' - https://files.ofsted.gov.uk/v1/file/50166875

workforce, its Councillors and its residents on this topic.   The new Equalities strategy was launched in March 2021, with a cross Council programme group of Officers and Members that is supporting the delivery of the action plan. The way the Council approaches performance and risk management has been recognised as an area to develop and steps are underway to progress this, with significant investment in corporate capacity to do this. There are signs that this is an organisation that wants to be guided by data and insight, as well as be able to anticipate future needs. How that translates into day-to-day decision-making needs further articulation and the Council is creating a Data and Insight strategy to support this development.

The Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee is often the scene of lively debate and is seen as a political arena rather than creating 'good policy' and positive challenge. Following the peer challenge the Council should ensure that all members engaged in scrutiny understand the Terms of Reference of each Scrutiny Board and recognise what 'good scrutiny' looks like.

The focus on l delivery, balancing this with strategic planning and responding to COVID has absorbed capacity but has bought the organisation together for a common purpose. As the Council moves towards recovery from COVID this feels like the right time to restate the Council's values and commitment to good governance.

What good governance means to the Council needs to be clearly and widely articulated. It must reflect the differing roles of members and officers and establish clarity around those roles and behaviours that underpin them. The Peer Team recognised that in some instances Members were keen to be close to operational delivery.  Whilst the desire to support the shaping and delivery of services is understood, it is important for Members and Officers to work together with clear roles and responsibilities to avoid adding additional complexity.

Overall, the peer team came across some instances where governance structures and lines of accountability and responsibility could be more clearly stated and lived. This will ensure the Council can maintain an appropriate balance between strategic and operational leadership with role responsibilities widely stated and understood. In addition the council may want to explore introducing an independent person to the Audit Committee to strengthen governance.

Debate and communication within the Council can be very dominated by party

politics, and this can sometimes get in the way of what the Council is trying to achieve. The current electoral cycle of elections in thirds can contribute towards a short-term focus and the Council has an opportunity with the boundary review to develop a clear position on what electoral cycle might help to foster a more collaborative culture. Equally, the peer team feel that if the Council had a longer term vision then confrontational political debate on shorter term issues may lessen as the Council's future vision and delivery plan would be clearer and potentially allow less space for unproductive debate.

### Recommendations - Governance and Culture

10. Define the accountability and responsibilities of Executive, Scrutiny and the Corporate Leadership Team and the differences between the roles and what that means for civic leadership. Subsequent to clarify the roles of statutory officers, their lines of accountability and how you hold each other to account to drive improvement.

11. Review whether the responsibilities and reporting lines of the Deputy Chief Executive, Monitoring Officer and Head of Internal Audit represent good governance and promote accountability

12. Consider how to make Overview and Scrutiny more about positive challenge and producing good policy and less dominated by party political debate. Ensure regular opportunities for member development particularly on overview and scrutiny, modelling equality and diversity & behaviours that underpin good governance & visible leadership

13. Recommend a review of the current election cycle.

## 4.4. Financial Planning and Management

*"We are trying to make it a living budget so that if we need extra resources there is a decision-making process around it and we can flex as needed"*

Members speak confidently about the council's current financial position and what options it now faces. There is an expressed clarity on the future commercial investment strategy following a period of commercial investment to deliver and drive

regeneration. There are strong underlying principles to the council's commercial investments centred on strong yields with low-risk borrowing. The Council has implemented a robust, risk-based approach to commercial investments and is embedding a more commercial mindset in the Council that goes beyond commercial investments to promote income generation. The Council is clear it aims to be free of debt by 2033 but with secure, long term income streams that have promoted a new retail and leisure offer in the town centre promoting independent retail offerings.

Within the Council's General Fund, pressures are being effectively managed. There are savings and transformation programmes within major service areas that are owned and managed by Directors. There is no current need for a major corporate savings programme as the current Directorate led programmes are successfully achieving significant improvement and agreed MTFP efficiencies. The Council has previously delivered a corporate savings programme through the 21st Century Council programme and is now appraising whether its level of corporate and support services resourcing is fit for the future.

The Council operates a 'business as usual' budget to allow it to try and understand the impact of COVID. It has recently agreed to release supplementary funds to allow it to progress at pace on key issues such as equality and diversity. This approach allows for budgets to support "invest to save" projects and be agile in nature to emerging pressures and ensure that the budget is 'living' and responds to in-year changes.

The fundamental principles of financial controls and management are understood, and the Council is confident it can deliver a balanced position going forward. There have been concerns expressed by external auditors that the Council needs to address capacity issues in its finance function, and with an impending change in senior officers in the function imminent the Council needs to ensure its finance capacity is adequate going forward.

There is wide engagement in the budget setting process with scrutiny committees discussing the draft budget plans up to 6 months before the budget is adopted. There is a recognition that this scrutiny could be more meaningful and positively challenging.

The Council maintains reserves levels above the minimum recommended level of

£6.6m and at the time of writing are forecasting General Fund Reserves levels to be higher than initially thought earlier in the financial year 2021-22 at £10.2m.

The Council is well versed in describing its risks and operates a detailed corporate risk register. Whilst risk reporting is extensive, it is important for the Council to restate what risk management and mitigation means for the organisation; who is accountable for delivering it; and what the consequences of non-delivery are.

### Recommendations - Financial Planning and Management

14. Restate what risk management and mitigation means for the organisation; who is accountable for delivering it and what the consequences on non-delivery are.
15. Develop financial scenario planning to test and flex wide scale savings plans. To enable the Council to 'future proof' its future financial sustainability in the advent of significant potential financial pressures.

### 4.5. Capacity for Improvement

*"There is a strong ethos that this is an organisation that encourages colleagues to grow"*

The Council has restructured its services to enhance its capacity and resilience, which proved vital in the response to COVID. The Council recognises that working in partnership with the voluntary and community sectors is vital to its focus on putting 'residents at the heart of everything'. This was strengthened during the pandemic and both residents and partners praised the approach of the single front door with Citizens Advice who clearly understand their audience and the community's diverse needs.

There has been a focus in recent transformation approaches in streamlining the customer journey and there is potential to further improve this and make communications more focused on supporting this. The Council undertakes regular public consultations and residents, and partners would like to see more feedback throughout the consultation process and a greater focus on more regular

engagement.

Residents utilise existing council-led communication methods that are viewed as trusted and reliable. There are examples of utilising a range of communications channels for sharing information and insight through partner networks to ensure the best reach locally. The Council has sought other means of communication to complement the local media channels and to broaden reach. The Council has plans to explore how to enhance its engagement with residents through communication mechanisms that are not online, and digitally hard to reach and this should aim to be as fully representative of the community as possible.

The Council utilises social media channels in a predominantly broadcast manner and there is some negativity on social media about the Council and its approaches. Members worry about the impact of this, and the peer team would urge the Council to genuinely consider how much relevance to give to this.

The Council recognises it has more to do to build on engagement with, and understand its residents' needs, and in addition to investing in a new Engagement Platform it has also developed greater use of a residents' survey platform to help inform decision making which complements the traditional engagement methods for those who don't have digital access. Whilst the impacts of this are emerging, this is a positive statement of intent and investment in resources.  The peer team will be particularly interested to hear about the impact of this across different audiences in the revisit in 6 months' time.

The Council retains a significant housing stock and has well established mechanisms for tenant engagement. These are well received, and, with sufficient time, tenants feel they can make a genuine contribution to both policy and design.

The Council operates a well-developed change management/Programme Management Office which is adding value and strategic capacity. These can provide the capacity to support the emerging change narrative and delivery of key strategies.

The Council has shown a strong commitment to growing future talent through the National Graduate Development and Kickstart Programmes. There is scope to further link this to a wider approach to talent management and career progression, and to support the Council's advancing agenda to promote equalities, diversity and inclusion. These approaches to career progression and talent management are

foundations for the development of an Organisational Development strategy and the Council should continue to advance these at pace.

The Council has a number of senior positions filled on an interim basis – this is not unusual and in the coming months as the Council continues to strike a balance between responding to the pandemic and driving recovery from it there will be a need to ensure that this does not negatively impact on strategic capacity. Whilst strategic capacity is being enhanced there remains concerns over the corporate and support capacity of the organisation, with a heavy reliance on self service approaches in key services such as HR.

The Council has stated that it wants to be an employer of choice.  However, it needs a clear understanding of what this means in terms of its Employee Value Proposition (EVP), including its organisation culture, pay structure, employment policies and overall employer brand.

### Recommendations – Capacity for Improvement

16. Ensure that the Finance, HR & Change functions have appropriate resource and capacity to deliver what the council needs.
17. Articulate and accelerate an ambitious Organisational Development strategy including a clear employer brand.
18. Undertake a communications review to support building a communications and engagement strategy to use social media to show success and pride in a proactive way and to build and share the future vision identified in the Key Recommendations.

## 5. Summary and next steps

It Wokingham Borough Council is very focused on delivering for its residents. It has taken some bold decisions to deliver regeneration and financial stability through delivering efficiencies and commercial income. The Council has provided a valued response during the COVID pandemic and is well placed to continue to support its community to recover and renew.

The Council clearly wants to deliver the best for its residents, and it now needs to

invest in more meaningful engagement with its stakeholders and partners to help define a longer-term vision for the Borough. A commitment to a long-term vision for the Borough co-designed and co-delivered with partners can become the focus for the entire community. This can guide the Council's resources, capacity and leadership and provide a space for positive challenge, innovation, and civic pride. To equip itself to successfully deliver this the Council should address the recommendations raised by the peer team on governance and continues to focus on delivering the best outcomes for its residents.

Both the peer team and LGA are keen to build on the relationships formed through the peer challenge. The CPC process includes a six-month check-in meeting. This will be a short, facilitated session which creates space for the council's senior leadership to update peers on its progress against the action plan and discuss next steps. This is due to take place at the end of May 2022.

In the meantime, Mona Sehgal, is the main contact between your authority and the Local Government Association. Mona Sehgal is available to discuss any further support the council requires. mona.sehgal@local.gov.uk, 07795 291006.

**Clare Hudson, Peer Challenge Manager, on behalf of the peer team**

# 6. Annex I – Full list of Recommendations

### 6.1. Key Recommendations

1. Restate and bring to life the narrative about the Council's ambitions for its residents and the future vision for Wokingham - the place, the people, and the opportunities.
2. Recognise the role of council leadership in community and place leadership – and sometimes that means taking criticism and tough decisions.
3. Ensure that there is adequate capacity in core corporate services to drive forward change where needed – HR, Finance, change
4. Continue to embed Equality, Diversity and Inclusion for members and officers, and through the delivery of services.
5. Ensure there is a commitment to a long-term vision for the Borough co-designed and co-delivered with partners to become the focus for the entire community.

### 6.2. Recommendations – Local priorities and outcomes

6. Further embedding of the Council vision to act as a golden thread throughout all the strategies & consider future opportunities there are for building citizen pride through place making
7. Identify the impact the adopted strategies have on the council's priorities and delivery plans and what a priority and non priority means.  Also invest in identifying how the outcomes of the adopted strategies will be evaluated, analysed and reported against
8. The Council has already introduced co-production as part of the development for new strategies e.g. Domestic Abuse, VCS strategy, Anti Poverty.   It is recommended that this partnership approach continues and to further enhance it, use of the new WBC Engagement Platform should be exploited to support early opportunities to seek the voice of the

customer and partners in strategic planning

### 6.3. Recommendations – Organisational Leadership

9. Build on the Council's ethos as a "place for growth" by developing a strategic approach to organisational development, including talent management, leadership development, organisational culture and through continuing to promote its role in equality, diversity and inclusion

### 6.4. Recommendations - Governance and Culture

10. Define the accountability and responsibilities of Executive, Scrutiny and the Corporate Leadership Team and the differences between the roles and what that means for civic leadership. Subsequent to clarify the roles of statutory officers, their lines of accountability and how you hold each other to account to drive improvement.

11. Review whether the responsibilities and reporting lines of the Deputy Chief Executive, Monitoring Officer and Head of Internal Audit represent good governance and promote accountability

12. Consider how to make Overview and Scrutiny more about positive challenge and producing good policy and less dominated by party political debate. Ensure regular opportunities for member development particularly on overview and scrutiny, modelling equality and diversity & behaviours that underpin good governance & visible leadership

13. Recommend a review of the current election cycle.

### 6.5. Recommendations - Financial Planning and Management

14. Restate what risk management and mitigation means for the organisation; who is accountable for delivering it and what the consequences on non-delivery are.

15. Develop financial scenario planning to test and flex wide scale savings plans. To enable the Council to 'future proof' its future financial

sustainability in the advent of significant potential financial pressures.

### 6.6. Recommendations – Capacity for Improvement

16. Ensure that the Finance, HR & Change functions have appropriate resource and capacity to deliver what the council needs.
17. Articulate and accelerate an ambitious Organisational Development strategy including a clear employer brand.
18. Undertake a communications review to support building a communications and engagement strategy to use social media to show success and pride in a proactive way and to build and share the future vision identified in the Key Recommendations.

# 7. Annex II – communications best practice

Set out below are a range of best practice to set standards for communications which the peer team suggest the Council explores, alongside commissioning an LGA Communications Review:

**Government Communications Service** GCS | The professional body for government communicators (civilservice.gov.uk) – membership includes local government communicators who are encouraged to draw on standards set by GCS

Professional standards for government communicators - GCS (civilservice.gov.uk)

Modern Communications Operating Model (or how to run a CEM team): Strategic Communication: MCOM Function Guide - GCS (civilservice.gov.uk)

Communications campaign planning uses OASIS: Guide to campaign planning: OASIS - GCS (civilservice.gov.uk)

Competency framework describes what a government communications professional should be able to do: Competency Framework - technical specifications - GCS (civilservice.gov.uk)

Strategic communication - GCS (civilservice.gov.uk) is focused around four principles – insight, ideas, implementation, impact

Impact, or knowing the difference you've made and learning from it is measured in a specific way in government to ensure what you do (outputs, send press releases) leads to outcomes (for example engagement in priorities, attending events, putting bins out on time, etc.etc.) Evaluation Framework 2.0 - GCS (civilservice.gov.uk)

Communications strategy template Strategic communication - GCS (civilservice.gov.uk) (requires an understanding of who your audiences are, and what you need from them – awareness, advocacy, action?)

**Local Government Association**

**Future Comms** interprets GCS standards and guidance and applies it to local government context: #FutureComms - building local public services for the future

through modern communications | Local Government Association

Strategic communications Strategic communications in local government – the challenges and opportunities | Local Government Association (defines the purpose of communications in a council)

What good looks like  What good looks like – the conditions and skills needed for success | Local Government Association

Place marketing Place marketing: Telling the story of your place in a way that works for everyone | Local Government Association

**Engagement** standards are set in New Conversations: New Conversations Guide refresh_11.pdf (local.gov.uk) – toolkit that defines inform, engage, converse to help focus attention on engaging instead of often, currently, just informing/broadcasting