


LGA Corporate Peer Challenge

East Suffolk Council

22 – 25 February 2022

Feedback Report





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1. Executive summary

East Suffolk Council (ESC) is a relatively new council having formerly replaced two sovereign councils – Suffolk Coastal District Council and Waveney District Council in 2019.

Formal merger development commenced in 2016 with Secretary of State approval in 2017 with ESC sovereign and operational from 2019. ESC is now one of the largest district councils in the country. Peers were impressed with the Council's journey and transition to a new council. The organisation should be proud and celebrate what has been achieved.

During October 2021 a team of peers undertook a review of the Council's 'Community Partnership' model. The learning and outcomes of this work has been incorporated into this Corporate Peer Challenge.

The same peer team with the addition of one Officer peer returned to ESC during 22 – 25 February 2022 to undertake a Corporate Peer Challenge comprising of two-days of virtual meetings followed by two further days of meetings on-site, across two sites in the north (Lowestoft) and south (Melton) of the Council's geography.

The peer team were made to feel very welcome by the Council with positive engagement at all levels internally and externally with partners and community representatives. From the outset with clear leadership from the East Suffolk Leader and Chief Executive the peer challenge process was embraced by the Members and staff as a vehicle to deliver improvement and learning. All participants engaged with openness and honesty and a genuine will to offer constructive insight to further improve the Council.

ESC has been on a journey and has achieved more than the obvious transition from merging two councils. Peers were impressed by how in a relatively short period of time ESC has created a new identity that reinforces a 'one council' ethos which is at the heart of its organisational culture. Amongst the elected Members, staff, partners and the business community there is a strong consistent view that the Council is operating as one organisation.

Partners describe the Council as regularly "punching above their weight in the

County”, recognising the ambition and scale the Council now operates at.

The ‘Community Partnership’ (CP) model implemented by the Council supports all Members in engaging with their local communities. Many partners can see the opportunity the CPs are creating for innovation and offering focused problem-solving fora to some of the systemic and complex issues faced by communities and the people who live within them.

ESC adopted a creative approach to producing their first Strategic Plan, harnessing the skills and expertise of a large local employer to facilitate a collaborative ‘hot-house’ between Members (inclusive of the opposition) and Officers over a period of three days. Peers see the approach as innovative and notable. The Strategic Plan, approved in February 2020 provides a navigational compass for Members and staff ensuring all decisions, investment and work programmes clearly track back to one or more of the six Strategic Plan themes. Peers were impressed with how the Strategic Plan had galvanised Members and staff. It is evident they are emotionally connected to the journey and are proud to be working for the communities they serve.

ESC is now at an important stage of its journey and should maximise the positivity and upward trajectory it is experiencing as the organisation pushes on with its very ambitious forward plan. To ensure continued alignment around the common purpose ESC should facilitate a subsequent ‘hot-house’ to refresh the Strategic Plan and focus on prioritisation, capacity, capability, governance and oversight. This type of approach should become part of the Council DNA in how it plans and works with others.

Peers were struck by the high level of ambition and pipeline of significant projects, some of national significance (e.g. £334m planned capital programme, Freeport East, Sizewell C, the Energy Coast, LATCo to replace East Suffolk Norse, Digital Smart / Towns, Lowestoft Town Investment Plan, Housing Service Transformation) and day to day work programmes. The Council will need to ensure prioritisation of future work is considered alongside available capacity and resources whilst being mindful of potential conflicts growth has with the natural environment and related business sectors.

The organisational culture is impressive, driving a desire and passion to trail blaze or be an early adopter. Members and staff are empowered to deliver and no one or no

team wants to let the side down. This passion for delivery can also be construed as an over done strength, resulting in high workloads, competing capacity and an unsustainable work plan. Staff are tired from the pandemic response and need support to reprioritise and to create the capacity to support the Strategic Plan.

Performance indicators within the Council's internal governance systems have identified issues and it is clear that ESC needs to increase its control of oversight and ensure process and practices continually evolve and adapt to ensure there is robust management of complexity and risk. Peers reflected that many councils of similar size and scale to ESC have these systems in place.

In advance of the Corporate Peer Challenge process peers were made aware of a live operational performance issue relating to historic and inherited compliance issues pre-dating ESC within the Housing Service, including Health and Safety of dwellings and the process for rent setting and rent conversions. Despite ESC now robustly responding to the issues, the actual occurrence is an indicative example pointing towards a need for reviewing prioritisation, capacity, capability, governance and oversight. Peers are confident ESC will use this event as a platform to ensure appropriate organisational learning will take place to ensure operational and system failure is reduced and mitigated.

The Council should reflect and question if it has the right level of leadership capacity at senior levels for both Members and Officers.

There is a significant need to address senior corporate capacity as quickly as possible. Recruiting an additional member for the strategic management team with a corporate focus would provide increased capacity to provide tighter oversight of performance, whilst ensuring there is an adaptive and evolving approach to supporting the Strategic Plan. Recruiting a corporate focused director would also reduce the number of direct reports to the Chief Executive, providing more capacity for an increasing external agenda such as the recent announcement of the Suffolk County Deal, Health and Care integration and the establishment of Integrated Care Systems.

Remaining financially sustainable is one of the key themes within the Council's Strategic Plan and focuses on five sub priorities. The objective is focused on ensuring the Council's finances are well-run, provide value for money and striving for

excellence. There is a budget gap within the MTFS from 2023/24 standing at £5m - £5.9m. The Council is confident that it will close the £5m - £5.9m gap and has various options in this regard including investment plans to drive savings and income from leisure partnership investment and the transfer of East Suffolk Norse undertakings into a local authority trading company. Whilst there is a plan around how the gap will be closed, the Council has adopted a cautious approach to this but recognises the need to articulate its plan.

Peers support the actions flagged within the CIPFA self-assessment and agree with the need to do more long-term scenario planning to support mitigation of adverse impacts that may follow the reforms to the Local Government finance system.

This Corporate Peer Challenge comes at a time when ESC is at its next phase of organisational development, where it can be reflective on the journey and achievements so far, whilst taking stock and making an assessment of future need to ensure the Council is 'fit for purpose' and ready for the next stage of the Council's ambitious journey.

2. Key recommendations

There are a number of observations and suggestions within the main section of the report. The following are the peer team's key recommendations to the Council:

2.1. Recommendations

1. Take time out to reflect and celebrate all you've achieved.
2. Address your senior corporate capacity gap as quickly as you can.
3. Use your hot-house process to refresh your approach to focus on prioritisation, capacity, capability governance and oversight.
4. Bring forward a recruitment and retention plan to address key workforce shortfalls including pay and reward.
5. Don't just respond to the housing issues, draw out the learning around your systems and capacity. Consider an LGA Housing Management Peer review to support your improvement.

6. Move quickly and with greater certainty to your new model of 'post' pandemic working.

3. Summary of the peer challenge approach

3.1. 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 on the basis of their relevant expertise. The peers were:

- Steven Pleasant (Lead Officer Peer), Chief Executive, Tameside Council & Accountable Officer at Tameside and Glossop CCG
- Councillor Isobel Darby, Buckinghamshire Council
- Rachel Joyce, Director of Corporate Affairs, Harrogate Borough Council
- Rob Gregory, Operations Director, Housing & Communities, Stevenage Borough Council
- Andy Barton, Strategic Director, North West Leicestershire District Council
- James Mehmed, LGA Peer Challenge Manager
- Rachel Stevens, LGA Project Support Officer

The peer team considered the following five themes which form the core components of all Corporate Peer Challenges. These areas are critical to Council's 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?

3.2. 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 in order to ensure they were familiar with the Council and the challenges it is facing. The team utilised two virtual days meeting a range of participants followed by two days onsite at East Suffolk Council, during which they:

- Gathered information and views from more than 39 meetings, in addition to further research and reading.
- Spoke to more than 90 people including a range of Council staff together with Members and external stakeholders.
- A previous phase of peer support (October 2021) utilising the same peers focused on the Council's 'Community Partnerships' model involving meeting 60 people through 22 meetings providing further insight into the Council.

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.

4. Feedback

4.1. Local priorities and outcomes

ESC benefits from strong leadership from both the Leader and Chief Executive. This was further demonstrated through the approach to creating the Council's first Strategic Plan. Optimising their relationship with BT, the Council was able to bring around 60 Members and staff together to use an innovative 'hot-house' facilitated event to coproduce a Strategic Plan in 3-days, maximising local knowledge, community needs, information and data. The peer team recognise this as notable and innovative practice. The Strategic Plan is the Council's 'compass', guiding all its decision making against six themes. The plan has previously been refreshed to reflect the impact of the covid pandemic. At the end of the current Administration, the Strategic Plan should be reviewed to build on the learning from the previous 'hot-house' approach to refresh the Strategic Plan and fully consider in the context of prioritisation, capacity, capability, governance and oversight.

The Strategic Plan is governed by a Strategic Plan delivery board and strategic theme delivery board. Through the many meetings and conversations it was evident that the Strategic Plan is understood throughout the organisation and there is clear sign-up internally and from across the external system.

The Council is clear about the challenges and differences throughout the district such as the levels of deprivation and the makeup of its communities and the associated current and future challenges.

As part of the process to create the new council, public consultation was undertaken. One of the main concerns expressed about a new, bigger council by residents and Town and Parish Councils was the potential for disconnection with communities given its large geographical area that is served by 55 district councillors. In response, the Council launched (December 2019) eight Community Partnerships (CPs). CPs are a mechanism for maintaining and enhancing existing local connections, bringing partners and community representatives together to problem solve local priority issues identified through a combination of data analysis and local insight. The Leader of the Council attended each CP's initial workshop which was supported by a bespoke data pack produced by the Suffolk Office of Data Analytics.

The Council has recently engaged the community through an online [resident's survey](#) and has been explicit regarding the financial challenges faced and seeks input on how a £5m budget gap can be closed.

Despite a track record of achievement across a range of exemplar projects (e.g. Lowestoft Towns Fund, Town Revitalisation Programme, Felixstowe Beach Front & North Felixstowe Garden Neighbourhood) and themes the organisation is showing signs of fatigue. Staff are fully committed to the Strategic Plan and the work programme. Discretionary energy is in abundance although not sustainable given the demands of current and future work programmes e.g. the ambitious capital programme, the energy coast, creating a LATCo and economic recovery & growth.

There is an urgent requirement to address the future capacity and capability needs against the work programme alongside reprioritisation.

The systems are in place to track performance with the framework built around the Strategic Plan, providing KPIs that inform the Council if outcomes are being met although this needs closer monitoring. The pandemic has adversely impacted a number of performance indicators and those that require further intervention detail summary commentary and mitigation.

The Council's headline performance can be found on LG Inform using this link - [LGA Research Report - Headline Report for East Suffolk | LG Inform \(local.gov.uk\)](#)

The Council is committed to the improvement of equality and diversity. Corporate leadership is provided by a strategic director to ensure oversight and steering related work groups. Improving equality and diversity within service areas is through a specific group made up from service representatives. The Council's People Strategy ensures the workforce considers the policies required as well as the related workforce skills.

A recent self-assessment using the LGA's Equality [Framework](#) for Local Government has been undertaken and identified a number of actions for improvement. For example, focused training and development is being provided to members to help them more effectively understand the makeup and diversity of need in the communities the Council is providing services to. The Council recognises they are on a journey and need to make more progress. A positive example of engaging with the East Suffolk Youth Group has highlighted specific needs young people are

concerned with following recovery from the pandemic. There is recognition that greater engagement and understanding community dynamics leads to more accessible services.

4.2. Organisational and place leadership

The organisation benefits from a strong and visible partnership between the Leader and Chief Executive. There is a clear link between leadership ambition and the culture of the organisation. The ambition of the political leadership can be seen at all levels of the organisation and is captured in the Strategic Plan. The Leader has visited all wards and spent time with Members to improve the understanding of local issues. The pandemic stopped further planned visits and tours of the district, although these are planned to resume to ensure Members are more closely connected with the communities impacted by the programmes and initiatives within the district.

Senior managers demonstrate a high degree of passion for their work areas and are dedicated to ensuring the Strategic Plan outcomes are delivered to communities. Peers could see and feel the organisation's values in the way staff behaved and spoke about their work, teams and culture. There is a strong sense of 'one council' which galvanises the organisation and energises the workforce to do whatever it takes to deliver on the plans. There is a risk that the levels of energy required to serve the level of ambition over time are not sustainable. The Council should reflect and question if it has the right level of leadership capacity at senior levels for both Members and Officers. The Council has a strong commitment to member development and staff learning and development. Future capacity building should be aligned to the refreshed Strategic Plan and part of an overall organisational development plan.

The Council has a range of innovative and inclusive partnerships (e.g. Coastal Partnership East, Anglia Revenues Partnership) and uses its agency to convene partners to deliver services and to develop strategies and projects, for example there are three established placed based examples each in various stages of delivery that focus on improving local priorities in Leiston, Lowestoft (Lowestoft Investment Plan £24.9m) and Southwold.

The Council is well regarded within the system by statutory and local authority

partners. The Council was described as “punching above its weight in the County”. The Leader and Chief Executive were seen as positive contributors within the Suffolk Public Sector Leaders forum - [Suffolk Public Sector Leaders group | Suffolk County Council](#)

The requirement to work effectively across the system is further enhanced by the County being selected as one of the early adopters for a County Deal. The Council should reflect on the role it plays within the system. There were many examples where the Council takes a leadership role, consuming further capacity. Within the context of driving local change and transformation, it would be prudent to take a step back and review where the Council thinks it can achieve the most value and influence whilst continuing to build positive relationships and social capital across the Suffolk system.

The relationships across Suffolk are seen as generally positive, there have been some examples where partners refer to the overly assertive stance taken by the Council has resulted in disagreements on issues of significance and advised to reflect on the feedback and consider in the round as further system working is progressed. The pursuit of opportunities for economic growth across East Suffolk was applauded by partners, however it will be important for the Council to consider future opportunities against other priorities and reflect on the role it should play in further immediate initiatives.

The community partnership model has been acknowledged as positive by partners. It made a great start however has been slightly blown off course due to the impact of covid and the requirement to use the partnerships in the context of directly supporting communities through the emergency phase of the pandemic. The Council has positively used the October 2021 focused peer support to evaluate progress and facilitated a cross partnership event shortly after in November 2021 to respond to the feedback and develop an action plan to ensure the community partnerships are congruent with the original vision, objectives and Strategic Plan.

The Council has made some positive progress with their climate and environmental objectives. The cross-party working group is led by a passionate cabinet member, ensuring that the group is outward looking and encourages external input from

specialists. This approach is inclusive and dynamic and should be considered in other policy areas. Focus is on carbon neutrality and the debate on climate is constantly live with the environment at the heart of all Council business. Cabinet receives quarterly reports on progress. Progress already includes energy reduction within leisure centres, solar PV installation and decarbonisation of the fleet delivering a significant reduction in carbon emissions. There is also a strong communications plan around this. More resources were requested to deliver this important agenda and will be helped by the pending appointment of an Environmental Climate Change Lead Officer.

4.3. Governance and culture

The Council has strong leadership for driving improvement and organisational learning. The peer challenge process and previous peer support was assertively positioned as an improvement process, with an open and transparent approach to sharing information and experience. Both the Leader and Chief Executive create the climate for the organisation to be open and Members and Officers were actively encouraged to speak honestly about their reflections, experiences and future challenges.

All 55 Members are encouraged and supported to function as 'place leaders' through their membership of their local community partnership and to play a pivotal role in engaging their communities to understand and problem solve the complex locality issues.

Relationships between Officers and Members were described as positive and supportive and further evidence of operating as 'one team', fully behind the achievement and delivery of the Strategic Plan. There is a strong sense of shared common purpose.

The Council should be cautious of its overreliance on specific individuals which could be perceived as a single point of failure, adding risk to work programmes. Peers referred to the concept of 'passion tax' where high performing, committed staff openly take on more work given their passion and general desire to serve communities, being 'taxed' for their passion through the allocation of further work or accountability. This is not a sustainable position and needs to be resolved as part of reflecting on the Council's next phase of organisational development.

The Council's 'People Strategy' covers the period of 2021 – 2024 and details five core values which were developed by staff across the organisation. Throughout the many meetings with staff, peers were able to observe the values being practiced through day-to-day work. Staff described the working culture as empowering, supportive and with a "family feel". Everyone wants to give more with high volumes of discretionary energy being exercised. There is a strong 'one team' ethos that runs through the organisation across both Members and staff and there is a clear sense of pride in all they do. Everyone wants to deliver the best outcomes for their communities. The commitment is an impressive component to organisational culture and a sound foundation for building upon.

In contrast to the very positive work culture the high desire for achievement and delivery may be an inhibiting factor with regards to constructive challenge and openness to resolving issues. Peers heard multiple references to "not wanting to let the team down".

There should, however, be a healthy level of 'grit' within the organisation to ensure there is sufficient challenge and constructive feedback to positively impact on performance and improvement. The Council should consider raising the profile and importance of healthy constructive challenge if upon reflection this seen as a limiting factor.

There was strong evidence of cross-party working arrangements in place, from developing the Strategic Plan, project work, community partnerships to distinct work focused on the Strategic Plan for example climate and environment.

Cabinet portfolio arrangements are seen as effective as well as evidence scrutiny is informing decision-making. Peers support your review of scrutiny which will enable the Council to take stock and consider how the process can be even more effective and add value in the context of your current and future ambition.

Partners reflected back strongly that they observe the Council as credible and performing as a joined up new organisation.

The Council also benefits from good relationships with the district's three Members of Parliament.

There are multiple meetings set up to monitor governance and performance

(Corporate Management, Strategic Plan Delivery Team Meetings x 6, Corporate Governance Group, Designated Officer Group). It would be prudent, in the context of refreshing the Strategic Plan (prioritisation, capacity, capability, governance and oversight) to ensure they are they adding value and not muddying the water as conversations are fragmented and potentially not working as effectively as they could.

Internal controls failed relating to the Housing Service which should raise awareness of the need to manage wider governance and assurance issues. Peers were reassured by the development of a new compliance dashboard which will provide real-time recording as well as an HRA Asset Management and Compliance Strategy.

Peers understand the Council will be commissioning a comprehensive, external, independent Governance review, which will be carried out to understand how the issues experienced were not identified sooner. The output of the review will support further joined up conversations around governance and oversight. The recently appointed Head of Housing should be further supported by the leadership team to drive the emerging improvement plan.

In the context of ensuring the Council mitigates any future service failures, looking at how the impact of the audit function can be increased would be prudent. This comes at a time the Council is seeking to increase its ambition around commercialisation, requiring greater due diligence and robust monitoring and oversight. The suggested capacity additions should help in addressing this.

Developing a culture to promote the benefits and impacts of audit will improve the early engagement, opposed to being contacted at the point risk is experienced. Staff should be supported to feel more comfortable about discussing issues with audit. There is a view that involving audit may slow down delivery and compromise timelines. The function could benefit from a reset and capitalise on the Housing Management Service issues as a platform to promote the value of audit, oversight and governance.

4.4. Financial planning and management

Remaining financially sustainable is one of the key themes within the Council's Strategic Plan and focuses on five sub priorities. The objective is focused on ensuring the Council's finances are well-run, provide value for money and striving for excellence. The financial objectives are overseen by the Financial Sustainability Theme Group that reports annually to the Strategic Plan Delivery Board.

The Council has a well-developed financial planning process and uses the above governance arrangements to ensure there is full awareness of financial management including detail on the total budgets, capital programme, treasury, HRA and plans for dealing with budget gaps in the context of setting the MTFS. The Council have an established business case model that is built into governance around investments to ensure financial sustainability is maintained and transparency around anticipated financial outcomes.

The Council updated their MTFS during January 2022 and set a balanced position for the current year and 2022/23. Historically the Council has experienced a strong budget position and good financial management as reflected in the external auditor judgements; last year's is still pending.

The General Fund balance stands at £6m and there are no plans to draw on these reserves over the MTFS period.

There is a budget gap within the MTFS from 2023/24 standing at £5m - £5.9m. There is a shared understanding of the financial situation between Members and staff, whilst at the same time being outwardly open and transparent with the challenge and has requested the views of the community through an online [resident's survey](#). The survey asks residents where they would tolerate reduced spending and requests their ideas for how the budget gap can be closed.

The Council is confident regarding closing the budget gap and has a range of options balanced by income opportunities and efficiency savings, for example through taking back waste management through setting up a trading company (East Suffolk Norse) and from the leisure partnerships.

Despite the confidence and various options to close the £5m - £5.9m gap, peers agree it is important to develop your plan around the gap closure and ensure your plans are developed and agreed soon.

The Council's awareness of capital programme slippage could also benefit from being further understood. During the peer process and related meetings some very sound reasons for the slippage were discussed, including the impact of covid and supply chain fragility, these also need a narrative being developed to articulate the reasons and future mitigation.

The Council is consciously self-aware of the favourable position it enjoys regarding the current business rates retention system with significant income being achieved through Sizewell B Nuclear Power Station and Felixstowe Container Port. Deferred reforms to the business rates retention system have favoured the Council but it is now increasingly likely reform will adversely impact this position. Peers support the actions flagged within the CIPFA self-assessment and agree with the need to do more long-term scenario planning to support mitigation of adverse impacts that may follow the reforms to the Local Government finance system.

Alongside the Council's significant ambitions comes significant increased financial risks to be assessed within the round. The Council should strongly reflect on levels of direct project leadership capacity, assessing if the current system of corporate governance is robust enough and assessment of risk beyond capital schemes such as the formation of LATCo.

Following the issues raised by the review of the Housing Management Service, it would be advisable to commission an external validation of the HRA.

4.5. Capacity for improvement

Peers were on-site at the time the last remaining covid restrictions were removed by Government. In both face-to-face staff sessions (north and south of the district) there was an overwhelming buzz of energy as colleagues reconnected in person and enjoyed their time together. The enthusiasm and levels of engagement was high. Throughout the process, there was a strong theme of fatigue and tiredness amongst staff, particularly caused by responding to the pandemic. Staff were complimentary about the provision of IT and equipment, citing a smooth transition to remote working whilst experiencing lockdowns and stay at home mandates.

Whilst discussing the future, there was an emerging need to clarify what the next six-months of working arrangements will entail. There were some quite opposing views

expressed from staff which underlined the need for a bespoke team-by-team approach to understanding future work practices. Some staff enjoy the remote working arrangements, whilst others are seeing their team cohesion diminish and some feel working from home is impacting their learning and development and career development prospects, which could further impact staff retention. Staff are asking for clarity and guidance for staff in relation to the future of office working was in the process of being issued at the time of the review and will help to process new ways of working and start associated transition.

The empowering organisational culture drives innovation and a can-do attitude amongst staff. Opportunities for learning and development were viewed as positive by staff identifying how it has supported career progression. The member development offer is comprehensive having adopted the member development charter and charter plus status. A cross party member development steering group ensures the focus is strategic and a strong commitment to continuous learning.

The relationship with the trade union is a positive partnership and early engagement with organisational change should be maintained as the Council evolves and considers its next phase of development. The trade union was complimentary about the ambition and progress being made on equality and diversity and complimented the leadership of this important agenda.

The Council has a 'People Strategy' that is linked to the achievement of the Strategic Plan and underpinned by development of people, leadership and culture. There are longstanding recruitment issues that need resolving. The People Strategy should help mitigate supply issues by investing in training and development to 'grow your own', however these are more longer-term strategies. A holistic review of recruitment and retention is needed including pay and reward. Further dialogue with system partners such as health who suffer similar recruitment challenges could be pursued to better market the 'place offer' for East Suffolk as a great place to live and work.

The ambition of the Council is outstripping your capacity, which if not resolved is likely to bring risk and impede the next stage of your journey. It was evident from your risk register, from yourselves and from your managers, staff and partners that capacity is an urgent issue. Capacity at strategic corporate management level is

urgently required to improve the support to your heads of service and wider workforce. This is not specifically about providing an additional level of oversight, however more focused on supporting strategic decision-making so Heads of Service feel supported. A corporate focused director will be able to provide oversight across the different functional areas and provide line of sight across the range of work programmes.

Increasing strategic corporate management capacity should support achieving more grip around some of your corporate processes and provide further accountability to ensure these are aligned to the achievement of your Strategic Plan.


A corporate focused director could be made accountable for providing leadership to the next stage of the organisations development and ensure there is adequate alignment between for example the Council's processes, resources, culture, systems and the ongoing requirements of the Strategic Plan. The role would be pivotal in ensuring existing plans such as the People Strategy (including recruitment and retention, pay and reward) and existing frameworks, for example performance management and programme management continue to evolve and adapt alongside the Council's ambitions and Strategic Plan.

Peers viewed the digital strategy as well developed and a foundation stone to future ways of working and driving further efficiency and demand reduction through channel shift and greater self-service. There was good evidence that data and insight is being used to inform decision-making for example in the way themes and trends are identified in Community Partnerships and when creating the Strategic Plan and related themes.

5. Next steps

It is recognised that senior political and managerial leadership will want to consider, discuss and reflect on these findings.

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 progress review session, which provides space for the Council's senior leadership to update peers on its progress against the action plan and discuss next steps.



In the meantime, Rachel Litherland, Principal Adviser for the East of England Region, is the main contact between your authority and the Local Government Association. Rachel is available to discuss any further support the Council requires. rachel.litherland@local.gov.uk, 07795 076834.