

# Corporate Peer Challenge **Cotswold District Council**

*5<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> November 2019*

Feedback Report

## 1. Executive Summary

The council has a strong track record of service delivery and is well respected by its partners. The new administration has a big agenda and an ambition for the council to play a stronger role in place shaping. This means change for the organisation and they will need to prioritise these ambitions in line with available resources and capacity.

The incoming administration is viewed positively, and is seen as taking ownership of Portfolios and the agenda for the future. Staff are enthusiastic about the Council and are optimistic about the future, and partners value the more outward looking focus of the council.

There has become a disconnect between the objectives of the council and Publica, as a result of which Members don't appear to 'own' Publica in their hearts and minds. The appointment of a new MD is seen as an opportunity for Publica to consolidate past successes and for the organisation to review how it operates in order to respond to the changed priorities of the new administration.

There is a genuine desire to reframe and reset the relationship between Publica and the council, and a positive first time would be to address the confusion that remains over the branding and identities of Publica and the Council. Governance, roles and responsibilities continue to need review, development and clarification.

The Transformation programme has stalled and needs reinvigorating, whilst the Pay and Grading work linked to the creation of the new Publica organisation has absorbed capacity and energy. Retained staff are working to maximum capacity and will not be able to deliver new and emerging priorities and it is the view of the team that some capacity issues present a real and immediate risk to the council and its ability to operate safely.

There are a number of opportunities to enhance capacity, however these will require strategic planning and development. The commissioning function remains confused with direct lines of accountability blurred and needing more clarity.

Programme and project governance is ad hoc and lacks strategic oversight and direction. With the greater emphasis on place shaping in the new administration's agenda, the Council will need new and different skills and expertise in some areas to the ones it currently holds to ensure successful delivery.

## 2. Key recommendations

There are a range of suggestions and observations within the main section of the report that will inform some 'quick wins' and practical actions, in addition to the conversations onsite, many of which provided ideas and examples of practice from other organisations. The following are the peer team's key recommendations to the council:

- In order to produce credible delivery plans for the emerging priorities of the new administration, the council should set aside sufficient and distinct organisational thinking time to develop a credible Corporate Plan and to determine the resources required to deliver.
- Ensure the council has the strategic leadership capacity it requires, within the retained senior officer team, to:
  - shape the identity and unique agenda of CDC and to influence key stakeholders
  - engage in wider partnership working to help deliver new and emerging ambitions
  - work with and influence the Publica strategy/policy team

- act as Intelligent client to commission services from Publica and other partners
- Develop a medium-term financial strategy to underpin implementation of the Corporate Plan that identifies opportunities to enhance financial capacity including:
  - income from fees and charges
  - returns on investment from treasury management
  - savings and income from Publica
  - opportunities to generate savings and create additional capacity to deliver through partnership working
  - A commercial strategy, learning from best practice elsewhere, to create new income streams
- Recognise the value and potential of Publica to refocus capacity to deliver on the council's ambitions and utilise the opportunity of a new MD to reset the relationship between the Council and Publica and address governance issues.
- Undertake the LGA's Communications Health Check to support improved communications and help develop a branding strategy
- Build the council's organisational capacity by:
  - Putting in place a development programme for officers to harness enthusiasm and positivity of group and business managers which will build organisational capacity.
  - Strengthening performance management and reporting including programme and project management.
  - A comprehensive reboot of the current transformation programme in order to develop a new programme plan, with the resources and expertise in place to deliver
- Ensure the potential risks associated with any potential equal pay claim are understood and being managed

### **3. Summary of the Peer Challenge approach**

#### **The peer team**

Peer challenges are delivered by experienced elected member and officer peers. The make-up of the peer team reflected your requirements and the focus of the peer challenge. Peers were selected on the basis of their relevant experience and expertise and agreed by you. The peers who delivered the peer challenge at Cotswold District Council were:

- Councillor Sarah Butikofer – Leader North Norfolk District Council
- Councillor Chris Millar – Daventry District Council
- Alex Parmley– Chief Executive, South Somerset District Council
- Mary D'Arcy– Director for Communities, Adur and Worthing Councils
- Natalie Anderson – Head of Organisational Development, Elmbridge Borough Council
- Emily McGuinness, Peer Challenge Manager - LGA
- Andrew Field - NGDP

#### **Scope and focus**

The peer team considered the following five questions which form the core components looked at by all Corporate Peer Challenges cover. These are the areas we believe are critical to councils' performance and improvement:

1. Understanding of the local place and priority setting: Does the council understand its local context and place and use that to inform a clear vision and set of priorities?

2. Leadership of Place: Does the council provide effective leadership of place through its elected members, officers and constructive relationships and partnerships with external stakeholders?
3. Organisational leadership and governance: Is there effective political and managerial leadership supported by good governance and decision-making arrangements that respond to key challenges and enable change and transformation to be implemented?
4. Financial planning and viability: Does the council have a financial plan in place to ensure long term viability and is there evidence that it is being implemented successfully?
5. Capacity to deliver: Is organisational capacity aligned with priorities and does the council influence, enable and leverage external capacity to focus on agreed outcomes?

In addition to these questions, you asked the peer team to consider:

- The culture of the organisation and the extent to which this reflects political ambitions and aspirations;
- The capacity of the organisation to deliver emerging Council Plan; and
- The identity of the council within the Publica context.

## **The peer challenge process**

It is important to stress that this was not an inspection. Peer challenges are improvement focussed and tailored to meet individual councils' needs. They are designed to complement and add value to a council's own performance and improvement. 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 for the peer challenge 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 then spent 3 days onsite at Cotswold District Council during which they:

- Spoke to more than 139 people including a range of council staff together with councillors and external partners and stakeholders.
- Gathered information and views from more than 47 meetings and additional research and reading.
- Collectively spent more than 210 hours to determine their findings – the equivalent of one person spending more than 5 weeks in the council.

This report provides a summary of the peer team's findings. It builds on the feedback presentation provided by the peer team at the end of their on-site visit (5<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> November 2019). In presenting feedback to you, they have done so as fellow local government officers and members, not professional consultants or inspectors. By its nature, the peer challenge is a snapshot in time. We appreciate that some of the feedback may be about things you are already addressing and progressing.

## **4. Feedback**

### **4.1 Understanding of the local place and priority setting**

Officers and members of Cotswold District Council share a strong sense of place, and of the challenges and opportunities presented. In particular, the council is well aware of the pressures associated with attracting high levels of second home ownership and the subsequent impact on the cost and availability of affordable housing for local people. The newly elected political administration has responded by ensuring delivering affordable housing and housing growth in general are given a high priority focus within the emerging Corporate Plan. This shows a strong commitment to respond to local challenges, but it is important that expectations of all stakeholders are managed, given the fact that 80% of the district lies within the Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and the significant development constraints this brings.

Similarly, there are positive moves to more actively embrace economic growth within the district, in particular to maximise the potential offered by the development of the cyber park in the neighbouring district of Cheltenham. In engaging more proactively in projects such as this, the council will be better placed to address another recognised local priority, that of providing suitable employment for younger generations thus ensuring the longer term sustainability of the district.

The new administration campaigned on a comprehensive manifesto of over 70 pledges, reflecting all aspects of life in the district. These manifesto pledges have formed the basis of the emerging Corporate Plan and show that the administration, supported by officers, is developing a clear agenda for the future of the district. It is encouraging to note that the administration have taken advantage of support from the LGA in this process, however, and in line with comments already made about managing expectations, further work needs to be done to prioritise the administration's ambitions and to align resources accordingly. Doing so will help all stakeholders to coalesce around a shared set of deliverable objectives and contribute to the stated objective of creating and maintaining a stronger identity for Cotswold District Council – both internally and externally.

The process of developing the new Corporate Plan is an important opportunity to engage, and in some cases re-engage, with all stakeholders and the wider community. Positively, steps have already been taken to seek the views and input from these stakeholders, including Publica partner councils, town and parish councils, business and voluntary sectors. Continuing to build on these foundations can only serve to ensure CDC fulfils its leadership of place potential through ensuring the needs and expectations of all those it serves are reflected in corporate plans and activities.

The council has access to good data about the profile of the district, provided by the Insight Team and the value of this should be harnessed and used to inform future plans and decisions. Whilst there is clarity around the key issues of affordable housing, climate change and economic growth, partner organisations identified that the council would benefit from a more clearly articulated response to the issues of rural poverty and isolation that exist in some parts of the district. Doing so will enable CDC to better meet the needs and expectations of all constituent communities and residents.

CDC has responded to the increasingly high profile climate change agenda. In July 2019 the Council declared a state of climate emergency and has committed to achieving carbon neutrality for the council's own operation and estate as soon as possible. Beyond this, they have also committed to review the Local Plan with an ambition of ensuring it is 'Green to the core'. The council has recently approved funding to secure a senior manager to lead on this work as well as allocating funding to develop a Carbon Neutral Plan and to commission technical work to

support the review of the Local Plan, along with a number of lower level activities. The intent signalled by such actions is commendable, however, more consideration of the implications of commitments will be imperative to ensure that the council is able to deliver on all stated priorities. Care and time will need to be given to plan how the council will deliver all ambitions in harmony – for example balancing climate change objectives with commitments to build new homes, create more economic growth opportunities and perhaps most challenging, the provision of a multi-storey car park. Similarly, reviewing the Local Plan is no small undertaking and the resource requirement to do so, should not be underestimated.

The discussions planned for the coming weeks and months to support the prioritisation of ambitions and the drawing up of delivery action plans will provide an ideal opportunity to consider these points.

There is now a need to redefine the council's future relationship with Publica, reflecting the change of focus, from a vehicle designed principally to achieve service efficiency to one through which the community outcomes of a place shaping agenda can be delivered within CDC. This exercise will need to be undertaken at the earliest opportunity so that the new Council Plan has appropriate delivery structures supporting it. Revisiting the role and function of the Publica partnership and in particular the resetting of the relationships between the council and the partnership will be pivotal in determining future success for CDC.

## **4.2 Leadership of Place**

The administration is clearly committed to developing its role as a strong leader of place as evidenced by the numerous and detailed manifesto pledges which are currently being translated into a Council Plan for the next 4 years. This is a significant change in organisational focus for CDC and, as such, there are some important initial steps that need to be taken to ensure leadership of place ambitions are met, and are seen to be met, by stakeholders and that sufficient time (and clarity) is provided to allow for the reallocation of resources.

CDC is well regarded by partners, many of whom welcome the more outward focus of the council which has developed over the past months. Many key partners including the county council and town and parish councils would welcome further approaches to build and enhance partnership working. Indeed, there is the potential to develop more effective relationships with partners and explore shared project and service delivery options e.g. with town councils. Whilst CDC has always used its resources to meet the needs of residents to the best of its ability, in order to deliver an ambitious and outcome based political agenda for communities, a more collaborative approach to partnership delivery will be important.

There are excellent relationships between the CCG and Housing and Health teams within the council which not only supports the high level of awareness of the issues facing residents in all aspects of their lives that exists within the district, but also provides a framework for enhanced partnership working and engagement going forward. The council's ambition to deliver more affordable housing will require a multi-faceted planning approach – and the partners we spoke with were positive that existing relationships could easily be developed to achieve this.

There is a lack of clarity for some partners around the vision and ambition of CDC in respect of economic growth and the appetite for development. This is inevitable given the emergence of the new Corporate Plan but the importance of providing this clarity at the earliest opportunity should be recognised. We heard of the Leader's desire to maximise the benefits to the district of the Cyber Park being delivered in Cheltenham and given the nature of this, and other development projects, being able to articulate the intent of CDC to public and private partners at

the earliest opportunity is key. Similarly, clarity in this policy area will help support the improving relations which we heard are developing within the LEP and other sub regional bodies, and leverage their support to help deliver Cotswold's economic ambitions. As a minimum, an early indication of CDC's appetite for growth, through well-defined Economic Growth and Development Plans, is essential.

Many opportunities exist to work across a wider footprint with neighbouring authorities and other partners on shared agendas such as climate change, housing and commercialisation. Building on improving levels of partner engagements could realise opportunities to draw in additional resources to support the delivery of your ambitions and thus ensure you deliver more than if you are working on your own. Public Health partners are eager to work more closely with CDC on shared public health priorities. Those we spoke with stated that whilst CDC currently respond well to requests for support, greater opportunities exist around mutual objectives, particularly around housing and promoting active lifestyles. In particular, partners cited shared and similar ambitions around climate change where currently resources and expertise across the partners, including within CDC, are limited.

CDC has made a commitment to refresh the Local Plan against the objective of 'Green to the Core'. We recognise the intent behind this commitment but would urge the council to plan for this work with care. Undertaking such a task will require additional resources and again, managing the expectations of stakeholders will be paramount if this ambition is to be delivered and seen to be delivered.

Further work is needed to develop a clearer strategy on the branding of Publica and CDC to ensure clarity for residents, partners and staff. The council has already committed to undertaking an LGA Communications Health Check as an initial step to creating a stronger CDC brand identity, one that sits alongside, but is distinct from that of the Publica Partnership. Recent changes to how the council is represented on outside bodies, with the Head of Paid Service taking a more visible role and promoting a CDC perspective, are positive. If steps are taken to redefine the role of Publica as a means through which the aims and objectives of CDC are met, and Publica becomes an integral part of delivering improvements for CDC rather than being regarded as operating as a separate organisation, then the council can begin to develop a more recognisable identity both within the district and in sub regional, regional and national arenas.

### **4.3 Organisational leadership and governance**

The new administration has brought a sense of energy and positivity which is welcomed throughout the organisation. Staff hold the new leader and cabinet in high regard and are supportive of the emerging Corporate Plan and the manifesto pledges it seeks to deliver. We found a shared desire to change and move CDC forward in line with the political ambitions around the green agenda and the place shaping role of the council in particular, but clarity and detail about how this change will be delivered is needed to capitalise on this enthusiasm.

Similarly, the appointment of a new Managing Director for Publica is viewed in a positive light. The previous MD is recognised and valued as having delivered on the founding partnership objectives of achieving substantial financial savings whilst maintaining existing service levels. But a change of political administration has resulted in a shift in expectations about how Publica delivers on behalf of CDC. The appointment of the new MD provides the opportunity for discussions around resetting and redefining the relationship between Publica and the partner councils. Early indications are positive that the relationship between the political leaders and the senior managers within Publica is developing well and that channels of communication are open

and honest. It is vital that this continues to be built upon in order to develop a more symbiotic relationship between political and officer leadership.

There is a clear recognition of the need to build trust and confidence in the relationship between members, officers and Publica and to establish an organisational culture that promotes these values if the council is to fulfil its full potential and deliver on its priorities. Improved communication, both internally and externally and a better understanding of the role and function of all within the partnership setting is at the heart of this. The closer engagement of elected members by senior Publica staff, and the new MD in particular has already begun and is welcomed. Establishing effective channels of engagement as part of the process to redefine the relationship between the Council and Publica will be an important step and will help set and manage expectations.

Senior leaders, both within Publica and the council's retained office team, are stretched and are consequently not very visible to staff, which contributes to a perception of lack of openness and transparency. Staff want to see and hear more about their plans for change and progress. Positively, staff recognise the need for change but will require leadership to be present to guide them through the process. In contrast, the Members of the new administration are very visible and engaged with staff. There is a need to define and agree the roles and remits of officer and member leaders and communicate this to staff to ensure clarity and avoid confusion.

There are opportunities to improve communication both internally and externally, which is key to addressing a number of challenges. The council has already committed to undertaking an LGA Comms Health Check and this is a positive, and in the view of the Peer Team, necessary step.

Relationships between officers and political leaders are at a formative stage given the changes both politically and in senior officer leadership in recent months. We saw encouraging signs that senior leaders within Publica recognise that, as a company that is wholly owned by the local authorities it provides services to, it is operating in a political environment and that this needs to be understood both by the company's board and its employees and reflected in the way it operates. There is already an organisational shift towards the council having a more forward facing profile with Publica in a supporting role – this is to be welcomed and developed.

There is a need to develop and clarify the overall governance arrangements, roles and responsibilities of officers and members within the Publica Partnership Framework. The commissioning role of members needs to be strengthened further to allow them to set the direction of the council – taking into consideration professional advice and guidance from officers. To support this, there is a need for more clearly defined arrangements for CDC to hold Publica to account in their delivery of services to and for CDC would be beneficial.

Publica's Executive Leadership Team are well regarded and respected by staff although it is recognised that they are working at, and above, capacity. The role and function of this leadership team would benefit from being redefined so that they are able to fulfil strategic planning roles rather than being drawn into operational delivery, as is currently the case. The Peer Team's view on organisational capacity is reflected later in this report, but lack of capacity at a senior level, both within Publica, and perhaps more crucially, across the retained statutory officers poses a potential risk to the effectiveness of organisational leadership and governance at CDC. Issues around capacity will not only curtail the delivery of new political ambitions, but could also impact on the ability of the council to function effectively and safely in respect of the S151 and Monitoring Officer roles.

There is limited evidence of a culture of organisational learning at CDC. Performance management, project and programme governance needs to be strengthened to support effective learning and delivery. Examples were given to the team of good project management



and projects that were managed less well. Officers identified an opportunity to learn from the good project management that was currently not happening. In addition, many identified that when things did not go to plan, particularly in organisational change, the organisation did not take time to reflect on this, learn the lessons and do things differently. Embedding organisational learning through performance and project management systems will support the organisation in becoming even more effective at delivering change and the priority outcomes of the new administration.

Following the change in political administration in May this year, political management arrangements within the council are still at a formative stage. The incoming administration has been clear about wishing to adopt a collaborative and inclusive approach which is welcomed by partner organisations in particular. There is further work to be done to encourage and support members from all parties to actively engage in the political process. The Audit committee is seen as effective by both members and those officers who directly support it. The external auditor identified the committee as one of the most effective they have encountered!

The Overview and Scrutiny function is less clearly defined and needs to be reviewed – and resourced – to enable it to support the policy development and review roles of non-executive members. Developing more effective scrutiny arrangements has the potential to both unlock capacity in support of the political leadership as well as providing a channel for meaningful engagement for all non-executive members.

#### **4.4 Financial planning and viability**

There are financial challenges facing CDC, but the council is well positioned to address these challenges given they are starting from a comparatively good position. Steps taken over the past decade to reduce the cost of service provision such as establishing the Publica service delivery model and reviewing land and property assets to ensure surplus capacity is used to generate income have allowed the council to build revenue reserves to support the budget on an annual basis. However, these reserves may not be being put to best use and a review of the approach and policies around treasury management could lead to increased returns.

It is recognised that previous decisions in relation to Council Tax freezes and even decreases have resulted in a low tax base from which the council now has to build if it is to adequately resource its corporate plan objectives. Currently, CDC has a Band D Council Tax level of £128.93, which is the 11<sup>th</sup> lowest nationally. A 2% increase would add an extra £2.83 to a Band D property. There is a good awareness of the challenges this represents, both by officers and members but there is a pressing need to agree and implement a plan to address the issue.

Both officers and members at CDC expressed a commitment to examine new approaches to generate income to deliver the Council Plan. The peer team heard mention of an overarching strategy being in development, but we were not able to view one. Establishing a clear set of parameters, both around acceptable levels of risk and the principles for commercial activity are fundamental to a successful approach to commercialism. In addition, developing appropriate governance is necessary to ensure levels of Member engagement and oversight appropriate to the authority balanced against the need to act at pace in a commercial arena. There is substantial learning across the sector that CDC could, and should, take advantage of, allowing them to benefit from the experience of others. Producing and agreeing an overarching policy framework could provide an important opportunity for the council to review the decision to invest £15 million in a multi-story car park. A well-articulated strategy should set out CDC's desired outcomes for all commercial investment decisions including to what extent all such decisions

should support – or at least not contradict – other policy commitments such as delivering affordable housing and addressing climate change.

A well-defined Commercialisation strategy needs to sit alongside and support a new comprehensive Medium Term Financial Strategy. The current Medium Term Financial Plan is built around supporting service efficiency and not focussed on resourcing a more strategic, community outcome and place shaping agenda and programme. In addition, the funding outlook for district councils continues to look challenging over the next few years. In order to continue to protect services and to deliver the new ambitions, a new Financial Strategy should set policy objectives and financial targets for delivering not only ongoing efficiencies, but also additional income from chargeable services, treasury management, commercial services and commercial investments.

There are expectations that the transformation programme will deliver financial benefits. We heard that the programme in its current form has effectively stalled, primarily due to the challenges and the capacity absorbed by the work to bring together staff from the constituent councils into Publica and the ongoing work on pay and grading. If both the organisational and financial benefits are to be realised, the Transformation Programme needs to be reinvigorated with a new delivery plan, appropriate resources and possibly new branding.

Publica has invested significant resources in undertaking a review of pay and grading across all partner councils – this activity has had a direct impact on capacity to deliver wider transformation objectives but more importantly, as a result of this work, we would urge CDC and Publica to seek assurance that organisationally, the risk of potential Equal Pay claims is fully understood and managed.

#### **4.5 Capacity to deliver**

The council benefits from a hardworking and committed workforce which is ready to respond to the challenges ahead and to deliver the priorities of the new administration. Staff are dedicated, forward looking and open to change – they represent an asset to the organisation to be nurtured and engaged in taking CDC forward. In addition, the graduate scheme is well regarded for bringing new talent in to the organisation but needs now to be built upon to ensure adequate succession planning. However, staff feel that change has taken too long to deliver. There is a window of opportunity for CDC, alongside Publica, to harness the enthusiasm of staff and provide the clarity and direction that we heard staff desperately want.

Publica, as a service delivery model has many strengths and provides greater scope and capacity than CDC could achieve alone. As well as delivering efficiencies it has enabled more resilient services and a greater breadth of skills than the council could achieve on its own. It should be regarded as part of the answer to meeting the capacity needs of the new ambitions. It is an example of innovation and partnership working that has performed well against the original business case in terms of delivering savings to all partner councils and protecting services. Before moving forward into the next phase of partnership working between CDC and Publica, it is important that time is taken to learn from the experience to date to inform conversations around redefining the partnership approach in line with the requirements and expectations of the new administration.

The council's innovative approach to partnership working within service delivery is demonstrated in a number of ways. In addition to the Publica partnership, CDC plays an active part in a number of other partnerships including the successful Counter Fraud Partnership. This

initiative is an example of maximising resources to secure the greatest advantage for the organisation and opportunities to replicate this across the council should be sought.

It is early days for the new administration and the full implications of new priorities have not yet been worked through. Any discussions around priority setting and the delivery of the emerging Corporate Plan should note that retained staff are working to capacity and are unable to absorb additional work particularly in complex areas such as around housing delivery and commercialisation. Additionally new ambitions will put pressure on current structures and ways of working, exposing gaps in terms of skills, knowledge and experience. These issues are not insurmountable and it's vital that Publica helps provide a solution to capacity issues, for example through more effective commissioning arrangements and knowledge and skill sharing across the partner councils.

The retained staff within CDC need to effectively fulfil the role of intelligent client and in doing so champion the ambitions of the administration and help shape the identity of CDC and deliver its unique agenda. The current retained staffing arrangements require immediate and fundamental review, firstly to provide organisational assurance that statutory responsibilities can be fulfilled and secondly, to ensure that retained officers are able to maximise their impact on policy development, commissioning services from Publica and enhancing the external profile of CDC.

Whilst retained officers are undoubtedly knowledgeable and committed, the current structure lacks the capacity CDC needs and this has the potential to not only negatively impact on the organisation's ability to meet the expectations of the administration, but also poses a risk to the council's ability to operate safely.

The appointment of the new cohort of Business Managers is a positive step towards addressing organisational capacity issues, but both the Council and Publica will achieve more if they engage and empower them. There is a sense of frustration at this level that they could be more actively engaged to lead on service delivery and in doing so help address capacity issues within the Executive Leadership team.

Reinvigorating and repurposing the stalled Transformation Programme will be an excellent opportunity to investigate options for addressing capacity issues. Good progress has been made in implementing the new digital platform and maximising opportunities for organisational effectiveness in terms of process redesign will be a beneficial next step for CDC. However, the organisation needs a credible plan to deliver transformation, it needs to communicate this to staff and engage them effectively in the delivery.

There appears to be some missed opportunities to work in closer alignment with other Publica partner councils when dealing with common issues – for example, other councils within the partnership have, or are looking to employ, Climate Change Officers and the potential to share resources in this and other areas could be further explored. CDC should regard partnerships as holding some of the answers to the capacity needs and challenges of the ambitious new agenda.

There are opportunities to enhance the capacity of CDC and Publica to deliver but this needs to be supported by a better organisational planning articulated through sound Financial and Commercial Strategies and the all important work to redefine the relationship between CDC and Publica.

## **5. Next steps**

### **Immediate next steps**

We appreciate the senior managerial and political leadership will want to reflect on these findings and suggestions in order to determine how the organisation wishes to take things forward.

As part of the peer challenge process, there is an offer of further activity to support this. The LGA is well placed to provide additional support, advice and guidance on a number of the areas for development and improvement and we would be happy to discuss this. Andy Bates, Principal Adviser is the main contact between your authority and the Local Government Association (LGA). His contact details are: Email [andy.bates@local.gov.uk](mailto:andy.bates@local.gov.uk)

In the meantime we are keen to continue the relationship we have formed with the Council throughout the peer challenge. We will endeavour to provide signposting to examples of practice and further information and guidance about the issues we have raised in this report to help inform ongoing consideration.

### **Follow up visit**

The LGA Corporate Peer Challenge process includes a follow up visit. The purpose of the visit is to help the council assess the impact of the peer challenge and demonstrate the progress it has made against the areas of improvement and development identified by the peer team. It is a lighter-touch version of the original visit and does not necessarily involve all members of the original peer team. The timing of the visit is determined by the council. Our expectation is that it will occur within the next 2 years.

### **Next Corporate Peer Challenge**

The current LGA sector-led improvement support offer includes an expectation that all councils will have a Corporate Peer Challenge or Finance Peer Review every 4 to 5 years. It is therefore anticipated that the council will commission their next Peer Challenge before 2024.