

Corporate Peer Challenge **Rushcliffe Borough Council**

31st January – 2nd February 2018
Feedback Report

1. Executive Summary

Rushcliffe Borough Council (RBC) is an agile, commercially-minded council, focused on delivering quality services for its residents and communities. A forward-looking council, it is an exciting and rewarding organisation to work for. People want to move to the borough with its good service provision, leisure and culture offer, employment and businesses, many of which have been facilitated by the council.

There have been two major changes in the last couple of years: moving to its new headquarters in November 2016, and electing a new Leader in May 2017. The change of leader brought a renewed political energy, building on a strong history of success over many years. The Chief Executive has been in place for several years, managing the organisation through the changes brought about by austerity measure, and successfully leading the commercial agenda.

RBC is now based in a new, purpose-built, open plan office space. It is a welcoming place to be, and a flexible place to work. As well as the standard desk arrangements, there are pods for quieter work or private conversations, several glass rooms for meetings, and a large kitchen area which can be (and is) used for social and educational activities. Multimedia screens around the office area broadcast messages to staff and Members – information about changes, publicity about events, thanks to staff for their work, and praise to those who have performed over and above what would be expected of them in the normal course of their work.

Staff are dedicated, enthusiastic, knowledgeable, and adaptable and are proud to work for the council. Members and officers alike highlighted the skills and dedication of staff, and their commitment to the council. They report that it is a good place to work and like the new office arrangements. The physical space, along with the Chief Executive's leadership style, has encouraged a 'one council' approach, and positive 'can do' culture, as well as cementing the council's presence in the community.

The office is upstairs from the flagship leisure centre (Rushcliffe Arena), and this has added to the culture of the organisation, encouraging staff to take some physical activity, and promoting health and wellbeing messages. The build was successfully delivered on time, and on budget and is a credit to the council.

RBC spends considerable time understanding the current and future needs of its residents and businesses. Partners feel that it is open and transparent, inclusive and want to work with it. Nearby District councils indicated that they would be happy for Rushcliffe to represent them on a wider platform (such as economic growth partnerships), recognising RBC's skills, knowledge and organisational experience. They feel that the council is keen to explore options that maximise benefits for all stakeholders. It has a commercial head, focusing on work that delivers high social value. RBC's well-respected corporate brand means that it has a good reputation with the potential to motivate, inspire, influence and lead others.

The council is an organisation that has commercialisation in its DNA. It has a sophisticated approach, with various strands, not just income generation. Staff are encouraged to be efficient as well as effective. Projects are managed and focused to maximise savings, encourage growth and generate income. This leads to multiple and diverse positive outcomes for its residents and communities.

There are some very engaged and enthusiastic Members who use their knowledge and skills to help make strategic decisions and set the direction of the council. It would be good to encourage more Members to be actively engaged in taking the council forward. Member skills could be developed and harnessed further.

The new building has provided new opportunities for engaging with each other, staff and the public. However, some Members may have found it difficult to adapt to new ways of working because of reduced budgets, a new Cabinet and Leader, and the new open plan office. Clearer direction on how Members and officers engage with each other would help to address their concerns.

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:

1. **Position Chief Executive and Leader roles to maximise dialogue and engagement at local, Regional and National level.** This would provide an opportunity to showcase and promote your locality, and help to influence policies which affect the council. Make sure you are clear what your objectives are for relevant meetings, and that they benefit the council, partners and residents of the borough.
2. **Explore scope for greater strategic collaboration with and on behalf of neighbouring District and Borough councils.** RBC is already doing this, but neighbouring Districts and Boroughs in particular may welcome Rushcliffe taking a leadership role on their behalf, particularly around the growth and commercialism agenda.
3. **Improve engagement with Nottinghamshire County Council.** This could be through:
 - Supporting Rushcliffe's Members to engage with Members of the County Council
 - Strengthening joint leadership meetings, making sure they are regular, strategic focused and effective
 - Frame schemes that the County Council is able to support, to ensure stated political positions are not compromised
 - Optimise engagement with Nottinghamshire County Council through the positive use of both its Member and officer resources, to build relationships, influence and remove blockages which could be of benefit to both organisations and the public.
4. **Continue to implement and develop the Commercial Strategy.** Further enhance officer skills and capacity to enable them to develop, drive and market commercial initiatives and deliver the growth agenda. This will need continued development of strategies and resources to maximise the delivery of the affordable housing numbers required.
5. **Clarify, with partners, the role of the Economic Prosperity Committee.** Establish if this is still the best and most effective vehicle. If it is, raise its visibility and, where relevant, increase the frequency of meetings to build effective strategic partnerships, alliances and cohesive strategies and plans. If it is not, establish effective relationships with key partners through relevant and effective governance boards with both Nottinghamshire County and Nottingham City Councils, to maximise the benefits to the Rushcliffe community.
6. **Cabinet and EMT should spend team development time identifying and understanding one another's skills, and preferences.** Use accredited tools (such as Belbin, or MBTI), and use the results to inform and enhance ways of working to lead the organisation. This could then be extended to other senior managers and politicians, e.g. Chairs / Vice Chairs, Service Managers, Lead Specialists.
7. **Review pay, reward and progression package.** This is becoming critical across all services for recruitment and retention. Alongside this, review flexible and alternative working practices to ensure they are clear, fair, consistent, fit for purpose and communicated clearly to staff and managers in all service areas and locations.

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 based on their relevant experience and expertise and agreed with you. The team which delivered the peer challenge at Rushcliffe Borough Council was:

- Cllr Julian Daly - St Albans City and District Council
- Nicola Bulbeck – West Sussex County Council
- Louise Branford-White – Hambleton District Council
- Doug Bamsey – Sedgemoor District Council
- David Joel – Independent Consultant, providing an independent commercial perspective on RBC's commercial activities, particularly Streetwise
- Frances Marshall – Local Government Association
- Becca Singh – Local Government Association

Scope and focus

The peer team considered the following five questions which form the core components looked at by all Corporate Peer Challenges. 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 provide feedback on Growth, Rushcliffe's approach to Commercialisation, and the Streetwise company (feedback provided separately).

The peer challenge process

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. It is important to stress that this was not an inspection. 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 to ensure they were familiar with the council and the challenges it is facing. The team then spent three days onsite at Rushcliffe Borough Council, during which they:

- Spoke to about 90 people including a range of council staff, councillors and external stakeholders
- Gathered information and views from more than 40 meetings, visits to key sites and additional research and reading
- Collectively spent more than 340 hours to determine our findings – the equivalent of one person spending nearly ten weeks in Rushcliffe BC

This report provides a summary of the peer team's findings. It builds on the feedback presentation delivered at the end of their on-site visit (2nd February 2018). 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

RBC councillors, officers and partners all demonstrated good knowledge of the local place and local community needs. The Local Plan demonstrates understanding of current and future needs of communities and businesses. This is driving priorities and service delivery. Councillors, officers and partners all demonstrated this understanding.

The key priorities of the council are clear: Economic Growth, Quality of Life, and the Transformation of Service Delivery. Staff know and own these priorities, and they drive all work throughout the council. They demonstrated awareness of strategic challenges as well as their own specific areas of focus. The key challenge is the delivery of growth sites (for example, Gamston), particularly for housing. There is a significant gap between housing growth targets and delivery. This affects RBC's plans for growth and may also affect income in years to come.

Resident feedback shows high satisfaction with council services. However, with the increased pressure on staff and resources, as you continually strive to improve delivery, it is getting harder to continue to meet those expectations. Good communications and public engagement may mean that residents will be happy accept some 'good' services – a gold service rather than platinum – if they understand why.

4.2 Leadership of Place

There is strong political and managerial leadership, with both the Leader and the Chief Executive highly visible in the borough. Partners know and seek out both, and speak very positively about their leadership style. They are respected and influential.

External communications have improved recently with additional resource made available. The council could use its communications team to ensure that the public knows what RBC has achieved for its communities and why it is using a commercial approach. Residents may need more help to understand the growth agenda and good, varied communications will be crucial.

There is a creative and positive use of partnerships to deliver operational and strategic outcomes. A growing partnership with the City Council is leading to mutually beneficial developments (e.g. Clifton, and the A453 economic growth area). The Customer Contact Centre is an excellent example of joint working (with the police) leading to improved outcomes for the public and staff development. There is the opportunity to expand the service it provides to other partners, for example, increasing the work it does on behalf of Metropolitan Housing, or providing a service to new partners.

Strategic partnerships are difficult to leverage. Increasing visibility with national politicians, civil servants and other councils, could help to release some of the blockages that RBC experiences. Work with other District and Borough councils to provide clarity and prioritisation to the County and City Councils of what is required to deliver the economic and housing growth whilst also realising the maximum benefits for residents and communities.

4.3 Organisational leadership and governance

Rushcliffe BC's long-standing Chief Executive and Executive Management Team established a strong foundation of successful service delivery and commercial approaches, recently recognised in the LGC Entrepreneurial Council of the Year (2018). The new Leader and Cabinet have injected a new purpose and new clarity of political priorities, along with energy and fresh ideas. As a result, the organisation has recognisable good political and managerial organisational leadership.

The new Leader appointed his Cabinet through a competitive application and interview process. This ensured that executive Members considered carefully how their skills and experience could benefit the community, and that Portfolio Holders are knowledgeable about the services that they are responsible for. The team consider this appointment process to be notable practice. Going forward, it may be necessary to ensure that Portfolio Holders are not drawn into being managers of the services that they oversee, as their role is setting strategic direction and holding officers to account.

The Executive Management Team (EMT) is visible throughout the organisation. Staff consider them to be approachable and enabling, experienced and professionally adept. This team has helped to create a positive organisational culture. There are clear levels of management, without a large bureaucracy, and staff are encouraged to develop their specialist skills and knowledge. Moving to the new office, along with the leadership style of the Chief Executive, has enabled the organisational culture to develop positively. The rest of EMT have embraced and promoted this culture.

Internal communications employ a variety of channels (screens, emails, blogs, newsletters, team meetings, etc). The open plan office has encouraged informal networking and communications, and helped to foster a positive work environment through a mixture of social and informative activities. For example, whilst the team was on site, there was a Mental Health awareness day, which involved information and support, sharing cakes and refreshments in the kitchen area. Although this is welcomed, and successful, it's important to consider those workers who do not work in the main office, and ensure that they are included and stay informed.

There have been significant changes for Members to deal with in recent years. The effects of these changes should not be underestimated. Some more work may be needed to ensure that all of them feel comfortable with these changes, particularly if they have been councillors for many years. The new office, and new political leadership, have brought a different approach to Member / officer relations. Changes to communication methods, and to how Members physically interact with officers, have meant that there are some Members feel that there is a remoteness between officers and Members.

Austerity measures mean that there are reduced staff numbers, and inevitably less face-to-face interaction than in the past. Not all Members understand how the new office works, and what access they have. They are more visible in the open plan environment than in the previous council offices and this may make some uncomfortable. All councils are phasing out paper-based communications, to reduce their environmental impact and save resources and time. In Rushcliffe, the drive for

digital communications with Members is now being supported by the Leader. However, these changes mean that some Members who feel out of the loop and are not actively involved in council business.

There is a core of Members who are actively engaged in the council processes and work, but a significant number who are not. A focused approach to developing Member skills and knowledge would help to harness their experience and complement those of the officers. It would also ensure that all Members understand that their important role setting strategic direction and holding officers to account.

4.4 Financial planning and viability

Robust financial planning and good corporate governance are in place and working well. This is demonstrated by the analysis in the 2018/19 budget setting report and associated financial strategies. The council currently has no debt; reserves are healthy in comparison to the risk and exposure of the Authority. Reserves are projected to increase and will be required to further support the commercialisation and capital project ambitions, and service reductions mean that it is in a healthier financial position than many District councils.

Members have several opportunities to understand and improve the financial understanding. Monthly meetings between the Section 151 officer and the finance Portfolio Holder. Recent Member budget meetings were well attended which helped Members understand the current and future funding situation. Internal Audit provides a good assurance mechanism. Both Internal and External Audit attend quarterly Governance and Scrutiny meetings. The statement of accounts is supported by good audit working papers. The external audit process works well, with good contact with officers, fulfilling statutory obligations. The external auditors have a high opinion of Rushcliffe and its approach to risk management.

Service delivery savings for 2018/19 are through cash limited budgets. This means that in-service budgets absorb the inflation cost increase of £270k. Service reductions are made even though there is less pressure than some councils as the Authority is in a good place financially. However, RBC is not complacent. It is fully aware of challenges (for example, the impact of the New Homes Bonus reducing) and is proactive in all measures.

Reserve levels are healthy in comparison to the risk and exposure of the Authority. Reserves are projected to increase and will be required to further support the commercialisation and capital project ambitions of the Authority. This is because of a recent review of current and future risks, including an assessment of its risk register. It also considers future pressures upon services, inflation and interest rates. Reserve levels include capital commitments and revenue, and include commercial income generated and all funding streams (for example, Business Rates Retention, Council Tax and Grants). The council currently has no debt, but is considering borrowing, subject to appropriate business cases.

Members and officers understand the financial challenge and the need for checks & balances. Improvements have been made, particularly in 2016/17 compared to

previous years. There are better links between EMT (Executive Management Team) and Cabinet, although there is some scope for greater member engagement in financial planning. Members are not necessarily getting information early enough, which should be addressed to improve the financial planning process.

There is a clear understanding of the importance of risk management, and balancing risk and reward. This is considered when making assumptions to support and maintain the robust budget whilst managing risk at a level that the council is comfortable with. RBC is willing to take some risk, with careful planning and mitigation, to reap rewards for its communities. There are no major concerns, although the council might want to ensure risk management is consistently understood and embedded.

Generating new income streams is progressively more difficult. The obvious quick gains and easy wins have already been taken. Everyone is encouraged to contribute to new ideas and projects, including for income generation. The Chief Executive speaks to staff directly for proposals which have included: delivering green waste services for Newark & Sherwood, maintenance of vehicles with City Council, shared car parking services with Broxtowe, and providing ICT services for small businesses. The team heard a suggestion to have regular (perhaps annual) meetings with individual contractors to discuss ideas that could have mutual benefit to RBC and the contractor.

Due diligence in project appraisal / business case is key, and may need further reinforcing going forward.

4.5 Capacity to deliver

Rushcliffe Borough Council has a strong track record of high quality service delivery, developing its entrepreneurial and commercial approach over recent years led by the Chief Executive.

Staff are proud to work for RBC and are highly motivated to deliver to the highest of standards for residents. The workforce feels empowered and supported by managers, with opportunities for development and freedoms to generate, share and progress new ideas. Significant investment in staff development has contributed to job satisfaction and a high level of workforce retention. All of this means that the council is described as an 'exciting' place to work.

There is a 'whole council' approach, enabled by the open plan office and the open, inclusive ethos. Cross-team working, with ad hoc cross-organisational project teams is common. Individuals are encouraged to generate ideas for efficiency and productivity, and ad hoc teams are brought together to deliver short term goals (for example, to organise green waste renewals).

RBC responds flexibly and swiftly to changing needs and situations. The willingness to bring in external resources or skills where and when required has enabled the council to make the most of new opportunities. The new Communications Officer and the Strategic Delivery Sites Officer posts are good illustrations of this.

There is however risk of organisational overstretch, as the council does more with fewer staff, coupled with high expectation both externally and internally. Whilst there has been a willingness by many staff to go the extra mile, this is not sustainable in the long term and capacity is an issue which requires further consideration.

Like all councils, there are skill shortages in key areas and challenges in recruiting to specialist roles. The competence and culture of current staff is not in question. To remain competitive, the pay and reward package should be reviewed along with other incentives to attract and retain the right talent. Individual managers currently have discretion over flexible working, although this is perceived to be inconsistently approved and applied. Clarifying the position for staff and managers would help to reassure staff.

4.6 Commercialisation

RBC has been on a commercialisation journey for over eight years and is well-advanced compared to many councils. It has a strong commercial mind set which is more subtle and impressive than most, exploring a variety of models to help deliver the RBC services. This includes streamlining processes and decision-making, as well as investments in property, communities, business development and income generation. The link between increased commercial activity and improved service delivery more widely is well understood amongst staff and Members. Creating social value is RBC's purpose, and commercialisation allows them to do this.

RBC has achieved key commercial success and has a good track record, for example Streetwise, Green waste, Property investment (the Point), and Industrial Units at Cotgrave for business start-ups. As a result, RBC is considered a trusted client. For example, Metropolitan Housing Trust cites them very highly amongst the 80 councils it works for.

RBC understands and seizes the wider benefits of commercialisation for Rushcliffe communities. Both staff and Members realise that doing things differently is acceptable and they are encouraged to explore, develop and deliver options beyond the most common commercial models, including investment, property development, income generation and streamlining processes. There are many commercial ideas generated, and RBC prioritises which are delivered, based on evaluation of risk and reward. Even more could be delivered if there were more officers with commercial skills in RBC. Some skills are already developed, empirically and through training (for example, the LGA / Institute of Directors course). Consider how to expand and develop these skills.

To continue to be truly commercial, strategic decision-making needs to be more agile. Delegated authority to the Asset Investment Group (AIG) could help this. If this body does what the Cabinet papers allow, the council should be able to do more. Members have a strategic role, setting policy and vision, and taking overarching decisions, which can bring relevant experience to bear, but need to do so without stepping into an operational role. Consider how to provide clarity to Members and the public on decisions that are made. Implementing robust commercial bid / no bid decisions, perhaps using the grid provided by the Institute of Directors will help to have a clear narrative on why decisions have been made.

Relationships are vital as is engagement with clients and users to establish common purpose and rapport. More training, for officers and Members, on improving organisational relationships, particularly with public sector partners, should be considered.

4.7 Growth

Rushcliffe Borough Council is a trusted brand and a respected and skilled delivery agent with a good reputation. Partners indicate that it is an excellent council to work with, and that it is achieving good outcomes for its residents, communities and businesses. It has taken a proactive positive role delivering tailored, targeted growth.

RBC established Growth Boards in key areas of the borough. These bring together partners from different sectors, including Members, developers, public sector partners, and local businesses for development and regeneration. They are all at different stages, and are learning from each other. Partners welcome this approach, which enables different solutions for different parts of the borough. Consider how the Community and Voluntary Sector could participate in Growth Boards. Harnessing their community activism and knowledge would add value and capacity of social infrastructure.

This creative approach is delivering locally derived solutions. For example, at Cotgrave, RBC is building an economic and community facility. This includes GP surgery, police and council information point, and units to support a variety of new and small businesses. Working closely with Nottingham City Council, RBC is developing employment opportunities for Clifton's residents, along the A453, which involves working with Highways from the County Council. Involving the voluntary and community sector more could enhance social infrastructure, and help to improve community understanding of the need for growth.

RBC has developed a flexible approach to funding, enabling it to divert LEP resources from one site to another (for example, Bingham to Clifton). It has had recent success in a housing infrastructure fund bid to Government.

The action plan from the Planning Peer Challenge has been delivered and is showing results. Reforms to the planning committee have enabled quicker, clearer decision-making. Proactive communications have improved the engagement with public and partners enabling swifter, better informed, decisions to be made.

Housing delivery numbers are a big challenge. There is no five-year land supply, and there have been some sites lost on appeal. Big sites are not delivering as planned, so, in addition to work to accelerate those sites, there is a need to identify and release smaller sites. The target of 30% affordable housing is not being reached, but RBC is doing better than other councils. There may be more work to do on increasing social housing numbers.

The Strategic Delivery Sites Officer has been appointed to clear blockages to delivering growth on strategic sites. He works closely with the dedicated delivery teams for each site, along with key stakeholders to remove barriers to delivery. However, there is a fragmented delivery partner landscape who are not all fully engaged, or engaged early

enough in the process. The Economic Prosperity Committee (EPC) appears to have stalled since the breakdown of the Combined Authority bid. The lack of effective meetings could result in the risk of credibility both at a regional and national level. There is a need for a collective strategic body of this nature to provide leadership, direction and prioritisation in the support of growth. There is also a role for such a body to support authorities in preventing land banking by key land owners both in the private and public sector.

Rushcliffe Borough Council has a key role to play in working with its District council partners to achieve better co-ordination and clarity of priorities, whilst also influencing the re-establishing of the purpose, motivation and governance of the EPC. Due to the size of the growth agenda within Rushcliffe, if the EPC is unable to gain traction then it will be essential for the council to establish an alternative strategy to participate within a relevant vehicle to maximise its influence and delivery.

4.8 Streetwise

Streetwise is a successful social enterprise delivering social value and financial benefit to RBC. It delivers street cleaning and grounds maintenance to the council and to the main social housing provider (Metropolitan Housing). The Managing Director has a strong drive and has instilled a strong commercial culture and people-orientated values. It has delivered external business to good acclaim with its Teckal compliant company.

To deliver a five-year plan, the Managing Director will need the support of a strong leadership team, including an operations director, finance specialist, and possibly an independent non-executive director. We recommend that this is put in place as soon as possible.

Streetwise needs a long-term vision to take it forward. It has benefited from opportunistic growth. A strong strategic vision will help direct its next steps. Once the new strategic management team is in place, they can establish the long-term vision, and plan out the marketing strategy for the company.

Suggestions from the peer challenge team include:

- Review and implement a new strategic management structure to support its growth.
- Review Streetwise and clarify the long-term vision
- Refocus growth strategy, for example through:
 - Market Penetration and Sales Growth
 - Public Sector Growth
 - Review and implement new structure to support Growth
- Develop and deliver marketing and communications strategy
- Establish better bid processes
- Review recharge structure from RBC to ensure best value to Streetwise
- Revise the constitution to ensure it allows Streetwise to be agile
- Relocation is key if margins are to be improved
- Implement Holding Company Structure and review roles and its objectives in relation to Streetwise
- Implement, review and monitor 2018 business plan

5. Notable Practice and Signposting

Notable Practice

- CABMAN meetings – regular Cabinet and EMT meetings for vision setting and as an accountability mechanism
- Cabinet role application process – Members had to apply for a Cabinet role and go through a shortlisting and interview process
- The Pickle Campaign – this communications campaign encouraged people to come to the council for help around benefit changes. The strapline was “don’t get in a pickle” with appropriate images and metaphors. It resulted in both service delivery improvement, improved customer experience and fewer mistakes or late payments.
- Growth Boards – multi-agency, locality based partnerships that identify current and future needs for the area and seek ways to deliver the growth that is needed.
- Cotgrave development – a community based and partnership approach which took vision from Rushcliffe. The community hub facility in Cotgrave will house health services and Rushcliffe services. Whilst focusing on ensuring that the NHS gets what it needs, it is developing into a wider partnership. Business units are available for new and small businesses.
- Imaginative and effective use of the Apprenticeship Levy to empower and develop staff.
- Approach to Commercialisation – commercialisation is used to provide social as well as financial benefit. The financial benefits enable good service delivery. Different models and methods are used; it is not just about income generation. Policies, practices and processes are reviewed with a commercial approach. Investments in communities as well as financial investments are seeing returns. Investment in staff development is broadening commercial expertise within the council. Property development and delivery supports the business growth that RBC is aiming for.
- Link officers at a senior level for Town and Parish council. This leads to positive and fruitful working relationships, effective and efficient ways of addressing challenges and improving collaboration.
- Staff engagement initiatives, such as ‘mocktail making’ during dry January, Chief Executive cooking for staff, the reverse advent calendar, and internal communications such as the TV screens.

Signposting

- Affordable housing delivery methods – Sedgemoor District Council works with landlords who are not Registered Social Landlords to deliver affordable rents.
- Forum for contractor liaison – St. Alban’s City and District Council has established annual reviews with its major contractors to identify opportunities of mutual benefit, such as better services, greater income generation or lower running costs.
- Joint County Council / District and Borough council management team meetings – West Sussex County Council and its Districts have achieved good outcomes for its residents using this model, through growth deals and HIF funding.

6. Next steps

Immediate next steps

We appreciate the senior managerial and political leadership will want to reflect on these findings and suggestions 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 some of the areas for development and improvement and we would be happy to discuss this. Mark Edgell, Principal Adviser is the main contact between your authority and the Local Government Association (LGA). He can be contacted by emailing mark.edgell@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 February 2023.