

Corporate Peer Challenge **Rushmoor Borough Council**

5th to 7th December 2017

Feedback Report

1. Executive Summary

Rushmoor is a Council that is well regarded by its partners across the public, private and voluntary sectors. It has a good understanding of its communities and the challenges they face, including relatively poor levels of educational attainment at secondary level, pockets of significant deprivation and health inequalities. It is prepared to act on these concerns, including looking to influence services and partners in areas which are not the direct responsibility of a district council. It has worked to secure the integration of minority communities in the Borough.

The Council recognises the real strengths of the area – its connectivity with the wider south east region and the economic growth opportunities this brings. Rushmoor has a strong heritage in the aviation sector and associated high technology industries, and Britain's premier business airport. Its economic development work builds on these assets. The Council has ambitious plans for the regeneration of both Aldershot and Farnborough town centres.

The Council delivers good services and has enjoyed a strong financial position, typified by spending within budget and making sufficient savings to date while being in a position to invest to secure future income streams. Member – officer relationships are good and there is a collaborative approach across the different political groups on the Council.

However, there is a recognition by the Council's leadership that it faces greater challenges in future – both financial and in terms of service delivery – and the organisation will need to change. The Council should become more agile and flexible; able to quickly seize new opportunities, driven by performance and the desire to make the most efficient use of resources. The appointment of a new chief executive in May 2017 completes a new political and managerial leadership team, which gives the opportunity to open a new chapter. That leadership has already shown an openness to change and a willingness to engage with partners locally and across the sector. This is summarised in the phrase 'Listen, learn and deliver better' which sits at the heart of the Council Plan 2017/18.

To modernise and embed change in the organisation, Rushmoor needs to develop and share a clear, long term ambition for both the Council and the Borough. It needs to revise the Council Plan to make it a longer term document that expresses consistent priorities and the outcomes to be delivered in support of that vision. The Council should ensure that there is clear accountability for the management of performance and delivery. The Rushmoor Strategic Partnership should be refocused around fewer, more strategic issues with the purpose of delivering improved outcomes. Responsibility for delivering particular outcomes should be shared across other partners, not just the Council.

The Council still needs to develop a wider understanding of the financial challenges it is facing over the coming years, as its previous ability to make savings supported by a pattern of underspending against budgets may be masking the extent of the financial challenge to a number of people. The Council is planning to make use of reserves to deliver a balanced budget over the next three years, which is not sustainable in the longer term. Increasing risks – for example arising from investments intended to secure future

income streams – mean that a higher level of reserves may be required. Longer term savings need to be secured and resources aligned to priorities.

The transformation programme will be key to both modernising the organisation and delivering the required savings. The Council needs to develop a fully worked-up transformation programme moving on from the '8 point plan' with clear project plans and delivery timelines. It has begun to do so, but needs to extend the reach of the programme into wider service transformation beyond delivering the necessary budget savings. That programme should address the sequencing of key tasks and milestones, so that change is achieved at pace but in a sustainable way. The Council needs to secure the necessary capacity and skills to deliver its ambitions, including change management, organisational development and in particular to support the major regeneration programme it is embarking on now.

The Council should now review and modernise a number of aspects of its governance arrangements. In particular, it needs to undertake a root and branch review of its scrutiny arrangements. This should enable scrutiny to make a real difference, through effective but constructive challenge to the executive and helping a wider range of members to contribute towards policy development and review. It should also lead to rationalisation of the current structure of Policy & Review panels and be supported by appropriate development opportunities for both members and officers involved in scrutiny.

2. Key recommendations

- a) Develop a long term vision for the Borough and the Council, and extend the planning horizon for the Council Plan to support delivery of that vision
- b) Undertake regular resident surveys to inform both the development and on-going review of the vision for the Borough and service transformation
- c) Reshape the Rushmoor Strategic Partnership (RSP) to focus on fewer but more strategic issues and share responsibility for delivering better outcomes across different members of the RSP.
- d) Strengthen performance management arrangements and ensure that poor performance is tackled effectively
- e) Undertake a thorough review of scrutiny arrangements, drawing on external expertise, leading to a rationalised structure and more effective scrutiny
- f) Ensure on-going development and other support to members and officers undertaking scrutiny, so that scrutiny can continue to make a positive difference
- g) Develop and communicate a wider understanding of the underlying financial challenges now facing the Council, including more regular monitoring and vigorous challenge to significant or high risk budgets
- h) Secure and deliver additional savings and income generation to reduce the use of reserves to produce a balanced budget over the coming years and move to a risk based assessment of the level of required reserves
- i) Develop and adopt an integrated strategy to guide commercial and regeneration property investments, along with proactive performance monitoring of investment returns.
- j) Continue to develop a transformation programme to modernise both organisational arrangements and service delivery, underpinned by a clear vision of the future organisation; specific project plans and achievable timelines
- k) Strengthen capacity in key areas, such as regeneration; transformation and organisational development through a combination of buying in external expertise, partnerships and skills transfer and growing talent within the organisation.

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 with you. The peers who delivered the peer challenge at Rushmoor were:

- Alan Goodrum, associate consultant (former Chief Executive of Chiltern and South Bucks District Councils)
- Tony Jackson, former Leader of East Hertfordshire District Council
- Adrian Sibley, Director of Corporate Services at Corby Borough Council
- Charlotte Burnham, Head of Member Support and Community Partnerships, Sunderland City Council
- David Armin, challenge manager, 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 consider the following issues:

- Functional areas and senior management structure - is this clear?
- Cabinet Portfolios – are they clear and focused on policy & outcomes?

- Work of the scrutiny function and panels - are they fit for purpose?
- How we best support Members in their community leadership role?
- Whole council approach, in particular our responsiveness and agility - how can we strengthen this?
- Our traditional approaches, particularly in partnership and community sector work (e.g. Rushmoor Strategic Partnership) – can this be modernised?

The peer challenge process

It is important to stress that this was not an inspection. Peer challenges are improvement-focused and tailored to meet individual councils' needs. They are designed to complement and add value to a council's own performance and improvement focus. 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 three days onsite at Rushmoor, during which they:

- Spoke to more than 70 people including a range of council staff together with councillors and external partners and stakeholders.
- Gathered information and views from some 25 meetings and additional research and reading.
- Collectively spent more than 200 hours to determine their findings – the equivalent of one person spending more than five weeks in Rushmoor.

The peer team also had access to the 2015 Corporate peer challenge report which the Council has recently published. That report found a stable council with strong traditions but since then new political and managerial leadership provides the opportunity to address with greater urgency the political priorities and underlying issues of financial and organisational capacity.

This report provides a summary of the peer team's findings during the peer challenge visit from 5th to 7th December 2017. It builds on the feedback presentation provided by the peer team at the end of the challenge visit. In presenting feedback to you, we 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

The Council demonstrates a good understanding of Rushmoor as a place and of its constituent communities. Despite being in a generally affluent area, there are some pockets of significant deprivation against at least one measure, particularly in Aldershot, including income deprivation among older people. The proportion of residents with degree level qualifications is below both regional and national averages. Educational attainment is below average, particularly at secondary level where progress measures are below average for three out of four secondary schools. There are health inequalities and challenges around mental health. The Council also recognises the area's strengths – its location and connectivity with the south east region, which is a major source of economic growth, along with the high proportion of high tech and research firms linked to the aerospace industry. Farnborough is the location of Britain's only dedicated business airport and the biennial International Airshow. The Borough has a long association with both the British Army (based in Aldershot) and the development of British aviation.

This understanding of place informs the priorities in the Council Plan. Under the theme of 'Sustaining a thriving economy and boosting local business', regeneration of both Aldershot and Farnborough town centres is recognised as a clear political priority. The Council states its intention to work with schools, Hampshire County Council, colleges of further education and employers to increase educational attainment, skills and aspirations. Under the theme of 'Supporting and empowering our communities and meeting local needs' the Council intends to develop specific projects to tackle mental health, obesity and income deprivation.

There are good examples of community integration, such as the food festival which has been used to bring together different communities and develop understanding of their respective cultural backgrounds. Since Gurkha soldiers, who have served in the British Army since 1948 gained the right to settle in the UK in 2004, Rushmoor has seen a significant influx of Gurkhas to live in the Borough. Some 3,000 ex-Gurkhas and their dependents have settled in the Borough. The Council has supported them to become integrated and provided information to help diffuse potential tensions and adapt to life in a very different environment to that found in Nepal.

To strengthen its priority setting processes and deliver improved outcomes, the Council should develop and share a clear long term vision and ambition for Rushmoor, to give a sense of what the Borough will be like in say 10 years' time. The current Council Plan covers just one financial year. Although built around the same four key themes each year, this does not give a sufficient time horizon to make a significant impact on outcomes in the community. There appears to be some significant changes in the planned actions year on year.

More typically, a council's corporate plan will have a three year planning horizon with an annual review and refresh. This should include both outcome measures (the impact in the community) and the planned actions to deliver these. In Rushmoor currently the plan focuses on actions and processes, as does performance management of delivery. This emphasis should shift towards impact and outcome measures.

With an annual planning process, there is a greater risk that new priorities will be added, which will stretch the Council's ability to deliver these. The Council needs to use its good understanding of place to agree the key priorities, stick to these and deliver over an appropriate period of time – and avoid the temptation to add to these until the planned outcomes have been achieved. There should be a clearer focus on what the Council and its partners will do to tackle the pockets of significant deprivation in parts of the Borough, and the specific impact this is intended to have.

The Council's understanding of place would be further underpinned by more regular resident surveys. Rushmoor has not undertaken such a survey for a number of years. A survey of elected members was undertaken recently to provide a proxy for such resident views, but the response to this survey was relatively poor with only a third of members responding.

4.2 Leadership of Place

The Council's Leader and Chief Executive, who was appointed earlier this year, effectively provide a new 'top team' which partners see as an opportunity to refresh and build on already established relationships. Rushmoor is a well regarded partner across the public, private and voluntary sectors. Its response is often characterised as 'how can we help?' when approached. The business sector sees the Council as nimble and responsive – 'open for business' and helpful in efforts to attract further inward investment.

There are some great examples of partnership working, such as the Council's investment in permanent exhibition space for the International Airshow along with a range of other partners and financial institutions. A number of key public sector partners are co-located at the Council's Farnborough offices including the police and Hampshire social services.

To enhance its economic development work to date, a more strategic and proactive approach is now required. This would build on the Borough's assets and offer to investors, such as developing the Farnborough brand as the home for research and intelligence based technology companies linked to aerospace. It should also include promoting particular sites for development, potentially proactive involvement in the town centre regeneration initiatives and building on the Council's sub regional role where the Borough's economic development strength gives it a natural leadership role.

Rushmoor's political leadership has the desire and commitment to exercise influence on key issues which provide challenges for its communities beyond the

traditional role of district councils – such as education, skills and health. It is seen as a constructive partner in these areas by Hampshire County Council, in addition to its economic development work. It is important for members to recognise and embrace this influencing role as continuing constraints on public spending will make direct delivery beyond core services increasingly difficult for the Council. Members in general appear to be active and engaged in their wards and with local community groups.

The Rushmoor Strategic Partnership (RSP) has been successful in developing relationships among important partners across the Borough and in sharing information. However, it is now questionable if this represents the best use of limited time and resources. The RSP should be retained, but re-shaped to focus on fewer, more strategic issues with an emphasis on working together to deliver better outcomes. Information sharing should be limited to that necessary to determine those priorities and monitoring to ensure delivery of agreed outcomes. Leadership should be shared across the different workstreams. Partners other than the Council should take on responsibility to lead work in different areas, but the Council should help facilitate agreement to this through the independent Chair of the RSP.

The Council is going through a period of transition as it modernises the organisation to become more responsive, efficient and effective. At the same time, it will need to maintain sufficient focus on place, so that it can deliver on the priorities for Rushmoor in the Council Plan and provide leadership when appropriate through the RSP. Periodic updates on the Council's vision for the Borough would be welcomed by a number of partners, including the business sector.

One opportunity to align the interests of the organisation and the place is the Council's acquisition of property and other investments to generate income to support future service delivery. Such investments can also have a direct benefit to Rushmoor's wider regeneration and economic development strategies, which the Council should keep under review. The Government is currently consulting on proposals to amend the Local Authority Investment Code, which may limit council's ability to make investments which do not have such wider social and economic benefits.

4.3 Organisational leadership and governance

Both the Council's political and managerial leadership are committed to change. There is a recognition of the need to develop a more flexible and responsive organisation which can adapt more quickly, and one which will be financially sustainable in the longer term. The new approach is summarised as 'Listen, learn and deliver better'. This leadership is underpinned by good member and officer relationships and a collaborative approach. There are constructive relationships across the main political groups. Although the Conservative Group has a clear majority, there are a significant number of members from the opposition parties so such constructive relationships are helpful, for example on the Policy & Review Panels.

People across the organisation recognise that there has been a change in leadership style and a desire for greater pace in making change and demonstrable progress in delivering priorities. Rushmoor recently undertook a staff survey, with results becoming available at the time of the peer challenge. This is a good example of Rushmoor wishing to develop its self-awareness. The survey achieved a relatively high response rate (approaching 80%). The results indicate a high level of understanding of the need for change (90%), notwithstanding a lower proportion feeling the reasons for change have been well communicated (55%). However, the results present some challenges for effective change management – only 21% felt change at Rushmoor is well managed (50% neither agree or disagree); 32% felt they were consulted in advance and 22% that they could influence change.

The messages from the survey seem reasonably consistent with what people told the peer team during the course of its work. There is some awareness of the proposed new operating model, which the Chief Executive has presented through a series of staff briefings. The principles of the new operating model (ie. customer first; modernisation; commercialisation etc.) need to be consistently explained and promoted, and translated into what this will mean in practice. Overall, there is a need for greater clarity about what the future council will look like and the journey the organisation will go through to bring this into being.

At the current time there is uncertainty about the prospects of structural change, which is giving rise to some nervousness across the organisation. The Council should quickly achieve clarity around senior roles and functional areas, and review and develop these over time. However, structural change is likely to be less important than values and behaviours and new ways of working in delivering a more modern organisation.

The Council should revamp its performance management processes, including enforcing standards and being clear about accountability for performance. There is a sense that Rushmoor does not deal effectively with underperformance, which is borne out by the staff survey – only 15% felt management dealt effectively with under-performance. Allied to this, it would be timely to review the personal development system to include outcomes, personal development and training needs and ensure it is applied consistently.

There is a need for consistent communication of key messages across and through the organisation. There is some suggestion of silo working and of communications not reaching throughout the organisation, partly as a function of individual managers' style and approach. Again this sense is supported by the staff survey. 38% felt there is a clear vision and strong strategic leadership from CMT; 37% that 'Rushmoor works as a team across services' and 35% that communication is good between senior management and employees. These need to be balanced against the observation that 87% felt that their manager was approachable.

The Council has been considering aspects of its governance arrangements for some time. This review now needs to be progressed with greater urgency. Some

tweaking of the current Cabinet portfolios may be beneficial, including enabling greater focus on transformation (delivery of the 8 Point Plan); corporate planning and performance and regeneration. In addition, some of the functional areas at officer level need clarifying, for example on property acquisition as part of the review of functions and structures.

More fundamental is the need to change the approach to scrutiny in Rushmoor. In the view of the peer team, root and branch reform is required. But this needs to engage and build on the commitment to good scrutiny apparent in members during the peer challenge. Currently, there are five Policy & Review panels – which is excessive for a district council. Moreover, the principal work of these committees is to receive service / project updates via reports ‘for noting’, rather than making recommendations for action by the Cabinet. This is evidently a source of growing frustration to scrutiny members themselves.

Any review of scrutiny at Rushmoor needs to start with agreement about the purpose of scrutiny – including effective challenge to hold the executive to account and enabling a wider range of members to contribute towards policy development and review – and that scrutiny should make a difference. It should also lead to rationalisation of the current structure of Policy & Review panels. Implementation will need to be supported by appropriate development opportunities for both members and officers involved in scrutiny; informed by practice elsewhere and led by senior members and officers to ensure continuing and stronger engagement of non-executive members in scrutiny.

A potential approach could be the replacement of the existing Policy & Review panels with an Overview & Scrutiny Committee (to undertake performance and pre-decision scrutiny) and a Policy Advisory Board (to develop policy). Task & Finish groups could then undertake scrutiny and policy development work on behalf of the principal committee. We strongly suggest that the Council seeks some external input to both the further development of its thinking around new arrangements for scrutiny and subsequent implementation.

4.4 Financial planning and viability

Rushmoor has benefited from a strong financial position historically. It has had sufficient resources to cover all priorities. This sense of financial security has been underpinned by a pattern of consistent underspends within each service area over a number of years. The Council has a track record of being able to make the necessary savings, for example through the budget challenge process for 2016-17 which delivered savings of £350k.

The Council’s financial position is further strengthened by Rushmoor being in a region enjoying relatively high economic growth, with the potential to benefit from New Homes Bonus and a share of business rates growth. It has invested in commercial property to access additional income in future. This current financial strength gives Rushmoor the capacity to invest to save to help secure its position in future.

However, Rushmoor is now facing more significant financial challenges and there is a risk that its relatively secure position to date may be deflecting attention from the need to address these issues now. The Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) currently shows a cumulative funding gap of £2.2 million by 2020/21 (out of a net revenue budget of £13.5 million). There are proposals in place to bridge this gap, through a combination of savings and increased income from investment and other sources. These proposals, however, are not guaranteed and represent a significant risk to the Council. (The Council currently reports that £948k of savings are on target or likely to be realised, with the remaining £1.2 million of savings being either predicted to be achieved or yet to be identified).

Furthermore, the MTFS funding gap assumes that over £2 million will be drawn down from reserves over the period 2017/18 to 2020/21. This is not a sustainable, long term strategy as reserves cannot be used indefinitely to bridge the gap in revenue spending (use of reserves at this level will leave useable reserves at around £4 million at the end of 2020/21). The underlying, fundamental funding gap is therefore some £4.2 million cumulative to 2020/21 (identified funding gap + use of reserves) which the historical pattern of underspending will not address. It appears that the extent of this financial challenge is not yet fully understood by a number of key officers and members. Developing this understanding could be assisted by improving the presentation of summary financial information to highlight these key challenges.

Reserves of £4 million represent 5% of annual expenditure. However, this is a relatively low figure if significant financial risks were to materialise. Such risks could arise from planned savings not being achieved, or the envisaged income from property investments, New Homes Bonus or business rates not being realised. It is therefore suggested that a more risk based approach is taken to determine the required level of reserves, rather than a percentage of turnover. It is likely that such an approach would increase the level of required reserves.

As the Council looks toward the future and its priorities it would be timely to review its strategic risks, indeed this would inform both priority setting and financial planning. These risks would concern both the delivery of key outcomes and financial uncertainties.

It is suggested one of the key risks the authority faces is the rental income from its property investment portfolio. Future net income streams of £1.6 million up to 2020/21 are a major element in the Council's plans to address the funding gap, which will include a contribution from sites not yet purchased or approved for purchase. Whilst there is a method for establishing a potential yield from purchases, finance officers are not engaged at all stages of the process and the investments are not undertaken as part of a wider commercial or investment strategy. This strategy should include the rationale for making acquisitions; key principles for decision making; the process and future monitoring arrangements. The current Government consultation, which may lead to further restrictions on purely commercial investments by local authorities, has been noted previously. A more integrated approach to commercial and regeneration investments could well

be beneficial, along with a deeper understanding of the long term financial impact on the Council of its regeneration and economic development priorities.

Addressing the future funding gap is not simply a finance issue, but a wider cultural issue which needs to be shared and owned by all budget holders. The authority may need to make difficult financial decisions in future. It needs to be assured that its budgets are not overstated and that budget setting and monitoring processes are sufficiently challenging to identify potential savings and underspends at the earliest opportunity. Based on past underspends and the previous budget scrutiny process, it is likely that further budget savings will be identified through more vigorous challenge at both member and officer level, along with a clearer allocation of resources in line with agreed priorities.

4.5 Capacity to deliver

Rushmoor benefits from having committed and dedicated staff, many having worked for the authority for a number of years. They are happy and proud to work for the authority and many are up for the changes which they know need to be made.

The Council is developing some of the key skills needed to take it forward. For example, it is improving project and programme management skills – in particular around the transformation programme. The Staff Showcase event provides the opportunity to share learning and innovation developed in particular service areas across the organisation. In these events, staff attend ‘market stalls’ to hear the story of what they have done and achieved, and discuss how this could be adopted by other service areas.

The Council is showing an increasing openness to new ways of working. For example, consideration of more opportunities for shared services; the potential establishment of a housing investment company and new approaches to economic development where investment and economic priorities are more closely integrated. An example of this is Rushmoor’s support for investment in the exhibition centre for the International Airshow.

Rushmoor has shown itself to be open to external challenge and learning from elsewhere, both through this peer challenge and the iESE (Improvement & Efficiency South East) brief to improve processes and culture around the Council’s interface with customers.

To take forward its ambitions for Rushmoor, the Council needs to strengthen its approach to longer term planning and develop its skills and capacity in some key areas to deliver its priorities. There is a desire among staff for the Council to stick with and see through a particular model for change. The Council should explain more thoroughly what the new operating model will mean in practice. People are looking for clarification of what is meant by ‘commercialisation’. This is not just about more trading opportunities or potentially establishing companies to deliver services on behalf of the Council, but simply being more business-like in managing and operating services more efficiently and flexibly.

Political and managerial leaders want to increase the pace of change. But this needs to be done in a way which achieves sustainable change in a planned way, through clear prioritisation, programming and key milestones for progress. Trying to do too much at once may be self-defeating. There should be a clearer and integrated annual planning and budgeting cycle, within the context of longer term agreed priorities. This should engage with Cabinet and scrutiny at appropriate stages, leading to the agreement / confirmation of priorities. This should reduce the risk of other priorities emerging during the year, with implications for officer time and attention and financial resources. This longer term planning should be underpinned by a review of strategic and operational risks.

The Council needs to revamp the '8 Point Plan' into a fully worked-up transformation programme with clear project plans and delivery timelines and governance arrangements. It has begun to do so, but needs to extend the reach of the programme into wider service transformation beyond delivering the necessary budget savings. In revamping the Plan, the Council should establish a clear and consistent narrative about the wider purpose of the Plan and the shorthand title '8 Point Plan' may no longer be helpful. The transformation plan should help to both embed and increase the pace of change. Within this framework of corporate and service transformation, the Council should develop a culture which empowers staff to make improvements to their services.

Skills and capacity need to be increased in some key areas, such as around change management and in particular the major regeneration programmes Rushmoor is now embarking on. These can be acquired through a number of means, including sourcing external support and joint ventures which entail an element of skills development and transfer. Organisational development (OD) resources need to be redirected and aligned with the transformation programme. Currently the Council's HR resources are largely transactional and operationally focused, reporting to the Chief Executive. The Council should consider members' development needs in the round, including the implications of its new relationships with communities, leadership of those communities and developments in its governance arrangements. It should then produce a development programme to meet these needs and ensure it is adequately resourced.

5. Next steps

Immediate next steps

We appreciate you will want to reflect on these findings and suggestions with your senior managerial and political leadership in order to determine how the Council 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. Kate Herbert, Principal Adviser is the main contact between your authority and the Local Government Association (LGA). Her contact details are: Tel 07867 632404 or Email kate.herbert@local.gov.uk .

In the meantime, we are keen to continue the relationship we have formed with you and colleagues through the peer challenge. We will endeavour to provide additional information and signposting about the issues we have raised in this report to help inform your ongoing consideration.

Follow up visit

The LGA 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 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 peer team. The timing of the visit is determined by the Council. Our expectation is that it will occur within the next 12-24 months.