



# Corporate Peer Challenge

# **Uttlesford District Council**

8<sup>th</sup> – 10<sup>th</sup> November 2016

Feedback Report



## 1. Executive Summary

Uttlesford District Council (UDC) is a well-run and stable council that is highly regarded by partner organisations, stakeholders and staff. The view of members is one of UDC being efficient and effective. Members who have experience of representing more than one council feel this strongly. Uttlesford itself is a great place to live with high employment (80.2%). It has a mix of heritage sites, thriving towns and rural landscape. Uttlesford also benefits from good transport links. Stansted Airport is within the district, there are train connections to London and it has the M11 and the A120 running through it connecting it to other parts of the region and London.

UDC has a fairly new leadership team. The chief executive has been in post less than a year and the leader has been in post for approximately 18 months. The peer team felt that this new leadership team was bringing energy to the council and its partnership working. The leader has been described as accessible to staff, members and partners and the chief executive is seen to be already having a positive impact on the district.

UDC is thought to be a positive and friendly place to work by its staff. The council is supportive and staff are proud to say that they work for UDC. It was evident that staff hold strong public service values and want to serve the community in the best way possible. There is a good skills base within the council and staff are well-motivated and keen to deliver. The council could maximise this asset by developing a comprehensive workforce strategy. This would help the council with its talent management, change agenda and succession planning. The council could also be strengthened through the creation of a member development strategy. This would ensure that all members in the council were confident about the expectations of their role within the council and as community leaders.

The council had a financial crisis in 2007 which had a profound impact on the organisation. Since then it has benefited from good financial management and is currently in a more fortunate position than many other councils. It has the capacity to deliver its own services, support partners and provide a high level of grant aid to the voluntary sector. One consequence of this is that the council lacks a burning platform. Without this there is less of a driver for change, although this is not to say that there isn't an appetite within the council for improvement and modernisation. The council does need to consider how it avoids complacency, maintains momentum for innovation and how it fosters a culture of change and modernisation. Whilst Uttlesford is currently financially stable, many other parts of the public sector are changing and evolving to deliver innovative services with less funding and UDC needs to reflect and respond so that it doesn't get left behind when facing future challenges.

Partnership working is strong in Uttlesford and the council has solid links and relationships with the business sector, the police, health and the voluntary sector. The council is well regarded by its partners both regionally and sub-regionally but there is further work to be done in strengthening existing relationships to enable different types and the intensity of service delivery. This would create some resilience for the council. It has good working relationships with two LEPs - Greater

Cambridge Greater Peterborough (GCGPLEP) and South East (SELEP) as well as the London Stansted Cambridge Consortium (LSCC). The council needs to continue to develop its position as a place of opportunity with regional and sub- regional partners and maximise its resources, assets and great transport links to enhance the councils influence and role on a wider economic development stage

Communication is one aspect of work within the council that has room for improvement. Partners know that UDC is committed to working together but they don't always know the outcomes of discussions. It is essential that UDC create a feedback loop for all their interactions, with staff, partners, and residents so that there is universal awareness of any results and decisions. Often it is the case that a matter has been dealt with or a problem has been solved. UDC needs to be braver in shouting about its successes but also informing stakeholders of any outcomes generally. This will result in greater buy-in and more satisfaction and understanding from residents and partners.

## **2. Key recommendations**

We have included a range of suggestions and observations within the main section of the report that will inform some 'quick wins' and practical actions. The following are the peer team's key recommendations to the council:

1. ***Continue to develop your position as a place of opportunity with regional and sub-regional partners***
2. ***Communicate and engage effectively at every level***
3. ***Create a compelling narrative and subsequent transformation agenda***
4. ***Review and re-provide member development / investment***
5. ***Improve your holistic workforce strategy***
6. ***Strengthen the partnership relationships and increase the intensity of delivery***
7. ***Continue to take pride in what you do.....***

## **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 Uttlesford District Council were:

- Andrew Muter, Chief Executive, Newark & Sherwood District Council
- John Cotton, Leader of South Oxfordshire District Council
- Sal Khan, Head of Service, East Staffordshire Borough Council
- Thomas Gower, NMT Officer, West Sussex
- Ami Beeton, Peer Challenge Manager, LGA

### **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 provide feedback on member support, engagement and the change readiness of the organisation.

### **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 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 3 days onsite at Uttlesford District Council, during which they:

- Spoke to more than 75 people including a range of council staff together with councillors and external partners and stakeholders.
- Gathered information and views from more than 18 meetings, visits to key sites in the area and additional research and reading.

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 (8<sup>th</sup> -10<sup>th</sup> November 2016). 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**

Uttlesford is made up of two market towns - Saffron Walden and Great Dunmow, a range of key villages; Elsenham, Takeley, Great Chesterford, Newport, Stansted Mountfitchet and Thaxted and a number of smaller parishes. The towns within the district are thriving and have not suffered greatly with the recession. Saffron Walden in particular is a busy successful market town with many independent retailers.

It is a predominantly rural district with transport links to London and Cambridge and it also hosts an international airport – London Stansted Airport. The connectivity via public transport links within the district itself is poor outside of the road network. This has caused problems of rural isolation and loneliness for some residents who have trouble accessing services or finding employment if they do not own a car. Whilst there is high employment generally across the district and large areas of affluence, the council is aware of pockets of deprivation within Uttlesford and strives to ensure that all residents can access the services that they need.

The council has recently refreshed its corporate priorities and senior management at the council have a strong understanding of the council's strengths and how they fit with the priorities for the council. The council needs to ensure that all members, staff and partners are aware of these priorities and that they are the driver for any decisions or changes that the council makes. A

strong evidence base needs to be in place to support the decision making process and align service delivery to the corporate priorities. The council currently looks to support partners and services it can but in the wake of future funding challenges it needs to consider a rigorous evidence based approach to support and deliver only those services that align with the council's priorities and objectives. This will also make the performance monitoring process more streamlined and effective.

Currently, UDC has a positive working relationship with Manchester Airport Group (MAG) who now own and operate London Stansted Airport. This has evolved and strengthened over the years moving from a position of opposition to the airport to one where it sees the benefit of working with the airport and works together to facilitate growth and development for the district (whilst being clear about its opposition to a second runway). This pragmatic approach is also demonstrated in the relationships that the council has with the business sector and the support that is available for the many micro businesses. The council needs to continue to demonstrate to partners within the sub- region and region that Uttlesford is a great area for growth and economic opportunity. At the same time as championing growth opportunities, the Council is sensitive to challenges such as rural deprivation that some parts of the district face. Linking the benefits of growth to measures which address pockets of disadvantage is an opportunity for the Council. One issue which the Council is aware of is the demand for additional employment land so that local companies can grow and expand in the district. This was identified through work on the Local Plan. The peer team recommend that UDC should consider whether this should be a stronger priority for the council. If more employment land was found this could help the council to build its position with partners and the LEPs as a key area which can grow. The council also has an opportunity to use its investment strategy to place itself in a strong position with economic development partners.

The council is active in the health and wellbeing delivery to residents and the leader has a strong understanding of the health needs and requirements of the district. He is keen for the council to get more involved with the Hertfordshire and West Essex Sustainability and Transformation Plan (STP) which covers the area of Uttlesford. But it is proving difficult, as it is for many councils across the country to effectively influence the STP process with partners. UDC needs to continue its current role of understanding partners' strategic health programmes so that it can effectively lead, reflect and influence where and when it can as the agenda moves forward.

The average house price in the district is currently £450,300 compared to a regional average of £299,400 (August 2015). With an average income of £24,575, the average house is more than 18 times the average income and housing affordability is a continuing issue that the council and its communities have to face. This has put a strain on housing stock and other housing solutions. In terms of housing development the council has a strong focus on the social rented sector. The council needs to consider strengthening the contributions of other affordable housing and the private rented sector to help solve the housing challenges that the district faces. This is something the council is already looking at.

## **4.2 Leadership of Place**

Officers and members are recognised and valued as community and place based leaders by partners and stakeholders. Both the leader and chief executive are described as accessible and keen to deliver services well. Externally the key contacts for the council are the leader and chief executive. There could be room here to maximise capacity within the council and for other members and staff to increase their visibility outside of the district and look to work with and share good practice with other councils and partner organisations in the region. Partners reported that the new chief executive was already having a positive impact on the district.

There are strong partnership arrangements in place with the business sector, the police through the community safety partnership and the voluntary sector as well as with the County Council. This is demonstrated through the council's support of the voluntary sector, the Police hub within the council building and the positive relationship that has been created with MAG, who operate London Stansted Airport. UDC has been successful in working with the airport and the county council to progress the potential for the first HE college to be built in the district..

The council has taken a supportive and traditional community role, partly due to its stable financial position but it needs to now consider whether there are new opportunities to build more effective relationships. Partners feel that sometimes the council has an inward focus and that the council looks to provide all the solutions to any problem that arises rather than sharing this responsibility externally. Now would be a good time for the council to change its focus and reach outwards encouraging and empowering partners to deliver services and avoid possible duplication. It should also consider whether all of the work with partners is aligned to deliver the council's objectives. A stronger partnership approach will provide the council with some needed resilience in case the financial situation changes and it is unable to deliver everything as it has done previously. A good example of where this has already happened is the delivery of the council's own sports and health improvement service; this has been reviewed and new commissioning arrangements have been put in place that facilitate these services being delivered more efficiently and effectively by their sports and fitness facilities provider. The council needs to continue this programme of reviews.

## **4.3 Organisational leadership and governance**

There is a good organisational spirit at UDC. Staff were proud to work for the council and it is perceived as a friendly place to work by staff, members and stakeholders. It was clear to the peer team that the new chief executive and corporate management team have brought a new energy to the organisation which has been well received by staff and members. Staff and stakeholders generally see leading members as accessible and approachable.

Regular appraisals are taking place throughout the organisation with a completion rate of 86% which is a great improvement on previous years but is still short of a 100% completion rate. Staff expressed concern that in the past they felt it was difficult to follow the golden thread from

the council's vision and objectives through to individual and team activities. Communication around this needs to be strengthened to ensure that all staff understand their contributions to the council's objectives. There is an appetite in the council for change and improvement. This needs to be supported by good engagement of staff and members and excellent communication with effective feedback loops.

Communication was a recurring theme that cropped up in discussions with staff, members and stakeholders. Some of the issues will be picked up in this section whilst other issues are covered later in the report under engagement.

There is scope across the council to improve communications internally and externally. This is a key issue for the council and one that it needs to get right. At times it can appear that the council is not acting on an important issue when in reality it just hasn't communicated about actions which they have taken. An example of this is when some UDC members have learnt about UDC issues via their parish council colleagues. This has a reputational impact for the council and also makes members feel isolated and disengaged.

Staff also feel that communications need to be improved. Some staff felt that they had to ask what issues are being discussed or find out what the outcome has been after something has been agreed. They are keen to be involved earlier in decision making so that they can contribute and be involved in the delivery process. Staff want to understand how their role contributes to delivery of the council's objectives. More regular and proactive communications will help members and staff to take ownership and feel more involved in the whole council delivery of services rather than just a service or ward area. Staff understanding the issues across the council could also lead to greater innovation and cross team working. This will build on the existing dedication that staff have towards public service and supporting vulnerable people

Whilst members and officers worked generally well together there were a few areas where this was more strained. Members were pleased that the forward planning process had been improved. Some members said they did not always feel that they were listened to and that sometimes they did not feel sufficiently well-informed to be able to contribute effectively to decision-making. Whilst these were not universally held views, it is clear that this has meant that some relationships within the Council have been strained at times. The process to develop the Local Plan is an example of an issue where some Members feel they could have been better informed and more involved. Following the decision to pause the local plan process the council has an opportunity to reassess and support all members to gain a clearer level of understanding about how the decision-making process will work and what role and influence members have at different stages of the process.

The Peer Team recognise that the Council has a number of relatively recently elected members and that different levels of knowledge and experience can sometimes leave some Members with a perception that they are not as involved as they should be. We therefore stress the importance of the recommendations in section 4.6 of the Report

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

UDC has strong financial health which demonstrates the effective political and managerial leadership that is in place e.g. the council has had early sign off of its Statement of Accounts. This is a very different position to the financial crisis that the council faced in 2007. There is no doubt that this crisis has shaped the way the council has operated and staff are very proud of their contribution to the council operating at a difficult time when it continued to deliver key services to residents. The council is now in an enviable position, being in the top quartile for many financial indicators. Members are proud of the progress the council had made in terms of financial performance in recent years. The council may need to consider how far the crisis of 2007 continues to shape the focus on finances and the mostly traditional way in which the council operates. The peer team believe that UDC need to consider the different approaches that can be applied to encourage innovation and allow the council to find untapped opportunities for cost saving and efficiencies. This would help to support its long term viability and modernise the way in which it operates, allowing the council to be flexible and responsive to change.

The peer team found that the council has a credible Medium Term Financial Strategy with a sound understanding of future financial risks, including potential business rate appeals, especially in regard to Stansted Airport, the outcome of business rate retention consultation, reforms to new homes bonus and the fair funding review. The council has identified potential for further cost savings if required but the peer team feel that this could be strengthened by looking at the current expenditure on discretionary services that do not support the council's priorities and agency staff. Whilst agency staff may be required in the short term, the council needs to look at other options to reduce its reliance on this. It was acknowledged that many councils in the East of England had trouble recruiting and retaining professionals, often losing out to London and Cambridge. Again a holistic workforce strategy will help to identify solutions for this.

The council takes a positive approach to supporting partners financially and supporting voluntary sector projects. Whilst this is to be commended the changes that are being made in regards to the application processes for grants for the voluntary sector and the increased accountability of the recipients will ensure a more robust and sustainable process. The more rigorous approach that the council is adopting will demonstrate how the council aligns its funding and grants to meet councils objectives and the needs of its residents.

The council operates most of its services in-house which is a traditional approach to service delivery. It has had limited success so far with shared services due to a variety of reasons. However, Essex County Council delivers part of the HR role for the council and there are other smaller examples, including delivery of the council's insurance service by a neighbouring district. Nonetheless, the peer team believe that, notwithstanding the challenges, this is a route that the council should continue to explore with partners and other councils. Sharing services with other councils could provide opportunities for efficiencies and provide the council with some resilience which it will need as the funding regime changes. It would also help recruit and retain high quality staff.

The council is in the process of rationalising some of its assets e.g. moving 3 depot sites into 1 more efficient site that would serve the district and free up the land to help with housing numbers; it is also marketing some of its main office accommodation that is surplus to requirement. This is an example of how the council is looking to be more commercially minded - thinking about income generation but also about the needs of the economy and community. The council has also set up wholly owned subsidiary companies of the council around housing and maintenance. Whilst these have not started trading yet it does show that UDC is keen to think about alternative sources of income.

The council also has a solid resource base in its staff. UDC could harness the knowledge and enthusiasm of its staff to identify further income streams and efficiencies. This approach would be supported by more cross organisational working and less silo based service delivery. The peer team felt that officers were not always empowered to take appropriate decisions. For example the decision on cleaning of the council building is an operational decision for officers. Where members have set clear organisational priorities and policies, officers should be able to take decisions about the best way to deliver priorities within the council's policy framework.

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

It is clear from speaking to stakeholders that the council is seen as having well motivated competent and professional teams. This is supported by the positive results of the customer satisfaction survey results, particularly for frontline services and feedback from partners. It is clear that UDC is doing a good job in delivering lots of services and currently has the capacity for this. The council may need to review this in future years as the funding changes. A prioritisation exercise will be fundamental to any review to ensure that the right services are being delivered.

There are good examples of career progression throughout the council with staff being able to rise up through the organisation via development and promotion. To ensure that this is sustainable, UDC needs to develop a comprehensive workforce strategy. This would allow them to take into account the difficulties they face in the recruitment of professional roles e.g. planning, staff retention, rewards and talent management. UDC needs to look at options to address staff salary levels as they are currently in the lowest quartile for pay. When needed UDC has the option of paying market supplements for key posts. Whilst this addresses the problem in the short term, the council needs to think about longer term sustainability and resilience. Market supplements will also be extending the pay gap even further with permanent members of staff which could potentially lead to staff looking elsewhere for a new job with a higher salary.

Whilst there is capacity within the organisation, there is a lack of agile working and of a corporate resource across the council. Currently projects, training and development and innovation happen within a team or silo environment. The council would benefit from cross

organisational working as this would increase resilience and innovation. A holistic workforce strategy would help with this whilst also looking at talent, development and succession planning.

There is a recognition within the council of the potential that Information Technology could help to enable improvement e.g. technological changes in digital and customer services. There is not currently a corporate approach to IT and it is felt that silo based decision making has resulted in some systems not being joined-up. This has caused issues in terms of accessing and sharing data of vulnerable people. To work more effectively the council needs to review its corporate IT strategy to ensure that it is more clearly aligned to corporate priorities and supports their digital strategy, customer service changes and achieves cost savings.

The use of evidence to support decision making is not always applied consistently or to its full effect across the organisation. To improve evidence based decision making the council could develop its research, policy and project and programme management capabilities. This would help to give members more confidence when making decisions and would also support and underpin any future transformation process that the council undertakes.

Following on from decision making, the peer team feel that the outcomes of decisions could also be measured in a more consistent way. The council could ask 'What does success look like?' more often. This is a question which could be asked internally of staff and members and externally of partners who are receiving grants. This would help all stakeholders to understand how their projects and services are contributing to delivering the councils objectives and the role and impact they have had, ensuring that the council is focusing its resources in the right places.

#### **4.6 Support to Members**

There are a number of experienced and knowledgeable members at UDC. There are also some fairly new members who bring energy and fresh perspectives but who would benefit from having a greater understanding of their role and responsibilities as members of the council and as ward councillors. Some members indicated that they were unsure of the expectations on them and what powers they had or didn't have. The peer team believes that the council could carry out some rapid member development and;

- refresh the member induction and create a comprehensive member development programme so that all members have the same understanding and a chance to develop and refresh their skills
- Centrally manage/ co-ordinate the member development programme and training needs analysis so that there is a corporate overview

- Strengthen member engagement through further involvement in the corporate plan, target setting and monitoring of the councils objectives. This would help to increase member understanding of their wider council role.
- Consider a community leadership training programme for members. This will provide a greater role for backbench and opposition members
- Continue to develop the way the Forward Plan is used to give all members a better understanding of future decisions and their part in them. Use the Forward plan process to reinforce the link between individual decisions and the Council's corporate plan.
- Update member and officer protocols and offer guidance so that all members understand the relationships.
- Ensure that members are well informed about activities within their wards and work with town and parish councils.

#### 4.7 Engagement

The peer team found evidence that staff were receptive to the regular briefings and focus groups that had been established since the arrival of the new chief executive. Staff were very positive about this approach and appreciated being asked their views. However they didn't always feel that they had been listened to as they were not sure of the changes or outcomes as a result of their contributions. The introduction of a strong feedback loop would strengthen internal communications and ensure staff understood any outcomes from their input and discussion.

Whilst staff reported having team meetings it was understood by the team that the frequency of these varied leading to some staff feeling ill informed about key decisions and key information. The council needs to build on the work it has already started with the briefings by developing a coherent narrative on the organisation's vision and progress, ensuring that there is a golden thread between the corporate plan and individual and service objectives. Key messages could then be cascaded to all staff, fortnightly following the Corporate Management Team (CMT) meetings ensuring that all staff within the organisation are aware of the decisions and objectives that are being considered by the council. This would empower junior staff and address the communication issues felt by some staff at different levels of seniority because there would be a universal understanding of key issues and objectives. Inclusion of a wider range of managers in some of the CMT discussions would also be welcomed.

The council has a number of enthusiastic and motivated staff members who could play a greater role in innovation across the council but who currently do not feel empowered enough to do so. There is some innovation, including suggestions by staff for new ways of working, but this appeared to be mainly within teams and service areas. Sharing the key decisions and objectives

of the council and providing a clear narrative will go some way to opening this up as all staff will have the same understanding. The staff suggestion scheme could be developed and enhanced to encourage and empower staff to suggest innovative ideas for work across the council. This would also help to break down some of the silos in the council and increase engagement and communication between staff whilst supporting a culture of innovation across the council. This would also help with identifying and managing talent within the organisation.

Partners also fed back their views on communication with the council. As mentioned above, partners were complimentary about the role of UDC in delivering services to the community however they too felt unsure at times about what action had been taken as a result of discussions, consultations and meetings. UDC needs to be bolder in telling its partners and the community that it has acted on their needs and wants and delivered services and objectives as a result. There is a risk that partners and residents feel that UDC are listening but not acting on feedback and input from others. A clear 'we asked, you said, we did' approach could be adopted by the council. This would ensure that engagement is improved and more transparent.

#### **4.8 Change Readiness**

There is no 'burning platform' for change within UDC because it does not face the same immediate financial pressures that are being faced elsewhere in local government. This means that the council needs to create its own compelling narrative that defines the clear business imperatives, which fit with its own context and challenges. There is a danger in feeling safe and comfortable with the council's current position. The council can avoid this by keeping abreast of the changes that are happening in the sector. There is an opportunity for the council to lead the change rather than have it imposed. UDC is in a fortunate position in that it can make changes and explore innovative ways of working without huge financial pressures hanging over it. If it acts now and modernises its way of working the council will be in a stronger position when possible changes to delivery and structures happen within the sector e.g. devolution, more systematic sharing of services or even reorganization etc. The council could seize this opportunity to position itself with partners and talk about the opportunities that can be found in the district and the work that the council is already doing e.g. new college, development of business parks, the very good strategic transport links and the role that Uttlesford has to play in maintaining and growing economic prosperity for the area. There is an opportunity for UDC to lead and promote change with neighbouring councils within Essex, demonstrating that the Council has an outward focus on public sector transformation.

UDC has the opportunity right now to plan and do things differently. Not just to fill future budget gaps but also deliver and create some innovative outcomes for its residents and stakeholders. The council needs to develop a sustained, integrated, proactive and engaging transformation programme around its change objectives and shape the cultural values that will help achieve the change that is needed within the organisation. There should be more systematic use of staff across the organisation to innovate and bring scale and pace to support the rate of change. It is clear that they staff are motivated, competent and keen to be involved in future decision making and design of service delivery. The council could use some benchmarking, both in terms of

CIPFA nearest neighbours and geographically close districts for inspiration and ideas for shaping their own agenda that is appropriate to UDC.

To prepare for the changes that lie ahead the council should look to invest in its leadership team (political and managerial). An exercise in creating a narrative and clear future vision for the council will help with any future direction, transformation and cultural programme that the council undertakes. The council is in an enviable and exciting position and the peer team look forward to hearing about what happens next.

## **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. Gary Hughes, Principal Adviser and Rachel Litherland, Principal Adviser are the main contact between your authority and the Local Government Association (LGA). Their contact details are: [gary.hughes@local.gvo.uk](mailto:gary.hughes@local.gvo.uk) and [rachel.litherland@local.gov.uk](mailto:rachel.litherland@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 original 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.