

# CORPORATE PEER CHALLENGE:

**Action Plan summary**

**Updated March 2025**

## Introduction

Since receiving the corporate peer challenge (CPC) report in July 2024, we have:

- Developed an action plan setting out how we will address the eight formal, and other informal, recommendations in the report.
- Appropriate officers have been identified to ensure appropriate responsibility for delivery and governance, and a lead Member to aid with political accountability and ownership (whilst the overall response to the CPC remains within the remit of the Leader and Chief Executive).
- The action plan contains **27 actions** linked to the **eight recommendations**.
- The CPC Team completed a progress review in March 2025 with 3 actions linked to additional comments.
- There are now **10 actions** linked to the **additional comments**.

## Overview of the Action Plan

### 27 Actions linked to 8 Formal Recommendations

19 actions completed	
8 actions in progress	
0 action not started yet	

### 10 Actions linked to Additional Recommendations

3 actions completed	
7 actions in progress	
0 action not started yet	

## Recommendation one

**Align finance and workforce to deliver the agreed political priorities including a review of organisational structure.**

**STATUS**

Completed

### Completed action

- A consultation with senior staff was conducted on restructuring the senior leadership team.
  - Following the closure of the consultation in December, the final proposal presented on 17th January 2025.
  - The new structure has been fully implemented. Heads of Service are now meeting portfolio holders and internally there is clear governance for leadership direction in setting priorities **Completed March 2025**
- ✓ **Evidence:** CPC001 Senior Leadership Team consultation outcome January 2025

## Recommendation two

**Strengthen the internal approach to engagement which ensures the voice of residents/service users are at the heart of decision making.**

**STATUS**

Ongoing

### Ongoing actions

- **Policy decision to strengthen internal approach.** To more effectively manage consultation and engagement activity aligned to Senior Team restructure. Options paper went to SLT in February 2025, with further actions to explore options for additional, specialist consultation and engagement resources. **In progress, due Sept 25**
- **Focussed resources to support delivery of engagement events.** And to ensure there is a co-ordinated approach for the delivery of the Corporate Consultation Schedule. Resources to support co-ordination of engagement activities has been identified and recruitment to be completed by August 2025. **In progress, due Aug 25**

### Completed actions

- **Community Health and Wealth building – co-design.** Three community co-production workshops took place in August and September 2024, which were as demographically balanced as possible to garner a share of voices from across our communities. Further focus groups have taken place with seldom heard groups, including young people and people living in low-income households, rural communities, and from ethnic minority backgrounds. **Completed December 2024**
  - ✓ Evidence – CPC003 Overview and Scrutiny Panel 5 June 2025 item 8. Community Health and Wealth Building
- **Champions.** A network of communications champions has been established with services across the council to provide more co-ordinated communications messages, share learning and develop key campaigns. **Completed January 2025**
  - ✓ Evidence – CPC005 The Communication Network Champions internal group have been meeting once a quarter with an updated list of pipeline activity.

## Recommendation three

# Develop a resourced Communications and Engagement Strategy which defines the HDC brand and strategic narrative.

**STATUS**

Completed

### Completed actions

- **A Communications Strategy** and supporting Communications Action Plan has been developed and shared with Cabinet. **Completed December 2024**
  - ✓ Evidence: CPC007 The development of a Communications Strategy 2024-28.
  
- **A new corporate narrative** has been developed, and work is now underway to embed this across the organisation. **Completed December**
  - ✓ Evidence: CPC008 The Corporate Narrative has been completed.
    - New additional action suggested by Peer Review Team March 2025 is to produce an elevator pitch for the Corporate Narrative. See additional suggestions page

## Recommendation four

**Review the planning service to ensure that within the planning policy framework the council's priorities are being delivered, for example climate, environment and inclusive growth.**



**STATUS**

Completed

### Completed actions

- **Engagement with the team.** From November, monthly member briefings are being used to encourage a holistic view to delivering the Council's growth and development ambitions. All Member briefings are now embedded as part of the wider approach to information sharing and council decision making. Further work will continue with Planning specifically, alongside the action plan for this service.

#### **Completed March 2025**

✓ Evidence: CPC011 The May 2025 Member Briefing

- **A Planning Service Peer Review** was completed, recommendations provided, and an action plan developed to take into 2025/26. Draft report received and comments fed back with action plan linked to service planning for 2025/26. **Completed March 2025**

✓ Evidence: CPC009 Development Management Committee 19 May 2025 item 7 - Planning Service Peer Review

- **The Council wide continuous improvement journey** was one of the key objectives for the Service Planning process rolled-out early 2025. All Services have now submitted actions and projects focused on continuous improvement and transformation efficiency and change. This continued focus across the Council is linked into the budget setting process, regular review of service plan projects and actions, and identified audits and external reviews.

#### **Completed March 2025**

✓ Evidence: CPC013 Presentation to Leadership and Service Managers early 2025, with service plans submissions completed in March 2025.

## Continued Recommendation four

**Review the planning service to ensure that within the planning policy framework the council's priorities are being delivered, for example climate, environment and inclusive growth.**



### Completed actions continued

- **A Local Plan consultation** on issues and options was conducted December 2024. And in March 2025 a response to the Government's National Planning Policy Framework expectations to produce an updated Local Development Scheme plan was completed and submitted to MHCLG. **Completed March 2025**
  - ✓ Evidence: CPC010 Consultation for 'Further Issues and Options Paper' Local Plan November 2024
  
- **Delivery board, strategic board and lessons learnt** at both the tactical project level, and the sponsor level, to inform future HDC delivery of significant change programmes requiring planning. The recommendations from an independent project review were endorsed in January 2025, identifying lessons learnt for earlier engagement with Planning Services. **Completed February 2025**
  - ✓ Evidence: CPC012 An independent review of the major project at Hinchingsbrooke Park identified lessons learnt.

## Recommendation five Deliver the imminent Workforce Strategy at pace – including addressing staff concerns.

**STATUS**

Completed

### Completed actions

- An action plan, which includes a schedule of prioritised actions, timeframes and resources, was approved by Employment Committee, and is now underway with regular quarterly reports being provided. **Completed December 2024**
  - ✓ Evidence: CPC014 to CPC019 Employment Committee 25 Feb 2025 item 6 Workforce Strategy Update

This includes:

- Awareness of impacts to team performance and absence with implementation of robust policies and practices.
- Development of an employee value proposition is scheduled between January to March 2025, which will feed into the corporate narrative.
- Staff pay review is underway.
- A new provider in place to provide Employee Assistance Programme to support wellbeing for staff.
- A review of policy and practice is continuously ongoing.
- Shortlisted for an LGC Workforce 2024 award for the 'best innovation in recruitment' category

## Recommendation six

### Continue to strengthen the council's approach to governance, compliance and risk.

#### STATUS

Ongoing

#### Ongoing actions

- A **Constitution Review Working Group** has been established and key areas of focus identified. Meeting in February 2025 completed to review Council Procedure Rules and Scheme of Delegation, LGR being factored in whilst setting priorities. Further meeting scheduled 18 June 2025 with support from the Association of Democratic Services Office. **In progress, due February 2026**
- **Recruitment of a Monitoring and Deputy Monitoring Officer** to follow completion of the Senior Team restructure (recommendation one). To commence employment 30 June 2025. **In progress, due June 2025**
- **Member training.** Training on topics such as scrutiny has been provided, with further training session arranged. The Member Development Working Group now meet quarterly. They have met to consider future training needs and development documents, reviewing attendance, and development of a Member intranet portal for accessing resources. Continued partnership working between Members and Officers to develop the Scrutiny approach and agendas for 2025/26. On going training programme in place. **In progress, due September 2025**

## Recommendation seven

**Support and develop a member led scrutiny work programme and prioritise areas where they can add value and help mitigate risk – SLT support.**



**STATUS**

Ongoing

### Ongoing actions

- **Processes and approach to briefings** has changed (agendas changed and the Chair's briefing includes the future plan for meetings). Further discussions took place end of 2024 and January 2025 including work programme for the coming year, use of external support to assist committee development, and reflecting on feedback to Officers. More support in development in partnership with the Member Development Group. Development of the action tracker, and a best practice guide including a topic submission form have been shared with each Panel, and will be shared again June 2025 to finalise the process and approach. **In progress, due June 2025**

### Completed actions

- Training has also been provided by EELGA regarding self-scrutiny. **Completed December 2024**
  - ✓ **Evidence: CPC024 Reflection on the training has resulted in an agreed Overview and Scrutiny process map for how topics are requested, considered and decided upon for future work programmes. This has been shared with members.**

### Improvements identified

- Ensure less pre-decision scrutiny and less of information items
- Develop a clearer forward plan of items for scrutiny consideration; making use of service plan actions
- Identify additional topics outside of service plan scope
- Identify policy development involvement
- Identify agenda items following monthly member briefings
- Identify external partners to present to panel to strengthen partnership working

## Recommendation eight

### Define and communicate your approach to transformation/ continuous improvement.

#### STATUS

Ongoing

#### Ongoing actions

- Improvements to data management and use of data to drive risk-based decisions is underway. Collation of benchmarking information and service metrics from across the Council will support these decisions for prioritising transformation across HDC. Scheduled to be completed early 2025/26. **In progress, due September 2025**
- A new approach to service planning has been established, approved by SLT, and launched for 2025/26 in December 2024 to generate a single Transformation Plan focused on change projects (replaces the Annual Delivery Plan and Productivity Plan). This has a shared ambition of a 15% net reduction in expenditure through efficiency savings and/or increased income/commerciality. Initial draft was completed April 2025, with the final 'check and review' process to be completed July 2025. **In progress, due July 2025.**

#### Completed actions

- Appointment of a new Chief Digital Information Officer across the shared IT service reporting to the Chief Executives to drive focus change. **Completed November 2024.**
  - ✓ Evidence: Employee recruited
- A new appointment to the role of Business Performance and Transformation Manager, with the Improvement Team becoming the Transformation Team. **Completed November 2024**
  - ✓ Evidence: Employee recruited
- Action identified to combine the outputs from the Annual Delivery Plan process with the three cross-cutting service reviews; customer, leisure, planning - with appropriate governance in place. **Completed January 2025**
  - ✓ Evidence: CPC025 Cabinet Away Day Briefing 2025 Service Planning
- 2025/26 Transformation Approach **Completed February 2025**
  - ✓ Evidence: Framework was approved by CLT in February 2025 for implementation Q1 2025/26.

## Additional recommendations and suggestions



**Suggestion: To meet the council's ambitions for enhanced partnership working, review the skills and capacity needed to support this work with senior stakeholders and partners.**

- Action: To identify a maturity assessment tool, and develop proposals for how it is used, with supporting training and action plan. **In progress, due December 2025**
- Action: To publicise Council structure and responsibilities by July 2025. To develop the partnership working model by September 2025, aligning implementation with any maturity assessment tool by December 2025. **In progress, due December 2025**

**Suggestion: Create and communicate key points of entry into the council for partners and stakeholders.**

- Action: To follow the Senior Team restructure under recommendation one. **Completed March 2025**

## Additional recommendations and suggestions



**Suggestion: Facilitated top team development would assist the new team in building relationships, understanding leadership styles and create space for strategic visioning.**

- Action: CEX has appointed team development coaches to work with CLT and HoS. CLT team coaching commenced in December and HoS commenced in March. **Completed March 2025**

**Suggestion: Further work is needed with service managers to improve horizon scanning and feed this into the budget setting process.**

- Action: To be undertaken as part of annual service planning and budget setting.
- Action: The updated and simplified service planning process for 2025/26 requires all services to undertake a SWOT analysis to be the basis of the actions for change in the next three years for each service area. This is linked to the Contextual Information for Huntingdonshire established in 2024/25 as part of the Council's Performance Management Framework. **Completed March 2025**

## Additional recommendations and suggestions



**Suggestion: The Ideas Board should be taking a more strategic approach to reviewing requests for funding, making sure any bids are aligned to the councils' priorities and clearly drive innovation. There also needs to be consideration given to how any projects funded on a trial basis could be sustained in the longer term if deemed successful.**

- Action: The outcomes of the Ideas process was reviewed and presented to SLT in January 2025. A review of the Ideas process and purpose has commenced with the aim of completing the review May 2025. With a focus on enabling Transformation and invest to save. **In progress, due May 2025.**

**Suggestion: Consideration should be given to undertaking a full staff survey.**

- Action: A full staff survey was completed in September. Results have been reported to SLT with any concerns raised with relevant Managers. **Completed September 2024**
  - ✓ A review will happen in September 2025 to assess whether a further survey is required.

## Additional recommendations and suggestions



**Suggestion: The council to continue driving efficiencies and value for money across the organisation through service improvement and contract management to enable focused delivery on political priorities.**

- Action: Additional support in Contract Management; Audit and Transformation services has been completed by February 2025.
- Action: SLT have set a shared organisational target of a 15% reduction in net expenditure driven through either efficiency, savings or income opportunities as a clear driver behind the 2025/26 Service Planning. All services are to contribute towards this target. The service planning process is focused on transformational actions to contribute towards this target. **In progress, due June 2025**

## March 2025 Peer Team Revisit - Additional recommendations and suggestions



**Suggestion: Produce a short punchy statement to accompany corporate narrative. Communicate to staff and members, and use this narrative statement for internal and external communication.**

- Action: To produce an elevator pitch to provide a brief and introduction for the corporate narrative document. **In progress, due June 2025**
  - ✓ Have started to embed the narrative and brief summary with staff and members. To conclude action once all services are initially advised regarding future communications.

**Suggestion: Develop the PAS review action plan and utilise the Councils scrutiny functions to oversee the action plan and implementation of recommendations.**

- Action: To develop the PAS review action plan and to develop appropriate governance for scrutiny. **In progress, due September 2025.**
  - ✓ The report was considered and recommendations agreed by DCM on 19<sup>th</sup> May 2025. Action plan is being developed.

**Suggestion: Peer suggest further communication on the process and timeline for how reviewing the 121 processes, working with Unison looking at performance management and L&D will be linked to pay increments and remuneration in the future.**

- Action: To provide further communications for staff regarding the expectations of the 121s for managing performance and development, and how this aligns to the pay increment and remuneration process. **In progress, due September 2025**