

CORPORATE PEER CHALLENGE: SIX MONTH VISIT

Action Plan

Updated February 2024

Introduction

Since receiving the corporate peer challenge (CPC) report, 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**.
- **7 actions** linked to the **additional comments** .

Overview of the Action Plan

27 Actions linked to 8 Formal Recommendations

23 actions	
4 actions	
0 actions	

7 Actions linked to Additional Recommendations

3 actions	
4 actions	
0 actions	



Recommendation one

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

STATUS

- 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.
- Implementation **1st February 2025, full transition by 1st March 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

- **Community Health and Wealth building – co-design.** Three community co-production workshops were held in August and September, aiming for demographic balance to capture diverse community voices. Additional focus groups included seldom heard groups such as young people, low-income households, rural communities, and ethnic minorities. **Completed**
- **Policy decision to strengthen internal approach.** To more effectively manage consultation and engagement linked to Senior Team restructure. Options paper to SLT **24th February 2025.**
- **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, a proposal for a fixed-term Consultation and Engagement Lead position has been identified. **Both actions underway**
- **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**

Recommendation three

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

STATUS

- A **Communications Strategy and supporting Communications Action Plan** has been developed and shared with Cabinet. **Completed**
- A new **corporate narrative** has been developed, and work is now underway to embed this across the organisation. **Completed**
- **Three key campaigns** have been identified and proposals for two of those are in development.

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

- The **Planning Service Peer Review** is complete, with recommendations and an action plan for 2025/26. The draft report was reviewed, feedback provided, and the action plan integrated into service planning for 2025/26. **Completed.**
- A Local Plan consultation on issues and options was conducted, and the team are reflecting and processing comments. **Completed.**
- **Response to the Government's National Planning Policy Framework** expectations to produce an updated Local Development Scheme plan by March 2025. **Completed** and sent to MHCLG.
- **Engagement** with the team. From November, monthly member briefings to encourage a holistic view to delivering the Council's growth and development ambitions. **Underway**
- **Lessons learned from** Delivery and Strategic boards, with tactical and sponsor levels, will inform future HDC change programmes. Recommendations from an independent project review (endorsed January 2025) identified lessons from engagement with Planning Services. **Completed.**
- The Council wide continuous improvement journey part of the Planning Service Peer Review action plan for 2025/26. **Underway**

Recommendation five

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

STATUS

- 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** including:
- 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	

- A Constitution Review Working Group has been established and key areas of focus identified. Further meeting scheduled February 2025, reviewing Council Procedure Rules and Scheme of Delegation, LGR being factored in whilst setting priorities. **Underway**
- Recruitment of a Monitoring and Deputy Monitoring Officer to follow completion of the Senior Team restructure (recommendation one). **Underway**
- 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 a further meeting scheduled for January 2025 to consider training 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. **Underway**

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

- The **briefing processes** have changed, including updated agendas and the Chair's briefing now covering future meeting plans. At the end of 2024, discussions included the work programme, external support for committee development, and feedback to Officers. Additional support is being developed with the Member Development Group, and Directors of Place and Communities are leading work on each Panel. **Underway.**

- Training provided by EELGA regarding self-scrutiny. **Completed**
Improvements identified:
 - Ensure less pre-decision scrutiny and less of information items
 - Develop clearer forward plan 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

- Appointment of a **new Chief Digital Information Officer** across the shared IT service reporting to the Chief Executives to drive focus change. **Completed**
- A new appointment to the role of **Business Performance and Transformation Manager**, with the Improvement Team becoming the Transformation Team. **Completed**
- Action identified to combine the outputs from the service planning process with the three cross-cutting service reviews; customer, leisure, planning - with appropriate governance in place. **Completed**
- A **new service planning approach**, approved by SLT, was launched in December 2024 for 2025/26. It creates a single Transformation Plan focused on change projects, aiming for a 15% net reduction in expenditure through efficiency savings and increased income. Completion April 2025.
- Improvements to **data management** and **risk-based decision-making** are underway. Resources have been recruited in performance and insight services, and key HDC metrics data collation has started. A meaningful data matrix for prioritizing transformation will be Completion May 2025/26.

Additional recommendations and suggestions

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.

STATUS



- Action to identify a maturity assessment tool, and develop proposals for how it is used, with supporting training and action plan.
- Ongoing dialogue with partners to ensure we're meeting each other's needs, and review of engagement with groups, boards and partnership meetings to ensure value for money and beneficial attendance.

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

STATUS



- To follow the Senior Team restructure under recommendation one.

Additional recommendations and suggestions

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

STATUS



- CEX has appointed team development coaches to work with CLT and HoS. CLT team coaching commenced in December and HoS commences shortly.

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

STATUS



- To be undertaken as part of annual service planning and budget setting.
- 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.

Additional recommendations and suggestions

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.

STATUS



- The outcomes of the Ideas process have been reviewed and presented to SLT.
- A review of the New Ideas process and purpose is endorsed for Q4 2024/25 following service planning with a focus on enabling Transformation and invest to save.

Consideration should be given to undertaking a full staff survey.

STATUS



- A full staff survey was completed in September. Results have been reported to SLT with any concerns raised with relevant Managers.
- A review will happen in 12 months to assess whether a further survey is required.

Additional recommendations and suggestions

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.

STATUS



- Additional support in Contract Management; Audit and Transformation has been added.
- SLT have set a shared organization 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.