Corporate Peer Challenge - 'What difference has this made' summary

Following the Overview and Scrutiny (Performance & Growth) meeting on January 21st, 2026, a further summary document was requested to outline the 'so what'; what difference has Corporate Peer Challenge recommendations made.

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

Ref	Action	What difference did it make	
CPC001	Review organisational structure.	**What we did:** Implemented a revised senior leadership structure with clearer alignment between finance, workforce, and political priorities.	**So what?** This has strengthened resilience with addressing operational challenges and risks. The new structure continues to embed, with the recent appointment of the remaining three Heads of Service – two of those being internal promotions.
CPC028	Review skills and capacity for partnership working	**What we did:** To support leadership, a partnership maturity framework has been developed and implemented with a rolling review programme.	**So what?** This ensures we have the right skills and capacity to collaborate more effectively with partners, supporting LGR requirements and improving strategic collaboration.
CPC029	Create clear points of entry for partners	**What we did:** Clarified how partners and stakeholders interact with the council following the leadership restructure.	**So what?** Collaboration is now easier and more coordinated, leading to stronger cross-agency partnerships, as exemplified by the work with health partners within the Communities and Leisure spaces.

| CPC030 | Develop senior leadership team | **What we did:** Delivered coaching and development for the senior leadership team. | **So what?** Leadership cohesion has improved, enabling stronger strategic direction and better collaborative decision-making across the organisation. This continues to be developed, including Heads of Service as the collective leadership team for the Council. |

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

Ref	Action	What difference did it make	
CPC002	Communications accountable for engagement.	**What we did:** Established a structured governance approach with a clear policy decision for communications and engagement.	**So what?** Leadership can now prioritise engagement more effectively, ensuring decisions are influenced by consistent, well-managed communication activity
CPC003	Community Health & Wealth Building co-design. (CHAWS)	**What we did:** Collaborated directly with local communities by running workshops, outreach sessions and focus groups — including targeted engagement with seldom-heard groups — to co-design the CHAWS strategy with residents at its centre.	**So what?** The strategy now reflects real community experiences and priorities, creating a more inclusive, trusted, and resident-led approach. The pilot fund has launched, and the full scheme is open for applications that clearly demonstrate measurable community impact.
CPC004	Strengthen internal communications approach.	**What we did:** Recruited full-time resource for engagement and service-user support, bringing stronger alignment with the Council's principles.	**So what?** Engagement is now more coordinated and far-reaching, as demonstrated by the success of "Make January Happen."
CPC005	Communications champions.	**What we did:** Established a champions group to share best practice.	**So what?** Engagement activities are now more consistent and better aligned across services, with key details captured through the service planning process. This has strengthened cross-council collaboration and improved the way teams work together.
CPC006	Focussed resources for engagement events.	**What we did:** Created an annual consultation schedule with planned resources to ensure a consistent approach for all major events.	**So what?** Engagement activity is better planned and more consistent, enabling high-quality consultations such as the Local Plan. This new approach for the Local Plan attracted strong levels of public comments and participation - significantly higher than those typically achieved by other councils.

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

Ref	Action		What difference did it make
CPC007	Communications Strategy.	**What we did:** Launched a Communications Strategy detailing the service plan actions for the year.	**So what?** Staff and Members now have a clear roadmap for communications priorities and delivery clearly aligned to Corporate Plan outcomes.
CPC008	Corporate Narrative.	**What we did:** Implemented a Corporate Narrative endorsed by Cabinet.	**So what?** The organisation now has a unified way to articulate the Corporate Plan purpose, priorities, and value.
CPCU1	Short 'punchy' Corporate Narrative.	**What we did:** Created and published for staff an elevator pitch to support Corporate Narrative.	**So what?** Staff can easily understand and communicate the council's mission and direction

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.

Ref	Action	What difference did it make	
CPC009	Planning service peer review.	**What we did:** Completed the Planning Peer Review, presented the action plan to Development Management Committee, and began implementing changes — including updated processes for handling amendments to planning applications.	**What difference this made:** These improvements have increased transparency, strengthened oversight, and supported a more consistent and efficient Planning service. Performance indicators are now routinely published for Members.
CPC010	Local Plan consultation.	**What we did:** The Local Plan consultation on issues and options was held in 2024, and a response to the National Planning Policy Framework was submitted to MHCLG in early 2025. Consultation on the Local Plan continues as a result of the preferred issues and options, with further to follow.	**So what?** This has generated strong engagement and detailed feedback from residents and stakeholders. Their input is leading to higher-quality insights and actively shaping the Local Plan.
CPC011	Wider engagement with the team.	**What we did:** Introduced monthly member briefings.	**So what?** Members' understanding of planning policies and procedures has strengthened, which is essential to a key function of the council.
CPC012	Share lessons learned with Officer-led strategic boards.	**What we did:** Shared Hinchingbrooke Country Park independent project review and lessons learnt with officer-led strategic boards.	**So what?** Projects are now managed more holistically and consistently across all services, centrally overseen by the Transformation Board oversight, improving assurance and cross-council coordination.

CPC013	Continuous improvement journey.	**What we did:** The service planning approach was refreshed to place greater focus on continuous improvement, and a series of financial and operational efficiencies were delivered within the Planning Service. This included introducing a fee for amendments to live plannings applications, which is forecast to raise an additional £50k in income in 2025/26. Other projects are progressing automation opportunities and ways of working and strengthening performance management across the service.	**So what?** These changes have improved the consistency and reliability of planning processes, generated additional income, and created capacity for further enhancements. They have also strengthened the service's contribution to the wider transformation programme by embedding a more initiative-taking and improvement-focused culture.
CPU2	PAS action plan and oversight	**What we did:** Developed action plan as a part of the Planning peer review and strengthened oversight and governance. Regular updates are provided to the Development Management Committee.	**So what?** Improvements are being delivered and are tracked more transparently, ensuring accountability and consistent progress.

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

Ref	Action		What difference did it make
CPC014	Workforce Strategy action plan.	**What we did:** Launched an action plan for the Workforce Strategy.	**So what?** Staff experience, clear policy expectations and performance management, pay, wellbeing and organisational culture have improved through clearer processes and enhanced support.
CPC015	Performance and absence impacted.	**What we did:** Explored how team performance and absence may be impacted by the introduction of robust policies and practices.	Key actions undertaken from the Workforce Strategy include:
CPC016	Employee value proposition.	**What we did:** Enhanced the employee value proposition.	- A new provider is in place to provide the Employee Assistance Programme.
CPC017	Review staff pay.	**What we did:** Undertook a staff pay review.	- A review of policy and practice is continuously ongoing. - The Council has moved to the NJC terms for Pay negotiation, which has seen a 98% uptake.
CPC018	Review staff wellbeing.	**What we did:** Undertook a staff wellbeing review.	- A formalised increment process has been implemented for 2025/26.
CPC019	Review policy and practice.	**What we did:** Undertook a policy and practice review.	- Electric car salary sacrifice schemes were launched. - Open engagement with staff on proposed changes has resulted in hybrid working pods and improved coffee shop.
CPC032	Staff survey.	**What we did:** Completed a full staff survey and applied the findings.	**So what?** Improvements were identified and incorporated into the workforce strategy, delivering tangible changes such as the leadership development programme and strengthened internal communications—directly addressing staff feedback on wishing to feel better informed.
CPCU3	1-1 framework	**What we did:** Implemented and communicated a new 1-1 framework and increment process.	**So what?** The links between staff development, exceptional performance and pay progression are now clearer and more consistent. Incremental progression will take place this year for staff who are exceptional.

Recommendation Six
Continue to strengthen the Council's approach to governance, compliance, and risk.

Ref	Action		What difference did it make
CPC020	Constitution review working group.	**What we did:** Established a working group and review programme.	**So what?** The group reviewed key governance processes, including procedure rules, options for opposition budget proposals, and a substitutes policy. These updates have modernised governance, reduced risk, and improved overall transparency.
CPC021	Monitoring Officer recruitment	**What we did:** Recruited a Monitoring Officer and Deputy.	**So what?** Governance is now more resilient, with stronger legal and compliance oversight.
CPC022	Member training.	**What we did:** Developed a Member development programme.	**So what?** Members have been developed in key council areas and are now better equipped to scrutinise, challenge, and contribute effectively.

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.

Ref	Action		What difference did it make
CPC023	Review agendas and future plans.	**What we did:** Reformed agenda setting, chairs briefings and forward plans.	**So what?** Members have greater control, receive information earlier, and can shape scrutiny more proactively. For example, the O&S panel for Communities, Environment and Partnerships, at their instruction, have scrutinised the Community Health & Wealth Strategy – a direct example of member led scrutiny.
CPC024	Review scrutiny best practice.	**What we did:** Members completed EELGA training and agreed a revised scrutiny process map. Identified improvements; • clearer forward planning, • reducing pre-decision and information items, • broader topic generation, • increased policy development involvement, • use of monthly briefings, • and engagement with external partners.	**So what?** Scrutiny is now more structured, informed, aligned with strategic risk, and driven by best practice. Improving Member capability, strengthening partnership working, and enabling more effective, outcome-driven scrutiny.

Recommendation Eight
Define and communicate your approach to transformation / continuous improvement.

Ref	Action	What difference did it make	
CPC026	Transformation approach	**What we did:** Implemented a new service planning process aligned through to the Transformation Approach and Programme. Members approved a supporting Framework confirming the approach.	**So what?** Services are clearer on how their work contributes to transformation and improvement. Members also have a greater level of oversight due to the annual Transformation Report.
CPC027	Data improvement	**What we did:** Completed a Data Maturity Assessment (scoring 3.2/5.0) and implementing an action plan.	**So what?** The assessment has identified areas where data can be used more effectively. Acting on these findings will improve data driven decision making, boosting efficiency, and ensuring that service delivery is better informed.
CPC031	Horizon scanning and service planning	**What we did:** Introduced a SWOT analysis into the service planning process.	**So what?** Risk awareness and future planning have improved, making budget setting more robust, and enhancing the identification of transformation and continuous improvement opportunities.
CPC033	Review of Ideas Panel	**What we did:** Strengthened the governance and documentation of the Ideas Panel process and Transformation Board oversight.	**So what?** New ideas are assessed more strategically and aligned to transformation objectives and governance, ensuring benefits are being consistently captured.
CPC034	Drive efficiencies and VFM	**What we did:** Additional procurement capacity and strengthened Procurement Board governance were introduced to oversee the contract register and improve value for money. A new Transformation Framework and service-planning approach were implemented, incorporating mid-year reviews aligned to the budget cycle	**So what?** These steps have strengthened oversight, improved value for money, and created a clearer, more aligned transformation programme. The council is now better positioned to drive efficiencies and maintain focus on key priorities.