

Public
Key Decision – No

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Title: Corporate Peer Challenge Actions Update, Quarter 3 2025/26

Meeting/Date: Cabinet 10th February 2026

Executive Portfolio: Councillor Sarah Conboy, Executive Leader, Executive Councillor for Place

Report by: Business Performance and Transformation Manager

Ward(s) affected: All

Executive Summary:

This report provides the Quarter 3 update for 2025/26 against the actions identified from the Corporate Peer Challenge (CPC). The CPC report was received by the Council on 17th July 2024 with a progress review received on 4th March 2025.

CPC is a key part of the improvement and assurance framework for local government. The Challenge assists councils to meet part of their Best Value duty, with the UK Government expecting all local authorities to have a CPC at least every five years.

The action plan developed from the Corporate Peer Challenge (CPC) report and recommendations address the eight formal and additional informal recommendations. The action plan contains 27 actions linked to the eight recommendations and 7 actions linked to additional comments.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

The Cabinet is asked to:

- 1) Review and comment on progress made in Quarter 3 of 2025/26, noting that all formal recommendations and suggestions have now been fully met and transitioned to business as usual, with ongoing oversight to ensure they are maintained. A summary is provided in this report, with full details in Appendices one and two.
- 2) Confirm the action for the Executive Leader and Chief Executive Officer to write to the LGA informing them of completion of the formal CPC action plan and to provide the necessary evidence to support this position.

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 This report presents progress against the actions identified from the Corporate Peer Challenge undertaken in May 2024, and a progress review in March 2025 (Appendix 1).
- 1.2 With the formal recommendations and agreed actions now being fully met and embedded, the report summarises ongoing oversight to ensure these remain upheld.

2. WHY IS THIS REPORT NECESSARY?

- 2.1 Corporate Peer Challenge (CPC) is a key part of the improvement and assurance framework for local government. The Challenge assists councils to meet part of their Best Value duty, with the UK Government expecting all local authorities to have a CPC at least every five years.
- 2.2 Council on 16th October 2024 requested an appropriate mechanism for reporting back to Council Members on progress with the actions identified through the Corporate Peer Challenge.

3. SUMMARY

3.1 Corporate Peer Challenge

- 3.1.1 The Peer Challenge provides an opportunity for external peers from other Local Authorities to assess how effectively we deliver our services and measure our ability to deliver on our plans and vision for the future. This will help inform and shape our improvement journey and share best practice learning.
- 3.1.2 The Corporate Peer Challenge focused on five core components that underpin good performance that all LGA Corporate Peer Challenges cover. They are:
 - **Local priorities and outcomes:** Are the council's priorities clear and informed by the local context? Is the council delivering effectively on its priorities and achieving improved outcomes for all its communities?

- **Organisational and place leadership:** Does the council provide effective local leadership? Are there good relationships with partner organisations and local communities?
- **Governance and culture:** Are there clear and robust governance arrangements? Is there a culture of respect, challenge and scrutiny?
- **Financial planning and management:** Does the council have a clear understanding of its current financial position? Does the council have a strategy and a clear plan to address its financial challenges?
- **Capacity for improvement:** Is the organisation able to support delivery of local priorities?

3.2 Update on progress for reporting period

3.2.1 Formal Recommendations

There are 27 actions linked to the eight formal recommendations. The progress position for this reporting period is shown in the table below.

Recommendation	Number of completed actions	Number of action in progress	Total actions	Status (Fully met or In progress)
One	1		1	Fully met
Two	5		5	Fully met
Three	2		2	Fully met
Four	5		5	Fully met
Five	6		6	Fully met
Six	3		3	Fully met
Seven	2		2	Fully met
Eight	3		3	Fully met
Total	27		27	

- The 27 actions linked to formal recommendations are now fully met and embedded resulting in no formal recommendations or actions outstanding.

- This progress position has improved since the previous reporting period Q2 2025/2, with the remaining recommendation and one action being fully met.

Formal recommendation actions completed in the last quarter period

- **Recommendation eight: Define and communicate your approach to transformation/ continuous improvement.**
 - Action CPC026 Transformation approach - A new transformation approach and programme has been successfully implemented, replacing the previous Annual Delivery and Productivity Plans. Launched for 2025/26, this unified approach focuses on change projects with a clear ambition to deliver financial efficiency and opportunities through streamlined processes and governance. It ensures sustainable delivery of council priorities. The Transformation Framework and Programme Report was presented to Overview and Scrutiny Committee for comment on 5th November 2025, and was approved by Cabinet on the 18th November 2025, marking the action as fully completed.

3.2.2 Additional Suggestions

- There are ten actions linked to the identified additional suggestions from the CPC. These actions are now fully met and embedded resulting in no additional suggestions outstanding.
- This progress position has improved since the previous reporting period Q2 2025/26:

Additional actions relating to CPC suggestions completed in the last quarter

- Suggestion CPC028 Partnership working - To meet the council's ambitions for enhanced partnership working. A partnership maturity tool has been approved and applied, creating a register of key partnerships for council priorities.
- Suggestion CPC034 Driving efficiencies and value for money (VFM) - To strengthen efficiency and VFM through enhanced procurement and transformation processes. A monthly Procurement Board now oversees contracts, and additional resources have been deployed. The Corporate Transformation programme for 2025/26 integrates service planning and service-led improvements. This was presented to Overview and Scrutiny in November 2025 and was approved by Cabinet in November. A mid-year review of service plans began in October 2025 to align with the budget cycle, ensuring continued focus on political priorities.

3.3 Ongoing oversight for formal recommendations

3.3.2 As requested at the July 2025 Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Performance & Growth), the completed actions now include commentary regarding the ongoing business as usual (BAU) activity and responsible officer (appendix 1).

3.3.3 Members at the December 2025 Member Briefing Session requested additional information to highlight ongoing oversight to ensure recommendations remain upheld. The summary of the ongoing oversight for each formal recommendation and accountable Portfolio Holder and Officer is shown in the table below and in appendix 1 for a full breakdown.

Recommendation	Ongoing Oversight	Portfolio Holder	Accountable Officer
1. Align finance and workforce to deliver agreed political priorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Governance and leadership accountability embedded. Chief Executive oversees structure and alignment with priorities. SLT restructure and leadership development ensure continued assurance. 	Executive Leader, Executive Councillor for Place	Chief Executive
2. Strengthen internal approach to engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Corporate-wide engagement approach embedded with ongoing learning and good practice. Governance enhanced with senior leadership ensures continued oversight. Engagement champions network meets quarterly to share continuous learning and development of engagement activity. 	Executive Leader, Executive Councillor for Place Executive Councillor for Resident Services and Corporate Performance	Head of Communications, Engagement & Public Affairs
3. Develop a resourced Communications and Engagement Strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communications Strategy and Action Plan endorsed by Cabinet. Corporate narrative and elevator pitch embedded. Communications Team continues to embed narrative and campaigns. 	Executive Leader, Executive Councillor for Place Executive Councillor for Resident Services and Corporate Performance	Head of Communications, Engagement & Public Affairs
4. Review planning service to deliver council priorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Governance strengthened through Planning Peer Review and Local Plan compliance. Regular member briefings and Development Management Committee provide oversight. Continuous improvement driven through service planning and Transformation governance. 	Executive Councillor for Planning	Head of Planning, Infrastructure & Public Protection
5. Deliver Workforce Strategy at pace	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Workforce Strategy monitored through quarterly reporting to Employment Committee. Continuous policy review and national recognition for recruitment 	Executive Councillor for Climate, Transformation & Workforce	Chief Executive Head of HR, OD & Health and Safety

6. Strengthen governance, compliance, and risk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Governance improved with recruitment of key monitoring officers and member training. • Constitution Review Working Group established with ongoing meetings. • Robust compliance and risk management embedded. 	Executive Councillor for Governance & Democratic Services	Head of Democratic Services & Monitoring Officer
7. Support and develop member-led scrutiny	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scrutiny processes improved with best practice training and agenda planning. • Forward plan and topic submission process established. • Continued development of member-led scrutiny. 	Executive Councillor for Governance & Democratic Services	Head of Democratic Services & Monitoring Officer
8. Define and communicate transformation approach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New transformation programme launched with streamlined processes and governance in place to ensure continued oversight. • Data maturity improvements underpin risk-based decision-making with ongoing improvements. • Transformation Plan to be presented to O&S Cmmt July 2026. 	Executive Councillor for Climate, Transformation & Workforce	Head of Policy, Performance and Emergency Planning

3.3.4 A summary of the recommendations with ongoing oversight and actions fully met with ongoing BAU is shown in Appendix 1. This has been sectioned into the eight recommendations.

3.3.5 The full breakdown of actions and detail is shown in Appendix 2.

4. RISKS

4.1 Corporate Peer Challenge (CPC) is a key part of the improvement and assurance framework for local government. The Challenge assists councils to meet part of their Best Value duty, with the UK Government expecting all local authorities to have a CPC at least every five years.

4.2 The Peer Challenge provides an opportunity for external peers from other Local Authorities to assess how effectively we deliver our services and measure our ability to deliver on our plans and vision for the future. As

such the CPC and actions contribute to the governance of the Council and control of risk.

5. LINK TO THE CORPORATE PLAN, STRATEGIC PRIORITIES AND CORPORATE OBJECTIVES

5.2 The Corporate Plan provides a 'golden thread' throughout the organisation, linking activity at strategic levels from Huntingdonshire Futures through to activity in service plans, filtering through to objectives set for teams.

5.3 Priority 3 – Doing our Core Work Well is focused on:



The Corporate Plan has a specific action in 2025/26:

60. Implement the recommendations and suggestions made from the Local Government Association Corporate Peer Challenge, continuing to drive transparent continuous improvement.

6. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

6.1 There are no additional resource requirements arising from the Corporate Peer challenge or the Action Plan derived from the recommendations.

7. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDED DECISIONS

7.1 This report presents Council members with an update on the progress with formal actions and additional suggestions arising from the Corporate Peer Challenge 2024.

8. COMMENTS OF OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY PANEL

- 8.1 The Overview & Scrutiny (Performance & Growth) Panel discussed the report at its meeting on 21st January 2026.
- 8.2 Councillor Martin congratulated The Communications Team for the Strategy, though it was commented that he would have appreciated it to reach the Panel sooner.
- 8.3 Further insight was requested regarding outputs in order to better understand the impact and improvements made from the changes implemented. A Supplement has been added to the Cabinet report in response to this.
- 8.4 Following the discussion, the Panel were informed that their comments would be added to the Cabinet report in order for an informed decision to be made on the report recommendations.

9. LIST OF APPENDICES INCLUDED

Appendix 1 – Corporate Peer Challenge Action Plan summary. Updated Q3 2025/26

Appendix 2 – Corporate Peer Challenge Detailed Actions

Additional Item requested by the Overview and Scrutiny (Performance & Growth) Panel – Corporate Peer Challenge – What difference has it made.

10. BACKGROUND PAPERS

Council 16th October 2024 – [Local Government Association Corporate Peer Challenge](#)

[Local Government Association Corporate Peer Challenge, item 40.](#)  PDF 109 KB

[Appendix 1 - Corporate Peer Challenge Action Plan, item 40.](#)  PDF 89 KB

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