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Governance and Audit Committee	
7 June 2012	

Subject: WLDC LG Peer Review Sept 2011 – Final Report

Report by: | Customer and Policy Officer

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Purpose / Summary: | Matters Arising from December 2011 Governance and Audit Committee – Request to see the LG Peer Review Report. The report is attached.

RECOMMENDATION:

1) For Members attention only. No further action required

IMPLICATIONS

Legal: None specifically as a result of this report

Financial : None specifically as a result of this report

Staffing : Any projects evolving from any recommendations highlighted by the peer challenge will complete a risk assessment.

Equality and Diversity including Human Rights : None specifically as a result of this report. Any projects evolving from any recommendations highlighted by the peer challenge will complete an equality impact assessment where appropraite.

Risk Assessment: None specifically as a result of this report. Any projects evolving from any recommendations highlighted by the peer challenge will complete a risk assessment.

Climate Related Risks and Opportunities : Any projects evolving from any recommendations highlighted by the peer challenge will complete a risk assessment.

Title and Location of any Background Papers used in the preparation of this report: None

Call in and Urgency:

Is the decision one which Rule 14 of the Scrutiny Procedure Rules apply?

Yes		No	x

Key Decision:

Yes		No	x

1. Introduction

1.1. A Local Government (LG) Peer Challenge Review was completed at West Lindsey during the week commencing 19 September 2011.

1.2. This report is to give a little background of the review and enclose the report (Appendix A). Ultimately it is addressing the issue that some members have not seen the final outcome report.

2. Background

2.1 The review was requested with the purpose to endorse our new corporate plan and way forward. In Manjeet's words at the time "This review is seen as a key milestone as we approve our long term Corporate Plan and proposals for how we organise ourselves to deliver."

2.2 The main aims of the review were:

- Understanding of local context and priority setting
- Leadership and governance
- Financial planning and viability
- Localism
- Our developing working relationship with the County Council

2.3 Members of the Peer Review Team were:

T Member Peer   Alan Melton
Leader Fenland DC & Councillor Cambridgeshire County Council

Lead Officer   Chris Bocock
Chief Executive Malvern Hills District Council

Senior Officer   Laura Taylor
Strategic Director Mole Valley District Council

LG Group Programme Manager   Neil Shaw

2.4 The review took place at the same as Lincoln County Council had a LG Peer Challenge and some joint activity was combined.
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3 Conclusion

3.1 The review was a positive experience by all involved in the process and as the attached report (Appendix A) highlights our way forward and direction of change was complimented and endorsed.

3.2 No significant issues were highlighted and it is a positive read. The recommendations made have been incorporated into existing plans and good practice examples are being followed up.

WEST LINDSEY DISTRICT COUNCIL

PEER CHALLENGE FEEDBACK

20-22 SEPTEMBER 2011

1. **Purpose**

   This paper has been produced to capture the outcomes from the Local Government Group's peer challenge at West Lindsey District Council in September 2011. This paper presents the key findings from the peer team.

2. **Context**

   West Lindsey District Council is an organisation undergoing significant change. The appointment of a new leadership team (Chief Executive and Leader) in 2010 signalled the start of a process of a change in direction. Considerable effort has been dedicated in the last eighteen months to addressing significant governance issues and to providing the council with a new vision and direction.

   The peer challenge has coincided with a time where the council has published its new Corporate Plan in September 2011.

3. **Focus of the peer challenge**

   The council identified the following themes which formed the focus of the peer challenge:

   - Vision and corporate strategy (future direction)
   - Leadership and governance
   - Financial viability
   - Localism
   - Further strengthening County and District working

   Within the context the council were seeking a steer and support from the peer team in the approach to the future direction, identifying positives as well as possible risks, seeking a view on challenging areas and signposting to examples of best practice.

4. **Key findings from the challenge**

   Future direction
   - A clear vision and future direction exists for the organisation captured in the recently agreed Corporate Plan
   - The Corporate Plan is ambitious and comprehensive
   - In recent months a more positive culture has developed which supports the direction of the organisation e.g. enthusiasm, passion and a 'can do' attitude from staff and members

- All these recent developments have established a clear set of building blocks for future improvement e.g. a clear vision and direction, sound medium term financial plan and the entrepreneurial council model
- The performance of key service areas such as waste, street cleansing and revenues and benefits are good
- Overall, the council has a strong focus on local communities and is open to learning

To support further improvement, the council now needs to:
- Ensure the vision and content of the Corporate Plan is thoroughly understood throughout the organisation and gains the understanding of partner agencies
- The council needs to satisfy itself that it has the capacity and capability to deliver its change programme
- Ensure the whole organisation understands the full implications of the entrepreneurial and localism approaches
- Recognise that change of such a complex nature is likely to benefit from further reflection and iterative discussion and development as the council moves into the 'action' phase of its change
- Housing and Planning services face specific challenges in meeting their key targets' (these issues have been recognised, actions are being undertaken, but are yet to result in conclusive outcomes)

Leadership and governance
- The type and style of political and managerial leadership has positively changed over recent months
- Positive working relationships exist between politicians and officers
- New governance arrangements are becoming embedded. These include the introduction of a Leaders Panel and more informal member forums and are allowing better relationships to be built between officers and members
- Members and officers are generally enthusiastically embracing the new ways of working

To support further improvement, the council now needs to:
- Ensure they are equipping members and officers with the skills to deliver the council's ambitious change programme
- Gain a better understanding of partnership governance arrangements
- Actively engage champions throughout the organisation to take a stronger leadership role and ownership of the Corporate Plan to ensure leadership is extended through the organisation
- At a time of major time senior officers make sure they spend time to be engaged with officers in addressing issues of concern in delivering the corporate plan

Financial viability
- The council has a sound medium term financial strategy to meet the current financial challenges but it will be important to review this as

the future national and local financial picture develops in coming years
- The actions in the Corporate Plan can be delivered within the council's current financial plans
- The council is taking opportunities for efficiency savings
- Financial management is supporting the vision/objectives

To support further improvement, the council now needs to:
- Manage the future risks around the role income generation will play in managing the council's overall financial position
- Explore opportunities for more innovative use of assets, shared services and ensuring value for money e.g. through the co-location of services and more effective procurement. This should enable a clearer view of what benefits can be derived from working with other organisations
- Maximise the use of external funding

Localism
- The council's approach to localism is being developed
- There is an openness to change and redesign services based on community feedback
- Considerable good work is already taken place under the localism 'umbrella'. One of the challenges for the council will be to build on this further
- Allocating lead area responsibility to key service managers is beginning to strengthen ownership of the 'localism' agenda
- Members have been engaged in shaping local area priorities
- Robust data sets and information are being used to develop area profiles to ensure future work is evidence based

To support further improvement, the council now needs to:
- Ensure it fully understands the implications which its approach to localism could bring e.g. more requirement to work at a strategic level, letting go etc
- Ensure local action plans are manageable and deliverable
- Ensure key roles like the Area Managers and Community Action Officers are clearly defined and is understood
- Join up internal working (between services) and external working (between the council and other agencies)
- Ensure key local partners ensure the local ways of working
- Existing service provision by community and voluntary groups is mapped to ensure better knowledge of local provision and to avoid duplication of effort
- Understand how it will equip local organisations and communities to embrace the localism agenda
- Review the approach to communicating with local communities to ensure the existing approaches are having the appropriate impact

Further strengthening County and District working

- Positive relationships between County and district officers and members
- An existing track record of joint working upon which to build
- There is a convergence in the philosophies and the overall priorities

To support further improvement, the council now needs to:

- Ensure there is a sufficient level of political commitment
- Explore where collaborative working might eventually lead to
- Think through how this approach is presented to the councils themselves and the outside world, including; other district councils, partner agencies and communities
- The County and district to determine the right level of ambition for future plans

5.   Notable practice

The peer team believe it is important to share learning from other organisations.   The team provided some specific examples and 'lessons learned' during the localism workshop during the peer challenge.   In addition to this, the team identified a number of initial examples of notable practice (or practice to consider) from which the council are likely to benefit from.   This is attached in the appendix.   The team would like to reflect on further examples and provide these following the feedback discussion.

Chris Bocock (lead peer)
Chief Executive, Malvern Hills District Council
22 September 2011

Examples of notable practice

The team identified a number of initial examples of notable practice (or practice to consider) from which the council are likely to benefit from. We will provide an overview of the localism work in Worcestershire and Cambridgeshire following this paper.

In this appendix we provide a brief overview of some practice it might be useful to reflect on. These are not intended to be prescriptive, but merely provide learning in terms of some of the key issues explored for the future improvement of the council.

Localism work – Surrey
The Surrey First programme focuses on five workstreams to reap efficiencies by making collaborative strategic decisions across Surrey. It is lead through a joint committee of all Leaders from the Districts and the County along with the Chairman of Surrey Police Authority. Work is managed through the Chief Executive Group and commissioned through existing professional networks in Surrey (paper available).

The Mole Valley Localism work focuses on five areas of service delivery that are delivered by the County and District Council. The aim of the project is to stop services 'falling through the gap', avoid duplication and increase community engagement. An early success of the project is the alignment of s106 monies to localities by both authorities and passporting of money to community groups or a parish council for spend locally (paper available). The project is managed through the Mole Valley Local Committee which is a form of area committee under the County Council's constitution.

Neighbourhood action teams – NW Leicestershire
The establishment of multi-agency teams in 2006 in the district's seven neighbourhoods has helped provide a local focus for service delivery. The teams meet several times a year to task actions to meet local needs and issues which are raised by neighbourhoods. A neighbourhood co-ordinator looks after more than one neighbourhood and is tasked with working with a range of public and voluntary sector organisations to ensure the NAT works. One of the NATs is co-ordinated by the voluntary sector to explore alternative approaches to working at the local level.

Using Twitter to better understand local activity
A number of authorities are considering (but are yet to implement) an approach using Twitter or other social media to track the activities of a range of services in a locality. A Twitter group is created online which includes all the locality based officers in the local authority. Officers update their Twitter feed every time they undertake an action in that community e.g. responding to a noise nuisance issue, a graffiti incident, faulty street lighting. The area manager can then visit their Twitter group page regularly, understand the

variety of activity being undertaken and also link different service issues together with minimal effort.