



**Council**

**Monday 4 July 2022**

**Subject: Outcome of the LGA Follow-Up Peer Review, 2022**

Report by:

Chief Executive

Contact Officer:

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Purpose / Summary:

To present the findings of the LGA Peer Review Follow-Up, which was undertaken to assess progress against the recommendations made in the original Peer Review conducted in 2020.

**RECOMMENDATION(S):**

1. That Members note the significant progress made by the Council against the ten original recommendations arising from the 2020 Local Government Association (LGA) Peer Review.
2. That Members note the findings of the LGA Peer Review Follow-Up Report, paying particular regard to the follow-up recommendations, and the actions being taken by the Council to ensure these are implemented in full.
3. That Members agree that the actions required are built into the Council's ongoing planning processes.
4. That Members agree for the LGA Peer Review Follow-Up Report (attached as Appendix B) to be published on the Council's website.

## IMPLICATIONS

**Legal:**

No legal implications arising from this report.

**Financial : FIN/5/23/SL**

No financial implications arising from this report.

**Staffing :**

No staffing implications arising from this report.

**Equality and Diversity including Human Rights :**

Not applicable in the context of this report

**Data Protection Implications :**

Not applicable in the context of this report

**Climate Related Risks and Opportunities:**

Not applicable in the context of this report

**Section 17 Crime and Disorder Considerations:**

Not applicable in the context of this report

**Health Implications:**

Not applicable in the context of this report

**Title and Location of any Background Papers used in the preparation of this report :**

**Risk Assessment :**

Not applicable in the context of this report

**Call in and Urgency:**

**Is the decision one which Rule 14.7 of the Scrutiny Procedure Rules apply?**

i.e. is the report exempt from being called in due to urgency (in consultation with C&I chairman)

Yes

No

**Key Decision:**

A matter which affects two or more wards, or has significant financial implications

Yes

No

## **1 Introduction**

- 1.1 The Local Government Association (LGA) offers all councils a Corporate Peer Review, and subsequent follow-up, every five years. The LGA describes this process as “a tried and trusted method of improvement; that provides councils with a robust and effective improvement tool which is owned by the sector, for the sector.”
- 1.2 In January 2020, West Lindsey District Council participated in an LGA Corporate Peer Review, which returned 10 key recommendations, as summarised below (a copy of the full text of the recommendations is attached as Appendix A).
- i. Implement the new senior management structure.
  - ii. Reduce the Customer First Programme to its core and rebrand it.
  - iii. Use the ‘purposeful pause’ regarding commercialisation and financial planning to understand and identify where future savings should come from.
  - iv. Clarify what ‘social regeneration’ means to the Council, what it is and how to resource it.
  - v. Improve communications with all stakeholders.
  - vi. Use the Local Plan review process to ensure the viability and deliverability of allocated housing sites across the district.
  - vii. Review the Overview and Scrutiny Function.
  - viii. Ensure a structured approach to workforce and succession planning.
  - ix. Ensure performance management processes are consistent at a service level.
  - x. Consider a Cultural Strategy
- 1.3 On 25<sup>th</sup> February 2022, the Council took part in a follow-up Peer Review, led by the LGA, to assess progress against each of these recommendations, and to identify any further areas for improvement. This report presents the findings of the Peer Review team, focusing on the significant progress that has already been made, and the actions that the Council is taking in relation to any further recommendations. A full copy of the LGA Peer Review team’s report is attached for information as Appendix B.

## **2 Scope of the Follow-Up Peer Review**

- 2.1 The follow-up review took the form of a full day of remote activity on 25<sup>th</sup> February 2022 which included three group sessions with the Leader of the Council, Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen of those Council committees which the recommendations related to, the Chief Executive and senior management. Individual sessions were also offered to any elected member who wished to speak to the peer review team on a one-to-one basis.
- 2.2 Each session was facilitated by the Peer Review team, which was the same team that ran the full Peer Review in 2020, excepting one member who has since retired. A Peer Review team is a mixture of senior officers and experienced members who have wide ranging experience of local government. In recognition of the challenges posed by the pandemic, the LGA’s review process has been revised to account for this and the scope of the Council’s follow-up review was to explore:
- Positive progress against each of the 10 recommendations and;
  - Any additional areas and suggestions for improvement.

### 3 Findings emerging from the Peer Review follow-up

3.1 In its own assessment, submitted to the LGA team as part of the pre-review process, the Council reported that eight of the ten recommendations had been implemented and integrated into business as usual, with the remaining two (recommendations three and four) continuing to be monitored via Governance and Audit Committee. The Peer Review team corroborated these findings, stating in their report that “the Council has made significant progress against the recommendations from the peer team’s January 2020 report. This is no mean feat given that the Council has been responding to the various impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic throughout this time.” The peer team noted the following:

- Members’ and officers’ enthusiasm, commitment and skills to deliver the best services to the district’s residents, businesses and other customers.
- That members and officers have used their strategic skills and knowledge to progress, and plan the refresh of, their Corporate Plan. WLDC clearly knows what it wants to achieve and what it needs to do to achieve those aims
- More consolidated internal thinking of council specific concepts and programmes, e.g. around the Together 24 programme and Levelling Up.
- WLDC’s own self-awareness, openness, honesty and ideas as to what it could do better on its continuous improvement journey and why, both through and outside of this CPC process.

3.2 The feedback report builds as much on the Council’s own suggestions of how to improve as well as the peer team’s recommendations. A breakdown of the findings for each of the ten recommendations is summarised below, with the full content available in the feedback report attached as Appendix B.

### 4 Progress to Date and Further Recommendations

#### 4.1 Recommendation One – Implement the new senior management structure:

<b>Findings</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The peer team found that the review of the senior management structure had been completed, with additional changes in light of staff departures since 2020.</li><li>• Changes to the senior structure have been well communicated and well received by staff, as evidenced by high levels of staff and member satisfaction.</li><li>• The appointment of the Assistant Director for Homes and Communities was welcomed as an important acknowledgement of the Council’s role in supporting the health and wellbeing of its residents.</li><li>• The report recognises that “there is a determination at [the Council] to do things even better, based on its learning throughout the pandemic and the Council’s more strategic and cohesive footing since returning to the Chief Executive model in 2020.”</li></ul>
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<b>Further recommendations</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continue communicating any changes to the structure with staff to ensure they understand reporting lines and to reassure staff of stability at the senior level to deliver services</li> <li>• Resolve any temporary staffing arrangements throughout the Council to ensure the right number of skilled and experienced staff are in substantive posts.</li> </ul>
<b>Next steps</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Council continues to keep staff updated of changes to the senior structure, with recent appointments of the Director of Corporate Services, and the Assistant Director of People and Democratic Services communicated with staff via the weekly bulletin and at the March Corporate Update.</li> <li>• Staffing is one of the core elements of the Together 24 (T24) Programme, ensuring the Council's services are supported by skilled and experienced officers. T24, along with a robust Workforce Planning Strategy, will ensure the Council maintains a highly skilled and fully-resourced workforce that is able to meet the changing demands faced by the Council.</li> </ul>

4.2 **Recommendation Two - Reduce the Customer First Programme to its core and rebrand it:**

<b>Findings</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In August 2020, the Council replaced Customer First with its flagship Together 24 Programme and the peer team found this was on track to review all Council services by December 2024.</li> <li>• The people-led approach of the Programme was commended by the peer team, ensuring staff are engaged at all stages of a service review so that a review is done 'with' staff and not 'to' them.</li> <li>• The report notes the successful service reviews completed so far, particularly in Land Charges which has seen a significant reduction in turnaround times for land charges searches as a result.</li> </ul>
<b>Further recommendations</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To ensure the Programme remains on track, the Together 24 Board should continue to monitor, and possibly accelerate, the momentum of service reviews.</li> <li>• The Council should consider how to involve members, residents and other customers in service reviews to ensure their needs are understood and responded to as effectively as possible.</li> <li>• T24 should align with the Council's customer satisfaction performance indicator (monitored via Progress and Delivery) to improve related performance as much as possible.</li> </ul>
<b>Next steps</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The T24 Board held an Away Day in March 2022 where these recommendations were considered and factored into the work of the Programme.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Board recognised the need to keep residents informed of the tangible improvements to service delivery, such as reduced land charges turnaround times and improved bulky waste collections, and this will be reflected in the communications plan for the duration of the programme. Members will continue to be kept fully informed of the Programme's progress via formal and informal channels such as committee reports, the Members' Newsletter and Leader's Panel.</li> <li>• Customer satisfaction is already monitored via Progress and Delivery reporting and the Board will ensure any additional data gathered during service reviews continues to be fed into this performance indicator.</li> </ul>
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4.3 **Recommendation Three – Use the ‘purposeful pause’ regarding commercialisation and financial planning to understand and identify where future income and savings should come from:**

<b>Findings</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The peer team acknowledged the completion of the Medium-Term Financial Plan for 2021-2026 and that new commercial opportunities and potential efficiencies continue to be developed through the business planning framework.</li> <li>• Although there is a projected funding gap of £1.6m for 2023-24, the peer team recognised the planning that the Council is undertaking to mitigate this, including a detailed review of every service's budget and the Council's investment programme to identify savings opportunities. The report also notes that the Council's funding reserve is approximately £1m above the set minimum.</li> <li>• The report notes the appointment of a Commercial Development Manager to provide additional capacity and capability in this area.</li> </ul>
<b>Further recommendations</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Council is encouraged to maintain its commercial momentum to ensure progress continues and is not wasted.</li> </ul>
<b>Next steps</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Commercial and savings opportunities will continue to be explored both through the business planning process, and through the T24 Programme.</li> <li>• The Commercial Board continues to meet regularly to monitor commercial activity and progress new ideas to ensure momentum is maintained.</li> </ul>

4.4 **Recommendation Four – Clarify what ‘social regeneration’ means to the Council, what it will deliver, and how to resource it:**

<b>Findings</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Council's Health and Wellbeing Strategy will ensure that the Council's services address inequalities and tackle issues that lead to deprivation.</li> </ul>
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Council's successful £10m bid to the Levelling Up Fund means that the language of 'social regeneration' has been replaced with 'Levelling Up'</li> <li>• Members have firm ideas of what 'levelling up' means, while recognising that it means different things to different people.</li> <li>• The Council's Economic Recovery Plan also recognises that 'levelling up' is a more accessible term, but that its meaning remains unclear nationally and locally.</li> </ul>
<b>Further recommendations</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Council is encouraged to work with members, staff, communities and partners from the outset to agree and clarify what 'levelling up' means for the district, especially the rural areas.</li> <li>• The Council should feedback its own definition of 'levelling up' to civil servants to help inform central government's Levelling Up approach.</li> <li>• The Council is encouraged to regularly communicate with communities and key stakeholders on its Health and Wellbeing Strategy and other related programmes.</li> </ul>
<b>Next steps</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Council's Corporate Plan is due for review in 2023. In preparation for this, officers will be working with members to define what 'levelling up' means for West Lindsey as a district, and at the local level, particularly in rural areas. This will drive the priorities defined in the refreshed Corporate Plan.</li> <li>• Officers meet regularly with the Department for Housing, Levelling Up and Communities regarding its Levelling Up Programme which provides opportunities for the Council to feedback its own definition of what 'levelling up' means to West Lindsey.</li> <li>• Engagement relating to the Health and Wellbeing Strategy and other related programmes forms part of the Council's Communications Plan and this will continue to be reviewed and updated as necessary to ensure the right level of engagement continues.</li> </ul>

4.5 **Recommendation Five – Improve communications with all stakeholders:**

<b>Findings</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There has been a significant increase in communication with all stakeholders since 2020, not least in response to the pandemic which accelerated the need for more regular communication.</li> <li>• The report highlights the learning the Council has taken from this; singling out the successes of regular staff surveys, the Chief Executive's "ward walks" with ward members, and regular bulletins for staff and members.</li> </ul>
<b>Further recommendations</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The peer team advised the Council to review how it monitors the impact of increased</li> </ul>



	communications in order to best motivate and engage with members and officers, and to enhance relationships and trust.
<b>Next steps</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In March 2022, the Council conducted its fourth staff survey since the pandemic began, which includes questions about the level and impact of staff communication. Additionally, regular Corporate Updates are used as an informal, two-way forum for the senior management team to provide key updates and for staff to provide feedback or ask questions. The format of these updates is constantly being reviewed to ensure they are engaging and encourage relationship building between senior management and officers, as well as between teams.</li> <li>• Senior and Wider Management Team continue to foster positive relationships with elected members. The Strategy Away Day in January 2022 presented an opportunity to hold a workshop with ward members to understand what data they would like to be presented with at ward level to aid decision-making, with officers undertaking to scope ward level information packs for each ward member. The Policy and Strategy Team is working with the administration to plan the format and agenda for Core and Full Leader's Panel for the next 12 months, ensuring members' are fully engaged with the Corporate Plan review. The Democratic Services team encourages officers to make use of the Members' Newsletter to share updates where a committee decision is not required. The team also seeks regular feedback following training sessions and events to ensure they meet the needs of members.</li> </ul>

**4.6 Recommendation Six – Use the Local Plan process to ensure the viability and deliverability of allocated housing sites across the district:**

<b>Findings</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The peer team noted how the Council had brought together its Corporate Plan, Local Plan and Climate Change and Sustainable Environment Strategy under a central Policy and Strategy team to strengthen the corporate, strategic and political position of the Local Plan.</li> <li>• The new team is also working to enhance data and information collation to inform the reviews of the Local Plan and the Corporate Plan. The peer team notes that this has helped to build strategic and financial joint working with key partners and stakeholders.</li> <li>• The report highlights how the Council's senior management has delivered key outcomes from the Local Plan review, including a specific policy for RAF Scampton, and improved policy context for the market towns of Market Rasen and Caistor.</li> </ul>
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The peer team heard how elected members felt more involved in the Local Plan as a result of the changes made over the last two years.</li> </ul>
<b>Further recommendations</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No further recommendations made.</li> </ul>
<b>Next steps</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Leader of the Council is currently Chairman of the Central Lincolnshire Joint Strategic Planning Committee, which considered the updated draft Local Plan at its most recent meeting in February 2022 with a view to proceeding with the final Regulation 19 consultation in the Spring of 2022.</li> <li>The final Plan is expected to be submitted to the Planning Inspectorate in the Summer of 2022.</li> <li>The Council continues to monitor the five-year land supply to ensure that delivery and supply keep pace with need and demand.</li> <li>The Council continues to work closely with landowners, developers and registered housing providers to deliver a quality offer across the district.</li> </ul>

#### 4.7 Recommendation Seven – Review the Overview and Scrutiny Function:

<b>Findings</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The peer team found that the Council recognises and supports scrutiny as a specific skill and has invested in regular training and support in order that members can maximise their role to make the most positive difference to Council decision-making. This has resulted in a more effective scrutiny function as a result.</li> <li>The report notes the increase in preparation time with members in advance of committee meetings, resulting in better informed reports and members of the committee taking greater ownership of the work programme.</li> <li>Working parties, enhanced questioning and feedback were all found to be more effective, noting the examples of flooding, draining and leisure.</li> <li>The peer team found a full work programme for 2021/22 inviting external partners to discuss their work on a regular basis. Performance management reviews are also scrutinised regularly and greater use has been made of task and finish groups.</li> </ul>
<b>Further recommendations</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No further recommendations made.</li> </ul>
<b>Next steps</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The function and operation of all committees is considered as part of the Council's annual review of its constitution, which includes the Overview and Scrutiny function. This work, in partnership with members, will continue going forward.</li> </ul>

**4.8 Recommendation Eight – Ensure a structured approach to workforce and succession planning:**

<p><b>Findings</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Many of the discussion and findings relating to succession planning have been covered in recommendations relating to the senior structure (para. 4.1) and the T24 Programme (para. 4.2), which addresses resilience, risk, capacity, training and development.</li> <li>• The feedback report notes that the T24 Board ensures linkages are made between business planning and service reviews, and that workforce planning forms part of strategic planning.</li> <li>• The business and strategic planning process was found to support staff development throughout the Council, supported by a clear framework of appraisals which strengthens the ‘golden thread’ from strategic objectives through to each member of staff’s contribution to these.</li> <li>• The report warns that reviewing services individually through the T24 Programme risks strengthening silo working, which could impact Council wide workforce and succession planning.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Further recommendations</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Council should enable services to work better together to make the most of staff skills and experience and to avoid silo working.</li> <li>• The Council should progress member training and development to enhance their roles and the impact of these roles.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Next steps</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Council’s Workforce Planning Strategy is due to be reviewed during 2022 which will reflect the findings of the peer challenge.</li> <li>• The Council is working on a Future Leaders’ / Talent Development programme for those officers undertaking, or wishing to undertake significant professional development qualifications or training programmes.</li> <li>• Schemes to retrain or upskill staff have been implemented successfully, such as retraining staff to work in the crematorium or to deliver waste collection services, which has created resilience for the future.</li> <li>• Such schemes and programmes are designed to support officers who either wish to progress to different roles or who want to perform at their best in the roles they are in.</li> <li>• A full member training and events programme is in place with the content reviewed regularly to ensure such events meet members needs. This will be reviewed again in preparation for whole Council elections in May 2023.</li> </ul>

**4.9 Recommendation Nine – Ensure performance management processes are consistent at service level:**

<b>Findings</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Council has made good progress since 2020 to develop and support consistent performance management practices across service areas.</li> <li>• Assistant Directors and Team Managers take more ownership of their portfolio’s performance, including their contribution to the Corporate Plan and forward planning, with support from the Change, Performance and Programmes team.</li> <li>• The changes that have been implemented appear to be improving performance issues where they arise. Performance management is also a key element of Together 24 so that service improvements can be assessed and made.</li> </ul>
<b>Further recommendations</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No further recommendations made.</li> </ul>
<b>Next steps</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Council is working to ensure performance management drives continuous improvement consistently across the Council and that it is a key element of delivering the ‘golden thread’.</li> <li>• Vital to achieving this is the rollout of the new OneCouncil performance system in April 2022. This system forms part of the OneCouncil platform which has already seen the rollout of the new finance system. It will provide decision makers with combined performance and finance data which, in turn, will enhance decision making, service planning and management and continuous learning and improvement in real time.</li> </ul>

**4.10 Recommendation Ten – Consider a Cultural Strategy:**

<b>Findings</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The peer team acknowledged the work that has been done in this area, such as identification of five work streams, which were approved by members in September 2021.</li> <li>• To support these workstreams, an action plan has been approved and capacity to deliver this has been created via a new fixed-term officer post.</li> </ul>
<b>Further recommendations</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Council should make full use of the cultural action plan to ensure events taking place on the same day or being unnecessarily duplicated, and to ensure the plans are delivered to their full potential.</li> <li>• The Council should apply for funding strategically and selectively.</li> <li>• The Council should consider issues such as accessibility and affordability as part of its levelling up agenda so that opportunities are accessible, affordable and appealing to as many people as possible.</li> </ul>
<b>Next steps</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Council is considering options to align cinema screenings and other cultural programmes between venues, including mobile ones, across the district so that cultural</li> </ul>

	<p>opportunities can be maximised across the whole district.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Council is working with the local university to consider opportunities in Market Rasen and to develop Trinity Arts Centre as a cultural hub with the whole district, as well as developing links with Lincolnshire Showground.</li> <li>• In relation to funding, the Council is developing a £5m bid to the National Lottery Fund for capital investment, events and activities at the Trinity Arts Centre with progress being monitored by the Commercial Board.</li> <li>• Customer feedback is consistently gathered by the Arts Centre to monitor the impact of issues such as accessibility and affordability. This will feed into the conversation piece about what levelling up means to the district to ensure accessibility and affordability of cultural events are considered as part of this.</li> <li>• The Council is already considering the balance between its cultural action plan and that for its visitor economy which includes support from the Local Government Association to develop and finalise both action plans as part of the Council's commercial agenda.</li> </ul>
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## 5.0 Next Steps

The Council is pleased that the peer challenge follow-up recognises the significant progress that has been made since 2020 to implement the recommendations and, in many cases, go beyond these to deliver further improvements to service delivery, ensure greater strategic alignment, secure a highly skilled and resilient workforce and ensure financial resilience, all of which puts residents at the heart of Council activity in line with its core values. The Council remains ambitious in its plans and recognises there is always more to do. This report sets out the next steps the Council is already taking on its journey of continuous improvement and officers will ensure that the additional feedback from the peer review team is aligned with existing governance structures and decision-making frameworks to become part of the Council's business as usual.

The Council would like to thank the LGA Peer Challenge team for undertaking the follow-up challenge and for preparation of its feedback report. West Lindsey's next, full peer challenge is scheduled to take place in 2024 and officers will begin work to prepare for this in collaboration with key stakeholders and decision makers.