

# Corporate Peer Challenge **Cambridge City Council**

11 – 14 December 2017

Feedback Report

## 1. Executive Summary

Cambridge City Council is a good council that is performing well and has a number of areas of strong practice, including leveraging in additional funding and grants, building new homes and supporting vulnerable residents both through service delivery and support grants to the voluntary and third sector. The peer team found both Cambridge City Council and its residents and stakeholders to be proud, passionate and community minded. There is a real appetite for Cambridge to be an ambitious city whilst maintaining and celebrating its rich heritage. The peer team found that the council had all the right ingredients to deliver on its future and ambitious programmes but that some work was needed to refine its objectives and ensure that resources were aligned and targeted appropriately.

The council has a strong vision for a 'Fairer Cambridge for all' which underpins the majority of the work delivered by the council. The peer team felt that this vision was also the council's key value and it could benefit from establishing a longer term vision for the city that could then be articulated to residents, partners and stakeholders. This would include considering the type of council and its role that the city needs in the future e.g. commercial council, commissioning council, facilitating council.

Cambridge City Council operates soundly within a complex political environment. It is the only Labour council in a multi layered local government structure. It works well with other political partners focusing on the greater good of its residents and finds consensus through common ground. Going forward the senior leadership of the council will need to continue to navigate through this political arena whilst maintaining relationships with other key influential partners e.g. businesses, developers and the universities.

Cambridge City Council is secure financially, having leveraged additional funding over the years and through sound financial management although it does consistently underspend. The council has recognised the need to modernise the finance system and it was clear that staff welcome these changes and the opportunities it will bring.

Cambridge City Council is good at delivering services which are well received by the public. The residents' survey from 2016 reported that 76% of residents were satisfied with how the council delivered services. 81% of residents were happy with the council's services collecting rubbish, recycling and green waste and maintaining parks and public spaces, protecting trees in the City and managing trees in public places. There is a clear commitment from the council to the principles of social equality and social mobility. This is backed up by the council's anti-poverty strategy and is reflective of the view of the city's community. The peer team noted that the council had really engaged with and integrated this shared belief within its plans and objectives.

Cambridge City Council is a place that is keen to nurture and build relationships. Senior members and officers work with and influence partners both across the city and the county. The council is involved in a number of different partnerships operating across different geographies. The council has been able to seize opportunities as they arise and the Leader's approach and standing has been key to many of the successful relationships and partnerships the council has. To strengthen the council's position it is important that these relationships are prioritised and focussed for the future. Clarity on

the future vision for the city as a place will help to influence and shape negotiations around shared services and with partners on a wider geographical area.

The council's transformation programme is working to develop and modernise key systems to ensure that staff are operating as efficiently and effectively as they can do and are able to respond to changing pressures. The council needs to check that its current governance structure will support the council in this change of pace and responsiveness.

It was clear to the peer team that the council is on the cusp of an exciting step change both internally and externally with partners. It is important that the council takes some time to reflect on and celebrate the success it has achieved to date with staff and partners. It can then use these achievements as building blocks to support future work. The recommendations set out in this report aim to bolster these foundations and aid the next stage in the council's journey.

## 2. Key recommendations

There are a range of suggestions and observations within the main section of the report that will inform some 'quick wins' and practical actions, in addition to the conversations onsite, many of which provided ideas and examples of practice from other organisations. The following are the peer team's key recommendations to the Council:

1. **Prioritise what's important to you and focus on delivery.** The council needs to ensure that resources are targeted to the council's key political aims and objectives and that all projects and service delivery can demonstrate this clearly.
2. **Articulate your narrative and tailor to different audiences.** Refining and articulating the narrative of the council will help to ensure that resources and objectives are aligned. By tailoring this to different audiences and making it relevant the council will be able to strengthen its position and clarity on key issues and secure greater buy-in.
3. **Consider if your decision making process will enable you to adapt and respond quickly to the changing landscape around you.** The council has a thorough and open decision making process but it needs to consider whether this is as fleet of foot as it needs to be when the council is required to make quick and responsive decisions.
4. **Move forward with an enhanced energised culture for delivering the council's future agenda and transformation programme.** The workforce of the council are committed, loyal and want to make a difference. The council needs to harness this willingness and create a forward looking and innovative culture that encourages staff to be proactive about delivering better and more efficient services to the council
5. **Work out what you want from shared services.** It is important that the council takes time to consider what is next for the Shared Services agenda. Reinvigorating the partnership and creating momentum for the arrangements will allow the council

to continue growing its expertise and resilience as well as making efficiencies and savings.

- 6. World famous cutting edge city – do you want to be a cutting edge council?**  
Cambridge City Council is a good council but has the potential and resources for more. The senior leadership team need to spend some time reflecting on the council's future direction and partnerships to work out how it can be a cutting edge council.

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### **3. Summary of the Peer Challenge approach**

#### **The peer team**

Peer challenges are delivered by experienced elected member and officer peers. The make-up of the peer team reflected your requirements and the focus of the peer challenge. Peers were selected on the basis of their relevant experience and expertise and agreed with you. The peers who delivered the peer challenge at Cambridge City Council were:

- Dawn Baxendale – CEX, Southampton City Council
- Cllr Pete Marland Leader, Milton Keynes
- Mark Parkinson, Deputy CEX, Exeter City Council
- Katherine Marriott, Deputy CEX, Rushcliffe Borough Council
- Ben Wood, Head of Communications, Strategy and Policy, East Herts DC
- Ami Beeton, Peer Challenge Manager, LGA

#### **Scope and focus**

The peer team considered the following five questions which form the core components looked at by all Corporate Peer Challenges cover. These are the areas we believe are critical to councils' performance and improvement:

1. Understanding of the local place and priority setting: Does the council understand its local context and place and use that to inform a clear vision and set of priorities?
2. Leadership of Place: Does the council provide effective leadership of place through its elected members, officers and constructive relationships and partnerships with external stakeholders?
3. Organisational leadership and governance: Is there effective political and managerial leadership supported by good governance and decision-making arrangements that respond to key challenges and enable change and transformation to be implemented?

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4. Financial planning and viability: Does the council have a financial plan in place to ensure long term viability and is there evidence that it is being implemented successfully?
5. Capacity to deliver: Is organisational capacity aligned with priorities and does the council influence, enable and leverage external capacity to focus on agreed outcomes?

In addition to these questions, you asked the peer team to consider/review/provide feedback on **managing effective partnership delivery and shared services**.

### **The peer challenge process**

It is important to stress that this was not an inspection. Peer challenges are improvement focussed and tailored to meet individual councils' needs. They are designed to complement and add value to a council's own performance and improvement. The process is not designed to provide an in-depth or technical assessment of plans and proposals. The peer team used their experience and knowledge of local government to reflect on the information presented to them by people they met, things they saw and material that they read.

The peer team prepared for the peer challenge by reviewing a range of documents and information in order to ensure they were familiar with the Council and the challenges it is facing. The team then spent 3.5 days onsite at Cambridge City Council during which they:

- Spoke to more than 95 people including a range of council staff together with councillors and external partners and stakeholders.
- Gathered information and views from more than 50 meetings, visits to key sites in the area and additional research and reading.
- Collectively spent more than 203 hours to determine their findings – the equivalent of one person spending more than 5.5 weeks in Cambridge City Council.
- This report provides a summary of the peer team's findings. It builds on the feedback presentation provided by the peer team at the end of their on-site visit. In presenting feedback to you, they have done so as fellow local government officers and members, not professional consultants or inspectors. By its nature, the peer challenge is a snapshot in time. We appreciate that some of the feedback may be about things you are already addressing and progressing.

## 4. Feedback

### 4.1 Understanding of the local place and priority setting

Cambridge City Council has a clear understanding of the opportunities and challenges that the city and its residents are facing. There is a good grasp of the role and direction that has been taken to date and which is summed up in three main aims and seven key priorities that the council has. This is demonstrated at a number of different levels including from a local perspective through to a sub-regional e.g. being a key part of the new Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority. One example of this is the work that they have undertaken to understand and tackle the welfare gap that the city faces. 'One Cambridge, Fair for all' is a key issue for the council and the understanding and commitment shown to dealing with this can be seen through many actions, a key strand being its anti-poverty strategy which is central to the council's partnership objectives to support vulnerable individuals and communities. E.g. part of the devolution deal for Cambridge and Peterborough included 500 new affordable homes. This strategy is well known and understood by staff, partners and stakeholders.

The peer team believes that the council now needs to start thinking about the next stage of focus for the city and create a longer term vision and narrative. By having a longer term vision and narrative in place the council will be in a strong place to negotiate and represent the city's asks and wants at meetings with partners, stakeholders and government. This includes identifying what the key contributions are from the city council and really understanding what the council's unique selling point is and then using this to establish the right future for the city and the council within the changing local government landscape.

The peer team found that the council is committed to engagement with residents and stakeholders. There are many opportunities for stakeholders to feed in their views and concerns through a variety of mechanisms including consultations, area forums and stakeholder and partnership meetings as well as through ward surgeries and formal council meetings. It was clear to the peer team that staff and members were proud of the open dialogue that they have with the city residents and stakeholders. The peer team felt that it was worth considering whether the right balance was achieved between dialogue, debate and action and suggest that the council might need to think how it maintains an open dialogue but ensures that it keeps a pace on delivering services and projects. The changing demographics of the city require a quick and responsive council and the current process in place, whilst thorough may not always allow for the council to provide a nimble and swift response to residents.

The peer team understood the Members, staff, residents and the Trade Unions to be well informed of the council's priorities and key strategies. This is underpinned by the council's approach to governance and the importance placed on transparency. This is then backed up by strong consultative processes. The

council is keen to support and reflect the views of the city in its approach to policies and the peer team saw evidence of this in the council's positive approach to equality and diversity through all its work e.g. the council supports a diversity forum and multi faith forum.

Partnerships are a key component in the greater Cambridge area and the peer team found that they were understood and valued especially by the senior leadership of the council. Both the leader and the chief executive were clear about the opportunities and benefits of partnership working and were engaged in a number of relevant partnerships with universities, businesses, neighbouring authorities and third sector organisations e.g. Greater Cambridge partnership. Joint working with these partners has ensured that Cambridge City Council has levered in significant funds e.g. Greater Cambridge City deal and devolved powers and funding through the Combined Authority. Further communications work could be carried out within the council to ensure that all staff and members understand the value of these partnerships and the council's contributions to them. This will help to embed partnership as a key delivery mechanism within the whole organisation.

## 4.2 Leadership of Place

Cambridge as a city is well known internationally due to having a world class university and a rich heritage. Members, staff, residents and businesses are proud to say that they live and work in the city. The council operates at a high level with stakeholders and the leader and chief executive are well respected, liked and seen as trusted players by their peers and stake holders. This is hugely important now and in the future as Cambridge City Council is key to a number of partnerships and is the voice of the city in future plans and ambitions of the wider geographical area. It was evident to the peer team that stakeholders and partners were looking to the council to drive future debates and were looking for the council to strengthen and reposition itself accordingly to do this. The peer team feel that the senior leadership of the council needs to continue with its commitment to partnership work and really seek to align with and understand partners' future visions and ambitions so that it can be clear about the council's contributions going forward.

The council has a track record of delivering for the city. Examples of this can be seen through the work with the Greater Cambridge Partnership in securing a city deal but also through examples of investment in infrastructure in new developments and the ongoing support provided to these new communities. The council does need to be mindful about established communities who feel that more support and resources has been allocated to new developments whilst they are still waiting to receive support for community spaces. Further examples of supporting residents however can be seen through the council's £900,000 community sector grants programme to support the city's most vulnerable people and work with the third sector and charities e.g. night shelters and CAB representatives within the council's customer service centre.

The peer team feel that the council needs to think about how it can manage the public's high expectations going forward. It is clear that the services delivered are valued by the residents but the council needs to consider how sustainable this is for the long term especially with the changing nature of the sector. One way to do this is by resetting the dialogue it has with residents and creating a new understanding of roles and responsibilities. Residents, businesses, third sector partners are all keen to take an active role in community life. One area it may wish to expand on as part of this 'reset' is community resilience -helping residents and other stakeholders to help themselves and others rather than having a strong reliance for the council to solve and sort every issue. Working with partners to increase community resilience may be one way of managing the effect of local government cuts.

Whilst members and staff have a good understanding of their local patch and individual services, the peer team did find a gap with some members and staff on the wider strategic view of the council. This wasn't necessarily at a high level in terms of understanding objectives but how other departments worked and contributed to the same objectives and aims. Closing this gap would provide members and staff with a more holistic view of the council and the services it was delivering creating opportunities to identify further collaboration and reduce duplication.

### **4.3 Organisational leadership and governance**

It was very clear to the peer team that the Leader of the Council and the Chief Executive, provide strong and accessible leadership to the organisation. Staff expressed a desire to see more of the chief executive and the peer team believe that this is due to the number of and layout of the buildings that the council has. Some further thought could be put into creating opportunities for staff to meet more frequently with the senior leadership team for example, quarterly briefing sessions, staff awards and innovative idea schemes.

Councillors are very able and well-thought of, with a wide range of skills drawn from professional backgrounds, and they make an active contribution to the work of the council. It was evident across all political parties that members have a strong commitment to their wards and the services provided to their residents and they should be commended for this. This is also supported by a mutual respect between members and officers who work closely together on projects and service delivery and via the governance structure which involves detailed briefings for members of the administration and the opposition. This process has ensured a high level of transparency across the organisation but also has ensured that members are well served and well informed. There is a danger that current practices could become overly time consuming and onerous. There is an opportunity to reflect on whether the briefing process could be more efficient for both members and officers to maximise time and resources.



Staff feel engaged with changes at the council and there are good internal communications in place. Building on this relationship further by opening up a dialogue with staff about their views on the future direction of the council would benefit the council with greater engagement, understanding and support for future changes that the organisation might face. Having an open and enhanced dialogue with staff would also help when deciding on where next for the council's transformation agenda. This is an area that needs to be shaped and defined quickly. The council is in the process of establishing a programme office that will co-ordinate the transformation activity across the council. This will need clear and consistent leadership from senior management. It is important that the transformation plan connects to the ambitions and objectives of the council and is shared with staff, members and partners.

To support this process the council have recognised the need for modernisation across some of its systems and processes for example finance, IT and the Organisational Development strategy. This is going to be paramount if the council is going to successfully deliver on its commitments to its residents, partnerships and successfully deliver its transformation agenda. The council acknowledged that there had been serious underinvestment in IT infrastructure which has impacted on staff morale. Modernising these systems will provide greater capacity and resilience for the services it delivers. Staff will also benefit from the modernisation through the creation of a better working environment with updated systems and processes. More staff will be able to work remotely and at some stage in the future consideration can be given to accommodation and the best use of the council buildings and assets. Modernising the systems will also help the council to respond faster when needed and be more on the front foot when working with partners e.g. sharing relevant information with partners.

The council demonstrates many examples of good practice within its governance structure and arrangements for example the Chair of the Planning Committee is not a member of the administration but is an opposition member. This adds to the strong emphasis placed on openness that the council has. A further example of good practice is that tenants are elected onto the Housing Scrutiny committee showing the council's commitment to listening and involving tenants', residents' and stakeholders' views in the decision making and governance structures. Whilst this approach is commendable the peer team were concerned that the decision making process consumes excessive resources of the council. The structure of the cycle and the length and amount of briefings involved could have an impact on the pace of change and therefore slow down the delivery of the political priorities. The peer team would encourage the council to consider this view and explore whether there is a feeling that appropriate decisions are made sufficiently quickly when needed within the current structure's timelines.

#### **4.4 Financial planning and viability**

Cambridge City Council is in a strong financial position. This is due to good financial management in the past and the strong track record the council has of

leveraging in additional funding. Examples of this include the city deal and income generation from commercial properties and car parking. As a result of this the council has been able to continue delivering a range of services to residents that they may otherwise might have not been to maintain. With a lack of clarity and certainty around the national policy for council funding, it would be beneficial for the Council to look at future proofing its finances to ensure that it is able to cope with any new changes or reductions and therefore manage and maintain service delivery. Suggestions of how this can be done are outlined below.

A review has been carried out recently on reserves that the council has which has been helpful in identifying available resources. This needs to be a continual process for the council to help understand the financial picture. The administration have been able to use the current reserves and previous underspends when needed to deal with any unexpected changes in service delivery. The current MTFS is a five year projection and the Budget Setting Report could be strengthened if the council was to take a similarly longer term approach e.g. the current approach doesn't appear to take into consideration liabilities going forward such as assets on new developments e.g. taking on the maintenance of additional public realm space. By aligning the political priorities of the council to the MTFS over five years, the council will have a much clearer position in regards to its long term financial sustainability and plans for the future.

The council has to identify net additional annual savings of £245,000 per year for 4 years. Whilst the peer team has confidence that the council will be able to achieve this target it could again strengthen its position by including the financial consequences of the transformation plan within the MTFS. This will enable the council to have a clearer understanding of all the challenges going forward and will support the financial planning and monitoring process. Identifying capital transformation projects within the wider capital programme of approximately 200 projects, would enable a more informed and comprehensive view of the programme and its contribution to the delivery of both savings and transformation. Having a correlation between the transformation programme and capital projects via the MTFS and a Programme Management Office would also 'provide the council with a better view of future of future resource requirements

As mentioned above Cambridge City Council has a good relationship with voluntary and third sector partners. Going forward the council could consider moving to a different approach with these partners to unlock other financial opportunities and to help deliver the council's outcomes. This can include taking on a commissioning and influencing role rather than always making a financial contribution to partnership work. The peer team suggest strengthening the grants process to ensure that any grant funded delivery is always clearly aligned to the council's aims and objectives. From talking to a number of stakeholders it was clear that many of the council's partners and stakeholders currently look to and appreciate the local leadership role the City Council plays. The council may, therefore, want to consider taking on a stronger role as a facilitator and influencer at both officer and political level especially if financial pressures were to increase

in the future and the council found itself in a position where it was unable to support or fund as many projects or direct delivery.

Cambridgeshire County Council is facing significant financial pressures and will need to continue to make more financial savings in the foreseeable future. The peer team noted that the City Council were aware of the impact that these savings would have on some of their residents but feel that a deeper dialogue needed to take place with the County Council and the impact they might have on the city council's priorities e.g. the anti-poverty strategy. If the County Council, Police or other strategic partners start to cut their services, there could be an expectation that the City Council would fill this gap and be criticised (albeit unfairly) if they don't. The consequences of not having a dialogue could then ultimately could be substantial in terms of finance and reputation.

Finally the peer team suggest that further clarity is gained by the City Council on the financial position of the shared services agenda and where this may lead to in the future. By having a fuller picture of all these issues and plans the council will be in a strong position to deliver successfully on it priorities and key services.

#### **4.5 Capacity to deliver**

Cambridge City Council benefits from having good member/officer working relationships. The staff are hardworking and committed, and feel valued and proud to work for the Council, and this was backed up by the staff survey results where staff felt that the council had handled the change agenda well to date. The peer team was struck by the loyalty and commitment that staff felt for the city and the council.

It is clear the council benefits from an active voluntary sector, business community and proactive citizens who all share the ambition for Cambridge to be a great place to live, learn and work. There is a great wealth of skills, knowledge and expertise within the city, which the council can willingly access. It is important that the council continues to utilise the shared passion and commitment to place and skills as an asset when scoping service delivery. It is also worth remembering that the council can gain insight and learning from other parts of the local government area. The peer team suggest that the council takes up the opportunity to learn and shares with other parts of the sector. This would benefit not just the senior team but is a practice that should be encouraged throughout the organisation.

The peer team found strong evidence that Cambridge City Council have a committed workforce that is willing to go above and beyond what is expected of them. Residents were really proud of the work that the council did in keeping the city looking clean and tidy and were quick to praise the City Rangers for their work. Other examples include the homeless shelters and activities for the elderly ranging from community centre support to tea dances. Whilst these services are really valued by the public, checks and tests need to be carried out to ensure that the

council is prioritising and targeting its resources on the council's key political ambitions and visions. If this process is not followed the council could be end up responding to the needs and wants of residents in a reactive and non-strategic way.

The council have recognised the need to refresh their OD strategy and the peer team believe that it is important that this is carried out quickly. There was a clear 'ask' from staff for more secondment opportunities and career development. The peer team feel that the new OD strategy should put a structure in place to support leading, learning and sharing. The council has a great asset in its staff and needs to focus on 'growing its own', retaining its best people by supporting career development paths and succession planning. Some staff currently were unsure of the level of responsibility that their roles held however there was a clear appetite from Heads of Service and managers to have greater autonomy in decision making within their teams and services. A clear and updated people strategy that is shared and understood by staff and members will help staff to understand their contributions, role and opportunities to develop within and work collaboratively across the council.

The peer team found some evidence of silo working within the council which in turn supports what the peer team believes is the councils current culture of 'waiting to be asked' and being individually service driven. This has led to a lack of collaboration and understanding of wider service delivery. To ensure that there is a greater focus on innovation and proactivity within the council there needs to be a shift in culture which will support these ideals. This will then in turn lead to greater efficiency gains and smarter, joined up and more responsive working which will help to deliver the future ambitious plans that they council has. Whilst it is positive that staff reported that the council provided a comfortable environment to work in, it is important that staff feel supported to be proactive around innovation and collaboration in service delivery. To aid in this shift in culture, the peer team suggest that the workforce are encouraged to be more active in terms of horizon scanning and future delivery. By being proactive now, when the financial pressures are being managed, the council can create a solid and sustainable platform for future years when the councils funding pressures or demands on services may have increased and innovation and a nimble and responsive workforce is needed.

#### **4.6 Managing effective partnership delivery**

Cambridge City Council asked the peer team to have a particular focus on managing effective partnership working and delivery, and there are several comments on this within the main body of the report. This section aims to give some high level messages on this theme.

The peer team saw examples of good strategic partnership working (Combined Authority, Greater Cambridge Partnership and the Shared Services agenda) and also examples of good operational partnerships (work to tackle homelessness,

community safety and health) which are generally working well and valued by the City. The peer team saw evidence that the council has developed a mature relationship with its partners and stakeholders but recognised that it wants to increase the value that it adds and receives from its partnerships to help achieve its objectives. It was clear to the peer team that council did value and utilise its partnerships well and that this collaboration had resulted in greater economic growth and increased housing development in the city.

The peer team found widespread strong acceptance across all partners of the importance of partnership working and a willingness to strengthen how that works in Cambridge. Cambridge City Council has a track record of driving effective partnerships and is valued and respected across the city. To maintain this strong position the council has started to assess and prioritise the resources it allocates to the different partnerships it participates in. The peer team encourages the council to continue with this process, really taking the time to reflect on its own future value and position and utilise this to help navigate the new world of the Combined Authority in a way that gets the right results for the city.

Undertaking a detailed mapping exercise to identify which partnerships are most effective would help ensure the Council understands where best to allocate its resources. This exercise should include thinking around what the council wants to achieve through its partnerships and if the type of relationships they want to develop from short term one off deals to medium and long term strategic plans. For these to be successful there needs to be a shared agenda and a space for honest conversations within any structure or framework that has been agreed.

To more fully integrate partnership working, the council could widen the engagement of its politicians and workforce in the discussion and delivery of partnership work. This would create more buy-in and understanding but also allow for a fresh perspective from those that have not previously contributed to this debate.

#### **4.7 Shared Services**

Cambridge City Council have entered into shared services arrangements with South Cambridgeshire and Huntingdonshire District Councils as a three council agreement but have a separate partnership arrangement with South Cambridgeshire for other service areas. Services that are being shared include but are not limited to Waste and Recycling, Planning, ICT, Legal Services and Building Control. It is really important that all three councils celebrate the success they have achieved within this area. For example Internal Audit were keen to share their view of a successful shared waste contract, with South Cambridgeshire, with the peer team. This is an agenda that has been encouraged by central government but is not always easy to implement due to local context, politics, geographic boundaries and local need. All three councils would agree that this has not always been a smooth journey but the peer team think that more time needs to be given to reflecting on what has worked so far and how this has been achieved.

Being in this space gives the councils an advantage of greater expertise and resilience.

Cambridge City Council and South Cambridgeshire District Council are keen to build on the existing relationship and look at further areas that can be shared to improve service delivery, capacity and create further savings. For this to happen the partnership needs to be reinvigorated from both sides and this means being committed to the agenda, understanding the future direction of both councils, focussing on why the partnership is needed, being clear about the benefits and articulating these clearly to all stake holders. It is important that each partner creates a message that fits with their own needs but that supports the wider aims of the partnership. For example whilst savings are going to be desirable for both councils there will also be a chance to gain new expertise and experience, create resilience and have a greater influence in a buying capacity through economies of scale. This renewed commitment and buy in to the shared services agenda will create momentum and a 'buzz' for both councils including opportunities for secondments and development. To support the agenda going forward it is essential that a clear narrative is articulated outlining the commitment, the reasoning and the benefits of this arrangement for both councils.

Following this the partnership needs to look at what services will be next in the agenda and then what is the right time for this to be explored and implemented. Clear and open discussions about timetabling will underpin the communications with staff and partners.

Finally it is really important to ensure that both councils manage their workforce cultures as one team but understand the individual context and aims of both councils. Some staff currently felt that there was an 'us and them' culture when referring to staff who worked on the shared services agenda, especially if the service was being led by a different council to Cambridge City. Having one culture for all staff at Cambridge City Council will encourage trust, openness and greater collaboration across services.

## 5. Next steps

### Immediate next steps

We appreciate the senior managerial and political leadership will want to reflect on these findings and suggestions in order to determine how the organisation wishes to take things forward.

As part of the peer challenge process, there is an offer of further activity to support this. The LGA is well placed to provide additional support, advice and guidance on a number of the areas for development and improvement and we would be happy to discuss this. Rachel Litherland, Principal Adviser and Gary Hughes, Principal Adviser are the main

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contacts between your authority and the Local Government Association (LGA). Their contact details are: Email [rachel.litherland@local.gov.uk](mailto:rachel.litherland@local.gov.uk) and [gary.hughes@local.gov.uk](mailto:gary.hughes@local.gov.uk)

In the meantime we are keen to continue the relationship we have formed with the Council throughout the peer challenge. We will endeavour to provide signposting to examples of practice and further information and guidance about the issues we have raised in this report to help inform ongoing consideration.

### **Follow up visit**

The LGA Corporate Peer Challenge process includes a follow up visit. The purpose of the visit is to help the Council assess the impact of the peer challenge and demonstrate the progress it has made against the areas of improvement and development identified by the peer team. It is a lighter-touch version of the original visit and does not necessarily involve all members of the original peer team. The timing of the visit is determined by the Council. Our expectation is that it will occur within the next 2 years.

### **Next Corporate Peer Challenge**

The current LGA sector-led improvement support offer includes an expectation that all councils will have a Corporate Peer Challenge or Finance Peer Review every 4 to 5 years. It is therefore anticipated that the Council will commission their next Peer Challenge before 2022.