

Merran McRae
Chief Executive
Calderdale Metropolitan Borough Council
Town Hall
Halifax
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29th July 2015

Dear Merran

Calderdale Metropolitan Borough Council - Corporate Peer Challenge 15th to 18th June 2015

On behalf of the peer team, I would like to say what a pleasure and privilege it was to be invited into Calderdale Metropolitan Borough Council to deliver the recent corporate peer challenge as part of the LGA offer to support sector led improvement. We commend the council for its willingness to invite an external team to provide feedback.

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 were all agreed with you. The peers who delivered the peer challenge at Calderdale were:

- Rob Walsh – Chief Executive, North East Lincolnshire Council
- Cllr Graham Chapman (Labour) – Deputy Leader, Nottingham City Council
- Cllr Sean Anstee (Conservative) – Leader of the Council, Trafford MBC
- Angela Probert – Strategic Director, Organisational Transformation, Nottingham City Council
- Claire Porter – Corporate Head of Legal & Democratic Services, Shropshire Council
- Peter Rentell – Programme Manager, LGA (peer challenge manager)
- Kate Herbert – LGA Programme Manager (shadow role)

Scope and focus of the peer challenge

You asked the peer team to provide external consideration to exploring whether you have a sufficiently robust understanding of your challenges, with a clear enough focus on planned actions and whether governance, planning and decision making arrangements are effective in ensuring streamlined decision making. You requested a view on whether the current priorities and interventions are addressing underlying causes and issues with robust challenge to help you think through priorities for the future, helping to ensure a balance between short term and long term objectives, and ensuring the focus is on tackling the things that will make the most difference to the quality of life in Calderdale.

You considered that the core components looked at by all corporate peer challenges will provide the framework to consider all of the above and these are:

1. Understanding of the local context and priority setting: Does the council understand its local context and has it established a clear set of priorities?
2. 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?
3. Political and managerial leadership: Does the council have effective political and managerial leadership and is it a constructive partnership?
4. Governance and decision-making: Are effective governance and decision-making arrangements in place to respond to key challenges and manage change, transformation and disinvestment?
5. Organisational capacity: Are organisational capacity and resources focused in the right areas in order to deliver the agreed priorities?

The peer challenge process

It is important to stress that this was not an inspection. Peer challenges are improvement-focused and tailored to meet individual council's needs. They are designed to complement and add value to a council's own performance and improvement focus. The peer team used their experience and knowledge of local government to reflect on the information and views shared by the people they met, the things they saw and the material 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 four days onsite at Calderdale Metropolitan Borough Council, during which they:

- Spoke to 153 people including a range of council staff together with councillors and external partners and stakeholders;
- Gathered information and views from more than 55 meetings/focus groups/telephone conversations including visits and additional research and reading;
- Collectively spent more than 210 hours to determine their findings – the equivalent of one person spending more than 5 weeks in Calderdale Metropolitan Borough Council.

This letter 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 (15th to 18th June 2015). 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. The LGA would be pleased to be involved with any further support you might require to progress any issues arising.

We also hope the feedback provided will help stimulate further debate and thinking about the continuous improvement programme for Calderdale and how it might develop and evolve.

Summary of feedback: overall observations and messages

Calderdale, like many places, has challenges but it also has strengths and opportunities. The Council is at a crossroads. The authority financial position is, comparatively, sound and the financial planning process appears to be solid. Children's Services have improved following concerted action and leadership on the part of members and officers. The Council has at its disposal a loyal, proud and committed workforce. Members are extremely passionate about the Borough and its communities.

In order to progress and realise its ambition for the Borough, the Council needs to articulate, with its partners, a clear vision for Calderdale as a place. Against that backdrop the Council needs to be very clear about its strategic priorities in a way that provides unambiguous focus for the organisation and the workforce. This will assist with informing a clear and strategic approach to resource allocation; the difficult financial decisions and cultural change that the Council knows it will need to take; as well as the need to encourage the identification of opportunities for collaboration and pooling of resources with partners. The degree and complexity of (necessary) change will require clear and consistent political and organisational leadership if the Council is to realise its ambition for Calderdale. This will also enable the Council to maximise its sub-regional opportunities and build on the respect and influence it has established amongst its sub-regional local authority partners.

Financial planning arrangements are sound and the medium term financial planning approach is effective. However, in the absence of a clear narrative and vision for the place (formulated with key partners) and a clear set of strategic priorities, the Council will struggle, over the medium to longer term, to align its financial resources with its ambition for economic growth and service transformation.

During the course of the peer challenge, the peer team identified the work being undertaken in respect of localities. However, it was not clear if this work formed part of a wider vision for community governance and engagement. The Council needs to clearly determine its intent and political commitment regarding a locality strategy and ensure that this aligns with the wider vision and narrative for Calderdale the place.

The consistent message picked up by the peer team, from members and officers alike, was that the Council recognises the need to change and adapt in order to deal with the effects of funding reductions, demand management and the wider sub-regional agenda. The peer team identified areas of good practice across a broad range of activities including the council's work on social cohesion, commercialism, the development of bespoke IT systems and future workforce planning. The peer team received consistent feedback about "cross-Directorate" activity happening in various parts of the organisation. It was evident that some space is being made for creativity and innovation. The "Change Makers" initiative is helping to break down traditional departmental barriers and the participants are to be congratulated for it. However, the peer team was left with an overall sense of cross-cutting activity happening "despite" rather than "because".

The Council's recognition of the need to change should be translated into an unambiguous corporately driven programme of transformation that demonstrates clarity of purpose, focus and ambition for both the organisation and the place. Programme governance arrangements need to be established and resourced to ensure progress, delivery and management of inter-dependencies. The appointment of a lead for transformation is "mission critical" and corporate and political support for the role is essential. It was strongly evident to the peer team that the

Council has some highly capable and enthused staff at its disposal. This capability and enthusiasm could be more effectively galvanised and developed in the context of a corporately driven change and transformation programme.

Member and officer relations are good, overall. There is sound cross-party involvement in a range of key issues. The Cabinet and Scrutiny meetings that were observed were considered to be examples of good practice, particularly from the perspective of public engagement. The peer team quickly formed the view that governance is perhaps a red herring in the context of the Council's desire to move at greater pace and deliver genuine, transformational, change. The constant thread of feedback to the peer team, regarding the member/officer relationship, was the notion of "silo" working, from Cabinet and scrutiny arrangements into Directorates. Accordingly, whilst the quality of the member/officer relationship represents a solid foundation to move forward, the Council needs to reflect on its current mode of operation, at both political and organisational level, if it is to progress the scale of change (it consistently told the peer team) that is required. Member/Officer roles and responsibilities should be reviewed in order to provide clarity between managerial and political leadership, ensuring that its design is not a contributing factor in allowing silo working to continue.

The fundamental challenge for Calderdale is to translate the clear recognition of your need to transform into tangible actions and evidence. This will require bold, determined and consistent political and organisational leadership. Accordingly, the key messages from the peer team are to:

- Develop a narrative for the council and the place;
- Be clear about your priorities and focus and communicate them;
- Determine your 3-4 'must do' objectives, stick with them and harness your capacity and resources to deliver them;
- Be consistent;
- Be bold and determined.

The key elements the corporate peer challenge looked at were:

1. Understanding of the Local Context and Priority Setting

There is clearly a tremendous amount of civic pride both within the council, the partners and the community. The area has had some challenging times but the council has been an anchor in protecting that civic pride. Neighbouring local authorities spoke highly of their relationship with Calderdale and saw them as a good partner who regularly 'punched above their weight'. We evidenced areas of good practice such as the social cohesion unit, neighbourhood teams and commercialism in some departments.

The Economic Strategy is thought through and co-ordinated with strong business engagement/account management with local employers. The council employs a Land Release Officer to identify strategic sites that may be available for future development in an area where land is difficult to release.

Partners were complimentary of the economic development service and thought Calderdale was easier to do business with compared to other local authorities although acknowledging there is still some way to go. All partner agencies and members were aware of the improved progress within Children's Services including West Yorkshire Police, the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) and Pennine Housing. There is widespread recognition of the collective political

desire to work together to tackle the safeguarding issue. The council need to consider 'lessons learnt' from this example and ensure it can adopt the same approach (collective political leadership, decision making, focus, pace and energy) across other aspects of service delivery. This will be critical if you are to sustain services in a challenging external funding environment for local government.

There was strong awareness of the opportunities that might be available from a devolved environment, for example the CCG clearly understood the link between demand management and integrated health and social care through to how planning, housing and employment and skills are able to support that objective. Despite this we believe members require further support to help them better understand why devolution is a good idea in order to drive the ambition across the Borough. In addition, the council is connected in parts to devolved service design e.g. the employment and skills offer and a desire to ensure Calderdale residents benefit from this.

Members and strategic partners were not able to articulate a clear vision for Calderdale the council and Calderdale the place. Evidence suggested that the Health and Wellbeing Board was being used as a de-facto Local Strategic Partnership. However, there is strong commitment from partners to engage with the council and an opportunity to refresh the many Boards and Commissions that have been created to overcome a challenging political environment of 'no overall control'. A clear narrative must be developed for the council and the place.

It was unclear to the peer team what the corporate and political commitment to a locality strategy was. There was insufficient attention to the member role and budgets in the locality strategy currently being developed and the current neighbourhood model doesn't correspond sufficiently with townships. We suggest that a more meaningful engagement with local communities is required and as part of this social cohesion must be built into the overall council strategy on local working.

The Calderdale way has historically been to do as much as possible as part of their community leadership role. With a need to focus on key priorities, maximise financial leverage from development and ensure the viability of essential services there will be a time to say 'No' to taking on more and possibly having to stop doing things in the future. This is part of the cultural shift needed by the authority to manage change in the future.

2. Political and Managerial Leadership

There is a strong commitment and understanding to cross-party working and Calderdale has managed the political consensus and turbulence, with changes in administration in recent years, well in terms of how business is done e.g. all party agreement of 'Building Ambition for Calderdale'. We found good and positive officer and member working relationships and evidence of effective leadership across the organisation despite austerity measures and significant reductions in staff numbers over recent years. In particular, the Chief Executive is widely respected across the organisation and with external partners.

This, coupled with effective partnership working across all sectors, has enabled the council to drive significant improvements over recent years, and to position itself well in the current economic climate. Staff are highly motivated to deliver good quality services and there is a 'family feel' to the organisation, providing a very supportive environment during challenging times with a 'can do' attitude

Staff and residents alike spoke warmly about the towns and villages that make up Calderdale but in particular pride in Halifax with the new developments around The Piece Hall, the Town Centre re-generation project and Broad Street Plaza complex.

We evidenced a clear passion for the place and mutual respect between officers and members and between members of the different political parties. There is a desire to make scrutiny both a pro-active as well as a reactive forum for policy formation and consensus building. There is also recognition of the need to change at most levels in the face of significant financial reductions and the radical re-design of the council. This provides a solid foundation with the right building blocks to deliver strategic change across the council.

Despite the size of the authority Calderdale is a key player in the sub-region at both City Region level and within the West Yorkshire Combined Authority. The council has a strong presence in discussions across the area working effectively with neighbouring authorities and key stakeholders. It is now timely to consider the role it can play in linking Greater Manchester with West Yorkshire as a key ‘connecting’ council between both city regions and, therefore, integral to delivering a Northern Powerhouse ambition. This is a key strength that, if your own narrative can be defined and articulated, can be exploited for the benefit of Calderdale.

A number of priorities have been established by the new political administration:

- Ensuring stable and sustained political leadership through a better governance structure
- Recognising the challenges of austerity but also the opportunity of devolution
- Economic investment and growth across Calderdale
- Improved skills and employment opportunities
- Keeping our most vulnerable children safe

Importantly we found that space is being created to allow for thinking time in terms of creative solutions and innovation. This is critical to ensure ideas are generated at all levels within the organisation and are considered with feedback provided on their acceptance or not with a clear rationale for the decision.

Despite the political consensus it is now time for the current Administration to make bold and courageous decisions going forward to assert itself on the direction ‘Calderdale the Council’ and ‘Calderdale The Place’ needs to take in terms of the key priorities. This will require a collective council vision, a coherent narrative and clarity of roles and responsibilities. It will require the council to be consistent, focused and long-term in its thinking and working in a cross-directorate manner. When asked by the peer team to articulate recent examples of difficult decisions taken by members, few were forthcoming. This suggests a culture recognising that decisions need to be made but also a reluctance to do so unless a lengthy process has been followed.

On this basis a key aspect will be to address what a future organisation, with significantly reduced funding, will look like. This is an important debate not just for the council but also for its partners and the local community. Understanding what the priorities are and how the council will deliver them will involve discussions about what the council does and does not provide. This will inevitably mean asking citizens and communities to do more as well as pushing for more effective integration with partners. Members need to be decisive in determining a process to take specific decisions about the preferred future operating models and they acknowledged that the decision making process needs to be improved and planned throughout the year, including mapping where contentious decisions are likely to be made so the council can appropriately timetable such decisions. This will need to be fully supported by officers who should lead the

organisation in a more effective manner and ensure cross-cutting discussions are at the basis of decision-making. Members in turn need to have a more open mind about the scope of service delivery models. This could be actively promoted by offering relevant member development training which would include the benefits of alternative models requiring a more rigorous approach to options appraisal.

We acknowledge and applaud the organisational change programme designed to help officers and councillors lead the transition and adopt behaviours and attitudes needed to be effective in a new environment. We saw some evidence of developing managerial behaviours. However, behaviours and consequences are not yet fully aligned politically and this needs further work. This will impact on the role of leaders across the strategic partnership and key stakeholders need to be fully aligned to such change and involved at an early stage. We therefore suggest you review your approach to strategic partnership working.

A re-designed organisational structure for the future needs to enable good policy and practice to be disseminated in a consistent manner across the council. In addition, current senior officers who lead on many agendas should look to the existing talent within the organisation in order to pass such responsibility down to free up their time for more strategic thinking. This will also help in developing leaders of the future.

We found that both internal and external communication processes were rather disparate in nature. An effective and coherent corporate communication strategy will be imperative in ensuring clear and transparent messages are disseminated across staff, partners and residents in a consistent manner in an ever changing environment. We suggest you consider commissioning an external review of your communications. LGA can assist in this having developed a communications improvement support offer using our own communications officers as peers.

It is imperative to ensure Calderdale's voice is clearly heard in the West Yorkshire context. The council recognises the potential of the West Yorkshire Combined Authority but has yet to articulate its precise role. It will only be able to ensure its voice is heard once that is resolved, for example, from people we spoke to there was not a common knowledge that Calderdale is the lead authority for health and social care in West Yorkshire. In addition, the council will need to address the resourcing and costs of work with the combined authority and determine what resource can be freed up from within the existing organisational structure.

3. Governance and Decision Making

We saw high standards of behaviour within the council amongst members with good cross-party involvement. We have already noted the good levels of mutual respect and trust among members and officers and the way they behave with each other and among themselves which was pleasing to see. There is an evident integrity in terms of the way the political and managerial leadership operate.

The peer team observed Cabinet and Scrutiny Panel meetings whilst on-site and both were considered to be examples of good practice. They were focused and well chaired and the fact that the public were invited to both was to be commended given the potential risks. This is apparently a regular method of operation and clearly serves the council well. In addition, the team has reviewed the constitution and considers it to be sound.

As previously mentioned the behaviours and values required by the organisation in the future ‘brave new world’ of local government are generally understood by staff. There is good work in terms of workforce development and many frontline staff and middle managers told us that they feel empowered, can take calculated risks and enjoy working for Calderdale MBC. This is a good base on which to drive the organisational transformation programme forward with pace ensuring members are bought along at the same time. However, staff told us they weren’t always clear about direction, purpose and expectation, therefore, an improved communication strategy should be introduced to disseminate clearly the future vision and corporate priorities but also to clarify how the individual staff contributions can support and underpin this.

One of the major issues facing the council is managing the changing demography. There is an increase in the population generally and an increasing minority ethnic population which inevitably poses challenges and opportunities. It is incumbent on the council to help ensure social integration and balance within communities and it can assist by providing more localised services which can respond better to local needs. The council should adopt the township strategy it is in the process of developing but ensure that budgets are also devolved and that local elected members have a key role in the policy. It should also ensure a policy of integration (social cohesion) is reflected in other aspects of council services e.g. location of schools, design of swimming pools and emphasise the need to maintain basic services to reduce justification for tension. Cross-departmental area teams could support this policy and we are aware the council is already considering this approach. A form of governance for such new system will need to be developed and will require flexibility on the part of elected members.

A number of people spoke to us about slow decision-making and we can see that given the previous turbulent history of changing political leadership there was a tendency to be risk averse and delegate decisions upwards. It is now timely to reconsider your approach to become risk aware. Where it is accepted that the People’s Commission makes for strong political consensus, members need to consider the pace in which decisions are made. This may involve reviewing officer delegations to implement strategic decisions quickly and take operational decisions independently.

We noted that Outcome Based Accountability (OBA) is being used in some areas, such as Public Health and within the Demand Management agenda, to good effect and suggest this approach needs a corporate wide push to provide more focused challenge around outcomes. This will align well with a new collective council vision and key corporate priorities.

In conjunction with this the council need to review, refresh and implement a strategic risk register focused on the broader risks faced in achieving the Council’s Corporate Plan and agreed priorities. The Council may also want to consider developing a Strategic Opportunities Register which can be used to monitor and act upon matters which will help deliver the Corporate Priorities.

4. Financial Planning and Viability

In comparison with many other council’s the financial position of Calderdale is sound. In recent years it has returned underspends and has increased its balances. The council’s unallocated reserves appear to be well-provided for and there are allocated reserves which could be put to use if required. The council is currently using balances to fund much of its Capital Programme as opposed to borrowing, thus making a net saving.

We found consistent evidence throughout the organisation that the three year financial plan informs thinking and is recognised as an exemplar for effective financial planning. Business Sustainability workshops are undertaken to assess financial viability for income and value. For example, services have been reviewed across schools, and this approach should be continually driven across the organisation.

In-house systems are a real strength with good commercial potential; officers were able to articulate clearly the link between self-developed software and service delivery particularly in social care. There is a real opportunity to generate an income stream as part of an overall income generation strategy to meet future budget gaps not only to capture enthusiasm of officers but also to clearly identify a target market base.

The council has a good awareness of the trajectory of the local government finance settlement and is planning to be self-sufficient with no Revenue Support Grant (RSG) by 2020/21. To assist in informing this strategy the council use information and data from multiple sources e.g. LGA, the West Yorkshire Combined Authorities and Special Interest Group of Municipal Authorities.

Members appear to be presented with information on a silo topic basis. For example, there wasn't a clear link between planning approvals, the increased business rate and economic value which is clearly important to allow them to see decisions in the round. There appears to be insufficient recognition of the demographic pressures facing some departments and a need for a more forensic approach to under-spend and over-spends dealing with each separately rather than allowing departments to use one to balance the other.

This will require the council to develop an overall financial strategy, in addition to the three year plan, that clearly aligns with your ambition for economic growth and service transformation. More thought needs to be given to how the balances can be used to provide greater returns and to support the commercialism strategy. We found significant enthusiasm and passion from officers in their approach to developing traded services. However, they were not clear on who they were selling to and how they identify potential customers. Some work streams will require a great deal of attention to ensure savings materialise but there is a real opportunity to join up procurement and bid managers to help service areas to succeed.

The council needs to carefully consider alternative models of service delivery. It is acknowledged that the Council wishes to avoid any significant reduction in service provision and has a commitment to maintain staff at levels that allow for the effective delivery of services. There are models of delivery such as partnerships, jointly procured services, Trusts and Mutuals which could achieve the aims of the Council but at a lower cost. We would recommend that the council carries out an options appraisal to determine which operating model(s) can deliver the desired outcomes.

This can provide a good base upon which to build wider member understanding of the council's finances to further support and inform decision making. Whilst the political and managerial leadership of the Council appear to have a good and consistent understanding of the council's finances, there is a need to ensure that this is the case with all members. There is a need to connect data between service areas and finances to inform members and facilitate evidence based decision making.

5. Organisational Capacity and Resources

Staff we met are loyal and committed to the Calderdale cause with a real ‘can do’ attitude. They have an energy and passion that needs to be maintained to achieve the future challenges. They spoke of good leadership at all levels and they love working for Calderdale. In fact, a number of staff have left neighbouring council’s to specifically work at Calderdale, even though this involves longer commuting. There is a clear public service ethos present throughout the organisation.

A significant asset for Calderdale is both the community and ‘The Place’, There is rich diversity within the community coupled with enviable physical and other assets such as heritage buildings which can all assist in informing the growth agenda as well as contributing to the transformation agenda. The future use of existing assets is a political and community issue to be determined, particularly how these buildings can be maintained and best utilised in future; this might include community ownership and/or income generation schemes.

There is a very imaginative approach towards rationalising office space as part of the Town Centre regeneration scheme. Coupled with a strong approach to workforce development this will facilitate future re-organisation and underpin the embedding of new behaviours and values to meet the required cultural change of the organisation.

We found a strong operational activity with statutory partners and the voluntary and community sector facilitated through effective working relationships. There is a strong partnership with the private sector, for example, American Express to drive development of the digital technology agenda with community groups and SME’s. The council also has strength in creatively attracting and accessing external funding e.g. employability. In addition, heritage lottery funding is being used effectively in shaping the place as evidenced by the development of The Piece Hall which is central to the renaissance of the town.

In conjunction with your vision for Calderdale and the place you will need to determine your approach to collaboration and pooling of resources. A skill gap analysis will help determine the skills and competences you need for the future shaped by the operating model you decide to run with.

There are various staff engagement tools, but some of these need to close the loop so staff who engage get quality feedback, even if ideas and suggestions are not fully taken on board. You need to celebrate success to ensure that the ‘going the extra mile’ culture which runs throughout the organisation is recognised. Overall both internal and external communications need to be more joined up and effective.

Cross-Directorate working needs to be corporately driven in order to break down departmentalism and capture cross-fertilisation of ideas and creative thinking across the organisation. This will help to embed cultural change and Children’s Services are a good exemplar of such change so use this as a model for transferable learning. Regarding cultural change, in our view, some members understand the need to change and others don’t so there needs to be a political drive to ensure this is understood across all political parties.

You are at an early stage of developing your joint commissioning strategy but there are some good examples of joint working e.g. Domestic Abuse, Troubled Families, Child Sexual Exploitation and Edge of Care work, and Vanguard status for the CCG will facilitate this. It is recommended that you establish a joint procurement/commissioning strategy to obtain the

efficiencies of market management, supplier sourcing, influencing and negotiating. Currently the procurement unit works well with providers and commissioners and this should be built upon.

One area to focus on would be engagement with the voluntary, community and faith sector. Whilst current engagement is good it could be enhanced by reaching out to other groups in the sector and ensuring they are ‘at the table’ at the inception of corporate strategy discussions and individual projects to assist with co-design and building capacity. As part of this we suggest you consider contract durations to ensure they are sufficient to embed the service provision and realise benefits over a longer term rather than constant procurement and re-tendering activity.

There does not appear to be an overarching programme management approach, or a structure in place to take an overview of corporate projects, from project initiation/ business case through to monitoring successful delivery. That is not to say that individual projects are not adequately managed, but the overview of all projects appears not to be taken in sufficient depth, at the appropriate corporate level. The Council will need to ensure that arrangements are put into place to enable the linkages, sequencing and inter-dependencies between the various projects and activity to be clear. Robust monitoring and accountability will need to be a key feature of your programme governance to ensure the contribution to the budget strategy. Such an approach would be required if, for example, you were to consider the linkage of asset rationalisation, agile working and channel shift.

Organisational Transformation

Staff at Calderdale are ambitious for the Council and for local residents and this will enable the Council to successfully meet the challenges it will face in the future.

The Council’s Transformation Change programme has five key enablers: shaping demand, early intervention/prevention, smarter working, digital technology/leadership and entrepreneurial skills/commercial thinking. There is evidence of transformational activity across the Council that is driven by frontline teams.

Ambition and passion for customers is evident across the Council. Frontline staff articulated their role in serving customers well across a wide range of functions and a ‘Public service’ ethos was seen as a key part of working for the Council.

The confidence and ability of staff to innovate was clear alongside evidence of improvement in pockets across the Council. Good examples were shared of initiatives that had been put in place resulting in positive impact on citizens and internal customers e.g. Customer Services team, Workforce Development team, Digital innovation and IT infrastructure and Early Years.

However, whilst the Council is committed to driving change, and has identified enablers to drive improvement; alongside the ambition of staff to improve services for citizens, the lack of an articulated corporate vision and key priorities mean there is not a corporate approach that links transformational activity and programmes together to harness, focus and maximise the resource deployed.

There is also no consistent approach to programme governance in place across the Council to ensure key programmes are on track to deliver identified benefits. Outcomes and improvements are being delivered in pockets through the commitment of staff and managers rather than through corporate leadership and governance.

The vision and ambition for Calderdale and the council needs to be clearly articulated. The narrative for the 'future state' needs to set out what will be different and identify key areas for transformation. The story needs to be simple and shared consistently across all teams so there is absolute clarity on the Council priorities and purpose. Ownership of the vision and the leadership role by senior managers will be key in helping frontline managers review current services and ways of working against the agreed vision and 'future state'.

Corporate governance arrangements need to be established for the transformation required; the new Head of Transformation will play a key role in leading this. The Corporate Leadership Team however should also consider its role in both sponsoring key programmes and also operating as the Corporate Transformation Board to ensure identified benefits are on track through honest and robust challenge and subsequent support. The Corporate Leadership Team should also own and communicate progress and impact across the Council and its partners, and allocate resources to ensure capacity is available to deliver the change required.

Consideration should also be given to the role Members should play in both the corporate governance arrangements and individual Programme Boards.

Key suggestions for consideration

Based on what we saw, heard and read we suggest you consider the following key actions. These are things we think will help you to deliver your future ambitions and plans:

1. The Council Leader and Chief Executive should adopt 3 or 4 key actions and deliver these within the next 12 months to support your agreed priorities;
2. Transformation programme governance and leadership must be clear, corporately driven, and consistent NOW;
3. Develop, agree and articulate your township/locality strategy;
4. Commission an external review of communications (LGA can offer support with this and has developed a communications improvement support offer);
5. Develop a system for spreading commercialism across the council and appoint a Portfolio Holder to champion it;
6. Ensure any corporate narrative developed includes social cohesion;
7. Clearly identify opportunities for collaboration and pooling of resources with partners e.g. people, assets etc.

Next steps

You will undoubtedly wish to reflect on these findings and suggestions with your senior managerial and political leadership before determining how the council wishes to take things forward.

As part of the peer challenge process, there is an offer of continued support which you can access through the LGA Principal Adviser for the Region, Mark Edgell who is the main contact between your authority and the LGA. Mark can be contacted via email at mark.edgell@local.gov.uk or by Telephone (07747 636910) and can provide access to further support.

All connected with the peer challenge would like to wish you every success going forward. Many thanks to you and your colleagues for inviting the peer challenge and to everyone involved for their participation. In particular, please pass on our thanks to Sheron Hobson, Judith Wylie, Andy Mallinder and their support team for their sterling support in organising the challenge.

Yours sincerely



Peter Rentell
Programme Manager, Local Government Support Team
Local Government Association

On behalf of the peer challenge team