

Martin Curtis, Leader
Mark Lloyd, Chief Executive
Cambridgeshire County Council
Shire Hall
Castle Hill
Cambridge CB3 0AP

7 November 2013

Dear Martin and Mark

Cambridgeshire County Council - Corporate Peer Challenge: 14-18 October 2013

On behalf of the Peer Team, I would like to say what a pleasure it was to be invited into Cambridgeshire County Council to deliver the recent Peer Challenge. The Team felt privileged to be allowed to conduct its work with the support of you and your colleagues.

You commissioned the Peer Challenge as an important part of the process of answering your questions on where you are going and what capacity you have to deliver. Within this theme you asked the Peer Team to focus on the following:

- What would good governance look like in a Council with no overall control?
- How robust are the Council's plans in identifying and delivering its projected financial savings?
- How strong is your organisational capacity to deliver the changes required?
- How well is the Council working with the District Councils and with other key partners to deliver sustainable economic growth and how could they do so more effectively?

In delivering this focus the peer team also considered the core components that all corporate peer challenges cover:

- Understanding of local context and priority setting: Does the council understand its local context and has it established a clear set of priorities?
- 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?
- Political and managerial leadership: Does the council have effective political and managerial leadership and is it a constructive partnership?

- Governance and decision-making: Are effective governance and decision-making arrangements in place to respond to key challenges and manage change, transformation and disinvestment?
- Organisational capacity: Are organisational capacity and resources focused in the right areas in order to deliver the agreed priorities?

It is important to stress that this was not an inspection. Peer Challenges are improvement - focused and tailored to meet individual Council's needs. The peers used their experience and knowledge to reflect on the information presented to them by people they met, things they saw and material that they read.

This letter provides a summary of the feedback that was presented at the end of our October 2013 onsite visit. In presenting this feedback, the Peer Challenge Team have done so as fellow local government officers and members or partners, not professional consultants or inspectors. We hope this will help provide recognition of the achievements of Cambridgeshire County Council while also stimulating debate and thinking about future challenges.

1. **Headline messages**

These are demanding times for all councils in their role as community leaders, ensuring that public services can help to meet people's future needs and aspirations. Within this context of tough financial times, with demands and costs increasing and funding decreasing, Cambridgeshire County Council (CCC) continues to be seen as 'Premier League'.

The Peer Team were impressed with the Council's strong and unified ambition for economic growth not just for the benefits of the County but in recognition of its position as an economic engine for the UK as a whole. Ambitions are matched by actions with significant investments in road and rail infrastructure, superfast broadband, housing developments and the Council's lead role in the Enterprise Zone and City Deal. We found strong respect for the leadership of the Leader and Chief Executive among members, staff and partners. We were impressed with the calibre of staff who are very loyal to CCC and recognise and generally support the Council's vision. These are very significant strengths.

The Council is at a pivotal moment. Big decisions are required and they need to be well considered and right to bridge the very tough financial position over the next five years before the anticipated financial benefits of City Deal over the longer term. In financial terms, the Council has to make savings of £149m across the five years of its business plan out of a gross budget of £490m (excluding schools). Balancing the need for significant savings with local and national demands to deliver growth requires a careful consideration of savings and investments with appreciation of longer-term consequences of both. This in turn will require clear and decisive leadership and a governance system that enables good and timely decision making. It requires all elected members of the council to recognise how tough it is and will continue to be and for them to communicate this to the public in their leadership role in their Divisions. It also requires the Council to be mindful of the risk carried by its very, very lean corporate management capacity. The structure has been shaped

around talented individuals and care must be taken to replace key officers when they leave

The following sections present our key findings and challenge for each of the themes you wanted us to address. Section seven provides our recommendations to Cambridgeshire County Council in moving forward.

2. Political and managerial leadership

The Leader is widely respected and is seen to have a consensual approach that is right for the time and what CCC needs. Following the elections in May 2013, the Council changed from a Conservative majority to a position of no overall control with the Liberal Democrats and UKIP as the largest opposition parties. Group Leaders and non-executive members within the Conservative Group recognised and welcomed the open and engaging leadership approach of the new Leader. They are motivated by it and feel able to engage with the political leadership more purposefully. This change in approach and tone will be an important building block to design a new governance model that is fit for purpose and can create the consensus required to provide an effective political leadership at a crucial time for the Council.

The Leader has a strong vision and commitment to the future prosperity of the County. The vision to 'make Cambridgeshire a great place to call home' recognises the importance of the Cambridge area as one of the UK's strongest local economies with nationally significant sectors and playing a key part in the recovery of the national economy. The vision is clear and recognised by members, staff and partners.

The Council has sustained its vision despite the severe financial challenges. Given the significant financial pressures as a result of less income at a time of higher demand on services, for example as a result of a growing and ageing population, this is a great credit to the organisation.

Members, staff and partners have high regard and respect for the Chief Executive and his senior team. The Peer Team heard many comments about the strengths of engagement, leadership and passion for public service in Cambridgeshire that they offer. Relationships are well established and trusted. Partners regard the Chief Executive as a public service leader within Cambridgeshire. We found very talented officers in some key positions. For the Council this will be important to realise the vision for economic growth, as well as managing the increasing pressures on Adult Social Care and Children's Services.

The Council's ambition transcends beyond that for the County Council to one for Cambridgeshire as a place, embracing the work and contributions of other public sector partners as well as the business and voluntary and community sectors. The concept of shared leadership across Cambridgeshire is recognised by staff and partners. The Public Service Board provides a useful vehicle and leads on partnership approaches such as the 'Making Asset Counts' programme.

There is a degree of uncertainty in the organisation. Staff are not convinced that members and some managers really understand *'how tough it is at the front line'*. Staff appreciate the scale of the challenge, have a high degree of good will and are prepared to work collaboratively to respond to the challenges being faced. They seek more dialogue and engagement with the Chief Executive and Leader, not necessarily to be given all the answers but to understand and be assured by the strategic ideas and plans for dealing with the financial challenges and the strength of shared leadership tackling it.

To address the significant organisational and financial challenges requires **all** members to take responsibility for responding to the challenges facing the organisation and sustaining a "Premier League" organisation. In conversations with members, officers and some partners, the Peer Team got a sense that this is not yet the case. For example, front line staff reported to us that members would challenge them over decisions not to grant specific services even where member policy decisions had recently reduced entitlements for such services. Given the significant and far reaching service savings that are being discussed in the run up to the budget for 2014/15 it will be crucial that all members understand the implications of these and are prepared to take responsibility in communicating these to their constituents.

We found less evidence of a cross-cutting and 'One Council' culture than we would have expected. While we had a strong sense of effective teamwork within Directorates, we found less evidence of staff working across the Directorates in order to learn from each other. There is only a very small corporate centre and Directorates lead on policy as well as organisational development and culture for their staff. The organisational design is a matter of choice for CCC but the current practice carries a risk that Directorates develop different cultures or use different methodologies and approaches with only a limited degree of sharing learning, best practice or realising efficiencies.

3. Financial planning and viability

The Council has open and detailed financial planning information. The Business Plan is available on the website and includes finance tables setting out detailed savings proposals over the five year span of the Medium Term Financial Plan. The plans include a line for 'unidentified savings'. The systematic and detailed approach enables officers, members and the public to understand the financial position and the Council's plans to deal with the savings requirements.

There are emerging mechanisms to manage the budget setting process for the 2014/15 budget. The Leader has introduced regular meetings of Cabinet and Group Leaders to work through savings proposals. These are detailed and lengthy meetings which are facilitated by the Chief Executive and his Corporate Management Team. They provide an opportunity for Cabinet and Group Leaders to discuss and challenge savings proposals for each Directorate and are very important given the changes in political control.

Engagement with partners on the scale of the financial challenge is strong. Our discussions with District Councils, the CCG, Fire Service and the Voluntary and

Community Sector highlighted that partners are aware of the financial pressure and are prepared to work across organisations to make savings. One example is the 'Making Assets Count' programme bringing together public sector organisations in a partnership to manage their combined property portfolio more effectively and efficiently. Work has started with partners to look at Community Budget approaches for two strategic outcomes: Supporting Older People and Priority Families to re-design and commission services in a more integrated and outcomes focused manner, with potential for significant savings across health and social care. Both initiatives are sponsored by the Public Service Board and it is crucial to build on these.

If successful, the City Deal will provide longer-term benefits for the Council and partners and is seen as a financial game changer. CCC together with Cambridge City Council, South Cambridgeshire District Council, the Greater Cambridge Greater Peterborough LEP and the University of Cambridge were invited to submit a proposal for a Second Wave City Deal in 2012. Local partners propose to undertake significant borrowing to address the city region's infrastructure and housing deficit as well as integrating key economic levers such as strategic planning and transport into a combined governance framework. In return, the main asks of the proposal are, firstly, for a 'gain share' mechanism that would see the local area retain a share of the additional tax revenue generated through the economic growth that the City Deal could deliver and secondly, some easing of the Housing Revenue Account debt cap to allow for enhanced delivery of affordable housing.

LGSS has exceeded its savings target for the last financial year and has contributed nearly £8m to Cambridgeshire County Council's financial position in excess of that within the Business Case for the period 2011-14. LGSS is a partnership arrangement with Northamptonshire CC to provide professional and transactional business support services to both Councils. LGSS is successfully growing its client base beyond the geography of the two Councils.

While LGSS has delivered impressive savings to date the Peer Team felt that you should consider whether you can drive further savings from LGSS to mitigate the impact of budget reductions on front-line services. Further cost reductions in LGSS could be achieved through greater automation of processes and self-service, driving up productivity and reducing supplier spend. This would require support from the Councils to make these changes effective across their workforce.

Looking forward, the scale of the financial challenge for CCC is not to be underestimated and is multi-faceted. Within the five year MTFP savings requirement of £149m, the Council needs to identify £54million of savings. General reserves are low, with £5.4m at 31st March 2013 and the Council has an in year overspend of £7m in Adult Social Care as a result of higher than budgeted activity and the non-achievement of savings within older people's social care services which were provided by Cambridgeshire Community Services (CCS) through a Section 75 agreement. At the same time, and as a result of the Council's ambitious capital programme, debt financing costs over the planned period are high at £35m for 2013/14 and projected to increase to £46m or 13.4 per cent of the council's net revenue expenditure by 2018/19. While we are impressed with the Council's continued ambition to realise economic growth and to reap the financial benefits of a

City Deal, there is a need for continuous challenge of the size and phasing of the capital programme. At the same time the council has to have sufficient capacity to invest corporate resource in pursuing whole systems changes in the Council's areas of greatest spend such as Adult and Social Care.

The recent changes in political control require different behaviours and new structures and processes to engage with all Groups. The departure from established Majority Party Cabinet Governance coupled with the enormity of the task has led to a degree of uncertainty that the Council has a process that will produce a sustainable and balanced budget for February 2014. Discussions with elected members highlighted that not everyone is fully aware of the scale of challenges and some appear to believe that *'the budget will look after itself'*. While the introduction of Cabinet/Group Leader meetings provides a useful mechanism to discuss and challenge savings proposals, Group Leaders need to take responsibility to engage with all member of their Groups to ensure that the scale and impact of savings on communities and Divisions are understood, debated and then accepted. This needs to happen urgently and well before the formal budget setting process in February 2014. Our observation of one of such meetings showed engagement but a relatively low degree of challenge, particularly around big savings proposals such as the reduction of the budget for Children's Centres or the management of demand in adult social care.

The Peer Team heard little about involvement of Overview & Scrutiny in responding to the financial challenges. Given the commitment of Scrutiny Chairs, the existing officer support and the importance of the 'overview' functions, we would challenge whether Overview & Scrutiny could be encouraged to consider how to manage the financial challenges using their overview role and participate earlier in the process. They could be supportive by applying some 'blue sky thinking' - looking outwards and forward in contrast to their subsequent role of scrutinising existing proposals. This would engage members in a more creative and forward looking way and could be a valuable process for generating new ideas.

4. Governance

There is a desire to re-involve and re-empower all members of the Council and to achieve pluralistic decision making. Our discussions with Cabinet, Group Leaders and backbench members highlighted that while this desire was triggered by the new political order since May 2013, it is genuine and has resulted in a change in leadership styles and organisational processes. We heard good feedback about the Council induction programme for new members and Group Leaders and new members confirmed that they have access to senior officers and are well supported in taking up their new roles.

A mature process exists to work through the issues of moving to a Committee System following Council's decision in May 2013. The process is overseen by the Council's Constitution and Ethics Committee and involved two workshops with members and informal consultation processes with Group Leaders and officers. This ensures that issues can be considered in a planned and systematic way.

Transition processes are in place for all Groups to be engaged in budget setting and for Group Leaders to consider issues. The regular Cabinet/Group Leaders meeting, facilitated by the Chief Executive, is highly valued and crucial to build engagement of Groups in this transition year.

While the Peer Team are not offering a judgement on whether or not the Council should introduce a Committee system, we would like to reflect the concerns we heard and identify several areas we believe need to be considered further as a matter of urgency:

- What are the outcomes desired from the governance change? There was little evidence of formal discussion about the objective of any governance change in our discussions with members or officers, or indeed in the officer report to the Constitution and Ethics Committee. Setting out the purpose of the change (what is it we are changing, how and why?) together with objectives and principles is important as a starting point. The current documentation we saw focuses on structure and details of how the model may work without considering its principal purpose.
- How will the new model facilitate the tough decisions that will be required as outlined earlier in this letter? The Peer Team picked up significant concerns from members, officers and partners about the possibility of the new form becoming a '*Kafkaesque nightmare*' of bureaucracy which stifles decision making. The degree of member involvement in decision making in particular does not seem to have been resolved.
- What is the potential impact of the new governance model on the expectations of partners and partnership decision making, for example in the context of the LEP or the City Deal and how will Committees manage outsourcing and commissioning by the Council, for example its Community Budget initiative?
- What is the extent of officer delegations that will be required under the new governance model and what does this mean in practice? Could this in practice have an unintended consequence of Council becoming a more 'officer led' Council?
- There is a need to clarify the boundaries between Members' policy setting, the Officer's Executive role and Members' scrutiny functions within the new governance model. The current proposals state that there will not be a separate Overview and Scrutiny function. This raises questions about which role – if any – members will play in policy development in addition to decision making?

Moving forward, the Peer Team believe that the Council needs to undertake a robust analysis of the full cost of a committee system to the council, this to include officer and member time to service the committee as well as the opportunity costs related to a slower process of decision making. We would recommend CCC seeks external assistance to work through these questions in more depth. An exercise to

understand the cost of some key processes under the current and proposed system will provide underpinning evidence that can inform decision making.

The current relatively informal Governance arrangements for LGSS need to be formalised to reflect the challenging financial environment and the potential need for both Cambridgeshire County Council and Northamptonshire County Council to achieve additional savings and potentially differential levels of service. The service relationship with other clients of LGSS also needs to be formalised to ensure that the balance of risk and reward are fully understood and accepted in the agreement. This will mitigate the financial and reputational impact of any potential future disputes on CCC.

5. Organisational capacity

Staff are loyal, focused and supportive of each other with strong values and a readiness to work collaboratively. Our discussions with front-line staff as part of two focus groups highlighted many strengths. Staff told us that they were well supported professionally with good arrangements for supervision and access to training and development. They valued the flexible working arrangements and some felt that the Council had good processes and procedures. Staff enjoyed working with each other and saw *'the people who work here'* as a key strength and were motivated by delivering the purpose and vision of the Council. Having loyal and dedicated staff is a great strength and essential to master the challenges that lie ahead.

The Peer Team were impressed with the degree that staff recognise and generally support the Council's vision and ambition for growth. There was a clear understanding that investment in infrastructure and economic growth was essential for the long-term social and financial viability of communities as well as the Council itself. This highlights effective communication around the vision and aspirations among managers and leaders.

We were impressed with the talent and experience of people in some of the key posts within the Council. We met with many highly skilled and some truly outstanding people and were impressed by their knowledge, experience, dedication and levels of innovation.

The Council is investing significant corporate capacity in taking forward successfully big, complex projects and programmes. Examples are the City Deal and LGSS both of which require significant time from senior officers. This confirms the Council's commitment and intent to invest in developing innovative delivery mechanisms that will yield longer term financial returns.

The 'Leading an Empowered Organisation' (LEO) programme in the Environment, Transport and Economy Directorate was well received and is having a positive impact on the Directorate culture and the Council would benefit from it being rolled out further.

The Council is very lean and on the cusp of being unsustainable. It has grown around talented key individuals such as the Executive Directors. This places a high reliance on key individuals which puts the organisation at considerable risk. It is

crucial that key people who are leaving are replaced to ensure that there remains sufficient senior corporate capacity, focus and skills to deal with financial challenges, City Deal, governance changes at LGSS and significant service changes, particularly within Children, Families and Adults.

The integration of Children's and Adult Social Care is still relatively early days but the Peer Team would challenge whether the benefits of having services in one Directorate are being fully realised. We found little evidence exploring the integration of commissioning approaches and teams or streamlining the interface with health jointly, as opposed to two different services, for example in Children's and Adults Mental Health services or Services for Learning Disabilities. Integrating teams and processes would deliver efficiencies and pool expertise and skills and these approaches should be considered while structures are still fluid and teams are embedding new arrangements.

The Peer team questions whether there is sufficient coherence as to how key corporate functions are delivered. We had very little evidence about corporate design, workforce planning, employee strategy, unified commissioning and business support or change management. Instead Directorates adopt their own operational processes, practices and resources with the inherent risk of duplication of effort and lack of coherence. While policies and practices need to be flexible to meet the variety of practices, this needs to be balanced against efficiencies to introduce corporate approaches to people management as well as establishing a distinctive 'one council' corporate culture and practice.

We saw some good examples of new approaches and innovation within Directorates, for example the place maintenance pilots, the move to Community Hubs. At the same time, staff we spoke with recognised the importance of doing things differently. Promoting innovation requires organisational conditions that encourage 'thinking outside the box' and idea generation in a systematic way. The challenge to the Council is how to more effectively capture and transfer learning across the organisation and how to provide structured support for innovation that draws on the skills, competencies and cognitive styles of staff across the organisation and not just within the individual Directorates or services.

What could CCC do to better engage with staff's willingness to change and work more collaboratively? Staff we spoke with had a good understanding of the external pressures and the need for the Council to change the way it operates. They were willing to contribute to the change and many seemed able to look beyond their own self-interest, but wanted to be provided with more opportunities to support the Council outside their own immediate sphere of influence. At the same time one of their key concerns was that their services would be changed by people who do not appreciate the impact of their services on communities or indeed on other services. Effective communication and structured engagement to harness staff ideas about savings or service improvements is key to making sustainable changes.

6. Working with partners to realise economic growth

There is a strong, cohesive and shared vision for economic growth in Cambridgeshire that has been sustained despite the financial challenges. Cambridgeshire's long history of effective partnership working has provided a strong platform and the Peer Team were impressed by the strengths of relationships and the consensus around growth which translates well into strategies and spatial plans across the six Councils. The Peer Team felt, however, that the scale and ambition of the vision makes it hard to summarise easily and there is a risk that not all stakeholders have a sufficient understanding of what is required.

Partnership working around the City Deal in particular is very strong, including CCC, Cambridge City Council, South Cambridgeshire District Council, the LEP and the University of Cambridge. If successful it will result in an integrated and shared vision, a single growth plan and the execution of powers through a modified Combined Authority model to drive economic growth for Greater Cambridge and hopefully all of Cambridgeshire. The proposed 'gain share' mechanism would allow partners to cover the costs of borrowing incurred to invest in the infrastructure to unleash the sub-regional growth potential. There is strong support for the City Deal across the County area, with partners recognising the potential that growth can have for each part of Cambridgeshire, in particular for the more deprived area of Fenland. Nevertheless, the Peer Team consider that the view and plans of how growth can benefit the areas outside the City Deal's immediate geographic scope need developing further with the strong engagement of those areas outside the formal City Deal geography.

The County Council and partners have a strong record of investments in transport, housing and communications. Examples include investments in the A14 upgrade which will allow developments such as Northstowe, the largest new town in the UK since Milton Keynes as well as the new Cambridge Science Park station. Recognising the importance of broadband provision to inward investment and economic growth, the County Council and partners have invested significantly in better broadband coverage. Levering additional investment from BT, the targets are for 98% of premises to have access to fibre-based broadband by the end of 2015 and for 90% of all premises to be able to get broadband speeds of at least 24 Mbps.

There is a strong history of joint working on strategic planning. The CCC, together with the five District and City Councils and Peterborough City Council have established a Joint Strategic Planning Unit to consider spatial planning issues that go beyond organisational boundaries. The Unit has worked with local authorities across the Cambridgeshire Strategic Housing Market Area to provide evidence for future levels of growth to inform the Local Plan reviews of individual councils. It is now supporting the LEP in preparing the Strategic Economic Plan across the LEP area, informing bids to the national Single Growth Fund. The CCC and partners have also introduced joint Development Control Committees for developments that span individual organisational boundaries. These initiatives are impressive examples of a pragmatic and mature approach to partnership working. They enable organisations to carry out their statutory functions whilst adopting a perspective that goes beyond their own geographical boundary.

It is also clear that after a slow start the LEP is perceived to be performing well and has earned the confidence of partners especially among the business community.

The relationship between the ambition for growth and the current capacity, capability and resources of CCC needs to be articulated more clearly. The Peer Team felt that this needed to work at two levels. Given the current budget pressures there is a need for a clearer financial model that shows the anticipated financial benefit of the growth agenda and the City Deal, in particular over the medium and longer term which can be offset against the current cost assumptions in the MTFP and in particular the current and increasing levels of debt finance. We would recommend this financial modelling is undertaken not just by the County Council but also with District Council partners and the LEP. This is essential for partners to take longer-term decisions and will help the County Council and partners consolidate their basis for negotiations with national Ministries around the City Deal. Secondly, the Peer Team believes that the County Council and partners can do more work to use the capacity and capabilities at County, District and LEP levels more effectively for the growth agenda of Cambridgeshire as a whole. Building on the successful model of a Joint Strategic Planning Unit, partners may want to consider whether they can adapt this model to business development by creating a common resource dealing with strategic issues and making business engagement locally more tactical, focused and tailored to business needs.

The Peer Team heard about the ambition of using economic growth to benefit all areas of the County, including the areas of greater deprivation in Fenland and the pockets of deprivation that exist across all local authority areas. However, we did not get a sufficient sense of early engagement and planning to ensure that this will be achieved. This work needs to be done in a systematic way to avoid the scenario that *'a new road from Wisbech to March means that you can drive to Cambridge faster'*.

Is there a Plan B in case the City Deal fails? While the Peer Team had a very strong sense of *'this will be delivered'* from partners, it is not guaranteed that the bid will be successful in its current form. There is a need for the County Council and partners to undertake some scenario planning to explore different permutations of the bid and implications. This will require some expert input but should strengthen partners' negotiation position. The analysis already undertaken by CCC showing that, under the current financial arrangements, "growth doesn't pay" should be used in ongoing discussions with Government.

Education providers and business have different views about the progress on matching training and skills development to business needs. We heard some excellent examples of direct engagement between schools and colleges with businesses to create career pathways for students, such as Fenland Enterprise in Education. However, our conversations with businesses highlighted a need for schools to put a greater emphasis on providing young people with generic skills and competencies to prepare them for the world of work. There was also a need to anticipate the implications of an ageing population on the available workforce. It will be important to address both these mutual concerns and mis-perceptions between skills providers and businesses through an on-going dialogue and understanding of each other's' priorities and constraints. The City Deal skills proposals – if taken forward – would provide a potential means of addressing these issues in the south of

the County, and the skills work led by the LEP provides a similar opportunity in the north of the County.

7. Key recommendations

Based on the Peer Challenge team's findings we recommend that the County Council considers the following actions. These actions we believe will help improve and develop the County Council's effectiveness and capacity to deliver future ambitions and plans.

- Consider carefully how the successful meetings between Group Leaders become a sustainable process that develops a consensus around leadership and direction for CCC, particularly in terms of some of the very tough financial and service decisions CCC will have to make.
- Ensure there is a robust analysis of the real 'cost to the business' of the proposed model of governance and its impact on effective decision making
- Building on current work - develop a structured process across CCC and partners to identify realistic savings across the system (using community budget approaches) especially in terms of prevention and early help
- Look again at the scale of ambition to reconfirm the priorities of the organisation within the financial resources available to it
- Ensure there is a robust analysis of the scale of requirements for corporate capacity and capability to deliver the Council's business plan and other key activities such as City Deal
- Consider a formal engagement process with all staff to develop ideas around efficiencies and innovation
- Ensure that the formal arrangements between LGSS and CCC are focused on delivering value to CCC

8. Next steps

The Council's political leadership and senior management will undoubtedly wish to reflect on these findings and suggestions before determining how the Council wishes to take things forward. As part of the Peer Challenge process, there is an offer of continued activity to support this. We made some suggestions about how this might be utilised, for example a follow-up visit after 9-12 months. I look forward to finalising the detail of that activity as soon as possible.

In the meantime we are keen to continue the relationship we have formed with the Council through the Peer Challenge to date. Rachel Litherland, Principal Adviser (East of England) is the main contact between the Council and the Local Government Association. Rachel can be contacted at

rachel.litherland@local.gov.uk and can provide access to our resources and any further support.

In the meantime, all of us connected with the Peer Challenge would like to wish the Council every success going forward. Once again, many thanks for inviting the Peer Challenge and to everyone involved for their participation.

Yours sincerely

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On behalf of the Peer Challenge Team:

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