

Corporate Peer Challenge **Teignbridge District Council**

7th to 10th March 2016

Feedback Report

1. Executive Summary

Teignbridge is a council that has strong political and managerial leadership. There are excellent member-officer relationships, which exist with members of all parties on the Council. Members across the different groups can work together constructively in the interests of residents and the Council while respecting their political differences. The Council has dedicated and talented officers, who are well regarded by members and by the various partners which the Council works with. More generally the Council is well regarded by its partners.

Members and officers have worked together to produce a new 10 Year Strategy, informed by extensive consultation with residents of Teignbridge. This identifies the 'Teignbridge Ten', the groups of related projects that will deliver the Council's vision to make Teignbridge a healthy and desirable place where people want to live, work and visit. The Strategy demonstrates the Council's understanding of place and the key challenges it faces. Its ambitions include providing affordable housing, attracting more employers that will offer high value jobs that will help to raise earnings locally and developing the skills of local people to take up such opportunities. Protecting and enhancing the local environment, the beauty of which is one of the district's key assets, is a key objective of the Strategy.

It is refreshing to see a Council take such a long term view of planning beyond a four year electoral cycle, as major projects may well take a long time to come to fruition and make an impact. Crucially, the 10 Year Strategy enjoys cross-party support and ownership and is was approved by Full Council in April 2016. While there will be differences in priorities across the different political groups the broad aims are shared. So any future change in political control may affect how the aims are delivered, but not the broad direction thus giving more confidence in such long term planning.

The Council demonstrates leadership of place in action, with an entrepreneurial 'can do' approach to take advantage of opportunities for the District as they arise. It has ambitious and bold plans to grow the local economy, to provide opportunities for local people and to secure the authority's financial independence. A recent example of this is the purchase of the Market Walk shopping centre in Newton Abbot, which it sees as the centrepiece for regeneration plans. The drive and leadership of the Council was a key factor leading to the opening of the Newton Abbot University Technical College (UTC) this current academic year, the first outside a major urban centre. Other examples of innovation and leadership include working with communities to enhance flood defences in Teignmouth and the development of the Teignmouth Pavilions community arts and enterprise centre and its transfer to a local trust for on-going management. The Strata ICT company, jointly owned with Exeter City and East Devon Councils is a further example of innovation and the three councils have established shared scrutiny of the venture through a Joint Committee.

In order to deliver the 10 Year Vision, it will be important to ensure the Council's financial plans which underpin it are sufficiently robust and risks well managed; that clear delivery plans are soon agreed and the Strategy document is effective in engaging staff, partners and the public. The team believe that more focused engagement with the Heart of the South West LEP may lead to access to additional funding sources. Teignbridge should

work with its partners to build on current arrangements to enhance the effectiveness of scrutiny of Strata, and any other future external partnerships / ventures which require shared governance arrangements. It should consider how to secure the continued engagement of non-executive members in scrutiny of delivery of the 10 Year Strategy, forward looking policy development and how to make scrutiny in general more outward looking towards partnership working.

2. Key recommendations

- a) Strengthen the Ten Year Strategy document, to give it greater impact and grab the attention of the intended audience, bringing the 'Teignbridge Ten' to life with examples of successes to date.
- b) Develop and agree action plans, targets and timescales to underpin delivery of the Teignbridge Ten super projects
- c) Actively promote the Teignbridge Ten to partners and public
- d) Give greater attention to engagement with the Heart of the South West LEP, including at a leadership level, with a view to securing additional investment in the area. You should work with other districts across Devon to make the district voice more effective at the LEP.
- e) Develop an investment strategy to underpin delivery of the Ten Year Strategy, and ensure that your longer term financial plans to support this are sufficiently robust
- f) Work with partners to understand and share the new approaches required for scrutiny of joint arrangements and to take advantage of opportunities for pre-scrutiny of decisions by the Joint Executive Committee for Strata
- g) Provide more development and support to members to undertake this new approach to scrutiny of joint arrangements and wider partnership working
- h) Make more use of member task groups to enable a wide range of members to participate in policy development through the scrutiny process
- i) Ensure scrutiny of delivery of the Teignbridge Ten, as these will be key to delivery of the long term vision for Teignbridge, and will need continuing engagement and ownership by a wide range of members
- j) Continue to pay attention to attracting, retaining, recognising and rewarding key staff to maintain and develop high performing teams.

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 Teignbridge were:

- Yvonne Rees, Chief Executive – Mole Valley District Council and Director, Customers & Communities – Surrey County Council
- Councillor Neil Clarke, Leader – Rushcliffe Borough Council (Conservative member peer)
- Councillor Peter Thornton, Leader – South Lakeland District Council (Liberal Democrat member peer)
- Allison Westray-Chapman, Assistant Director – Economic Development, Bolsover & North East Derbyshire District Councils
- Steve Capes, Head of Regeneration & Policy – Derbyshire Dales District Council
- David Lock, Adviser – Welfare Reform, LGA
- David Armin, 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. 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?
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 give particular attention to:

- The effectiveness of the Council's plans and capacity to implement its new Ten Year Council Strategy (due to be approved on 4th April 2016) and the extent to which the 'Teignbridge Ten' super projects are reflected in its plans and actions
- How the Council could enhance the way scrutiny works, including engaging members in policy development and review and the scrutiny of partnership arrangements.

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 focus. 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 Teignbridge, during which they:

- Spoke to more than 50 people, principally a range of council staff and councillors along with some key external partners and stakeholders.
- Gathered information and views from some 30 meetings, visits to key sites in the area and additional research and reading.
- Collectively spent more than 300 hours to determine their findings – the equivalent of one person spending 8 weeks in Teignbridge.

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 (7th to 10th March 2016). 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

Teignbridge District Council demonstrates a strong sense of place. This is informed by a good understanding of the socio-demographic and economic data about the area. Extensive consultation within the Council, with residents and partners has guided the development of its 10 Year Strategy, and the Teignbridge Ten – the 'super projects' that will address the key themes which underpin the Strategy. The research which underpins the development of this understanding of place is presented on the Council's website under the headings of Economy, Environment and Wellbeing.

The Council has a clear grasp of the main challenges facing the area. Although unemployment is lower than both regional and national averages, so are wages (in particular for those who work in the district as distinct from out-commuters to Exeter – the regional capital which is adjacent to the district). So attracting more value added jobs is a priority, along with developing the skills of local people to take advantage of these opportunities. The median price of a house is above the national average. Allied to low wages, this means affordable housing is a real challenge in the area. Teignbridge

includes parts of the Dartmoor National Park and Devon coastline, these beautiful areas are important assets for the district in terms of both quality of life for residents and attracting in visitors. This is reflected in the Council's concern to protect and enhance the quality of the environment.

This understanding of place is reflected in the Council's plans – for example in the objectives of the 10 Year Strategy and the Teignbridge Ten. More importantly, this understanding is demonstrated in action. The Council has facilitated the development and recent opening of the University Technical College (UTC) in Newton Abbot, the first outside a major urban area. The UTC was established in association with Exeter University and with significant private sector investment, including from Centrax (a major local employer in advanced manufacturing). The UTC will offer students from 14 to 18 an education in scientific and technical subjects and its values will help to make them work ready when they leave. This should raise the skills base in the area, to take advantage of existing high value jobs and attract more into the area. The link with Exeter University should also reduce the drain of young people out of the sub-region to further their education and careers.

The Council has acquired land to aid the regeneration of Newton Abbot town centre, including in the Bradley Lane area to improve business premises and offer new office, leisure and residential accommodation. It recently acquired the Market Walk shopping centre in the town, both as a cornerstone of those regeneration plans and as a source of future income to the authority. The Council understands and is acting upon the need to grow the local economy to ensure its future financial sustainability, given the clear national policy that councils should be financially independent from 2020 onwards through locally raised taxes, business rates, charges and investments.

The Council has invested significant time in the development of the 10 Year Strategy and engaging members across all parties in the process. This has secured cross-party support for the Strategy. Whilst members across different groups might assign a different priority to particular elements, the overall direction and objectives are shared. When formally agreed in early April 2016, the Strategy should enable the Council to plan over a longer term timescale than that of the four year electoral cycle – more typical of the private sector and other partners. This should be real strength, as major projects can take a significant time to come to fruition and have an impact. The Council can now focus on how and when, rather than what and why.

To ensure that the 10 Year Strategy is effectively implemented, and that the Teignbridge Ten make a real impact, the Council needs to give consideration to the following:

- The 10 Year Strategy needs to be underpinned by clear action plans with specific targets to ensure delivery. The team understands that this work is underway, but given the anticipated approval of the Strategy in early April this should now be accelerated. These plans will enable effort and resources to be directed at particular priorities at a given point in time.
- The team acknowledge that work on the draft 10 Year Strategy has recently been completed. However, we would suggest that attention is now given to ensuring

that the Teignbridge Ten are sufficiently visible to all staff and in particular partners and the wider public.

- Partner engagement in developing the 10 Year Strategy is not clear from the draft document. It will be important to engage partners effectively in implementation and the Council should actively involve them in action planning where appropriate and ensure that they take shared responsibility for the long term vision, objectives and the Teignbridge Ten as key issues for the area.
- Ensuring that its long term financial plans are sustainable and continue to provide sufficient resources to deliver the 10 Year Strategy.

4.2 Leadership of Place

We have already noted how the Council's understanding of place is clearly being translated into action. This is also a key facet of its leadership of place, through its support for flagship projects such as the UTC and the Teignmouth Pavilions community arts and enterprise centre. It has shown an entrepreneurial approach to take advantage of opportunities as they arise, such as acquiring land at Broadmeadow in Teignmouth and Bradley Lane in Newton Abbot, along with the Market Walk shopping centre to further its regeneration plans and enable the provision of new housing.

The Council enjoys a good reputation with the partners that it works with, including as an enabler and facilitator. Examples include working with the Police on the Prevent agenda and wider community safety work where it is seen to have been a constructive and active partner. The Council assisted the UTC in opening for its first intake of students in autumn 2015, by making its offices at Old Forde House available as classrooms for the first few weeks of term when, as anticipated from its project plan, the college's new premises were not ready for occupation at that time.

The Council benefits from an adopted Local Plan. The Local Plan was approved in 2014. The need to agree additional housing numbers inevitably causes differences of opinion across different communities and among members. Adopting the Plan required purposeful leadership and in the event was adopted on the casting vote of the Chair of the Council. Many members now acknowledge this as a pivotal moment for Teignbridge. It has enabled it to manage growth and draw on the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) and section 106 agreements to fund improvements in infrastructure and aspects of its regeneration plans.

The Council has good partnerships and positive relationships with parish and town councils across Teignbridge. It has made significant progress in developing Neighbourhood Plans with these partners. One is agreed and in place; the plan for Newton Abbot is subject to a referendum; one is due for submission soon and a further 12 are in development. The adopted Exminster Neighbourhood Plan aims to protect the visual quality of the landscape, ensuring that the proposed new development at Matford both establishes its own identity and benefits the wider area and to involve local people in developing the plan on an on-going basis. The availability of up to 25% of CIL funding through the adopted Local Plan for use by parish and local councils has provided an incentive for such partnership working.

There are further examples of how the Council looks to work with, engage with and empower local communities. It secured funding to replace an old theatre building to create the new Pavilions Teignmouth community arts and enterprise centre. A Board of Trustees has been established to provide strategic direction and ensure the smooth running of the organisation when the project is completed. Also in Teignmouth the local community have an integral role in flood response. Similarly, the local community have produced a resilience plan for the parish of Kenn.

The Greater Exeter / Greater Devon (GEGD) partnership with Exeter City and East Devon Councils provides the potential to drive economic growth in the sub-region which, with a combined population of 380,000, can be a major player in the economy of the South West. Established in November 2014, it aims to provide more joined up decision making around planning, housing and infrastructure, and better use of resources such as ICT through a Visioning Board made up of the Councils' Leaders and Chief Executives.

Teignbridge is part of the Heart of the South West LEP (covering Devon, Somerset, Plymouth and Torbay). It recently played a leading role in developing the Heart of the South West Devolution bid on behalf of the Devon District Councils. A number of people we spoke to felt that, given the wider footprint and other priorities of the LEP, Teignbridge would get little benefit from attempting to engage more proactively with the LEP. However, partners and the team itself take a longer term view and encourage the Council to make more effective use of the LEP, as these bodies are expected to continue to have a pivotal role in the allocation of funding in support of economic growth. Teignbridge should promote the success of its regeneration work to date and ambition for the future, as this track record could help to secure it a higher profile and further funding from the LEP. Currently all 8 districts across Devon are represented by one authority on the LEP Board – East Devon. One approach could be to rotate that representation around the districts, though there may be other approaches which can secure more effective engagement by the LEP with the district councils. This issue could be taken forward via pan-Devon meetings such as Devon Districts Forum, Devon Local Government Steering Group and Devon Chief Executives', all of which are attended quarterly by all Devon Council Leaders and Chief Executives including the National Parks.

Another way to give the districts, including Teignbridge, a greater voice on the LEP, could be through a formal overview and scrutiny arrangement for the LEP. (The Government's 2014 guidance on LEP accountability strongly encourages the establishment of an independent overview & scrutiny function). Examples of LEPs with such arrangements include the West of England and Cumbria, where members of the scrutiny committee include three members of district authorities which are not represented on the LEP Board.

The team believe that Teignbridge shows itself to be an effective leader of place, both in its ambition and actions, but this could be enhanced by consideration of the following:

- How can the Council derive greater benefit and secure increased investment from its membership of the Devon & Somerset LEP, and how can it best work with the other Devon districts to bring this about?

- How to ensure that partners are sufficiently acknowledged in the Ten Year strategy and engaged in its delivery? It will be important to engage partners in working towards the objectives of the Strategy.

4.3 Organisational leadership and governance

The Council has strong political and managerial leadership, able to articulate their vision and direction of travel for both Teignbridge and the authority. They have been able to see through difficult decisions, such as adoption of the Local Plan and the transfer of assets to the community such as Buckfastleigh swimming pool, Ashmoor leisure centre and public toilets across the district. This leadership is also shown in the Council's engagement with national agendas – in particular around self-build housing where the Government has drawn on Teignbridge's experiences and success to help shape policy development. The Council has also used articles in the sector press and participation in national awards to build the profile and reputation of Teignbridge.

Team working between the political and managerial leadership appears strong and good member-officer relationships were reported by officers and by members across all three groups on the Council. There are healthy relationships between members across different political groups. There are differences in priorities and policy preferences, but it is apparent that these are aired in debate without undue damage to relationships and councillors are able to agree on key issues for the Council – such as the 10 Year Strategy.

The Council is committed to effective engagement with and by all members. The team found this to be demonstrated through the opportunity for any member to address meetings of the Executive; through the Overview & Scrutiny and Scrutiny Audit Committees (which include all non-executive members) and some major decisions being taken after debate at Full Council, such as the recent Market Walk purchase.

The Council's scrutiny arrangements are generally well regarded, particularly for internal scrutiny. However, the team consider that external scrutiny arrangements could be strengthened – as part of a wider need to engage more with the Council's partners.

The Council, along with its partners, has developed appropriate governance structures following the creation in November 2014 of Strata Service Solutions Ltd, a company jointly owned by Teignbridge, Exeter City and East Devon Councils to provide IT solutions for all three councils. This was supported by funding from the Government's Transformation Challenge Award fund. The governance arrangements adopted appear to be sound. The Strata Chief Operating Officer reports to a Project Board of a senior officer from each of the councils. This is overseen by an Executive Committee made up of the Leaders and Chief Executives of the three councils. The work of this Executive Committee and the performance of Strata is scrutinised by a Joint Scrutiny Committee made up of three members from each council. As the Executive Committee is currently chaired by East Devon, and Strata hosted in Exeter, the Joint Scrutiny Committee is chaired by Teignbridge which appears to offer an appropriate system of checks and balances. We understand that the Strata Business Plan is the basis for scrutiny by the Joint Committee and this too appears appropriate.

The level and uptake of development opportunities for members and practical support for members appears to have been reduced in recent years. Over the same period, the Council's commitment to staff training and development has been maintained, which is commendable. Given the changing role of councils and elected members, and Teignbridge's commitment to community engagement, community leadership and neighbourhood planning could be particular areas to strengthen the member development programme.

To further enhance its leadership and governance arrangements, the Council should consider the following:

- How those in leadership roles can strengthen relationships with partners, in particular the Devon & Somerset LEP?
- Strengthening scrutiny of external partners
- Improving development opportunities for members so that they match those available for officers.

(Scrutiny was a particular area of focus for the challenge and some further observations and suggestions for improvement are therefore provided in section 4.7 below).

4.4 Financial planning and viability

The Council has a sound track record of successfully tackling financial challenges to date, contributing to balances through in-year underspending. Teignbridge has been adept in leveraging-in funding, optimising investment in projects to trigger additional funding. The senior management review in 2013 reduced such posts from 18 to 11 and total pay costs fell from £15.8m in 2012/13 to 14.9m in 2014/15. The BEST (Business Efficiency and Service Transition) reviews have produced further efficiency savings. Budget reports refer to the savings arising benefiting the budget, but do not specify the savings made or anticipated. The Council needs to ensure that the next round of BEST reviews and the Strata ICT partnership continue to deliver the required savings, and being more specific about these may assist in monitoring delivery.

The Council appears to have taken reasonable account of cost pressures in preparing its budget and financial plans through to 2018-19. Council Tax will be increased (by the maximum £5 per annum) for the first time in five years for 2016-17 onwards. The key to its financial plans will therefore be the robustness of its projections for NNDR (business rates), New Homes Bonus (NHB) and other sources of additional income such as rents from Market Walk which are expected to make a significant contribution towards both revenue and capital spending. There remains uncertainty at a national level about policy regarding New Homes Bonus and the redistribution of NNDR when these are fully localised, in addition to uncertainty arising from local market conditions and the general economic situation. The announcements in the 2016 Budget re business rate relief for small businesses and the need for further reductions in public spending before the end of this Parliament have introduced further uncertainty.

The Council has ambitious and bold plans to grow the local economy to help secure financial independence, and increase its income from a range of income streams (along

with more job opportunities for local people). A key part of this is the recent purchase of the Market Walk shopping centre in Newton Abbot, which will provide rental income to the Council. But it has also contributed to significant revenue funding of capital expenditure, estimated at £2.2 million in the 2016-17 budget, assumed to reduce thereafter. The Council will need to take a view on the most effective mechanism for the long term financing of this investment, and has considered the implications for its prudential borrowing indicators. It is therefore a key risk in the Council's financial planning. In making this purchase, the Council obtained independent, expert advice to help it undertake due diligence and consider and mitigate the risks arising from this acquisition, including modelling rental income streams in different scenarios and undertaking a condition survey to understand potential maintenance costs. But clearly a level of uncertainty will remain and the Council has made a modest increase in its general fund reserves in response to this, to 9.4% of net revenue budget in 2016-17 and 9.8% in 2017-18, which is still relatively low compared to other District councils. The Council will need to continue to monitor closely its investment in Market Walk, including the income raised and associated costs to ensure that the business case is delivered and risks continue to be mitigated and managed.

In looking to grow the local economy through such investments, councils like Teignbridge often move from being debt free to borrowing to fund investments. Developing an asset and investment strategy can be helpful in providing members with guidelines and parameters to aid decision making so that they can respond appropriately to opportunities as they arise, including avoiding excessive risks. Like other councils, Teignbridge has a treasury management strategy which it has revised to take account of recent investments. However, the team believe it would be helpful to have a longer term investment strategy to underpin the Ten Year Strategy. The Council intends to use short term treasury management cash balances to initially fund the Market Walk purchase, but expects it will ultimately be funded by long term borrowing. The team suggest the Council needs to:

- clarify its strategy to fund major purchases and capital projects in future and develop a framework to address future investment opportunities
- ensure that these risks associated with NNDR and NHB are sufficiently taken into account and more generally that its financial planning to deliver the 10 Year Strategy is sufficiently robust.

4.5 Capacity to deliver

The Council has many dedicated and very talented staff. They are highly regarded by members and senior officers from other authorities in the area commented on the quality of officers at Teignbridge. The Council has continued to invest in staff training and development and has been successful in 'growing its own' – a number of staff we met have seen their careers develop through different roles at Teignbridge. It has a long established focus on and ethos of transferable skills that has contributed to staff retention and enhanced performance. The Council leads a successful Learning & Development Partnership, originally established in 2005 which now provides services to over 4,000 employees across 12 councils, housing providers and national park authorities. Development opportunities are seen as a key tool for staff retention.

Teignbridge participates in several other partnerships and joint working arrangements with other councils. The most significant of these is Strata Service Solutions Ltd, the jointly owned ICT company referred to previously. Strata is still only in its second year of existence, but is seen to have the potential to enhance the resilience of all three councils ICT systems and is anticipated to provide up to £6 million in savings over the next 10 years across the three councils through a re-engineering of business processes and more collaborative working. No particular performance concerns were brought to the attention of the team beyond the teething problems to be expected in a new venture.

Staff reported that they felt empowered to bring forth new ideas and that the BEST 2020 service reviews had enabled them to see the 'big picture' in terms of service development. Staff have assisted with the introduction of new ways of working, such as the investment in a new re-cycling facility and vehicles which, allied to weekly re-cycling collections, are hoped to increase re-cycling rates to beyond 60%.

The senior management review in 2013 reduced senior posts from 18 to 11 and has produced significant reductions in staff costs. Of the remaining four Business Lead posts, two are currently vacant. The Council believes that it has sufficient senior management capacity, but should continue to reassure itself that it has the capacity commensurate with its ambition.

The Council has moved staff around to address priority issues and projects, and has brought together well resourced teams to deliver what is required in areas such as regeneration and local planning. It has been able to recruit and retain effective project managers.

The Council's good relationships with key partners such as the Homes & Communities Agency (HCA) and South West Water have enabled it to lever in additional resources to support key projects, such as flood defence works in Teignmouth. Teignbridge sees its local communities as key partners and looks to engage with the community and encourage active citizenship, for example through the transfer of assets to community ownership such as leisure facilities and public conveniences and participation in litter picking and the protection of environmentally sensitive areas etc. It has worked with local communities and shown leadership in projects such as the establishment of the Haldon gypsy and travellers site.

To secure its capacity to deliver into the future, the team suggest that the Council continues to:

- give attention to attracting and retaining key staff
- develop its project management methodology, drawing on the skills and experience of existing project managers, so the approach is embedded and can be adopted by new staff in due course and reliance on key individuals reduced.

4.6 The 10 Year Council Strategy

This is was one of the particular areas that the Council asked the team to focus on and we have therefore drawn together a summary of our reflections here. It is refreshing to see such long term planning, which recognises that major projects may need to be

delivered over a period beyond the four year electoral cycle. The shared ownership which has been achieved across officers and members of all parties is critical in making a reality of such long term planning. The sense is that should a change of political control take place, this would affect how the aims are delivered, but not the aims themselves. This gives greater confidence in long term planning – for officers, members and partners. The extensive consultation which has underpinned the development of the Strategy, within the Council and with the public, has helped achieve this shared ownership.

Given the investment in development of the Strategy, the team feel that the document should have more impact – to secure the attention of staff, partners and the wider public. The team suggest that the document should:

- articulate your partnership ethos
- identify some of your key achievements, demonstrating your capacity to deliver in future
- be more specific about what you intend to do
- develop a snappy one page summary to promote the 10 year strategy to a wider audience .

Given the long term time frame and the desire to secure cross-party support, the Strategy is inevitably at a high level expressing broad aims. This puts the onus on accelerating the preparation of detailed delivery plans with specific targets and timescales. The impact of the Strategy should be performance managed. The Strategy identifies seven high level objectives to which the Teignbridge Ten super projects will contribute. Some key, cross-cutting indicators aligned to these objectives could be used to give a summary assessment of the difference the Strategy is making.

The Council acknowledges that such a long term strategy will be subject to review during implementation, potentially on an annual basis with a more significant refresh following the elections every four years. It may be helpful to clarify this. As noted previously, the team regard greater clarity and confidence in the robustness of the Council's long term financial plans as key to the delivery of the 10 Year Strategy.

4.7 The effectiveness of Scrutiny

Scrutiny was also an area of particular focus for the peer challenge. The Council's internal scrutiny arrangements are generally well thought of, with confidence in the Chair of Overview & Scrutiny. There is a clear process for determining the scrutiny work programme and agendas, with the future work programme being agreed by the Committee. The recent introduction of a requirement on members wishing to put an item on the Committee's agenda / work programme to produce a rationale for this appears to be a helpful development. The Executive is a willing partner in scrutiny, in particular where it can contribute to future policy development. The team understand that Executive members are now more regularly attending and addressing scrutiny meetings and this should continue. Officers value scrutiny as a vehicle for developing cross-party support, for example in the development of the Homelessness Strategy.

The creation of a Joint Scrutiny Committee of members from all three councils to scrutinise the Strata ICT company is a positive development. The recognition that this scrutiny should be based on the Strata business plan is encouraging and in due course the Committee should monitor the delivery of the anticipated savings and service improvements, and ensure that it has access to the information required to do this. The Joint Scrutiny Committee has re-scheduled its meetings so that it is in a position to undertake pre-scrutiny of decisions by the Strata Executive Committee. Such scrutiny of joint arrangements is new to Teignbridge like many other councils. Scrutiny of business and other formal partnerships requires a different mindset and approach and more of an external perspective. Members from the other councils participating in the Strata arrangements are facing similar challenges and Teignbridge should work with them to develop effective approaches and provide development and other support for members to bring this about. More generally, the team feel that the scrutiny of other external partners needs further development in Teignbridge.

The success or otherwise of scrutiny ultimately depends more on the interest, approach, skills and commitment of the members taking part rather than structural arrangements. But structures and / or flexibility in their use can have a bearing on this. The success of the car parking task and finish group was reported to the team. The Council could make more use of such arrangements. A single Overview & Scrutiny Committee with 30 members may not be the best way to engage the interest and aptitudes of all members. Teignbridge may wish to consider a new structure with one or more 'forward looking' committees responsible for policy development and similarly one or more 'backward looking' committees concerned with holding the Executive to account for decision making and implementation (the model adopted by Rushcliffe BC for example). Members could then participate and develop their skills in the aspects of scrutiny which most interest them, and provide a basis for promoting the opportunities and impact of scrutiny to members. An important area of focus for a committee holding the Executive to account should be delivery of the Teignbridge Ten.

5. Next steps

Immediate next steps

We appreciate you will want to reflect on these findings and suggestions with your senior managerial and political leadership in order to determine how the Council 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. Andy Bates, Principal Adviser is the main contact between your authority and the Local Government Association (LGA). His contact details are: tel. 07919 562849 and e-mail andy.bates@local.gov.uk .

In the meantime we are keen to continue the relationship we have formed with you and colleagues through the peer challenge. We will endeavour to provide additional

information and signposting about the issues we have raised in this report to help inform your ongoing consideration.

Follow up visit

The LGA 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 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 12-24 months.