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October 2014

Dear Diane

Lichfield District Council - Corporate Peer Challenge
9th-11th September 2014

On behalf of the peer team I would like to say what a pleasure and privilege it was to be invited into Lichfield District Council to deliver the recent corporate peer challenge as part of the Local Government Association (LGA) offer to support sector led improvement.

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 Lichfield were:

- Antoinette Jackson - Chief Executive, Cambridge City Council
- Councillor Tony Jackson – Leader, East Hertfordshire District Council
- Beverley Smith – Corporate Director, Mansfield District Council
- Kirsty Cole – Deputy Chief Executive, Newark & Sherwood District Council
- Ed Hammond – Head of Programmes (Local Accountability), Centre for Public Scrutiny (CfPS)
- Paul Clarke – Programme Manager (Local Government Support), Local Government Association (LGA)

Scope and focus of the peer challenge

You asked the peer team to look at the areas considered by all LGA corporate peer challenges in the context of your plans for the future:

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?

You also asked the peer team to provide feedback on your Overview and Scrutiny arrangements and provide views on your plans for economic development. We have included specific sections on those two areas of additional focus within this letter.

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 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 days onsite at Lichfield District Council, during which they:

- Spoke to more than 80 people including a range of council staff together with councillors and external partners and stakeholders.
- Gathered information and views from more than 30 meetings and additional research, reading and site visits.
- Collectively spent more than 200 hours to determine their findings – the equivalent of one person spending nearly 6 weeks in Lichfield District 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 (9th-11th September 2014). 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.

Summary of feedback: overall observations and messages

Lichfield District Council has a good track record and reputation. It has in the past been categorised as 'good' under the Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA), and was renowned for impressive performance in specific services such as waste recycling. More recently it has delivered some notable achievements on its economic development agenda, and is undoubtedly punching above its weight in other areas such as its role in public health. The Council is well respected externally by partners, and clearly has a proud workforce and committed councillors who want to do their best for Lichfield district. These will all be crucial elements to utilise and build on as the Council continues to respond to the challenges it faces, and proactively plan for the future operating environment and context.

There is a good awareness and understanding of the immediate priorities, not least the short term financial challenge facing the Council. Rapid and decisive leadership and action has been taken over the last year or so to manage the immediate budgetary pressures and this appears to have provided some short term stability and certainty to the Council's financial planning. However, there did not seem to be a plan to achieve sustainable transformation over the medium to long term. To mitigate this there is an urgent need to focus more on the future and provide a greater clarity of the Council's longer term vision and ambitions. Agreeing the political values and organisational operating principles required to support and deliver the vision and ambitions will provide a better and longer term basis for decision making and priority setting.

There are without doubt pockets of excellence and good practice at Lichfield. But the organisation does not currently have a strong corporate culture or ethos. This is preventing the Council from maximising its efficiency and productivity, and is also potentially increasing the risk of governance issues. Adopting more of a 'one council' approach will enable the organisation to be more productive and ensure it operates in a more consistent and transparent manner. It may also help create and realign capacity and resources to enable and support effective transformation and deliver future priorities. Currently specific support for the 'Fit for the Future' change programme seems light given the ambitious levels of financial savings predicated on it.

It is clear there is an appetite from councillors and officers for effective Overview and Scrutiny at Lichfield, and good levels of engagement in the process. However, much of the scrutiny activity is not strategically focused, and there is limited evidence of it achieving better outcomes. Whilst there is an almost universal desire across those involved in it to improve its effectiveness, the focus is on changing the structure of the function. We strongly advocate that scrutiny improvement must be about culture, and focus on the potential for scrutiny to enhance corporate capacity and make a timely and meaningful contribution to key decision and strategic policy development.

The Council has rightly recognised economic development and growth as a priority for Lichfield. There are a plethora of partnerships and programmes advocating and

achieving economic growth, to which the Council contributes to. But it was not clear to us what the Council's Economic Development Strategy is. The Council needs to develop its own narrative and vision to better enable prioritisation of its diminishing resources within existing partnerships. In particular we suggest a vision and strategy that focusses on one functional economic area may now be needed.

Summary of feedback: priority setting, financial viability, leadership, governance and capacity to deliver future ambitions

Understanding of local context and priority setting

There is a good awareness and understanding across the organisation of the key priorities and challenges, not least the budget situation which has clearly been the dominant issue over the past year and a half. Now that the immediate challenge has been addressed, the attention needs to shift to agreeing a longer term vision. Moving forward there is a need for more clarity about the future shape and style of organisation required to deliver priorities. We suggest this needs to include being clear on the values and principles of the organisation. Political support and drive will be required to create the new operating model and will be essential in guiding how the organisation invests in future shared services, further collaboration and locality commissioning, and to inform workforce development and member support.

Future priorities and ways of working need to be considered in terms of how best to deliver outcomes and meet needs. Currently the emphasis is on service delivery, and the debate about financial savings is centered on reducing discretionary services and protecting statutory ones. There is a risk that this approach will miss opportunities of redesigning current services and interventions to better deliver priority outcomes. It also runs the risk of merely displacing demand, increasing need, or detrimentally impacting on the Council's ability to deliver on priorities through remaining services and activity.

We think the planned Away Days for the Cabinet and Leadership Team over the next few weeks and months are critical opportunities to begin to consider all of the above. They are a chance for senior officers and leading members as the Authority's 'top team' to jointly consider and agree a long term vision, ambition, and priorities, and the operating principles and the organisational development required to deliver these, along with the values and behaviours needed to realise a 'one council' approach. We appreciate the local elections in May 2015 may be seen as a natural watershed for a new Corporate Plan and vision, but given the need to provide a framework for key decisions about the Council's financial strategy and change programme - ensuring they help support and enable an organisation that is fit for the future - we think there is a need for the deliberations to begin before then.

In doing this, we encourage you to be mindful that partners appear keen to be engaged and involved in future plans and design. An outcome and needs led approach will undoubtedly require more joining up across the public sector to pool resource and capacity - something you have already recognised and demonstrated through your emerging local commissioning approach – so the engagement of partners will be important.

We were concerned to come across some pockets of denial about the long term financial context. Some people we spoke to - both councillors and officers - were under the illusion that the financial outlook for the public sector and local government might potentially improve beyond 2015/16. This is extremely unlikely. In communicating the future vision, ambition and priorities it will be important that there is a compelling and clear narrative about the context within which the Council's strategy and development sits, to ensure there is full buy-in and understanding for change across all parts of the organisation.

Financial planning and viability

It was clear to us that rapid and decisive action taken has been taken to manage the £1.7 million revenue budget deficit identified in early 2013. Phase 1 of the 'Fit for the Future' programme has achieved significant savings (£1.3 million) and has helped to put the Council on a firmer financial footing in the short. For example, general reserves are now at a level well above the minimum level you have assessed is required. A staff suggestions scheme, the programme of service reviews (phase 2 of the Fit for the Future) and the recent public consultation exercise on budget savings ideas are all being used to identify and sense check some of the potential service reduction options, and will undoubtedly help inform the next round of future savings decisions required.

The Medium Term Financial Plan includes a clear policy to move away from drawing on reserves to balance the budget. This provides clarity and confidence about the overall strategy. But we question whether all potential options to balance the books and fund the priorities are currently being considered. As mentioned previously, the current emphasis seems to be on identifying the potential to reduce discretionary service provision. We saw little evidence of opportunities for cross cutting and corporate efficiencies being explored. For example, we heard very little about things such as procurement, and other areas where many authorities are successfully realising efficiencies, achieving greater productivity, and reducing cost - such as contract negotiation, commercialisation, income generation, demand management and reviewing staff terms and conditions (albeit we know there is a planned Fit for the Future review of the latter).

We appreciate that the service reviews established as part of 'Fit for the Future' are not designed solely to save money but intended as an exercise to make sure the

Council is delivering services that communities need in the most appropriate and cost efficient way – including an exploration of some of the above. However, with limited corporate capacity to enable internal challenge and support a consistent implementation of the review methodology, some reviews seem to be defaulting to identifying ways of simply reducing the cost base of current services. If the Fit for the Future programme is to make a significant contribution to the £2.48 million savings required by 2016/17 then it may be that further investment is needed to enable the substantial exploration, consideration and appraisal of opportunities for significant transformation (such as a re-design of back office processes, new delivery vehicles, etc.).

The long term financial sustainability of the Council remains a challenge. You have rightly recognised the uncertainty on future Central Government grants, adapting the business rate retention scheme, the Council's capital budget pressures and the sustainability of the New Homes Bonus as key challenges. We identified the latter as a significant risk, given that by 2016/17 you are anticipating £2 million (nearly 20%) of your revenue budget being funded by it.

We strongly encouraged you to ensure there is robust scenario planning and sensitivity analysis of future uncertainties as part of your medium to long term financial planning. We were not clear as to whether there is a 'plan B' should some of the assumptions not materialize (e.g. New Homes Bonus), or whether there would be a political willingness to scale back on capital programme ambitions or explore other means of funding them given the current position on borrowing.

Political and managerial leadership:

The Chief Executive and Leader are both respected and well thought of by staff and external stakeholders and have obviously been instrumental in ensuring the reputation of the Council remains positive. Both are aware of the need for the Council to significantly change and evolve to respond to future challenges, and the Cabinet/Leadership Team Away Day in October will be an important opportunity to consider the narrative and communication that is provided to the wider organisation about this.

Most service managers appear to be up for change but will need clear leadership and narrative about the future vision and direction of travel. A coherent vision of what the council of the future looks and feels like will provide clarity about the shape, style and size of organisation required. It will provide a framework for prioritising, allocating and co-ordinating resources and capacity and for determining who, how and when you work with or influence others to leverage external capacity and deliver your priorities.

Cabinet portfolio holders are providing clear political leadership on a day-to-day basis within their individual areas and obviously have a good grasp of their brief. They will need to build on this to provide more corporate political leadership focused on set of shared outcomes. Moving forward there will need for absolute clarity on the political imperatives and non-negotiables, but also a steer on the operating principles to provide a clear basis for the strategy and decisions on things such as asset transfers, shared services and collaboration, channel shift and commissioning. Currently the strategy seems to be taking advantage of ad hoc opportunities and it may be there is a need for a clearer policy and strategy.

Senior officers have a key role in ensuring that the organisation feels more corporate and collegiate, and has a genuine 'one council' ethos. Currently a lack of operational consistency across the Leadership Team is leading to uncertainty amongst staff depending on where they sit in the organisation. We were told, for example, that the Fit for the Future service reviews were being implemented in different ways and that the pace of these varied significantly from department to department. There are also apparent variances in the implementation of policies such as flexible working across the organisation.

Governance and decision-making

The majority of information to councillors appears to be routed through the Overview and Scrutiny Committees, either through the meeting agendas or related member briefings. We comment specifically on the Overview and Scrutiny arrangements later in this letter, but there is we think a need to consider councillor's needs in the round including the briefing and support provided to them in their various roles and the training and development opportunities offered.

Member-officer relationships generally appear to be positive and based on mutual respect. But it is clear that on occasions these have become too informal, casual, over-familiar and, as many people put it, 'very cosy'. This might well be a consequence of low staff turnover and long serving councillors and the longevity of some key relationships. Whilst this is not an issue in itself, it does risk relationships not being mutually challenging and professional. Moving forward we think it will be crucial to ensure that high ethical standards, transparency, and systematic challenge (internal and external) are a key part of member-officer relationships, but also of governance, decision-making, and organisational culture more generally.

Whilst the key corporate systems and processes one would expect to see to support sound governance (such as regular and robust budget monitoring and risk management,) are in place, some of the key procedures and protocols may be in need of review and refresh – including the constitution which has not been comprehensively reviewed or updated for several years. You have acknowledged this and have made some recent improvements, for example budget monitoring has been

strengthened recently. We understand plans are in place to review the approach to risk management, and to look at the constitution and levels of delegation.

Notwithstanding the recent improvements and planned reviews, there is currently an apparent casual and 'laissez-faire' attitude across the organisation towards compliance with corporate processes. Managers clearly feel they have discretion on how they interpret and implement practice, and appear to be able to opt in or out of using corporate procurement and HR procedures without sanctions.

At best this leads to inconsistency across the organisation and reinforces a siloed culture. At worst it increases the risk of governance issues and failings arising, a risk that is arguably increased by the absence of shared and embedded organisational values and limited corporate capacity to enforce and support compliance. We think this is an important area for the Council to consider further and do more to address. In doing so you should consider awareness raising and training activity for staff and councillors to complement some of the process updates and reinforce the importance of high ethical standards and transparency.

Organisational capacity

As resources have reduced, the Council has shown an appetite to find new and effective ways of delivering services and outcomes. The Council is clearly flexible and receptive to different forms of shared services and collaboration as means by which to increase capacity, build resilience, improve outcomes and reduce costs. You are working with a range of partners and partnerships to enable the delivery of services and outcomes – for example, working with social housing partners to deliver work clubs, your work to pool budgets with other agencies locally, accommodating a County Council officer in the District Council offices, and the economic development work conducted through the Business and Economic Partnership. You are involved in a number of shared service arrangements with neighbouring districts, and the Council is also embracing asset transfers as a means of reducing running costs and empowering communities.

Partners are positive about their relationship with the Council and the contribution it makes to shared agendas and outcomes is recognised. The District Board (as the Local Strategic Partnership) is clearly valued by those who participate in it, along with a mature understanding that the role of the Board may need to evolve, particularly as the locality commissioning approach develops further. It will be important that the dialogue continues as partners, including the County Council, make their choices in response to budget reductions.

Whilst it is creditable that the Council is open to a range of new ideas and ways of working, there is of course a danger that the 'mixed economy' of approaches (albeit driven by whatever delivers the best outcomes for the people of Lichfield) becomes

increasingly diverse and varied, and stretches the capacity and skills of the organisation to effectively support them. There are signs that the Council is already beginning to struggle and we think you need to consider the shape, style and skills of organisation required for the future. As suggested already, clarity on what the council of the future looks like will provide a context and more deliberate strategy for prioritising, allocating and co-ordinating resources and for determining who, how and when you work with or influence. It will also help shape and inform the transformation and organisational development activity required.

More generally, we think the Council needs to decide how it can better resource and develop more capacity in the functions that enable and support good governance, organisational productivity and the transformation required. You have already recognised that ICT has an important role to play, both in terms of better supporting the day-to-day business of the Council but also enabling transformation. But there are other areas that need to be strengthened further to support effective change such as programme and project management.

You will also need to consider how the organisation levers in different skills and expertise at different times to support change and transformation. You will need to ensure that temporary capacity, skills and knowledge are secured through flexible and agile arrangements including for example internal and external secondments, and perhaps support from the sector too.

Summary of feedback: Overview and Scrutiny

Councillors are enthusiastic about Overview and Scrutiny and are very engaged in the process. There is an almost universal consensus that scrutiny as it currently operates 'doesn't work' as well as it might, but little in the way of ideas from members or senior officers about how it might develop further other than changing the way it is structured. We think that the focus needs to be more on the developing the culture, approaches and practice that occur within those existing structures. This should include rethinking what topics scrutiny investigates and reviews, and how it carries out that work, why and when.

Overview and Scrutiny is currently trying to do too much for the resource available. As one person put it, the Council has an 'overactive scrutiny gland'. There is lots of activity, but much of it is superficial and not strategically focused. There has rightly been a push to involve Scrutiny Committees more at the pre-decision stage, recognising that this can help enable better informed decision-making and policy development. But this seems to have resulted in almost everything being routed through the Scrutiny Committees before being submitted to Cabinet, regardless of the potential value that scrutiny could add to those individual decisions. You have sought to address this through the introduction of member briefings, but despite this, there is still a risk that Committee agendas become filled with individual operational decisions,

rather than items focused on challenging and strengthening the policy and strategy guiding those matters.

For example, the meeting of the Leisure, Parks and Waste Management (Overview and Scrutiny) Committee we observed included detailed debate of proposed asset transfers and lengthy discussions of a decision to commit a small amount of leverage/match funding. Time may have been better spent ensuring the Council had a clear, robust and relevant policy, strategy and assessment criteria in place to guide these decisions – leaving officers to get on with progressing these rather than feeling compelled to write a report and engage the Committee each time an opportunity arises.

By focusing Overview and Scrutiny more on policy and strategy, there is greater potential for it to help enhance the corporate capacity of the organisation. As we have alluded to earlier, major debate and decisions about the future of Lichfield are needed in the short and medium term. Active member involvement in those decisions through the scrutiny process in a proportionate way will mean a more integrated scrutiny function that makes a meaningful and timely contribution to the strategic business and direction of the Council. To help facilitate that you might consider a regular dialogue between Cabinet, the Overview and Scrutiny Co-Ordinating Group, and senior officers about broad strategic direction and key policy items for the Scrutiny work programme.

Whilst officers value the opportunity Scrutiny Committees allow to seek reassurance and endorsement for their proposals or decisions, we question whether that makes the most of councillor's enthusiasm and commitment, and the value that they could bring in offering a different perspective on major decisions.

This issue is accentuated by the fact that councillors are essentially 'passive recipients' of officer information. Information tends not to be gathered from alternative sources such as from frontline staff, members of the public, partners or elsewhere. This derives in part from the diffuse way in which officer support is provided to scrutiny committees, which at the moment places too much emphasis on the role of chief officers in service departments, and not enough on the need for a central policy resource for scrutiny. This creates an inability to triangulate evidence presented by officers with other independent sources in order to effectively challenge the Authority. Consequently, the return on investment in scrutiny is currently limited.

As such, and given an apparent pre-occupation with the cost of the scrutiny function, we think more thought needs to go into long-term investment in scrutiny based on its potential value for corporate improvement. The Council should – alongside broader steps to enhance corporate capacity – take some time to experiment with different approaches and methods on scrutiny. This should focus on developing more outcome-driven task and finish work, a more intelligent approach to pre-decision scrutiny which focuses on quality rather quantity and a more directed and forensic use of performance, finance and risk information.

This development work should focus on a culture change as regards the position, profile and value of scrutiny within the organisation. This culture change will require an acceptance by councillors that they will not – as at present – be able to receive, at committee, frequent updates on all council business on a regular basis. A proportionate approach to member briefing should help to allay any concerns that this approach may bring about.

Councillors should be engaged and involved in designing and evaluating the different approaches taken and deciding what, if any, permanent change should be made to how scrutiny operates once a variety of different methods have been attempted, perhaps over the course of the next year. Structural change to scrutiny can follow on from this evaluation, if it is felt that it is required. The Leadership Team will need to collectively help drive it forward as part of the wider corporate governance improvements.

Understanding that a revitalised Overview and Scrutiny function will bring significant value to corporate decision-making we think helps to make the case for a temporary increase in the specialist resourcing/support made available to scrutiny, at least until the evaluation we have suggested has taken place and a longer-term solution can be implemented. We know this is not easy, but think the investment that you make in scrutiny has to be seen as part and parcel of the broader investment we suggested earlier that you need to make in transformation.

Summary of feedback: Economic Development

The Council has a good track record and reputation for delivery on its economic development agenda. The recent development scheme at The Friary, the securing of High Street Innovation Fund in Burntwood, the ongoing work to develop a Business Improvement District (BID) for Lichfield and the Lichfield City Town Team initiative are all good examples of delivery on the ground. The shared service arrangement with Tamworth appears to be operating effectively, and is considered to be punching above its weight. Built on a mature relationship between members at Tamworth and Lichfield it is enabling some notable successes – such as Defence Medical Services where business location within the functional economic area was not constrained by district council boundaries, benefitting communities from both District areas.

Notwithstanding these successes, and your long standing strategic ambition and headway to deliver the Friarsgate scheme, we were not clear what Council's own Economic Development Strategy is. We appreciate the need to work through the shared economic development service arrangements with Tamworth, and the various sub-regional and regional partnerships and shared agendas. But we think to do this effectively and efficiently Lichfield needs to develop its own narrative and vision – so you are clear on where you see economic growth occurring (sector and area) and

how Council services are helping to contribute to the economic development of the district.

This will better enable prioritisation of diminishing resources within existing partnerships and inform your consideration of the organisational capacity required to contribute effectively to the growth agenda, and support the initiatives and projects most critical to the needs of businesses and the priority outcomes sought. We questioned, for example, where the capacity currently provided through the Southern Staffordshire Partnership will come from when that body is disbanded next year.

The development of a BID for Lichfield is a positive opportunity, but you will need to ensure Council services (e.g. regulatory functions) can respond to the requirements of it and make sure it supports the needs of local businesses. There will need to be a clear political will to facilitate an 'open for business' ethos across all parts of the organisation, enabling it to engage with most influential businesses. We also saw a need to further develop the information and intelligence you have on businesses across the district. There is limited direct engagement and relationships with key businesses. More analysis and understanding is required, for example about the biggest employers and their expansion plans, to ensure the Council is well positioned to proactively respond to needs.

The Council is clearly doing some excellent place marketing through its Tourism service. Whilst strategies exist, there is a need we think to ensure economic development and tourism are better linked. Currently they seem to be separate and disparate services and strategies. Given the array of advantages and assets the district has to offer as a place (transport links, location, availability of business spaces, cultural and destination assets, etc.) we think the Council needs to promote the offer more – both nationally and regionally – to attract more inward investment into the district. An inward investment programme can be enhanced through closer working relationships with the major employers in the District to act as Ambassadors promoting Lichfield as a place to live and do business.

We questioned whether a continued role in two Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) is sustainable for the Council. We understand and appreciate why the Council has chosen this position to date. But we think it will become increasingly difficult for the Council to maintain a meaningful presence in both of the Partnerships given the increasingly complex economic development landscape and the organisational capacity required to effectively contribute to two LEPs – in particular the ability for the Council to be 'strategically ready' to respond to requirements to bid for funding, and have 'shovel ready' schemes ready to go. There is also the need to consider the implications of combined authorities – something that many LEPs are looking at – and whether their governance arrangements will enable you to be a member of more than one Partnership.

Based on what we saw, heard and read, Lichfield's functional economic area is obviously Birmingham (especially in terms of travel to work and transport links) and there is therefore a compelling economic rationale to be a member of the Greater Birmingham and Solihull LEP. This alignment has already reaped an array of benefits for the district including funding for 'Capacity Development Programme', research on fast-growth SMEs, close working relationship with Marketing Birmingham, Birmingham Business Support Programme, and £28million ring-fenced for South Staffordshire.

There is less of an economic rationale for the Council's membership of the Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire LEP, albeit we understand the political rationale and motivation to be part of it. But that is not to say the Council can't continue to maintain a productive working relationship with the LEP and can still engage and benefit without being a member. Indeed, our understanding is that both Tamworth (with whom you share an economic development service) and East Staffordshire are effectively doing just that. So it would not be without precedent.

Our key recommendations and suggestions

The peer team developed some key suggestions for you to consider. These are based on what we saw, heard and read. Drawing on our experience of the sector and knowledge of local government improvement, we have made several suggestions throughout the letter of things you may wish to consider. The following are the key things we think you should consider and take forward:

1. Begin to consider, develop and agree a longer term vision, ambition, priorities for the Council, including the operating principles and organisational development required, and the values and behaviours (One Council) needed.
2. Use the learning to date to build on and develop the Fit for the Future programme to:
 - Ensure there is a robust, effective review methodology including programme/project management, that is followed consistently across the organisation
 - Extend the scope beyond service reviews into a wider transformational agenda, building on the thematic reviews already identified
 - Ensure reviews are prioritised in alignment with the vision and priorities
3. Further develop your longer term financial strategy, including sensitivity and risk analysis, and scenario planning. Look at what other authorities are doing.
4. Consider how you resource and develop more capacity in the functions that enable and support good governance, organisational productivity and transformation.

5. Review and refresh the way Overview and Scrutiny operates focusing on culture and behaviours (rather than structures) so that it:
 - Has a clarity and consensus of purpose
 - Is more strategically focused and outcome driven
 - Makes more forensic use of performance, finance and risk information
6. Develop a clearer narrative on the Council's economic development aspirations. This will then help inform a review of the operational and strategic capacity required to ensure you are able to play a full role in the growth agenda for Lichfield
7. Consider aligning only with the Greater Birmingham and Solihull LEP (whilst still maintaining a relationship with the Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent LEP)

Next steps

You will undoubtedly wish to reflect on these findings and suggestions made 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 activity to support this and we would be happy to discuss this further. In the meantime we are keen to continue the relationship we have formed with you and colleagues through the peer challenge to date. We will endeavour to provide further information and signposting on the above to help inform your ongoing consideration and thinking.

I thought it helpful to provide contact details for Howard Davis who, as you know, is our Principal Adviser (West Midlands). Howard can be contacted via email at howard.davis@local.gov.uk (or tel. 07920 061197). He is the main contact between your authority and the Local Government Association. Hopefully this provides you with a convenient and continued route of access to the Local Government Association, its resources and any further support.

All of us connected with the peer challenge would like to wish you every success going forward. Once again, many thanks to you and your colleagues for inviting the peer challenge and to everyone involved for their participation.

Paul Clarke - Programme Manager (Local Government Support)
Local Government Association
On behalf of the peer challenge team