

Corporate Peer Challenge

Preston City Council

10-12 February 2016

Feedback Report

Executive Summary

Preston is a city which has achieved much and has huge potential for the future. There is a clear commitment to growing Preston backed by credible plans. Good progress is being made with the work centered on the City Deal acting as a catalyst for significant economic growth in the city, infrastructure and large-scale housing proposals.

The city has a wealth of existing assets such as the University of Central Lancashire (which continues to expand significantly), and excellent connectivity through the motorway and rail network. There is clear political and managerial senior leadership driving improvement within the city and the council.

The council's ambition must be matched by the appropriate capacity in the right areas if it is to deliver on its plans effectively. The overall staffing, financial and management capacity of the council will be a challenge in a time of diminishing public sector resources. Preston City Council will need to be a different organisation in a few years' time. One which has embraced different operating models, used its influencing role more, driven better value for money in some service areas and take a more commercial approach. The council is well placed to make this transformation but must be confident and think through what kind of place it wants Preston to be - and what kind of organisation Preston City Council will need to be – to help deliver this ambition.

The council and its partner agencies have already been seizing opportunities to make some of this happen. This includes the sale of the Guild Hall, working closely with UCLAN to support its growth plans and delivering a range of interesting projects to promote a fairer society in Preston. It also has a number of significant plans to regenerate the city centre in the pipeline.

However, the economic development ambition the council has is not always matched by actions taken through the planning process. There is now a need to improve the pre-application process, broaden member experience of planning and improve the speed of decision-making by the Planning Committee to ensure the council can progress one of its biggest priorities at an appropriate pace and maintain its relationships with both local communities and developers.

The council's 'fairness' agenda is innovative. It continues to emerge and it's interesting that the council is exploring how communities can be strengthened to do more for themselves in the future. A key part of this approach in the future could be a strong drive to reduce demand for services. There are also opportunities to work with other agencies in the city to support people into jobs, play a stronger influencing role with registered social landlords, the clinical commissioning group and the university. The report contains a number of specific ideas which the council could take forward to put more emphasis on improving community resilience.

Overall, the council has achieved much. There is an excellent opportunity to now more carefully think through what kind of place the council thinks Preston should be and how it will more closely align its financial and 'people' resources to deliver on these priorities.

Summary of the peer challenge approach

The peer team

On behalf of the team, I would like to say how much we enjoyed spending time in Preston to work with you on the recent corporate peer challenge. The team very much appreciated the welcome we received and the positive way with which people engaged in the process and the support provided in the lead up to, and during the course of, the challenge.

It is testimony to the council's desire for constructive external insight that Preston commissioned the peer challenge. Peer challenges are managed and delivered by experienced elected member and officer peers. The peers who delivered the peer challenge were:

- Jim Dillon, Chief Executive, Scarborough Borough Council, (lead peer)
- Councillor Bryony Rudkin, Deputy Leader, Ipswich Borough Council
- Tracy Harvey, Head of Planning & Building Control, St Albans City & District Council
- Neil Shaw, Programme Manager, Local Government Association

Scope and focus

You asked the peer team to explore how the council can better:

- Support investment and business growth
- Develop community resilience

The peers used their experience and knowledge to reflect on the evidence presented to them by people they met, things they saw and material that they read. There are a series of guiding questions for all corporate peer challenges which we used to explore the first area of focus. These are:

- Does the council understand its local context and has it established a clear set of priorities?
- Does the council have a financial plan in place to ensure long term viability and is there evidence that it is being implemented successfully?
- Does the council have effective political and managerial leadership and is it a constructive partnership?
- Are effective governance and decision-making arrangements in place to respond to key challenges and manage change and transformation?
- Are organisational capacity and resources focused in the right areas in order to deliver the agreed priorities?

The peer challenge process

It is important to stress that this was not an inspection. Peer challenges are improvement-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 three days onsite at 10-12 February 2016, during which they:

- Spoke to more than 70 people including a range of council staff together with councillors and external partners/agencies and stakeholders.
- Gathered information and views from meetings, visits to key development sites in the city, observing a Planning Committee meeting and additional research and reading.
- Collectively spent more than 120 hours to determine their findings – the equivalent of one person spending more than 3 weeks at the authority.

This report provides a summary of the peer team's findings. It builds on the feedback presentation provided by the peer team at the end of their on-site visit. In presenting feedback to you, they have done so as fellow local government officers and members, not professional consultants or inspectors. By its nature, the peer challenge is a snapshot in time. We appreciate that some of the feedback may be about things you are already addressing and progressing.

Feedback

Understanding of the local place and priority setting

1. Collectively, elected members demonstrate a depth of understanding of the needs of local communities and a passion for wanting to see better, fairer, outcomes for local people. The Labour Administration have provided a clear steer on priorities for the council and as part of this process, in 2015 the council published a new corporate plan with three priorities: Your City, Your Council and Fairness for You.
2. Preston is a challenging place. It is good to see that overall deprivation in the city has reduced over the last 10 years. However, it is still amongst some of the highest areas in the country for the proportion of the population living in the most deprived super output areas nationally. It also has some challenging health inequalities.
3. Despite having clarity on current priorities, the council is likely to benefit from developing its strategic thinking on more clearly defining what kind of place it would like to see Preston being in the future. At the moment, the priorities reinforce the importance of growing the local economy to the council and also help the council cope with year-on-year budget reductions. It could be much more. The priorities could more clearly express what kind of place Preston should be in the future.

Leadership of place

4. On its 'Your City' priority it is clear that the council has a well-informed view of the actions needed to drive forward the achievement of this priority. This includes clear economic development plans, engagement with developers and advanced discussions (and support) for the University of Central Lancashire (UCLAN) who will be a pivotal part of the development of the city centre over the next 5-10 years. Similarly, on the 'Your Council' priority there is a good understanding of the projects and pieces of work which should deliver on this priority.
5. The council's emphasis on the 'fairness agenda' is innovative and emerging. The council is showing clear leadership on this issue locally. However, greater clarity is needed on the main drivers and actions to improve 'fairness' in Preston. There are some excellent opportunities to use the council's influencing role with public and private sector organisations in the city to drive progress on this agenda. This may deliver a stronger impact without the council feeling it always needs to directly deliver projects to progress this priority.
6. Now and in the past, the performance of a number of core council services has been good. For example, 39.5% of waste is being recycled annually, there are over 500 new housing completions per annum and the processing time for major planning applications is good.

Organisational leadership and governance

7. Since 2011 the council has had a Labour Administration. The Leader is well respected. The Labour Administration have provided a clear steer on priorities and these are well understood by both members and officers. The council's key governance structures, including the Cabinet and arrangements like the Scrutiny Committee, are clear.
8. The council has a relatively new senior management team, led by an experienced Chief Executive. The creation of the new senior management team within the last twelve months is now bedding in and the creation of the new corporate plan is providing a clearer focus for activities and projects.
9. The council recognises the unique position Preston has within Lancashire as the home of both Lancashire County Council and UCLAN. Together the three have established a Collaboration Board. This brings the three largest agencies in the city together to work coherently on development issues and take a joined up approach to planning facilities, services and development in the city centre.
10. The biggest leadership challenge for the council will be to decide whether it wishes to maintain its current strategic direction as a largely in-house provider of services or move to a mixture of different operating models that may be better at delivering strong outcomes for local people within the financial envelope of a reducing public sector budget. There are some early indications that this is beginning to be explored, for example in areas like leisure and the council will need to keep an open mind to the best options for delivering outcomes in the future.
11. The council has a shared service arrangement on revenues and benefits with Lancaster City Council. This appears to have reduced cost although claims processing times are above the average of other districts/boroughs in the North West. Shared service provision is limited overall and opportunistic i.e. largely when staff retire/leave the authority. Part of the future delivery options for services will be maintaining an open minded approach to more shared service options on a geographical 'footprint' which makes sense to service users. The council has sought to explore some opportunities in the past but this can only progress with willing partner agencies.
12. The council is actively involved in the current discussions and work to develop the proposal for a Lancashire Combined Authority. The chief executive has played an integral part in the working group progressing proposals and this has helped to ensure a strong input for Lancashire districts/boroughs to the development process. The development of the Combined Authority is a work in progress and the proposal for a clearer 'devolution deal' will become clearer in 2016 as the details of the proposal is shaped.

Financial planning and viability

13. The council has a revenue budget of £20.9m in 2015/16. The council set a savings target of £3.6m over the three years from 2014/15 to manage the reduction in the revenue budget as the Government's revenue support grant has reduced significantly. In 2015/16 the council the majority of savings planned are on target with some savings planned for future years being achieved earlier.
14. The council currently has £23.1m of reserves (a proportion of which are earmarked for contingencies and risks). The council has used £0.5m of reserves this year and plans to use a further £1.2m next year. The council is looking to support its general running of services via reserves in the next few years and recognises that this is not a sustainable position with the current level of general fund reserves being used at the current rate they will be exhausted by 2018/19. Some other local authorities have chosen to drive out reductions in revenue budgets and use only relatively modest amounts of reserves to balance the budget. The council needs to consider how it uses reserves to balance the overall budget in the future in order to ensure the future financial resilience of the council.
15. The council recognises its financial challenge. This will need to take account of the recently announced four year Local Government Finance Settlement and proposals to devolve 100% of business rates to councils, including Preston. As yet it is unclear what these proposals will mean for the council's finances especially in light of the City Deal and economic growth plan, which could increase their business rates take and council tax take, but also the costs of providing services to a significant number of new additional homes.
16. The council have examined its asset base as part of planning its longer-term financial position. This has included the closure of Lancastrina House and moving many services back into the Town Hall. It is good to see the council grasping the nettle on better use of its assets and this is a position it intends to keep under review for its other major assets.
17. Part of the financial challenge will be to drive better value for money in key services areas. For example, spend on back office support and museums is amongst the highest spending 5% of district councils nationally and spend per head of population on street cleansing is amongst the highest spending 10% of district councils nationally. More detailed analysis should be undertaken in areas where value for money is relatively worse than most other district/borough councils. Exploring options to achieve better value for money in these particular areas must be another key part of making the council more financially sustainable in the medium term. This should be considered alongside the strategic debate with leaders about other options for providing some services in the future.

18. As the council has very limited external provision of services its opportunities to achieve its savings target through re-negotiating contracts is extremely limited (unlike many other local authorities).
19. Another part of the financial challenge will be for the council to generate greater income. Income generation is significantly underdeveloped and there are opportunities to help make a better contribution to the council's financial position. The council is reviewing its ability to trade on a more commercial basis through exploring a number of options including arms-length trading companies. It is important to ensure a consistent approach across appropriate service areas if this approach is to be further developed.
20. The council has been open to looking at some new options. For example, it is good to see the council has already commissioned work to explore ways of making the Harris Museum & Art Gallery more commercial whilst retaining this integral cultural offer at the heart of the city centre. The Museum has a major financial impact for such a small local authority and finding a better financial platform for its future operation will be a major plank in the council's future financial sustainability. Some other districts/boroughs across the country are experiencing similar challenges with council owned cultural facilities and there may be opportunities to learn from others. For example, Carlisle City Council has been keen to explore how it manages facilities like Tullie House Museum & Art Gallery.

Capacity to deliver

21. The council is a much smaller organisation than it was five years ago. In 2009 the council had 1,149 employees and in 2016 this is down to around 700 (although it still has the second highest number of staff of a district/borough council in the North West). There is palpable enthusiasm from frontline staff and middle managers to make Preston a vibrant city and the council a highly quality provider of services. Despite reductions in budgets and staff, morale appears to be good. Staff have a realistic understanding that the council needs to change in the future.
22. The council have recently established an Innovation and Delivery Group. This could be an excellent opportunity to empower middle managers to seek innovative solutions to challenging problems. It would be good to see the Group selecting some challenging issues/services and seeing what creative solutions they might have to deliver strong outcomes on public sector issues.
23. Over a period of time the council has reduced its managerial structural levels as it continues its journey towards greater efficiency. This has been done in a managed way to ensure it has the capacity to deliver. However, it would be appropriate to reassess the number of managerial roles across the organisation to streamline decision-making and lines of authority
24. Like many local authorities the council has a skills gap in key areas which will be important in the future. Understanding how to take a more commercial approach,

generate greater income and build community resilience have been stated by the council to be key objectives. Currently the council commissions specific external support to boost these skills, for example, in terms of exploring opportunities for the Harris Museum & Art Gallery. However, there needs to be a more permanent and embedded approach to these skills in the future either by developing the skill base of key employees or making a decision to buy in this capacity, for example, through a commercial director/team like some authorities have done. Some smaller councils like Colchester have taken a more comprehensive approach to developing a more commercial approach and there is likely to be useful learning for Preston in examining approaches like this.

25. One part of the future approach to both make effective use of council capacity and manage the budget reductions will be to reduce demand for services (where appropriate). There are already some examples of this, for example, through the introduction of *My Preston* (to reduce the number of face-to-face interactions). It is unclear to what extent the council intends to take the opportunity to manage the demand for services on its own and working with other public sector agencies including Lancashire County Council and health agencies. This opportunity could have a significant impact on the council's financial position if services are reshaped, alongside work with service users to manage the transition.
26. On transformation and 'digital switch' of services the council has made significant progress in terms of enabling customers to access services online. However, there are further opportunities to ensure that services inside the council are also digitally enabled and integrated to maximise full benefit of moving the 'front end' of services online. Getting the 'back end' of processes more integrated so information is handled only once could see greater benefits being reaped.

Supporting investment and business growth

27. This is one of the two areas the council were particularly keen for the peer team to examine. Growing, strengthening and diversifying the economic base of Preston is a central theme of the council's priorities, expressed as 'Your City'. The council have had a strong focus on economic development for a number of years and have a number of achievements of which Preston can be rightly proud. This includes agreeing the City Deal (with Lancashire County Council and South Ribble Borough Council), road infrastructure developments to improve connectivity to the city, the growth of UCLAN, improvements in the city centre public realm and creating opportunities for large scale housing developments through agreeing a joint Local Plan with neighbouring South Ribble borough. There is a forecast to create around 20,000 new jobs and over 17,000 new homes in the City Deal area.
28. Preston is a vibrant city centre. With a significant retail offer, low business vacancy rates and the growing footprint of UCLAN on the edge of the city centre Preston feels like a city which has achieved much and has great potential for the future. The council, working with other organisations, is keen to do more. Two key elements in the future growth of the city will be the significant expansion of UCLAN

in the city centre over the next 5-10 years and the growth in the number of new homes (many of which have land agreed in the Local Plan but are yet to be developed). Around 500 new homes have been agreed last year, but there are opportunities to accelerate this housing and grow the city in a manageable and sustainable way. These house building opportunities must be taken if Preston is to keep pace with its own the economic growth.

29. UCLAN plans to invest around £200m over the next few years to significantly grow its Preston campus, build closer physical connection to the city centre and grow its student population. The university already makes a significant contribution to the economic life of Preston. With around 6,000 of the university's students based in Preston UCLAN contributes in the region of £240m annually to the Lancashire economy (through direct employment, student spend and the supply chain). With around a quarter of UCLAN students coming from Preston much of the university's current operation and future plans which will have a direct positive impact on the city.
30. Preston faces some significant economic challenges. Preston has around 64% of its working population which is much lower than the national average (of around 77%). The council have sought to work collaboratively with investors, developers and communities. A good, mutually beneficial, relationship with UCLAN clearly exists. Other positive signs include the sale of the flagship Guild Hall to a local entrepreneur to revitalise the venue and clear schemes for the redevelopment of the markets (beginning in 2016) and the bus station. The City Deal has pulled together the key Preston agencies to progress greater outcomes and improved infrastructure within Preston and across its sphere of influence in central Lancashire.
31. Feedback from developers and investors is useful in understanding how the council can provide even better support for business in the future. The single biggest 'ask' from developers/investors in discussion with the peer team was clarity, better communication and a more 'business-like' approach through a single point of senior level contact within the council. This would aim at taking ownership and drive forward proposals providing a 'one stop shop' approach for businesses. Places like Rochdale have gone one step further and created a Development Company to provide this function in a joined up and focused way. This model may or may not work for Preston, but there is value in exploring how this model might work and the benefits it brings for businesses.
32. The council should play a strong enabling role to ensure development is undertaken in a coherent and timely way. The council's regeneration and planning services are central to this. The current performance of the planning service is variable. 71% of major planning applications are processed within timescale – which is good. However, only 48% of minor planning applications are processed within timescale. The impact of this increases cost, has a negative impact on developers and is slowly the delivery of one of the council's key agreed priorities.

33. The council's Planning function is on a journey. Some good work is already in place such as the review of delegation, members' code of conduct and previous reforms to the structure of the Planning Committee. There are a number of opportunities to continue this development. There is good feedback from the developers on the approach of officers but there is a recognition of a lack of capacity which results in delays. Capacity has recently been increased within the Planning service, but it will be important for the council to keep this under review due to the scale of development in the city as the council will need to ensure there is sufficient capacity within the team. There are opportunities for support from other parts of the council (like the Contact Centre) and an integrated phased programme of development needs to be established.
34. There is a clear commitment from all members to deliver the City Deal and the major development programmes within it. However, this is not always matched by the decisions taken through the planning process. If the council is to deliver on its economic development priorities in a timely way the Planning function will need to be improved. The council should continue member development sessions including those on defensible planning decisions for the Planning Committee. There is likely to be a benefit in a joined up package of support for Planning members, leveraging the support of the Planning Advisory Service. This could include:
- member peer support to all political groups focusing on the Planning function (to provide the member-to-member perspective)
 - using site visits as a practical tool to further explain planning aspects/systems
 - 'on the ground' site training (not necessarily just within the city)
 - examining how other authorities run their Planning Committee (Bury might be a useful starting point given their recent Planning Committee review by the Planning Advisory Service)
 - consider reviewing the timing of Committees and member training to allow wider member participation and increase the pool of prospective councillors
 - implementing electronic voting (in the meantime, reverting to 'show of hands' would alleviate concerns about influencing within the committee)
 - consideration to where committee meetings are hosted (the council chamber or elsewhere in the city)
35. There is evidence that Lancashire County Council are sometimes not being involved on the pre-planning process. Better continuity of planning officer support in the pre-application process and development of the range of pre-application advice should create a more business-like approach.

Developing community resilience

36. This was the second area the council were keen for the peer team to explore. The nature of local government is changing and the council recognises that individual residents and groups will play a more significant role in delivering positive outcomes in the future. In past years Preston has been in receipt of a range of external national regeneration or community development funding, which now no longer exists.
37. The rapidly reducing level of revenue support grant from central Government has strong implications for Preston as already outlined. The council has been keen to explore ways communities can do more for themselves thereby reducing the requirement for a call on council services. Better understanding the needs of communities and strengthening particularly vulnerable individuals and communities is another core theme of the council's priorities, expressed as 'Fairness for You'. The council have a number of projects it is delivering or influencing to promote a fairer Preston but need to have a richer understanding of the people of Preston.
38. The council has been keen to promote the Living Wage and not only pays its own workforce the Living Wage but actively encourages other local organisations to do the same. The CitizenZone project looks to develop local people's IT and other skills through training. A range of projects exist to reduce financial exclusion, including Money Matters. The council have recently set up a credit union. A neighbourhood planning arrangement has been developed over a number of years in Inner East Preston. This is promoting pathways to employment, recreation activities and using capacity building support.
39. The council is proud of its recent Community Wealth Building project. This aims to encourage Preston organisations to use their procurement spend to use local Small & Medium Sized Enterprises and retain as much of the estimated £750m spend within the city. This is something other cities and towns could learn from. A range of other projects exist which contribute to the 'fairness' theme including; affordable warmth in private sector housing, work through the Children & Young People's Trust to support NEETs, the What Women Want sports project and the community asset transfer of community centres direct to communities.
40. The introduction of *My Preston* (as an online facility to access services more extensively) is a good opportunity to move more service and information requests online. As this is rolled out in a phased way it should have a positive reduction on the number of telephone and face to face customer service calls and this should be monitored and tracked.
41. However, improving resilience is something different to improving 'fairness'. To deliver more strongly on improving community resilience there needs to be a clearer understanding of what key pieces of work will drive this agenda. At this time the council has gathered together a range of existing projects under this banner. There

are some excellent opportunities to push this out much further and make better use of existing resources to build resilience.

42. Getting people into paid employment is probably the strongest single way of improving someone's resilience. There are opportunities to work in a more joined up way with JobCentre Plus and voluntary organisations to provide employment support, better signposting to training and individual support for unemployed people. The approach which authorities like Newham have taken to their *Workplace* service provides a more targeted and personalised approach to supporting people into work. A 'Preston Workplace' scheme shaped to the local context may have a real impact. UCLAN has a 'Northern Lights' service to support current undergraduates into employment by providing legal, accountancy and employment advice. There may be opportunities to work collectively on this as part of the university's corporate social responsibility agenda to find creative ways of enabling local people to access this service.
43. Education achievement could play a significant role in improving resilience. There is currently a gap in thinking about the role the council could play in influencing schools, academies and sixth form colleges in looking at vocational training and apprenticeships that fit most appropriately for Preston. Examining the approach of councils like Oxford City on work with local schools on the skills agenda is likely to be beneficial. Other ideas might include, for example, offering a single joined up services for 'Preston Apprentices' bringing together all existing apprenticeship efforts into a single stream and actively working with local businesses to boost the number of apprenticeships across the city.
44. The council could play a wider influencing role on the housing agenda with larger registered social landlords, including Community Gateway. This might include, for example, seeking to influence housing allocation policy for applicants who have done more to help themselves.
45. Reducing demand for council services should play a more important role in the council's work on improving resilience. There are some good but isolated examples of some services looking to get residents to do more for themselves and be less dependent on public services. This includes some environmental health functions (through better advice and support to businesses), some 'clean and green' functions (through working with Friends groups), health improvement support and work the Customer Contact Centre does (through working one to one with residents to move more people onto online services). These are really good examples but there are opportunities to do much more. This might include introducing charges for some services, for example, advising businesses for more complex environmental health advice. It could also include giving individual services a 'Resilience Challenge', asking them to seek specific ways of reducing calls on service. The Innovation and Delivery Group might play a useful role in pushing this.

46. If the council is to place more emphasis on the community resilience agenda it will need to challenge the mind-set of some members and council staff. When exploring how communities might do more for themselves the attitude of some members and staff might possibly be best expressed by the following comment by one member of staff: 'I don't have the capacity to deliver that'. This reflects a positive 'can do' attitude but also illustrates a default mind-set that the council should step in and directly take action, intervene or deliver a service. The council needs to think more creatively so it can consider what residents should be reasonably expected to do for themselves rather than automatically seeking to solve their problems for them. A key part of this will be supporting officers to think of all these options, embedding this in the mechanism for recruiting new staff and appraising the performance of existing staff.
47. Unlike some other cities and towns, Preston does not have a strong supporting infrastructure for the community and voluntary sector (CVS). The Community Network Organisation exists to provide some structure. However, some council engagement officers are acting as a networking or signposting point. Places which are looking to build stronger resilience often have a stronger CVS network and reap considerable benefits. There is value in reviewing the role and operation of the Community Network Organisation to work out how the council can better work alongside the voluntary sector to build resilience. The council might benefit from looking at work by organisations like Wirral Works to see how an effective infrastructure might be developed and the benefits it can deliver to improving resilience without the council needing to provide significant direct support or funding.
48. Engendering a stronger sense of community spirit can play a role in making communities and neighbourhoods more resilient. Some authorities use their ward members as a lynchpin in catalysing small groups of local people into activities like litter picks, children's activities, tackling 'grot spots' and getting involved in anti-social behaviour work, tackling graffiti etc. Although some of this happens in Preston so much more could be done. The council might want to consider setting up a small pilot project across a couple of wards and see what ward members might suggest in terms of resilience projects (taking care not to simply run interesting one-off community projects).
49. The use of volunteers could play a much stronger role in helping boost the council's capacity and, if well planned, might be used to encourage residents to do more for themselves. Within the region some Fire & Rescue Services like Merseyside and Greater Manchester make excellent use of large numbers of volunteers not only to address community safety issues but to examine wider social issues. A 'Preston People' programme, if well designed, might be able to harness a similar approach to engage large numbers of volunteers to tackle low level social care issues but also provide one-to-one support for residents in the most vulnerable neighbourhoods examining on an individual basis how we can encourage local

people to do more for themselves. UCLAN's 6,000 Preston based students may play a strong role in this if some of this capacity can be harnessed.

Finally, we would like to thank colleagues and members at Preston, especially Craig Sharp and Janette Duffell for their support in the lead up to the peer challenge and during the challenge itself. The council supported the process well.

Further on-going support is available through the Local Government Association's Principal Advisor, Gill Taylor (email: gill.taylor@local.gov.uk, tel: 0778 9512173). Gill will liaise with the authority in the coming months to explore specific issues the council may wish to be supported on.

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