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Dear Stuart

### **East Lindsey District Council - Corporate Peer Challenge**

On behalf of the peer team, thank you for your invitation into East Lindsey District Council to deliver the recent peer challenge. The team felt privileged to be allowed to conduct its work with the support of you and your colleagues who were open and engaged with the process.

You asked the peer team to provide an external view of the council and give recognition of progress made; and supportive challenge and feedback on how you are prepared to meet future issues and opportunities for East Lindsey.

You also asked the team to provide specific feedback on:

- exploring the council's vision for the future (the transformation agenda), testing the realism of that and exploring the range of potential approaches available;
- offering insight and challenge over future design and delivery options and programmes to bring that about; and
- testing the organisational capacity and mind set of staff to implement this.

To do this the peer team considered the ability, resilience and capacity of the council to deliver its future ambitions by looking at:

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

It is important to stress that this was not an inspection. Peer challenges are improvement-focused and tailored to meet individual councils' needs. They are designed to complement and add value to a council's own performance and improvement plans. The peers 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.

This letter provides a summary of the feedback that was presented at the end of our recent on-site visit. In presenting this the peer challenge team has done so as fellow local government officers and members, not professional consultants or inspectors. Our intention is to provide recognition of the progress East Lindsey District Council has made in recent years while also stimulating debate and thinking about future challenges.

### **Overall message**

East Lindsey is a council with good officer and Member working relationships. The council made a significant shift, under the former inspection programme, from 'weak' in 2005 to 'good' in 2008. This broadly coincides with the council having regarded itself as being ahead of the game. However long-term interim Chief Executive arrangements and a major restructuring have contributed towards an awareness that the council now needs to re-establish this position.

The council has a strong Leader who is recognised regionally and nationally as an advocate for the district. This role is operating in an uncertain political environment of a narrow majority administration which requires cross-party working arrangements to deliver an ambitious agenda.

The council is ambitious. However, this ambition does need to be refocused at a time of current local government financial constraint. This requires a resetting of priorities linked to available resources and comes at an opportune time as the council recognises it needs to review its vision and Corporate Strategy to reset priorities. For this to be most effective it will be also important to identify former priorities which, because of resource pressures, need to be discontinued or provided in other ways.

Local economic growth is an increasing priority for the council which is seeking to sustain its current economy and to shape this for the future. There are a number of notable characteristics that will bear on this. The district is a large – the third largest in England – with a strong dependency on the visitor economy. It has areas of deprivation (seven Super Output Areas in the top 10 per cent most deprived in England) and an ageing population (26 per cent over 65 years, against the national average of 16 per cent.) An ageing population will have implications for future health care provision, care sector employment and the employment profile for the future economy. There are the issues of out migration of younger people in search of education and employment and a recognised need to improve skills and training for young people to meet the employment needs of the future economy.

The council is engaged in a broad range of activity to address these issues, for example the work in market towns, the investment in housing, leisure and health improvement, culture and festivals and waste collection services. The Rural Development Fund is an

example of this innovation to help support the local economy with funding from New Homes Bonus (NHB). The fund receives bids for local business support up to £50,000 and is described as a “quiet success”. The application process is straightforward and funding is targeted at council priorities.

Partners are positive about working with the council and feel that they have access to suggest working arrangements of mutual benefit. Staff felt that partnership working initiatives at the service and operational level were working well.

Working across such a large geographical area makes partnership working even more important so as to develop shared capacity to deliver shared objectives. These arrangements are currently in a state of flux with considerations of the future potential of Area Committees. Discontinuation could present a risk to the council of creating a partnership vacuum. The inspection of 2008 highlighted partnership working with town and parish councils as an area to improve but the peer challenge found little evidence of this being progressed. The peer challenge team was informed that although partnership working appeared to be working well at the operational and service level there was a lack of clarity and coherence strategically.

There has been notable service transformation in housing services with the local stock voluntary transfer of housing stock and the productive relationship developed since with the housing association, Waterloo Housing. The council is investing with this partner to deliver on its priority of affordable housing, with an annual programme target of circa 75 units. The council has a strong portfolio of assets and has shown a readiness to sell these to the housing association, with the council reinvesting sale receipts, with the housing association, to support bids to the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) to generate additional HCA grant.

A different but equally notable model is that developed more recently with Compass Point Business Services (East Coast) Ltd., a company owned by the council in association with South Holland District Council. This provides revenues and benefits services for the two councils as well as a range of council back office services. Significant savings of £2.1m per annum are being obtained from this partnership which has been achieved by increased productivity and improved ways of working. There are important lessons from these models that should be transferable to other council services.

In the face of local government spending pressures the council has delivered the savings required. The approved net revenue budget for 2013-2014 is £18.18m which is a reduction of £4.5m (nearly 20 per cent) from 2010-2011.

However, the council is facing a funding gap of at least £1.18m in 2014-2015, with this growing each year thereafter. (The council also recognises that this gap is likely to be much larger - £1.7-2m - with the Comprehensive Spending Review scheduled for June, 2013.) The principal means of addressing this financial gap is the council's transformation agenda, which currently is a list of projects with expected savings.

Planning ahead for this funding shortfall by resetting the council's priorities, making decisions on future service provision and forms of delivery, will require clear and firm leadership to mitigate the worst effects of public expenditure cuts. It will need managers to firmly direct the process and provide support to elected Members. However, it will also

require Members to acknowledge the financial challenges facing the council and to commit to address these. This should then provide the basis for the political leadership necessary to take some difficult decisions.

## **The recent journey**

### The local context

The council had asked the peer challenge team to explore the council's vision for the future (the transformation agenda), to test the realism of that and to explore the range of potential approaches available. The vision is explored in greater detail later in this letter but it is important to state at the outset that the current vision set out in the council's Corporate Strategy is short-term in outlook covering a three year period (2010-11 to 2013-14). The fact that the current Corporate Strategy is reaching the end of its life presents a significant opportunity to reshape and restate a long-term vision for the district. Despite the difficulties of longer-term planning in an environment of local government funding uncertainties, such aspirations would be useful to envisage the East Lindsey of 10 years' time and what this might mean in terms of the council's role for housing, local economic growth, skills and education, health and wellbeing. This could help to gain broader political consensus for such a future, provide a longer-term vision for staff to work to and place the council again 'ahead of the curve'. It would also assist in developing priorities for the short- to medium-term that could be seen to contribute towards longer-term aspirations.

The exploration of the council's vision impacts on all areas of this peer challenge developed below. It is also subject to a detailed assessment later in this letter.

### Organisational capacity and mindset

Staff are proud of what they do and what they have achieved during the period of recent change. This is reinforced by a strong sense that the council wants to achieve the best it is able to for the community it serves and is supported by a good understanding of community need.

In addition it was striking to the peer challenge team, from the broad range of staff met, that they understood that recent changes, for example the staff restructuring, the establishment of Compass Point and the reduction of staffing numbers, were a consequence of the council responding to the challenge of providing services with reduced resources. Furthermore staff recognised that change would continue and there was an organisational readiness to meet this challenge.

A significant change for the council was the establishment of Compass Point. This venture entered into with South Holland District Council from April 2011, now provides Human Resources (HR), Customer Services, Information Technology (IT) and Revenues and Benefits services on behalf of the two councils. The councils invested £5.2m to establish the company, achieving savings of £2.1m per annum plus an additional 5 per cent efficiency saving of £105k for 2012-2013. Compass Point claims to have reduced the councils' operating costs by 20 per cent across services.

With the establishment of Compass Point there is a growing council awareness that its own work practices, processes and systems can be made more effective and productive. There

is an opportunity for the council to work with Compass Point to draw out some of the key lessons that might be transferable to changing practice in council services.

Training budgets are now being used to support service development needs. These budgets were an early casualty of service cuts but have been reinstated. This is important to support council-wide change and to support changing ways of working. It is also important for appropriate training to be provided for Members to be effective in a new local government environment that is changing quickly.

However, it will be important for senior officers and Members to actively manage the change that has occurred in recent years and that which is anticipated. It is undoubtedly the case that capacity is being stretched with the loss of resource, the increased use of staff 'self-serve' and staff assuming new roles. Attention will be required to monitor the new arrangements and identify pressure points. Morale during periods of change will inevitably be fragile and needs to be actively managed. Supporting workforce planning and development will require a clear organisational and service vision so that training objectives can be clearly linked to corporate priorities and managing change.

There is a need to ensure that the council maintains a strong client function for the services outsourced to Compass Point. For example, there is a risk to guard against in not losing sight of maintaining staff appraisals and proper Human Resources (HR) practices. That this could happen is understandable with the strategic HR function transferred to Compass Point while operational responsibility now lies with service managers. However, a difficulty is that operational responsibility has not been well established and the transfer occurred during a time of management restructuring that led to additional responsibilities for managers.

A practical outcome of this is that many staff the team met said that they had not recently received an appraisal with this point also being made in the recent Staff Survey with only 61 per cent saying that they had had an appraisal in the previous 12 months. This is despite the council successfully being reaccredited recently for Investors in People. Appraisals are obviously important to understand training and development needs but also essential to review individual performance against targets and to provide an opportunity for acknowledging achievement.

The council is aware that it needs to do more to ensure effective client-side management arrangements for the delivery of services provided by Compass Point. These arrangements have worked well in providing confidence in improved productivity and efficiency for outward customer services, for example council tax benefits but far less well for internal support services, for example IT support. This will be an important area to strengthen by a more focused client role.

Concerns over IT were raised in every staff session. There are two key elements to this. The first is the client side support arrangements described above. The second is the provision of an IT infrastructure that is an essential component for the delivery of services. The latter is recognised as an organisational issue due primarily to a history of under-investment. The council will need to make an assessment of current IT infrastructure, operational/resilience risk, the effect on productivity and from this develop an investment programme.

The team saw no evidence of ICT, workforce and asset management strategies along with linked resource implications. For example, the team were told that the council has assets valued currently at £76m with maintenance costs of £850k per annum. It is intended that a revised Corporate Asset Management Plan (CAMP) will be updated upon adoption of the revised Corporate Plan. These strategies are important to provide the framework for managing resources in a changing environment and to link investment to the corporate vision and priorities. Meanwhile the processes contained in the existing AMP are still relevant and continue to be used to review the council's property assets.

### Management and political leadership

The council works effectively to a strong Leader model. The Leader is a potent influence within the council and is recognised outside the district – in the region and nationally – as an advocate for East Lindsey. Supporting this is an emerging cultural style from the new Chief Executive that is open and supportive. The council rightly takes pride in retaining service levels during a time of financial cuts.

Collectively this leadership style is characterised by some key features that set out the new model of local government working at East Lindsey. There is a concern for staff welfare with good relations between staff and Members and the effective management of staff reductions. The council is open to considering new delivery mechanisms, for example the outsourcing to Compass Point, the housing partnership work with housing associations, work with coastal and rural communities and the developing Catalyst project to transfer arts, culture and festival services while ensuring a sustainable future for these. In addition the council recognises that it will need to do more of this in the future and is receptive to the range of vehicles and operational models that might be used.

There is a good communications framework for internal communications. This includes the Ello magazine, a weekly e-bulletin, the use of team cascades and appraisals. The Team Leaders have monthly meetings which provide a set of corporate messages that are cascaded to staff. It will be important to sustain this framework as more communications was one of requests coming from staff meetings, being confirmed in the Staff Survey, and this is not surprising at a time of change and uncertainty. Consideration of a targeted communications strategy that gears the message to its intended audience might be beneficial.

The council has also clearly showed its willingness to take bold and difficult decisions. The establishment of Compass Point was supported by a strong business case and by significant council investment which is being repaid. Financial pressures and the lack of car parking increases for many years led to a council increase in charges that were accompanied by a public outcry and local press coverage. The proposal to charge for the collection of Green Waste to offset service costs will be made by the council in July 2013 and is expected to be accompanied by a high level of objections.

However, to support the management and leadership of on-going change the council will need to sharpen the vision of what it wants to achieve in the medium- to long-term and make clear what this looks operationally, to include clear and measurable outcomes, and then communicate this clearly. One of the weaknesses of the current vision is the difficulty of identifying key measurable priorities and outcomes to drive team plans and services.

A related issue is the challenge for the council in sustaining a large number of initiatives. The lack of vision clarity and key priorities percolates down to services that may develop initiatives not necessarily always aligned to priorities or sustainable in the longer term. This is particularly an issue with external funding that begs the question how funding can be sustained to ensure continuity.

The council's rationale and programme for transformation is not articulated, at the moment this is a series of projects with cost savings attached to them. A detailed and longer term plan for this agenda now needs to be set out:

- What is meant by transformation
- Future delivery models that might be considered
- Partnership arrangements in future delivery
- What consideration of customers will feature as part of this process?

Given the above it is not surprising that the team found that staff view this agenda with some scepticism as a cost-cutting rather than a transformational agenda. The council should openly acknowledge that transformation will have to generate savings as well as provide an operational model for the future.

The staff survey conducted in 2012 has not been acted upon consistently. This is despite the fact that the top three areas for improvement for staff are: staff involvement in decision making, IT and the way that staff are managed. The survey presents "some crucial challenges for the council over the coming months and years" yet no obvious action has been taken on this. Staff need feedback on the conclusions from this survey and what actions the council intends. It is also important that Members own the outcomes and proposals from the survey.

Effective partnership working is increasingly important for local government to develop capacity that is being lost from resource cuts. It is important to invest in partnerships that fit with the delivery of corporate priorities, which emphasises the need for vision focus, and are supported by a business case of return on investment and/or invest to save. Some partner comments are positive with one describing the council as "a fantastic authority to deal with". Although successful partnership working draws plaudits it does need to be more consistent to be most effective. The team were told of protracted discussions on potential partnerships that were either too slow or didn't materialise and this can colour how future partners see the council. The abortive discussions on a joint waste service across Lincolnshire is one example but partners hinted at more. To be fair, the criticism could be levelled at neighbouring authorities too and there was a suggestion from a number of quarters that Lincolnshire was generally insular in its partnership outlook.

#### Financial planning and viability

Financial planning and management is strong. The Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) forecasts a financial position up to 2017-2018 and provides some assurance for the council in steering a financial path during uncertain times for local government. This relative financial stability is supported by a track record of delivering significant financial savings in recent years. For example, the management restructure of September 2011

delivered savings of circa £500k. This financial position is supported by the council's track record in attracting external grants.

It is also supported by a good understanding of the council's financial reserves and that they are not being used to support the base budget. In addition there is clear recognition of the council's strong asset base and how this can be used to generate revenue or capital receipts. For example, the council has transferred assets to town/parish councils (public conveniences and buildings) and this could be an important precedent for future transfers. The council is currently engaging consultants to provide advice on the future potential sale of the Cattle Market site although no decision on this has been taken. The council's transformation agenda sets out a project list from which significant savings are anticipated to support the revenue budget.

The council's capital programme is being used to support communities in East Lindsey and for the provision of infrastructure for the district and council services. Examples include the investment in high speed broadband, affordable housing, rural grants and fleet replacement for refuse collection vehicles.

However, there was no clear evidence that the allocation of resources is related to priorities. An example of this is the council's assessment that 63 per cent of resources are allocated to the council's priority 2 in the current Corporate Strategy that is 'Improving equality of opportunity and life chances'. However, there is no performance data that provides a confident understanding how this expenditure is related to outcomes. Similarly the peer challenge team used LGA Inform performance data that suggested the council is in the top 5 per cent per capita spend of English district councils for housing, culture and sustainable economy. It appeared that this data source was not being used by the council to provide assurance on Value for Money studies nor to check if this level of expenditure coincided with council priorities. The council does have a 'Value for Money and Efficiency Improvement Strategy' (2006) but this is outdated. The peer challenge team recommend that a similar strategy is developed for the council's approach to value for money work.

The council is facing a funding gap from 2014-2015 of at least £1.18m which increases cumulatively year by year to £4.49m by 2017-2018. This is recognised as a priority and appears to be the imperative for the transformation agenda. The council does need to link the vision and Corporate Strategy refresh directly to the funding gap and future priorities. This is acknowledged by the council as a major piece of work to be completed by the end of this calendar year but so far progress has been limited to cost reduction projects within the transformation agenda. This is a priority piece of work for the council.

Although the council has managed its budgets well there has been a history of revenue budget underspends in previous years, for example the team were told of £1m+ and £3m+ underspends. Historically financial management has allowed the council to spend within its approved budgets. This offers choices as to whether certain budgets could be reduced however there is a good track record of reallocating unused budgets for beneficial projects such as solar photovoltaic panels placed on leisure facility roofs to reduce running costs and secure feed-in tariff income and performing at levels significantly in advance of expectations. Managing budget underspend is certainly improving with the council delivering a broadly balanced end of year budget over the last two years.



The council intends to allocate 50 per cent of New Homes Bonus (NHB) funding (approximately £500k) to support the base budget from 2014-2015 onwards. There is clearly a risk from such a strategy; if NHB were to end it would provide a significant gap in the budget. The council is advised to develop contingency arrangements for such an eventuality and to consider if there might be other means by which this could be met without having to allocate NHB.

### Governance and decision making

The council's governance arrangements appear robust and respond to Audit Commission recommendations.

The council operates with a narrow political majority which was described to the team as "treading a very fine line" in being able deliver the administration's agenda. The council recognises that with the political cycle (next elections in 2015) there are difficult decisions on future spend that need to be made during this year. This is a narrow window of opportunity and will require the Chief Executive and Corporate Management Team (CMT) to prepare a range of options for the majority group to encourage an internal debate on the council's future direction. It is also recognised that this needs to build on the current use of Member workshops so as to work to achieve a broad council consensus so far as possible.

There is also a comprehensive performance management framework with quarterly performance reviews to CMT, Scrutiny and to Executive. The layout uses the Balanced Scorecard. This approach translates down to the use of Service Plans for delivering corporate objectives and the commitment to the use of appraisals for the setting/monitoring of individual targets.

Despite the performance management arrangements being comprehensive (circa 40 pages in the quarterly report) it does not provide the council with the ability to measure outcomes with confidence nor to align these directly to the resources applied. This is in large part due to the lack of specific outcomes contained in the vision and Corporate Strategy, which makes measurement extremely difficult. The opportunity for the council is to ensure that the council vision refresh provides clarity and focus on priorities and outcomes with these underpinned by a relevant set of key performance indicators.

The council has recently introduced new working arrangements for the Scrutiny function and it is recognised that these offer "potential" to support policy development and the work of the Executive. This is an important area to develop as an effective Scrutiny function can be an asset to support the council in making difficult decisions.

The layering of the council's senior officer structure has had an effect of speeding up decision making and of empowering Team Leaders to assume increased decision making responsibility.

However, the team were told that Members can become heavily involved in the operational decision making process. It might be that this has increased since the structure layering and might benefit from the officer structure providing more clarity on the Team Leader/Strategic Development Manager roles generally and, in particular, their interface with elected Members. This is important as internally the senior officer structure is not providing a ready understanding or coherence for staff – one said "I can't explain our

structure to my Mum". It may also be an opportunity to review the Member role and how this might be developed to be more strategic to support the work of the council during this time of change. This could also consider the role of Scrutiny and an enhanced role of the ward Member on community leadership.

The respective roles of CMT need to be more sharply defined and the relationship between the 18 Team Leaders and the three Strategic Development Managers – who currently have no line management responsibilities – more clearly delineated. This will be important for several reasons:

- CMT will have an essential role in working with Members to refresh the council's vision and Corporate Strategy
- Similarly there is a major piece of work to align the priorities of the new vision to a greatly reduced revenue budget
- The council is recruiting to the vacant Strategic Development Manager position. It will be important for the council to consider the skills/experience needed for this post bearing in mind the above points and the existing skills in CMT.

Community engagement arrangements are in a state of flux. As in many parts of England there is consideration to discontinuing the partnership arrangements of the Local Strategic Partnership. The council is currently also working with seven Area Committees. These have no budgets for local spend and no decision making authority. It was generally acknowledged to the peer team that they are resource intensive to service and, currently, generate limited community engagement and value. The council is considering the future role and potential of these forums and the peer challenge team recommend that there is a review of how this model might be made to work better, for example by: establishing parish clusters; considering the use of limited devolved budgets; a role for the county council to be involved; and local, defined decision making authority. A redefinition of the role and focus of Area Committees, so as to become more effective, would send a clear message on the importance of community engagement and the role of the non-executive member in that process. East Lindsey covers a large geographical area with 189 parishes, and community engagement arrangements will be essential.

The peer challenge team were told by a number of external partners that the council can appear to be driven by process. There could be a number of factors behind this perception including how partners have viewed what can feel to them a slow process of engagement. This might benefit from a review of partnership working, supported by a partnership strategy and a practice of only working in partnerships that demonstrate a contribution towards corporate priorities.

### Vision

The council has a clear understanding of the challenges facing local government and the serious economic context. The current Corporate Strategy sets out the council's strategic objectives and outcomes. The new management structure is seen by the council as providing the senior officer framework for delivering change.

However, the three year Corporate Strategy runs out in March 2014 and the council is aware of the need to update this, which presents an important opportunity. The current strategy contains a number of outcomes that are imprecise and are difficult to measure achievement. This makes it difficult: for services to specify corporate and service priorities; for resources to be allocated with confidence to priorities; and makes performance management difficult to show with confidence the link between priorities, resources and outcomes. One senior officer told the team that there are “sixty views on what the vision is” and an acknowledgement that ambiguity could make the Corporate Strategy appear to offer something for everyone.

The future strategy should pick up on what appears to be accepted future council priorities such as housing, spatial planning and growth, education and skills and start to set these into a coherent framework for early discussion with Members. These should be the building blocks for the future strategy. This is an area that CMT could start building now.

This is important as the team could see, for example, no evidence of clear ambition to deliver local economic growth, yet this is acknowledged as an increasingly important area for the council. A reactive approach to inward investment is insufficient in what is a highly competitive market. There are many means by which councils can enhance their competitive edge in attracting employment and investment that can be facilitated by, for example, thinking ahead on land allocations, site readiness, site marketing and local skills and training development, to list a few.

Equally important are the work to understand those priorities that, although desirable, are acknowledged as being lower priority and for which resources are not available. These will either have to be: reduced in scale of delivery and cost; discontinued; or delivered by another provider. This process of identifying priorities will be increasingly important over the coming years with continuing financial constraints.

There will be an important role for partnerships to work with the council to deliver on priorities. These can take two forms: first are those that provide services on behalf of the council. The council has some reservations on these, in some part influenced by the experience of outsourcing waste collection before bringing back in-house. However, there are other highly successful partnerships, for example Waterloo Housing and Compass Point. In managing these arrangements it may be helpful to acknowledge the distinction between control of services through direct delivery and the opportunity of influencing this through a partnership.

The second form is those that share the council's priorities and commit to working with the council on the delivery of these, for example the current arrangement with Lincolnshire County Council for the delivery of the Health Improvement Programme. Both models will be important and should be supervised by a partnership strategy. The peer challenge team believe that the potential of partnerships should be exploited further and should include the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) and working with Lincolnshire districts and with the county council.

The council is open to alternative service delivery options but does want to ensure that the council can obtain efficiency savings from such arrangements and is able to guarantee the level, quality and sustainability of service. This outlook will be important for the future when financial pressures become even greater. The council would benefit from learning more of

innovative and transformative work taking place in other parts of local government. This is not to repeat what has gone on elsewhere but to understand what this involved, the benefits and to gain knowledge of practices that might be adapted to the council's circumstances. The LGA would be happy to assist with this.

Developing a clear vision is important to provide the council with certainty on:

- What are and what are not priorities
- What are the council's core services that might be retained in-house for delivery
- To ensure alignment with the emerging Local Plan/Core Strategy and the local economic growth strategy for the district
- To identify those other services that might be available via other forms of delivery
- How to open the council up to genuine innovation and transformation which are generally accepted as a requirement for future local government working
- Providing improved alignment of priorities, resources and outcomes
- Providing a framework from which the planned driving out of costs and value for money work can take place
- Providing clarity of organisational priorities such as: housing – what are the funding commitments after 2015; how to integrate elements of coastal and market towns with spatial planning to set out a coherent growth agenda; to clarify the spend on leisure by tighter links to outcomes; a skills and training strategy in association with the LEP, Lincolnshire districts and Lincolnshire County Council etc.

To summarise the council acknowledges the need to create a new vision and set of corporate priorities for the council. It is also aware that this is to take place at a time of financial cuts and that this will impact on future service provision levels and forms of provision. It also recognises that there is a narrow window to develop this vision to fit with the budget making and political cycles. There is much work to be done to implement this and the CMT must take the lead on this.

### **Moving forward - suggestions for consideration**

Based on what we saw, heard and read we suggest you consider the following actions to build on the council's undoubted successes. These are things we think will help you improve and develop the effectiveness and capacity to deliver your future ambitions and plans.

1. The council needs to give urgent attention to completing its Corporate Strategy that sets out priorities matched to available resources.
2. Political and managerial leaders need to work together to ensure organisational priorities inform the Corporate Strategy
3. The Corporate Strategy needs to respond to the looming funding gap and ensure that this is addressed by a combination of planned efficiencies, service cuts and service transformation
4. Review the senior officer structure to ensure coherence, roles and management responsibilities are set at the optimum level for the forthcoming changes anticipated.

This will be particularly important for the vacant Strategic Development Manager post that the council is recruiting to.

5. Work with Compass Point to draw out some of the key lessons that might be transferable to change practices in council services.
6. Consider an 'invest to save' policy as a means to obtain service efficiencies, transformation and service improvements
7. Review the Area Committee model with a view to this becoming a more effective vehicle for community and partnership engagement and provide a meaningful role for non-executive members
8. Review current arrangements on partnership working with a view for these to be reset to support delivery of the council's new set of priorities and Corporate Plan objectives
9. Strengthen the 'intelligent client' role and ensure that service issues with Compass Point are taken up by this role
10. Strengthen the Scrutiny function to support the council in policy development and to help it make difficult decisions
11. Act on the findings of the recent Staff Survey that present "some crucial challenges for the council over the coming months and years" and inform staff of what follow-up actions are intended
12. Review and update the council's strategic approach to value for money work.

We have attached a set of slides that summarise the above feedback. The slides are the ones used by the peer team to present its feedback at the end of the onsite visit.

## **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. In particular the LGA is able to offer up to 12 days of Productivity Expert programme support and to source a Member/senior officer peer to facilitate a Vision setting workshop for the cabinet and senior management team.

We would also wish to offer an improvement and prioritisation workshop to the council to take place some time after this letter is received by the council. I look forward to finalising the detail of that activity as soon as possible.

In the meantime we are keen to continue the relationship we have formed with you and colleagues through the peer challenge to date. Mark Edgell, Principal Adviser (East Midlands, Yorkshire and the Humber, North East) is the main contact between your authority and the Local Government Association. Mark can be contacted via email at [mark.edgell@local.gov.uk](mailto:mark.edgell@local.gov.uk) (or tel. 07747 636910) and can provide access to our resources and any further support.

In the meantime, all of us connected with the peer challenge would like to wish 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.

Yours sincerely

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On behalf of the peer challenge team:

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- Councillor Duncan McGinty, Leader of Sedgemoor District Council
- Andy Jones, Deputy Chief Executive and Monitoring Officer, Warwick District Council
- Caroline Green, Lead Adviser, Policy and Development Programmes, LGA

**Appendix 1 – Feedback slides**

**Appendix 2 – Signposting note**