

# Corporate Peer Challenge **Wiltshire Council**

6 – 9 November 2017

Feedback Report

CONFIDENTIAL

## 1. Executive Summary

Wiltshire Council (WC) has strong, visible and accessible political leadership which sets a clear direction for the council and the place. The council leader is at the core of this but it is equally evident throughout her very impressive cabinet colleagues. This means stakeholders are clear what the council stands for, how it goes about its business and what its plans are.

The council has just launched its new Business Plan which sets out an ambitious agenda for the next 10 years. There remains a resolute focus on 'strong communities', complimentary priorities which reinforce this and a refreshed approach highlighting the key enablers to deliver them, including transforming adult social care and being more commercial. The Business Plan is very new, so now is the ideal time to draw out those key priorities and enablers, clarifying and quantifying them so that in turn a sharper focus can be brought to organisational delivery and resource allocation which should underpin this.

The council benefits from a committed workforce. All the staff we met with told us that WC is a great place to work. They also told us they feel valued, are developed to undertake their roles and feel supported to progress their careers. There was evidence of a very impressive approach to staff engagement, which was clearly owned throughout the organisation from front-line staff to senior leaders.

Such characteristics as those described above will help ensure Wiltshire Council remains a progressive and well regarded council, but it will need to enhance that capacity further as it strives to deliver its Business Plan and develop those key organisational enablers, notably its commercial and digital capability. The council has a strong base but there is more work to do to build a shared understanding of the opportunities, investment required and skill needed in these areas and others, as this will be key in enabling it to achieve successful outcomes.

As one stakeholder told us 'strong communities is in our DNA' and the council has a track record and infrastructure to deliver this - campuses, community hubs and Area Board structures evidencing how it seeks to achieve its purpose. There is an opportunity now to think again about the current and potential intent of the Community Area Boards, build on this agenda further and be bolder about their intent so that the council's ambitions in terms of leadership of place can be further realised. In the same vein, the council is on a journey of transferring some operational services and assets to towns and parishes and we encourage them to provide more clarity in terms of the "what" will be transferred and 'why' so, and as with Area Boards be clear and proactive in how it progresses this agenda.

The council has a solid track record in terms of financial management. Since 2010 it has delivered over £120m of savings and has managed to both rationalise its office buildings and invest in its estate, through campus and community hubs - all the time focusing it steadfastly on the 'strong communities' vision. It has also made savings through a range of ways including flexible and smart working practices. However, there are growing pressures in key demand areas such as adults and children's, there has been in year budget overspends in some services and the council has a relatively low level of reserves. As such, given the advent of the new Business Plan, now is timely for the council to more

closely align financial and budget planning to organisational priorities. Underpinning all of this it will be important that it adopts a more robust planning and performance management regime, linking that to business and financial planning and supporting a culture of openness and accountability. In the view of the peer team such clarity and alignment is somewhat underdeveloped.

Following a disappointing Ofsted inspection in 2012 it is clear 5 years on that there has been a very good recovery in Children's services. That recovery has successfully leveraged the wider resources and commitment from across the council and in the view of the peer team there is clear and collective ownership right across the piece. That same focus now needs to be replicated in adult social care, where the council is now directing significant efforts and resources to transform those services with a view to further improve outcomes, capacity and leadership. We are pleased to report there is a realistic recovery plan in place and leading councillors and officers are owning this. This is important as the current state of the service poses potential risks to the council in terms of service delivery and financial stability. For the future the council has plans to further integrate adult social care and health including the appointment of a joint Corporate Director for Adult Care and Health, with the CCG. Such intentions are very credible but for now our core advice at this juncture is to approach any such integration carefully, doing so from a position of strength and clear priorities set across the two agencies.

Although the leadership of the council is clear about the need for increased housing numbers across Wiltshire, we picked up that issues at the local level are sometimes slowing and frustrating progress. In the view of the Peer Team the council may wish to think about developing its thinking further around a smaller number of strategic sites which could strengthen its ability to secure the appropriate infrastructure and enable it to more effectively deliver its housing plan aspirations.

Finally, the council is looking to build its capacity at a senior officer level and at the time of our visit was appointing to some key posts. As part of this there is a new Corporate Leadership Team (CLT) being established. This is very encouraging and our advice is to ensure that both the council and CLT themselves invest sufficient time in focussing on their development as a team. They have a pivotal leadership role into the future and it will be important to learn the lessons of the past in terms of building an effective leadership team and help them think through collectively how they will provide strong, collegiate corporate leadership on behalf of Wiltshire Council into the future.

## **2. Key recommendations**

There are a range of suggestions and observations within the main section of the report that will inform some 'quick wins' and practical actions, in addition to the conversations onsite, many of which provided ideas and examples of practice from other organisations. The following are the peer team's key recommendations to the Council:

1. To enable the most effective delivery of the Council's Business Plan it should seek to clarify and quantify its key priorities. In such a way a sharper focus can be brought to organisational delivery and resource allocation which underpin this.

2. In respect of the key areas of commercialism and 'digital' the council should build a shared understanding of the opportunities, investment required and skill needed in these areas so that it is more able to achieve successful outcomes.
3. Revisit the current intent and application of the Area Boards - so that into the future the council's ambitions in terms of leadership of place can be further realised
4. More closely align financial and budget planning to organisational priorities and underpin this with a more robust planning and performance management regime. This will enable better linking of business and financial planning and further supporting a culture of openness and accountability
5. Apply the same approach and commitment to the Adults Services Transformation plans as was afforded to the council's previous children services recovery plan – so that it is organisationally owned and more likely to be delivered as a consequence
6. In order to increase the delivery of housing numbers across Wiltshire, the council may wish to consider developing its plans in respect of a smaller number of strategic sites. This may strengthen its ability to secure the appropriate infrastructure and enable it to more effectively deliver its housing plan aspirations
7. Ensure that both the council and CLT themselves invest sufficient time in focussing on their development as a team. They have a pivotal leadership role and such investment will help them realise their ambition provide strong, collegiate corporate leadership on behalf of Wiltshire Council into the future.

### **3. Summary of the Peer Challenge approach**

#### **The peer team**

Peer challenges are delivered by experienced elected member and officer peers. The make-up of the peer team reflected your requirements and the focus of the peer challenge. Peers were selected on the basis of their relevant experience and expertise and agreed with you. The peers who delivered the peer challenge at Wiltshire Council were:

- Cllr Sean Anstee, Leader - Trafford Council
- Cllr Sue Baxter, Chairman – National Association of Local Councils
- Gavin Jones, Chief Executive - Essex County Council
- Joy Hollister, Strategic Director of Adult Care - Derbyshire County Council
- Dave Roberts, Head of Traded Services Strategy - Warrington Borough Council
- Paul Masters, Strategic Director Neighbourhoods - Cornwall Council
- Mark Golledge, Programme Manager, Digital Health and Care - LGA
- Paul Clarke, LGA Challenge Manager

#### **Scope and focus**

The peer team considered the following five questions which form the core components looked at by all Corporate Peer Challenges cover. These are the areas we believe are critical to councils' performance and improvement:

1. Understanding of the local place and priority setting: Does the council understand its local context and place and use that to inform a clear vision and set of priorities?
2. Leadership of Place: Does the council provide effective leadership of place through its elected members, officers and constructive relationships and partnerships with external stakeholders?
3. Organisational leadership and governance: Is there effective political and managerial leadership supported by good governance and decision-making arrangements that respond to key challenges and enable change and transformation to be implemented?
4. Financial planning and viability: Does the council have a financial plan in place to ensure long term viability and is there evidence that it is being implemented successfully?
5. Capacity to deliver: Is organisational capacity aligned with priorities and does the council influence, enable and leverage external capacity to focus on agreed outcomes?

In addition to these questions, you asked the peer team to consider/review/provide feedback and reassurance to the council in respect of the plans it has in place to:

- Enable greater digital access to all services
- Focus more on commercialisation of its services (maximising every opportunity to generate income and operate in a more business like way).
- Continue to involve communities and encourage them to do even more for themselves
- Transform adult social care
- Increase the supply of and access to affordable housing

The feedback for these areas as well as the core components has been incorporated into this report

### **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. The process is not designed to provide an in-depth or technical assessment of plans and proposals. 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 current LGA sector-led improvement support offer includes an expectation that all councils will have a Corporate Peer Challenge every 4 to 5 years. Wiltshire Council had a Corporate Peer Challenge in 2012. Where relevant to do so, findings from that previous peer challenge have been referenced in this report.

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 4 days onsite at Wiltshire Council, during which they:

- Spoke to more than 130 people including a range of council staff together with councillors and external partners and stakeholders.
- Gathered information and views from more than 40 meetings, visits to key sites in the area and additional research and reading.
- Collectively spent more than 260 hours to determine their findings – the equivalent of one person spending more than 7 weeks in Wiltshire.

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 6<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> November 2017. In presenting feedback to you, they have done so as fellow local government officers and members, not professional consultants or inspectors. By its nature, the peer challenge is a snapshot in time. We appreciate that some of the feedback may be about things you are already addressing and progressing.

## 4. Feedback

### 4.1 Understanding of the local place and priority setting

Wiltshire Council (WC) used the opportunity of becoming a unitary council in 2009 to establish a strong and steadfast focus on establishing a modern council and delivering better outcomes for its communities. The creation of one council offered significant opportunities to rationalise assets, including the programme to reduce from 98 offices into 3 main administrative hubs, creating significant savings and headroom to invest in its community infrastructure plans and ambitions.

The council has a well-established and respected community area model with 18 Area Boards which reinforces their 'strong communities' mantra. Led by Wiltshire councillors, but managed in partnership with the local key public services partners they are active forums which meet 8 weekly and focus on tackling local issues and delivering local solutions.

Each community area is furnished with a subset of the joint strategic needs assessment providing a detailed evidence base on which each area consults and sets local priorities. This then helps focus activity on those things that matter most to local communities based on robust facts.

Areas are further empowered with some local decision making processes on behalf of council in place and with access to devolved budgets for a number of activities, for example minor highways works, the spend of which is prioritised by local communities.

It was the team's view that this sound basis of an area model could be used to influence still further activities to support 'place based' delivery of services so that co-ordination of activities between communities, parishes and towns across a larger geographical footprint can be exploited to the full. This could be done by further exploration of larger devolution packages that would require the input and coordination of parish and town councils, particularly where devolved services serve greater geographical areas.

The peer team thought that further consideration should be given to the project management of the devolution agenda being tightened up with clearer community reporting and the capturing of financial and community benefits. This will ensure that the council is clearly monitoring the delivery of the budget saving identified in the forward plan.

The council's new business plan has a 10 year horizon. This is a very positive approach which lays out a vision and aspirations for the next decade structured around Wiltshire, its communities and how the council will influence these through its four key priorities, notably: Strong communities, Growing the economy, Protecting the vulnerable and an Innovative and effective Council. That Business Plan is new and the council should use this opportunity to be more specific about translating these priorities into tangible outcomes with plans, actions and resource allocations assigned so the Business Plan is brought to life and can be delivered.



The council is well aware of the opportunities for growth and its economic corridors are well understood and drive its focus. Its central location, proximity to major economic centres, military presence and partnership, rapidly growing population and strength of a skilled workforce are all areas where the council is investing in to make its contribution count. That growth and ambition to drive the economy needs to be matched with housing growth and infrastructure. The Peer Team felt that there was some evidence of what we called a 'disconnect' between senior political understanding for need of new housing and a resistance felt at more local level in terms of growth and especially housing. This disconnect will need to be addressed if the growth and especially housing aspirations are to be met and this is explored further in the section below.

#### **4.2 Leadership of Place (including delivering housing and involving communities)**

The political leadership at Wiltshire Council is palpable. The Leader, her Cabinet and indeed other members we met with are highly visible and accessible to public, partners and staff. We witnessed at first hand the openness, transparency and importance of public engagement at the cabinet meeting we attended. We also saw at first hand a strong sense of ambition and passion for the residents of Wiltshire. We know the Leader and her cabinet are front and centre in promoting Wiltshire regionally and on a national stage but just as importantly they are equally visible locally and recognise the need to be accountable to their residents.

As well as the Area Boards we saw proactive engagement between the council and its towns and parishes including a renewed focus on parish councils being invited to negotiate packages to transfer assets and devolve services in order to localise but importantly sustain services. Indeed across the partnership spectrum we could point to several examples of strong leadership of place, e.g. the military rebasing specifically but generally the strength and trust within that relationship was very evident and the attention to the needs of the military and their families was second to none. Likewise, the application of the One Public Estate Programme in Wiltshire and the gains achieved and anticipated from that, we were told make Wiltshire the 'go to exemplar site' for effective partnership and implementation. A challenge for the council in terms of the breadth of its partnership domain would be to reflect on its leadership role and influence and consider how in other areas, for example the community safety partnership and how it could leverage further the capabilities of existing partners to achieve better their collective ambitions. This is particularly true of the engagement of blue light services at a community level and their method of engagement. The peer team considered that a thematic approach may well improve engagement with communities rather than standing agenda items for multiple partners.

On the back of a disappointing Ofsted inspection in 2012, Wiltshire Council established a focussed and effective council wide response to turning around its children's services. It has a strong story of improvement to tell. In turn, the council is very aware of some of the underlying weaknesses in the performance and management of its adult social care arrangements. We would advise that it reflects on the lessons, approaches and successes from children's and apply these with vigour so that the same outcomes can



be gained for its adult services recovery plan-this is explored in more detail later in the report.

We have pointed to a vibrant and talented Cabinet. They, 'working hand in glove' alongside the newly formed officer Corporate Leadership Team will provide an important and pivotal leadership focus. The advice from the peer team is to invest time at this important stage to work together on tackling potentially complex issues in the Business Plan that require collective council ownership and ensure there is a diarised forward plan to identify and progress these issues together.

## **Delivering Housing - Supply and Access**

In summarising our findings and observations in respect of this area it is important to identify the strong foundations that exists -there is a Core Strategy in place (adopted 2015 and 42,000 houses to be built between 2006-2026) and a review of the Local Plan has also commenced. As such the strategic framework, clarity in respect of delivery and review of plans are all in place.

Crucially, the council has a five year land supply which makes the area far less vulnerable in respect of speculative development. Overall, both housing delivery and affordable housing delivery appears to be broadly in line with that plan, for example since 2006 the council has delivered approximately 6,000 affordable houses (29% of total housing against an overall plan target of 30%). Furthermore, in line with our earlier comments in terms of effective partnerships, it is clear that there is a strong, productive and sustainable partnership with the HCA (Homes England). In respect of this, at the time of our visit there was a major infrastructure bid awaiting decision - the ambition of which is aimed at unlocking and accelerating planned and sustainable development-so again clear evidence of real strength and purpose.

More frequently nowadays councils are taking an active role in the housing market, many being bold and assertive in terms of developing housing companies and taking on house building. Wiltshire Council, from a position of strength, would be wise to review its assets and capabilities in terms of how it should intervene in housing delivery (the council does have a small house building programme already-158 new homes built through use of council resources). As such it has some experience, but there are many fore-runners in this area in terms of significant progress other councils have made and as such it is an ideal time to look elsewhere, see and assess what others have done and with the benefit of their learning decide what is in the best interests of the council and its residents. The LGA can provide additional support and signposting in respect of this if required.

We made reference in the executive summary to local issues holding back the council's plans for sustainable development and growth. As such we would encourage the council to develop further its thinking around a smaller number of more strategic sites to focus its time and attention so that ambitions are met. We believe this approach will in turn bring with it the ability to secure appropriate infrastructure to meet the required housing demand.

Finally, in line with other observations in respect of delivering priorities from the council's new Business Plan, we recommend the council consider the real opportunity that targeted and sustainable housing growth can support in terms of its other priorities and demand pressures. For example, a full housing needs assessment for older adults, younger adults and children with complex needs, translating this then into a plan covering accessible homes, sheltered housing and extra care for example, so that it is proactively intervening to deliver better outcomes in these areas.

## **Involving Communities**

The council's vision and priorities right from the outset has been focussed on strong communities. That strategic intent is constantly reinforced through the leadership of Wiltshire Council and they are rightly proud of what they have achieved to date.

The council is now steadfastly progressing the opportunities that early intervention, investment in the fabric of communities and prevention can create. In short, it stems demand on overstretched services and builds more resilient communities into the future. This mantra of strong communities is lived out through many community activities and programmes which the council sponsors, for example: 'men's sheds', luncheon clubs, 'knit and natter groups' etc. These and many more besides provide sound local solutions. Our challenge is for the council to expand its thinking, capability and targets in respect of these approaches and then plan for how it could extend these to reach a larger cohort of people and communities to achieve more coverage and greater impact.

The Area Boards are a very tangible means through which the council shows its commitment to engaging with local communities. The focus on these boards is rightly prominent with the political leadership of the council and they are a very important aspect of Wiltshire Council's presence across the county. From this well established and respected baseline we would now encourage the council to build on this agenda further and to be bolder about its intent to engage and empower local communities to take even more control and influence of things that matter to them, and to further enhance the role of divisional members as leaders of place. The local plan and future development may well benefit from the use of area boards as champions of local delivery.

The council is committed to transferring some operational services and assets down to towns and parishes as it has a strategic view that such services can be provided more efficiently, effectively and sustainably at such a level. The council is actively engaging its towns and parishes to pursue this agenda and indeed there was scheduled to be a county wide Town and Parish Council Conference facilitated by WC shortly after our peer challenge. We encourage the council to work with its Towns and Parishes and provide more clarity in terms of the "what" is to be devolved and there is a real window of opportunity now to be bolder in terms of its intent, to ensure not only that parish and town councils are true partners in enhancing services for their local communities but that the delivery of the budget saving highlighted in the council's forward plan is delivered.

The council raised a specific frustration with the Peer Team in respect of the time it takes to secure asset transfers and movement of some operational responsibilities to town and parish councils. In essence this is not happening with the pace or coverage it would wish for and we recommend that the council pulls together a 'start and finish task force' to identify the issues and establish a plan to unblock them.

### **4.3 Organisational leadership and governance**

A constant theme of this report is the strong political leadership which gives clarity of direction and is publically visible. In the view of the Peer Team to lever the best from it for the future it needs to work, in a 'business like' way, in harness with the new CLT to set the collective leadership tone for the council. Our challenge to the council is to do this well, so that the need to set in train recovery plans, as has been in place for children's and which is now in place for adults, are mitigated against. This means that new CLT specifically must take the opportunity to establish collaborative and collegiate managerial leadership, be given the space to allow it to lead the officer group of the council and provide an effective foil, including challenge to the political leadership. Indeed we left the council with some suggestions in respect of the characteristics of being 'business like' and proposals to promote a successful CLT, which we have highlighted at Appendix 1 and 2 respectively.

Overall we saw harmonious and productive member and officer relationships throughout the council and some great examples of where this partnership of trust and challenge is alive and well, especially between cabinet members and their respective corporate director-but in truth these were reflective of several strong senior leadership partnerships.

As well as developing the CLT team, the council is looking to build capacity across its whole senior officer structure. To reflect its new Business Planning priorities it has both increased and realigned its tier 2 structure, increasing capacity with 15 new director roles reporting to the Corporate Directors. Again, as with CLT, this group will also require focus and development through change and there are some existing vacancies in that new structure. These will need to be filled in the medium term with new but appropriately skilled and experienced staff to enable that cohort of leaders to achieve their maximum potential.

We were pleased to hear about then see at first hand that the core value and behaviours of Wiltshire Council are well embedded across the council; furthermore staff engagement is first class. The EPIC values and approach (empowering people innovation and collaboration) is very much owned and lived out through the organisation, with systems and processes underpinning them, such as the council's GROW system, which provides a digital platform for both learning & development and performance management and has been developed further to make that engagement real, meaningful and focussed steadfastly on helping to achieve the council's objectives.

In contrast we had some doubts about the current effectiveness of all of the council's commissioning, procurement and contract management arrangements, although we didn't have the opportunity to review this area in detail it was evident in the slippage in the capital programme. We advise the council to commission a discrete and detailed

piece of work to review this as in terms of outcomes, performance and efficiencies we believe there is headroom to exploit.

#### **4.4 Financial planning and viability including commercialisation**

The council has created a relatively strong financial position. This has been achieved through good financial management and a focus on efficiencies. Indeed since 2010 it has made in excess of £120m of savings and as such has an established track record in this respect. Furthermore, it has a strong base of core revenue, including council tax base, good growth projections and from the financial year 2018/19 will be free from Governments Revenue Support Grant.

There are challenges of course, and as with all councils there are further efficiencies that will need to be made. Indeed the council estimates it will be required to make savings in the region of £45m over the next 3-4 years. Significant elements of its emerging approach are based upon the implementation of its digital and commercial plans. Therefore it will be important that more detailed work is done to substantiate and provide confidence around deliverability in respect of these. As we shall see later in this report such plans are relatively new.

The council is well aware of its relatively low level of reserves. Given the existence of current demand pressures in front line services areas, for example adult social care, it will be important to keep a strong focus on this. It should plan accordingly to ensure it does not further restrict the council's ability to manage in year budget overspends as this will have a negative impact on its medium term financial planning.

Along with comments already made and given the financial challenges referred to we feel it will be important for the council to adopt a stronger planning and performance management regime; one that more explicitly links business, risk, financial planning, and major programmes into one coherent whole and establish a clear and coherent "Golden Thread" throughout. The council is well aware of the need to focus its attention on this and as it does so it will be moving from what we felt to be "budget based priorities" to "priority based budgeting" which can be linked more clearly to strategic objectives and specific priorities and outcomes.

#### **Commercialisation**

The council asked us to provide external challenge to how it might better focus its approach to commercialisation and maximising opportunities to generate income and operate in a more 'business like' way.

First and foremost we saw both ambition and appetite (consensus politically and at officer level) that commercialism should become a key driver for change and improvement; it is identified as a key enabler to help achieve the priority of being an Innovative and Effective Council in the new Business Plan. The success of the council's own office rationalisation and the resounding success to date of the One Public Estate Programme across Wiltshire shows that the council can through effective partnerships achieve considerable leverage from a better use of its own and others assets.

When we gave feedback on the final day of the peer challenge we produced a bulleted list of what we coined as the characteristics of being 'business like' (appendix 1). First and foremost the council is at an early stage in developing a commercial strategy and it was in draft at the time of our visit. As such the potential to underpin that strategy with a *clear sense of purpose that captures the imagination and stretches the organisation* seemed a key component that will be required in its development and subsequent adoption.

A further characteristic of being business like is *having financial literacy and using resources effectively*. In this area we felt the council could make relatively easy strides forward. For example, we felt that officers didn't always understand the true costs of providing all services or how financial models might be used to effectively support business case development and we believe the council would be wise to develop its plans in this area.

Another example of how the council may become more commercial or business like lies within the approach to fees and charges. We recognised that a recent review was carried out across the council, however it wasn't always clear about the benefits that could be accrued by reviewing its fees and charging policy and maintaining the discipline of doing this on an annual basis – this seemed a potential quick win that could very easily create momentum and appetite to progress this agenda further.

The council has a good base to build upon but the financial imperative to make savings in the order of £45m over the next 3-4 years is rightly creating the impetus and thrust to further stretch its strategies and plans. This means in these next 3-4 years it must become more commercial and inject the pace and focus that will be required. As part of this the council has, can and will need to be more proactive in learning from and applying in context what other councils are doing to become more commercial: to what end, why and what value is being achieved. A good starting point would be to review some of the work of other councils via public sector support organisations such as the LGA's own website (<https://www.local.gov.uk/our-support/efficiency-and-income-generation/commercialisation>) and to actively seek out and contribute to sector networks and events and realise the wider benefits of sharing best-practice.

In respect of the above we believe it will be important for the council to internally validate its commercial ambitions. At present those ambitions reflect a contribution toward the £45m of savings as part of the medium term financial plan. But it will be really important that the council spends focussed time reviewing its appetite for risk, and likewise its appetite for investment too. For example, does or could the council intend to be more interventionist in the housing market to both stimulate income but also achieve its priorities in terms of vulnerable people. That review of risk, investment and focus on achieving key priorities is very important within this context.

As part of reviewing its commercial ambitions, the council must be clear that operating existing services more efficiently is a major contributory factor in becoming more 'business-like' and a focus should remain on improving the financial envelope of the council. It can do this by continuing to seek out operational commercialisation opportunities as well as adopting innovative income generating models. Using digital



technologies to support service design activities is a very good example of how it may deliver on this agenda.

As with other references in this report the council will, once its commercial ambitions are clear, need to ensure it has the necessary skills and capabilities in terms of processes and people to generate sufficient income to achieve its targets. Into the medium term therefore it will be important to align its commercial ethos to the vision and priorities outlined in its Business Plan so they can be achieved and Wiltshire Council can truly be 'business like'

#### **4.5 Capacity to deliver (including transforming adult social care and digital)**

There is great strength in the people and processes underpinning the political leadership of the council. We were particularly impressed with the Cabinet and portfolio holders' structure which is strong, inclusive, increases capacity and provides opportunity for succession planning.

In terms of capacity there is the clear investment in the new senior officer structure and the increase in number of Associate Directors and likewise in Corporate Directors, focussing around key council priority areas. As already outlined that capacity will only be enhanced further by investment in the development of that senior officer team to support collegiate and strategic working.

The council has a motivated and committed workforce with strong development programmes, staff engagement and flexible working in place. WC's approach to flexible working has reaped rewards in terms of staff satisfaction, improved customer outcomes and efficiency savings for some years now. New examples to report since the last peer challenge were the range of the leadership development programme-from apprenticeships to master's level and the very impressive EPIC programme mentioned already in this report. All of this demonstrates a council which sees the benefits in investing in staff.

The council has sought to build capacity through reconfiguring services and transforming key service areas. Again the reconfiguration of the children's services pathways as well as the realignment of domestic abuse and substance misuse services all point to a council that is seeking to constantly gain improved outcomes for service users and gain maximum efficiencies through strong partnership working.

Our main advice for the council in respect of this area is twofold. Firstly to consider how it can seek to get that balance right between continual change at organisational level and the need to give its staff group a sense of stability and certainty at any given time. Furthermore, within the context of change and stability above it will be important that the council becomes forensic about the skills and capabilities it needs for the medium to long term, especially in the light of observations in respect of digital and commercial etc. and puts in place a clear plan to recruit and grow such capacity so it can meet the changing demands and priorities of the council.

#### **Transforming Adult Social Care**

The council recognises the need to change and transform adult social care. A council led review coupled with the external challenge of an LGA led peer review in February this year, signalled several key areas for improvement across adult social care and led to the council establishing a programme for transformation. There were core issues to attend to in the way the service was managed and led and a need to refocus on key aspects such as prevention, commissioning, managing demand and costs, information, managing more effectively the 'front door' into services and providing a coherence to performance management. The council has also recognised the need for further integration and collaboration with its health partners through the Better Care Fund which interface with the transformation programme through an emphasis on re-ablement. Equally, the council saw the benefits of the well-established Children's Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) and determined that it was necessary to create a similar arrangement to improve the safeguarding for vulnerable adults.

The council has created capacity within its officer senior leadership, through for example, the appointment of an interim corporate director. This coupled with the leadership shown by the cabinet lead, the establishment of the transformation programme and an emerging plan instilled confidence within the Peer Team that the council is aware of what is required and is intent on improvement. However, at this stage, and again the council is aware, there is much to do and there remains some risks due to a range of 'unknowns', which can impact upon and across the range of issues outlined in the paragraph above, including the challenging performance targets for DToC and the potential consequences for BCF funding associated. Clearly many of these issues are not particular to Wiltshire and its partners, since they are national issues that the majority of local authorities across the country are likewise facing.

In terms of learning it is important to reflect that many of the lessons in respect of children's services can be applied to aid improvement here. The council - wide ownership is key, the stability and focus of leadership to see the change through equally important and a resolute focus on achieving outcomes and measuring success. In recognising this, the council deliberately has included representatives from across the entire organisation, particularly from Children's Services, as key members of the transformation board. The programme is in the midst of being developed and it is considerable. At this stage it has the appropriate coverage but not the granular detail nor clearly sufficient progress to sense the likelihood of successful deliverability. As such it will be important that this is regularly reviewed and the reporting and governance framework surrounding the transformation programme needs to be reflected upon, which oversees the deliverables and timetable.

As well as the ownership and leadership across the council there are other encouraging signs. We saw strong staff engagement with the transformation programme across the piece and staff throughout the service understood the need for change, welcomed the opportunity to shape the future and told us they were fully committed to improving services for customers. In our view 'Making Safeguarding Personal' is embedded into the working culture supported by clear processes and auditable evidence. We also saw that across both children's and adults there are seemingly strong safeguarding boards with effective chairs. As said, the council are planning to enter into a partnership arrangement to have an adult Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) building on the success of the MASH within their children's partnership. Partners were very positive



about the potential of the MASH for data sharing and joint approaches to safeguarding particularly across health and social care. Furthermore, Public Health is now beginning to be used as a corporate resource and the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment is being used at Place level, shaping prevention approaches such as tackling isolation and within spatial planning. Clearly there is the potential to develop all of these further but they are all positive examples of ownership and positive change.

‘Market management’, in our view is in its infancy. The council needs to ensure that it has learned the lessons from provider failure and demonstrate it has a strong grip on market sustainability and quality. There appeared to us to be a ‘disconnect’ between commissioning (what do we need) and procurement (how do we get it) and contract management (is it working). Importantly the council is aware of all these matters so it is now key that it secures a market development strategy as a priority including securing and then retaining appropriate skills.

Although they are clear priorities within the council’s transformation plans, demand management including front door, prevention strategy and re-ablement are only just beginning to ‘transform’. As such it will be important that these are the subject of regular review within the context of that plan and sufficient resources are allocated toward these key areas so that in due course WC has a consolidated and effective approach which delivers the outcomes it seeks.

### **Enabling greater digital access to all services**

The council has some well embedded core approaches which provide a good platform from which to support its broader transformation objectives.

It has a strong and well established approach to ‘systems thinking’ throughout the organisation and its strategic application is well understood and enacted, helping improve service design and delivery. There has been broad engagement in this approach from across the organisation at both officer and member level.

The council is combining its work on systems thinking with the approach to digital service design – an approach which has been shared nationally. This approach is helping the council to identify priorities, reduce complexity of services and improve service delivery to residents. The council has used data to prioritise areas of focus e.g. high volume transactions and the method of resident engagement with those services and has worked to re-design those services using digital solutions. This includes work enabling residents to sign up and pay for garden waste collection services online, including renewals, where 76% of transactions have been shifted to a new automated channel.

The council has made significant progress in other areas – enabling citizens to do more things for themselves, at a time they want. For example, the My Wiltshire platform and app is enabling residents to report issues to the council in key areas such as highways, street scene, rubbish collection, fraud and trading standards.

Similarly, the council has been making progress through the “Single View” programme in supporting joint working with partner organisations. The platform is starting to enable

key information to be shared with partner organisations including with social care, health and the police. This has aided partnership working and ensuring that residents are receiving joined up services. There are further ambitions to extend this programme of work.

We saw a developing focus on using data and analytics to drive improvement in services and ensure that this is ensuring resources are targeted effectively to those most in need. For example, in adult social care there has been close working with expertise in public health to identify need across local areas which is being used to shape the adult social care change programme. Importantly, there has been strong engagement with local area forums – using data to better understand their local population and need and helping to identify future priorities. We believe that there are opportunities to build on this approach in the use of data across the council as a whole.

The council has made a strong commitment at both a member and senior officer level to re-design services and consider how they can better be delivered in the context of the digital environment in which we live. This aspiration has recently been set out in the new Digital Strategy which has had positive engagement from across all services in the council. This Strategy sets out an aspiration for end-to-end digital services for citizens.

We believe 'digital' can be a real driver to help achieve improved delivery of services at Wiltshire Council. As is often the case when introducing new or refreshed approaches to drive improvement in any organisation, clarity of purpose and outcomes is key and we found that when we spoke with various people across the council we heard mixed views of what 'digital' is or could be. There is a potential risk therefore that it is viewed in a narrow way as a technology and systems programme championed by a few core individuals. Our view and indeed the view of some key stakeholders within the council is that what is required is a shared narrative of what is being sought through 'digital' which starts with a vision for re-designing the way services are delivered.

The steps the council has already taken are important and is bringing knowledge and expertise from systems thinking, customer and digital give an excellent opportunity to enhance this work. Again, the new Business Plan provides an ideal opportunity for the council to better align the key programmes it has or is intending to put in place to tackle the core challenges it is facing now. These apply across its range of priorities. For example, there is already significant work underway in adult social care to re-design the way services are delivered, including how citizens are supported where care and support may be needed. There are opportunities here to work with citizens and staff to re-design services and consider how digital channels can support this approach.

The council has highlighted within the Digital Strategy the importance of using design standards to guide their approach. We feel more focus could be given to these design standards and how they can be embedded within the work undertaken (either adopted Government Digital Service (GDS) Standards or Local Government Digital Service Standards). This will help the council to better understand user needs, ensure there are sufficient and appropriate skills as part of multi-disciplinary team working as well as encourage maximum usage of services. These three areas were areas where we felt the council could give additional consideration. For example, we felt that there are opportunities for the council to consider the necessary skills needed to enable this work

as well as ensure that there is strong customer engagement both in understanding the existing service – as well as in re-designing the future service. The importance of encouraging residents to use these channels through behavioural insight was also highlighted during the review with opportunities to further promote these with residents.

Overall, the council has made important steps in recognising the importance of re-designing services to ensure that they are fit for a digital age. Progress has already been made in a number of areas guided by the adoption of systems thinking. There is recognition amongst a number of senior individuals that this is not an IT programme but rather about improving services for residents in collaboration with them. There are however opportunities to further strengthen the approach – particularly in ensuring that the areas of focus are aligned to key council priorities, considering the three areas highlighted above and broadening the ownership for this across the organisation.

## **5. Next steps**

### **Immediate next steps**

We appreciate the senior managerial and political leadership will want to reflect on these findings and suggestions in order to determine how the organisation wishes to take things forward.

As part of the peer challenge process, there is an offer of further activity to support this. The LGA is well placed to provide additional support, advice and guidance on a number of the areas for development and improvement and we would be happy to discuss this. Andy Bates, Principal Adviser is the main contact between your authority and the Local Government Association (LGA). His contact details are: Email [andy.bates@local.gov.uk](mailto:andy.bates@local.gov.uk)

In the meantime we are keen to continue the relationship we have formed with the Council throughout the peer challenge. We will endeavour to provide signposting to examples of practice and further information and guidance about the issues we have raised in this report to help inform ongoing consideration.

### **Follow up visit**

The LGA Corporate Peer Challenge process includes a follow up visit. The purpose of the visit is to help the Council assess the impact of the peer challenge and demonstrate the progress it has made against the areas of improvement and development identified by the peer team. It is a lighter-touch version of the original visit and does not necessarily involve all members of the original peer team. The timing of the visit is determined by the Council. Our expectation is that it will occur within the next 2 years.

### **Next Corporate Peer Challenge**

The current LGA sector-led improvement support offer includes an expectation that all councils will have a Corporate Peer Challenge or Finance Peer Review every 4 to 5 years. It is therefore anticipated that the Council will commission their next Peer Challenge before 2022.

## **Appendix 1**

### **What does a good business look like?**

- A clear sense of purpose that captures the imagination and stretches the organisation
- Leadership that is accountable and drives performance by paying attention to the business
- A can-do, customer focussed culture
- Financial literacy that uses its resources effectively
- Robust but agile systems, processes and structures
- A culture of continuous learning and skills development
- Communicates well

## Appendix 2

### Helping to make your new CLT successful

1. **Empowered:** The Corporate Leadership Team are empowered to make the organisational decisions they deem necessary to deliver on the Council's priorities and policies
2. **Time and Space:** CLT commit a sizeable portion of their individual time working as a leadership team on the strategic council wide agenda
3. **Team Development :** CLT prioritise investment in their collective leadership development so they are able to act as a collegiate team that leads organisationally
4. **Performance Management:** CLT implement a Corporate Performance regime that ensures there is clarity in terms of success criteria and the culture, processes and systems are in place to drive sustainable performance improvement
5. **Wicked issues :**Identify a number of cross cutting issues/opportunities that create the opportunity for organisational and system wide collaboration
6. **Transformative Learning:** An environment is set where active learning is valued as a means of Improvement, reflection leading to continuous performance improvement