

Rutland County Council Corporate Peer Challenge

**Feedback from the peer challenge team
26th – 29th November 2019**

The peer challenge team

- **Dorcas Bunton** (Former Chief Executive - Derbyshire Dales District Council)
 - **Councillor Peter Nutting** (Leader - Shropshire Council)
 - **Patsy Dell** (Assistant Director Strategic Planning, Infrastructure and Economy - Hertfordshire County Council)
 - **Lysanne Eddy** (Head of Corporate Strategy - Southend on Sea Borough Council)
 - **Andrew Hughes** (Head of Care and Health Improvement Programme - LGA)
 - **Satvinder Rana** (Programme Manager - LGA)
-

The purpose of peer challenge

Peer challenges are improvement-focussed and tailored to meet individual council's needs.

They are designed to complement and add value to a council's own performance and improvement focus.

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.

The team provide feedback as critical friends, not as assessors, consultants or inspectors.

The process of peer challenge

- Peers reviewed a range of information to ensure we were familiar with the council, the challenges it is facing and its plans for the future
 - We have spent 4 days onsite at Rutland County Council during which we:
 - Spoke to more than 100 people including a range of council staff together with councillors and external stakeholders
 - Gathered information and views from more than 47 meetings, visits to key sites and additional research and reading
 - Collectively spent more than 230 hours to determine our findings – the equivalent of one person spending over 6 weeks in Rutland County Council
 - Feedback session at end of onsite visit, followed by a short report and follow up activity (to be confirmed)
-

Scope and 'brief' for the peer challenge

We have considered the core components looked at by all corporate peer challenges, namely:

1. Understanding of the local place and priority setting
2. Leadership of Place
3. Organisational leadership and governance
4. Financial planning and viability
5. Capacity to deliver

Scope and 'brief' for the peer challenge

You also asked the peer team to explore the following areas:

- **Community engagement** – how you can continue to learn from your previous experience and find a formula that will work for you and your community
 - **Reputation of the Council** - how you can improve the reputation of the Council to ensure that your wider community understand what you do and to assist to shift the perception of negativity
 - **Corporate Plan** - a reality check against your Corporate Plan and plans for creating your 50 year vision for Rutland and how you might tackle 'resistance' to change more positively
-

Overall messages and observations

- Rutland is an ambitious council delivering quality services with high performance levels
 - There are some good innovations coming forward e.g. prevention and early intervention in adults and children's services
 - There are examples of strong partnership working e.g. MOD, Army, schools, CSP, Integration work between Health and social care
 - The Council is well respected by local and sub-regional partners and has influence above its footprint e.g. A1 Corridor
 - There is strong organisational leadership at political and managerial levels
 - The size of the organisation is used well to exploit opportunities and to secure external funding e.g. HIF
 - We met enthusiastic, committed and loyal staff working for the Council who are passionate about Rutland
-

Overall messages and observations

- Community consultation is in place, but mechanisms need to be developed to facilitate continuous community engagement that is more than consulting on options and instead takes residents on a journey to co-design/co-produce solutions at all levels
 - A clear strategy that distinguishes between communications, consultation and engagement is needed. This will facilitate the building of trust within communities and pro-actively win hearts and minds
 - Working with Town and Parish councils RCC should co-design and co-produce a framework for future engagement
 - Capacity and resilience are risk areas for the Council to think through and address
 - Organisational stability now and in the future is critical, particularly in areas driving the Council's ambition and key objectives
 - There is huge potential to develop 'Team Rutland' and its brand into a structured strategic partnership to help own and deliver the future vision for Rutland
-

Understanding of place and priority setting

- There is developing knowledge and understanding of the local place and context which has been used to set objectives and priorities in the Corporate Plan
 - More engagement with communities would enrich this understanding of the local place and help to develop and articulate a strong vision and narrative for Rutland that can be used to win hearts and minds
 - The intention and drive to develop a '50 year vision for Rutland' is positive but ownership of it by the whole community and stakeholders is essential
 - The Corporate Plan provides a sense of direction for the Council, however it currently stands in isolation from the vision
 - The Corporate Plan should be driving the agreed outcomes and quantifying the impacts, not just delivering outputs
-

Leadership of place

- There is effective and well respected political and managerial leadership in the Council.
 - Ownership of the Corporate Plan by the Leader and the Deputy Leader is a real strength and gives weight to what the Council is trying to achieve
 - Key operational partnerships are in place and are effective. However, there are opportunities to work together to visibly strengthen relationships with Town and Parish councils and a huge opportunity to further develop and use 'Team Rutland' more strategically e.g. it could help to own and front the '50 year vision for Rutland'
 - A widely owned and bought into '50 year vision for Rutland' backed up with a clear and strong narrative will focus strategic capacity and enable successful leadership of place
-

Organisational leadership and governance

- Strong and effective leadership provided by the Leader, Deputy Leader and supported by the Cabinet is maturing
 - All the necessary governance and decision making structures are in place and working. However, there is an opportunity to make better use of scrutiny to support policy/decision making through focused commissions and deep-dives into strategic challenges facing the Council
 - There are good Member development opportunities, but Members could benefit from ongoing training and development
 - The Chief Executive carries immense corporate memory and capacity and is held in high regard internally and externally
 - Succession planning, particularly at senior level and in key single posts, is required to ensure longer-term stability, delivery of outcomes and maintaining key relationships
-

Organisational leadership and governance

- There is tension between delivering the priorities in the Corporate Plan and ad-hoc service requests that suddenly appear to be a priority. This tends to divert effort and create undue pressure on staff and resources
 - There is evidence of good internal communication across the organization through regular team meetings, all staff briefings, etc
 - The 'One Council' approach is clearly a strength
-

Financial planning and viability

- The Council is financially stable with healthy non-earmarked reserves
 - The Council's approach to financial management and financial planning is robust and includes budget monitoring reports that clearly identify the areas of budget pressure
 - Risks are identified in budget reports and how they are to be managed
 - There is a five year medium term financial plan (MTFP) where assumptions made are explicit and regularly updated
 - Funding for Capital projects is clearly identified
 - Financial uncertainty beyond 2024 is a risk and the Council is articulating its approach to deficit mitigation
 - Ensure robust resourcing of major projects is in place if outcomes are to be achieved e.g. St George's
-

Capacity to deliver

- The Council manages its capacity to deliver very well. However, staff “wear many hats” which allows for interesting jobs but there are risks in spreading staffing resources thinly
 - High staff turn-over (particularly at senior level) can destabilise the organisation and undermine momentum on key projects, particularly those aligned to priorities
 - Options in terms of service delivery in key areas should be explored to improve resilience
 - The Council has fantastic people who love working for the Council and are highly motivated and supported to develop themselves and their roles - “there is a family atmosphere here”
-

Capacity to deliver

- New and existing staff are very positive about how it feels to work for Rutland CC and see it as an opportunity to develop their careers and experiences
 - Grievances and competency reviews appear high in comparison to other similar sized organisations and this should be investigated and addressed
-

Recommendations

1. Develop mechanisms to facilitate continuous community engagement that is more than consulting on options, builds assurance and transparency around future plans to win hearts and minds
 2. Work with stakeholders to help build trust and buy-in to the ambitious '50 year vision for Rutland'
 3. Working with Town and Parish councils co-design and co-produce a framework for future engagement to help build a stronger conduit to communities and residents
 4. Further develop 'Team Rutland' and its brand into a structured strategic partnership to help articulate and communicate/promote the future vision for Rutland
 5. Address issues of capacity, resilience and succession planning to ensure stability and long term sustainability for the Council
 6. Use the Council's Corporate Plan to contribute to the delivery of the '50 year vision for Rutland', once developed
-

Next steps

- Opportunity for questions and discussion now
 - Feedback report to follow
 - Follow up visit to be scheduled
-

Contact

For more information please contact

Satvinder Rana, Programme Manager,
Local Government Association

satvinder.rana@local.gov.uk

Tel: 07887 997 124
