

City of York Council Corporate Peer Challenge

**Feedback from the peer challenge team
June 2013**

14th June 2013

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The peer challenge team

- Dave Smith, Chief Executive, Sunderland City Council
 - Jon Collins, Leader, Nottingham City Council
 - Clare Whelan, Councillor, LB Lambeth
 - Giles Perritt, Director, Plymouth City Council
 - Tom Stannard, Director, NIACE
 - Fiona Johnstone, Director, Wirral Council
 - Judith Hurcombe, Challenge Manager, LGA
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The process of peer challenge

- Thank you for the invitation. We have been made very welcome and well supported
 - Not an inspection: the team provide feedback as critical friends, not inspectors or assessors. We are reflecting back what you have told us
 - 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 York during which we:
 - Spoke to more than 150 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 200 hours to determine our findings – the equivalent of one person spending over 7 weeks in York
 - Feedback session at end of onsite visit, followed by a short report and follow up activity (to be confirmed)
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Scope and 'brief' for the peer challenge

You asked us to provide an external 'health-check' of the organisation by considering the core components looked at by all corporate peer challenges, namely:

- Understanding of local context and priority setting
- Financial planning and viability
- Political and managerial leadership
- Governance and decision-making

And two additional areas of focus:

- Being a responsive and innovative organisation
- Community infrastructure and capacity building

Quotes of the week

The new building
is little short of
conceptually
brilliant

The support we
get from CYC is
excellent

As Cabinet
members we
push all the
little things; as
Cabinet we
push all the big
things

Of the 12 councils
we deal with, CYC is
the best one with
which to do business

This is a good
council to work
for

The culture is
an explicit
commitment to
successful
partnerships

Local context and priority setting

- Clear drive for economic growth
 - Visible ambition for the organisation and the place
 - Strong leadership on growth agenda from Leader and Chief Executive
 - A wealth of community assets and traditions
 - Economic strategy has sound foundations and is well recognised: going beyond the heritage/visitor economy alone
 - Emerging view of cohesion/community relations in context of significant future demographic and social change
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Local context and priority setting

(2)

- Too many priorities
 - Adding more priorities without losing any: the priorities are not yet shaping the day job
 - Does the financial strategy support the breadth of priorities?
 - Growth priority is clear, but what kind of growth?
 - The council plan:
 - Limited ownership and understanding
 - How grounded is it in ward level priorities?
 - How it links to supporting strategies, especially workforce and MTFS
 - Adults – major priority for budget, the strategy needs to include greater assurance on transformation, quality and safety
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Financial planning and viability

- You have a clear 2 year budget strategy that balances
 - You are maximising income including building up the council tax base
 - Appropriate challenge and review in 2 year strategy
 - Sound capital strategy including plant/fleet/machinery investment and street scene/public realm improvements
 - Financial leverage case for the switch of LEPs stacks up
 - Schools all contribute to the school improvement fund
 - Adults – there is a transformation plan and financial strategy, but you need greater dispersed leadership of this because it is so critical to the budget
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Financial planning and viability (2)

- No clear transformation plan across core services
 - There is evidence of core financial stability but we've not seen evidence of a strategic financial plan that grounds income and efficiencies over the medium term, in order to fulfil your ambitions
 - Transformation capacity seems patchy and project-specific – need a stronger corporate/programme management approach
 - Traditional salami-slicing budget cuts:
 - Which big ticket medium-term savings do these support?
 - Impact of this on wider service delivery
 - Resourcing neighbourhood and ward engagement – these appear to have been easy targets for reductions
 - Limited progress on key development sites
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Political and managerial leadership

- Leader is providing strong, visible leadership, clear about his priorities.
 - Strong leadership and credibility for the Chief Executive from all levels within the organisation and from a wide range of partners and stakeholders.
 - Positive and collaborative relationship between Leader and Chief Executive, both of whom are perceived to be passionate about achieving their vision for the city.
 - Buy-in to the ambition by the majority of strategic partners, and positive relationships are the norm. West Offices is home for some key partners, and a place that others are welcome to visit.
 - Cabinet members understand and provide leadership within their portfolios
 - Clear member commitment to the city and its people.
 - There was evidence of a strong community focus amongst backbench members.
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Political and managerial leadership (2)

- Too many priorities result in stretched officer capacity
 - Portfolios and directorates working together need to more closely contribute to fulfilling the leadership's ambition for the city
 - The Cabinet and CMT need to address the perception amongst backbenchers, opposition members and communities that they are neither informed nor able to influence decision making
 - Cabinet and CMT should refine their understanding of their respective roles and contribution in delivering the council's responsibilities
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Governance and decision-making

- Cabinet is well chaired, feels that it has momentum since 2011, and has an awareness of the need to identify 'non-priorities'
 - Has delivered some 'big things' like the West Offices move, and a balanced two year budget
 - Partners remain signed up to the Local Strategic Partnership
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Governance and decision-making

(2)

- Some partners, stakeholders and officers are yet to fully recognise the contribution of members to the leadership of the authority
 - Neighbourhood governance models are not clear or widely understood.
 - Have partnership structures caught up with or sufficiently focused on new and emerging agendas?
 - The council needs to further develop its approach to measuring and demonstrating success and performance against its ambition for the city
 - Scrutiny is under developed
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Being a responsive and innovative organisation

- This is a highly energised organisation with a lot of ambition and motivation e.g., ICT
 - At a tipping point of looking forward and needing to do things differently
 - Some good organically grown ideas e.g., Telecare service, fleet transport
 - You need to balance innovation and your capacity to deliver
 - Capacity seems over-stretched now
 - Do you have all of the right people and culture to transform?
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Community infrastructure capacity building

- The skills strategy for the economy shows clear plans for creating pathways to work, re-skilling and labour market access for deprived communities
 - The future operating model needs to be clearly articulated.
 - Current expressed intent/priorities are strategic, enabling but most of current resources are traditionally focused
 - Is there sufficient capacity or capability at strategic management level to be transformational?
 - Significant cuts from area management, play development, community development may run counter to building community capacity to engage in co-production and design
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Key messages

- Widely recognised that you've got the right ambition for the city
 - Ambition and energy invested so far has led to high expectations for York
 - Ambition needs to be better matched to the resources available
 - The ability to deliver that ambition is at risk unless you better articulate, plan, manage and deliver
 - Delivering the council's ambition will require hard choices, greater focus and more rigour.
 - Test the deliverability of your ambitions against the community and council's capacity for change in the current climate
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Next steps

- Consider our feedback
 - Draft report within 3 weeks
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Thank you

