

Corporate Peer Challenge Tendring District Council

March 6th - 9th 2018

Feedback Report

1. Executive Summary

Tendring District Council (TDC) is having a significant and positive impact right across its district. The Leader, Deputy Leader and Chief Executive are passionate and well informed about the area, its local context and challenges. Managers and staff are also committed to TDC. They are well engaged and recognise that the Council has been on a cultural journey which is now leading to improvements.

TDC as a council has made huge strides since 2010. It has become more outwardly focused and is now an effective community leader. It is a member of the key decision making bodies in its area. It is acting as a catalyst for more effective and joined up public services and it is holding other service providers to account. One of the key messages to emerge from this peer challenge is that TDC is even better than the story it is telling about itself. It is understating its achievements to residents and other stakeholders. Being clearer from the outset about desired outcomes will help it to tell the story of its achievements and successes in the district.

Political leadership within TDC is strong. The Leader has made a conscious effort to involve all Members. Cabinet and individual portfolio holders take a proactive approach to leading on the major strands of the policy agenda. Member and officer relationships are good. Members are engaged and well briefed on issues. They value the informal “all member briefings” that take place each month as well as the other opportunities to be involved. Members have taken a political decision to support a boundary review which has reduced their numbers from 60 to 48, which reflects the reduction of 130 staff posts due to efficiency savings in recent years.

The priorities for the Council are clear and reflect the needs of the district. Tendring has a typical coastal economy and faces the challenges of being relatively remote geographically, having a relatively poor transport infrastructure, few large employers and a reliance on seasonal employment in tourist related activities. The District also has a number of areas where there is significant deprivation, with the main areas of deprivation centred on Clacton and Harwich/Dovercourt. A section of Jaywick Sands in Clacton is the most deprived area in England according to the Index of Multiple Deprivation.

TDC’s community leadership role is widely recognised and respected. Key partners such as the leaders at Essex County Council (ECC), the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner (PFCC) and the local Member of Parliament for Clacton all praised the Council’s leadership role in the community and beyond. It is very clear that the council is using its community leadership approach to tackle some of its key issues such as education, skills, public health and community safety with its partners.

Despite the challenges faced by the district the Council is ambitious and has a record of delivering significant projects. These have often been delivered in partnership and the Council has been very successful in leveraging significant

funds from partners. The £36m coastal sea defence scheme is just one example – where with an initial £3m investment from TDC, it persuaded partners to invest a further £33m. The scheme has protected 3000 homes from the sea, regenerated the beaches along the coast from Clacton to Holland on Sea and led to significant private investment along the seafront.

TDC's finances are robust. It has already made £13m of savings in recent years without any significant loss of services. It has adequate reserves, and its council tax is low. TDC has a future savings plan that aims to deliver £300k savings each year over the next ten years. We feel that the plan should be clearer regarding how savings and income will be delivered, particularly in the early years. The Council generally has a cautious approach to its financial planning. The revenue budget has been underspent by £1m for the past three years and there is a large fund in place to underpin the savings plan. More focused risk assessment of future income and savings might allow this provision to be reduced. In fact neither the budget nor the capital plan appear to track the future delivery of projects and activity very clearly. Better profiling of future capital spend would enable capital funds to be better managed or invested to contribute to the savings plan.

The Council's approach to growth is sound, including its approach to tourism and the visitor economy. However, much of its plans are dependent on private sector investment and this is a risk, although not one that is unique to Tendring. TDC has a well evidenced Economic Development Strategy with clear and appropriate objectives. Its' Small and Medium Enterprises (SME) Fund comes to an end in March 2018 and its future needs to be considered as a matter of urgency. Partnerships are in place to deliver on three key regeneration issues linked to the growth agenda: health, education and community safety - a fourth key issue should be housing. The Council is in the process of developing its Housing Strategy, but this needs to be accelerated. TDC has shown strong leadership on delivering the Local Plan with good Member consensus.

Plans for the Garden Communities project in North Essex are ambitious but well developed. The Council is working with Essex County Council, Colchester Borough Council and Braintree District Council to deliver three new communities along the A12 with a total of 43,000 new homes and a similar number of new jobs. The arrangements for the Garden Communities governance are sound. The partners have established the North Essex Garden Communities Limited to lead the project. The Council's plans for regenerating Jaywick Sands are also ambitious. Its approach is very much about working proactively with the community and this is working as the residents are supportive of the council's plans for the area. This may now be an appropriate time to have a more formal approach to the programme. A Jaywick Sands Strategic Development Plan, produced with partners and the community, would pull all the regeneration strands together and engage stakeholders.

Going forward, a lack of capacity in Planning and Strategic Housing might slow delivery of the growth strategy. This is not due to any lack of support, or effort by the Council but to the recruitment difficulties of securing the right professional skills. TDC has been tackling these skill shortages for some time in a number of

ways including supporting graduate programmes in areas of skill shortages, developing its own staff, collaboration with other local public sector employees and by its successful and well embedded apprenticeship scheme.

TDC's Transformation Programme is addressing the right issues and budgets are already in place to deliver each part of the programme. Much of the groundwork for Transformation has been done. There is broad agreement on the different elements and plans are in place including detailed project timelines. Staff are on board with the plans but they want them to happen faster. There has been a delay of 12 months around Channel Shift and Customer Access which may have led to frustration and some loss of staff goodwill. The council has recognised that strengthening internal communication around the timescales and reasons for delays is needed and a new Communications Manager is now in post. Going forward, there needs to be a single transformation programme with four strands: Office accommodation, Digitalisation; Customer Services and People. More resources are likely to be needed to manage and deliver the Transformation programme. This could be bought in or developed in - house. There are plans for a Steering Board to co-ordinate the programme with a delivery board below, but these structures are not yet formally in place. There is a need to ensure these plans are put in place and there is clear monitoring and reporting of performance to Members.

Programme, project and performance management and business case processes are not universally well understood or consistent across the council. These activities can all be strengthened. TDC needs to develop its own approach. Being clearer about outcomes as well as outputs will assist the performance management process. Developing the Steering Board to manage the overall transformation programme with a consistent approach to programme and project documentation and reporting will help to address the Governance concerns.

2. Key recommendations

There are a range of suggestions and observations within the main section of the report that will inform the development of an action plan, 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. Improve how you tell the story of your ambition, your plans, your successes and the positive impact you are having across the whole district.** The Council has delivered some major projects in the district but it has not always captured all the positive outcomes these have had or communicated them to residents, staff and other stakeholders. Doing this better will provide some balance to the well publicised focus on the work being done in Jaywick Sands.
- 2. Devise a TDC approach to programme management, project delivery and performance reporting and be consistent in using it. This should include a focus on improving governance.** Currently these processes are

not well understood or consistently applied across the council. As a result programme and project management methodology varies. Performance management also varies and is not sufficiently robust, nor is focused on capturing or monitoring outcomes well.

3. **Bring the four key elements of your transformation programme together: office accommodation, digitalization, customer service and people.** Currently there are three strands each overseen by a different head of service. Bringing them together under one programme will make it easier to see the interdependencies. There needs to be a fourth “People” strand to the programme because people issues will determine the successful delivery and sustainability of the whole programme.
4. **Review how you deal with underspends, savings, risk and phasing of the capital programming.** We think this will release resources to tackle your capacity and delivery issues. Profiling the capital programme over the whole term of the Medium Term Financial Strategy will show clearly when spend is due to happen. This will allow better management of capital including potential for more income from investment of funds that are not yet being used.
5. **Add housing to the existing key strands of joined up working (health, education and community safety) and incorporate this into your emerging housing strategy.** Housing is a core part of TDC’s ambitions and plans for growth and regeneration in the district. It is also key to its work with partners and the private sector. The Housing Strategy will need to reflect this.
6. **Be confident in your plans for Jaywick Sands. Build a shared commitment with community and other partners, setting this out in a strategic development plan.** Relationships with residents are good and the time is now right to formalize the plans for regeneration, both physical and social, into a strategic document. This will help to further engage and enthuse all stakeholders.

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 Tendring District Council were:

- Phil Drury- Chief Executive & Corporate Director - Boston Borough Council
- Cllr Simon Cooke – Leader of Conservative Group - Bradford City Council
- Dai Lerner - Executive Director - Staffordshire Moorlands District Council & High Peak Borough Council

- Jonathan Lund – Corporate Director Transformation - Gloucester City Council
- Gill Elliott - Challenge Manager – LGA
- Laurie Woodgate – National Management Trainee - Nottinghamshire County Council (Shadow Peer)

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 on:

- How well Tendring DC is managing its overall transformation programme
- Growth and in particular the work in Jaywick Sands

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. This has been Tendring District Council's first Corporate Peer Challenge.

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 Tendring, during which they:

- Spoke to more than 90 people including a range of council staff together with councillors and external partners and stakeholders.
- Gathered information and views from more than 30 meetings, visits to key sites in the area and additional research and reading.
- Collectively spent more than 220 hours to determine their findings – the equivalent of one person spending more than 6 weeks in Tendring.

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. (6-9 March 2018) 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

The Council has a strong understanding about the key issues affecting the area. It knows what the challenges are, as well as the opportunities. This understanding has a strong evidence base including the Socio Economic Baseline, the Joint Strategic Needs Analysis produced by the County Council; Public Health Indices of Deprivation and the Health and Wellbeing Report for Essex 2016. The Council also uses data and intelligence from its work with other agencies and partners such as the County Council, Department of Work and Pensions, Clinical Commissioning Groups and the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner to inform its ambitions and priorities.

The Council's partners have a good appreciation of its issues and priorities and vice versa. This was evidenced by all the discussions peers had with external stakeholders and partners including Essex County Council, the police, Public Health and business representatives. This understanding has helped to create a number of successful partnerships that are tackling joint priorities. An example of this is the Essex Strategic Co-ordination Group which co-ordinates the work of partners across Essex. The Group is developing 7 cross- Essex workstreams and is chaired by the Chief Executive of TDC.

The Council's Corporate Plan for 2016-2020 is set out on a single page, making it both eye catching and easily digestible. It makes it very clear that the Council's vision is to put community leadership at the heart of everything it does. For TDC this means working to be a catalyst for effective joined up public service delivery; being a member of the key partnership decision making bodies in its area and beyond and active day to day working with partners on the ground. This is evidenced by its membership of the Essex wide Health and Wellbeing Board, its development of a Community Safety Hub with the police and a wide range of other partners; its leading role in establishing and chairing the Coastal Communities Group of the South East LEP and its work with Colchester and Braintree Councils to develop a joined up Stage 1 of its new Local Plan.

The Corporate Plan also contains the Council's high level ambitions and what it is seeking to achieve. It highlights the Council's challenges, opportunities and values. Challenges include the poor health of residents; pockets of unemployment; low economic activity and reducing council budgets. Opportunities are its vision for economic growth, its coast; tourism, culture and sport as well as the sea, and rail connectivity. The Corporate plan also makes reference to the values of the organisation including councillors and staff upholding personal integrity, honesty and respect for others; innovative flexible and professional staff committed to delivering excellence and collaborative working.

The Council's overall ambitions in the Corporate Plan are based on evidence and research and there is a clear rationale for them. The annual list of priorities are determined by the Leader and Deputy Leader based on business case evidence. The list for the current year includes priorities such as: adoption of the Local Plan;

ten new council houses in Jaywick Sands; delivering superfast broadband; a £1m public realm scheme in Dovercourt; and a Development Corporation for the Garden Communities Scheme. This priority list is developed further by management team and informal cabinet and is then included in the quarterly performance reporting which goes to formal cabinet and Overview and Scrutiny. The annual priorities then inform departmental service plans, project and performance plans, objectives and outcomes. Peers found that not everyone they spoke to had a clear understanding of why some issues are priorities and how they relate to the corporate plan or why some projects are not on the priorities list. The Council should set out more clearly with members, staff and partners, how the corporate plan links to the yearly priorities list and how it is embedded into budgets, service planning and performance monitoring – the golden thread.

The ambitions of the Council are also reflected in the clear focus it has on three key areas where joined up working with partners can deliver real results. These areas are: community safety, education and health and well-being. There has been demonstrable action and success in all three areas.

Within community safety TDC has:

- Developed a community safety hub with partners;
- Delivered Gangline – training for frontline professionals, secondary school workshops, mentoring vulnerable gang members.
- Improved crime and anti-social behavior indicators

Within education TDC has:

- Taken a lead in establishing a schools improvement group. All its schools are now rated good or outstanding although attainment levels are still not as high as they should be.
- Encouraged Teach First to assign teachers to its schools and run the first summer school for new trainees.
- Established a memorandum of understanding with both the University of Essex and Anglia Ruskin University
- Gained £1.2m worth of funding for an “Into University” centre based in Clacton. The scheme aims to raise the aspirations of young people. The centre offers support to disadvantaged children including personal tutoring/mentoring, visits to universities etc. All schools in the district can use its state of the art science facilities which include 3D printers and Robotics. The cabinet member for Health and Education is the lead member for the project.

Within health and wellbeing TDC has:

- Secured a seat on the regional Health and Wellbeing Board (HWB)
- Appointed an officer (funded by ECC) to co-ordinate public health projects in the district
- Developed a local HWB. Partners on the local HWB include the CCG and Citizens Advice Tendring. (CAT) Issues from the local HWB are taken to the regional HWB and information is cascaded back from the regional board.

- Worked with health and voluntary sector partners, to set up a Mental Health Hub to support people with serious mental health issues including those being discharged from hospital.

4.2 Leadership of Place

TDC is widely recognized by its major partners in Essex as a Council that “punches above its weight”. The MP for Clacton, the PFCC, and leaders at Essex County Council all praised the Council’s leadership role in the community and beyond. At a strategic level the Council holds a number of leading roles in Essex wide organisations. The Leader of the Council chairs the Essex Leaders and Chief Executives Group. The Chief Executive chairs the Safer Essex (Community Safety) Group; the Essex Strategic Co-ordination Group and is also on the health Strategic Transformation Plan) STP Board. The Cabinet Member for inward investment and Growth chairs the Coastal Communities Group on the South East LEP. These roles allow TDC to influence the agenda and promote Tendring’s interests in area initiatives.

The Council has a reputation for achieving, despite being a relatively small organization. It successfully developed a partnership of agencies that turned its own £3m investment into a £36m Coastal Defence Scheme. In three years the scheme delivered restored beaches and sea defences along the coast from Clacton to Holland on Sea. Partners included Essex County Council, Anglian Water and the Environment Agency. Outcomes of the project included three thousand homes being protected from the sea; private investment of £4m in the pier at Clacton, a new hotel being built on the seafront and a huge rise in the value of beachhuts.

The Council is demonstrating really effective joint working with the private sector, in particular around tourism. The Clacton Air Show is attracting 250,000 visitors and for a modest financial contribution from the Council is having a significant impact on the local visitor economy. Harwich Tourism Group is leading the development of preparations for the Mayflower 400 celebrations. The Council is also developing plans for an improved public realm in Dovercourt which will help create a focal point for the town.

As a peer team we feel that the council could be far more confident in telling its story. It plays a huge role as a leader of place; its community leadership approach with partners is delivering significant outcomes and it is having great impact across the district. Telling the story better will provide a counter to the view that the council’s focus is mainly on Clacton & Jaywick Sands.

4.3 Organisational leadership and governance

The Council’s political and professional leadership is highly respected and well-regarded by staff, councillors and partners. We heard that the organizational culture is open and positive. External auditors reported good access to senior officers as well as regular meetings and committed attendance by managers. There is growing trust between officers and councillors, although there may still be some more work to do to

clarify respective roles of councillors and officers especially in respect of planning matters. This may be a training opportunity for Members and non-planning Members in particular.

Staff also recognize the Council's commitment to their training and development and opportunities for internal promotion. They see that the Council is investing in them personally and professionally. There are a wide range of staff benefits and an annual benefits event is held to explain benefits like the staff pension. Staff performance reviews take place at all levels of the organization.

Staff welcome the existing engagement and communications arrangements. They said that the Chief Executive and his senior team are accessible and that they regularly visited the offices and depots away from the Town Hall. Staff value the all staff briefings which are held several times a year as well as the Chief Executive's Vlog and the regular team briefings from managers. There was a view that there could be more corporate information communicated to staff. Telling the story better about the council's outcomes and achievements would help all staff to feel valued. Peers were told that the council's intranet Ping! is not universally admired by staff. Seeking their views on how it could be improved might be a useful exercise. There is a strong desire from staff to interact more across departments and to know more about their colleagues and better understand their respective roles. The planned office moves will provide an opportunity to strengthen the "One Council" ambition by maximising opportunities for staff to get to know each other.

Decision making within the Council is inclusive and collaborative. All Member briefings have delivered excellent member engagement and cross party buy-in to issues like the Garden Communities project, boundary changes and Transformation project. The large intake of new councillors in 2015 presented fresh challenges to the organization. There was a hung council and a large number of new councillors. There is no longer a hung council due to changes in the political balance and a comprehensive programmes of members' briefings has supported the large number of new members.

The Council has plans to change the way overview and scrutiny is organized. One committee will have an internal focus and the other will consider external issues. In doing this the Council needs to ensure that the planned changes to Overview & Scrutiny enhances its value to the organisation, and aligns strongly with the key priorities and projects.

Staff reported that they were not always clear about how some projects became annual priorities whilst others remained business as usual. TDC could do more to ensure that staff, councilors and partners understand the decision-making process around priorities. Better communication and greater clarity about when projects are to be delivered as well as the impact that the outcomes will have should improve this.

The peer team were asked to consider how the Council balances the competing demands of governance, day to day delivery, projects and partner engagement. The team challenged the view that governance competes with day-to-day delivery. Its view is that effective and appropriate governance arrangements will make delivery easier, empower officers to deliver, help tell the story and demonstrate impact. Improved

project and programme management will improve governance across the whole range of the council's activities. The corporate risk register should also be reviewed regularly when the annual priorities are agreed so that it becomes a valued tool to manage risk and identify actions that mitigate the risks. A review will allow clarity on the risks being managed be they for TDC corporately or relating to the delivery of specific projects to the wider Tendring geography, economy and communities.

4.4 Financial planning and viability

The Council is in a secure financial position. It has a relatively low level of Council Tax and adequate General Fund reserves of £4m with earmarked reserves of £7.9m forecast at the financial year end. Funds have been allocated to key projects such as the Garden Communities, Harwich Public Realm, housing in Jaywick Sands and Transformation. The Council is good at drawing in funds into the district from other agencies for projects. Examples of this include the coastal defence scheme, the community safety hub and the Into University project. There has also been effective management of the Housing Revenue Account which has provided some financial headroom for the developments being planned around housing. The Council has a good track record of delivering savings whilst maintaining core services, despite the fact that 130 posts have been taken out of the workforce. £13m of savings have already been made over the past 5 years.

Members and Officers clearly understand the principles behind the strategy for a 10 year saving plan. People feel more confident about how they can contribute to an annual savings target of £300k. The Council has a positive working relationship with the external auditor which bodes well for the proposed audit of the 10 year savings plan this year. This will be a good opportunity for joint working on the plan. Auditors have already commented on a lack of detail about how savings and income generation will be achieved, particularly in the early years of the plan.

The Council's approach to budgeting generally is cautious. It should review the balance between holding reserves and the management of financial risks. The 10 year savings plan is underpinned by a fund of £1.7m. There have also been successive underspends of around £1m in the revenue budget over the last three years. The Council could consider making some adjustments to its 10 year strategy by reviewing recent and current year underspends and how these could be incorporated into base budgets. Assumptions and risk assessment could be made about future income for example from increased fees for business or garden waste, planning or crematorium fees. These could then be reflected in the savings plan and the size of the reserve underpinning it could be reviewed. This may release funding to address capacity issues and improved delivery of priorities such as Transformation which in turn will help to deliver the savings plan.

The Council would benefit from strengthening its approach to financial risk management to get a better understanding of the real risks. Absence of risk assessment in new projects has meant the council retaining contingency funds or reserves to provide some financial headroom. However, once risks are properly assessed and managed, the council can then decide whether the contingencies are

necessary and at what level. This may result in the opportunity to reduce the level of reserves and enable more money to be allocated to addressing capacity issues.

The council has a clear Capital Plan and major projects are funded. However, allocation of capital spend is not profiled across the period of the Medium Term Financial Strategy or aligned to priority project delivery. Doing this would make it much easier to see when capital is going to be spent. This will enable resources to be released only when they are needed. It will also allow for better management of money not yet spent. Plans for investment income can then be reflected in the Savings Plan.

4.5 Capacity to deliver

The Council demonstrates good overall organisational health. Staff commitment, morale and levels of engagement are high. Staff surveys are carried out frequently – there have been three since 2013. The organization has also been awarded IIP Gold and Disability Confident Level 3. Sickness absence levels are low at 2.55 days per employee per year (short term absence) and 7.51 days (long term absence). Staff value the range of flexible working arrangements such as homeworking and the many different benefits on offer including a salary sacrifice car loans scheme. There are positive trade union relationships. Regular monthly meetings take place with managers to discuss the Transformation project as well as regular Joint Consultative Committee meetings. The Transformation project will continue the process of dismantling silo working by co-locating staff in fewer building. This will help to deliver the “One Council” ambition.

There is evidence of capacity issues within strategic housing, planning and delivery of major capital projects. Planning staff identified that there was sometimes a conflict between balancing their day job and strategic roles. Within Housing there is a lack of strategic capacity to deliver key projects such as the Housing Strategy, tackling HMO licensing; managing the development programme for council housing and addressing the fact that there are a hundred families in temporary accommodation. There is also a lack of project and programme management capacity for major capital schemes. We were also made aware of the interim arrangements to cover the currently vacant internal audit management post. The External Auditor has encouraged the Council to explore the potential of a shared arrangement with neighboring authorities as a way of addressing the issue in the context of potential recruitment difficulties.

The Council is addressing its capacity issues. It has a clear “grow your own” ethos, and it has made considerable investment in employee development. It operates a system of career grades across the council. It also has a graduate programme for Planning and Environmental Health officers and there is an in-house development programme for managers and aspiring managers. The Council also runs a successful and well embedded apprenticeship programme. There are currently 70 apprentices on the scheme of which 30 are employed within the Council and 40 are employed by nearby councils like Maldon and other organisations in the district. 13% of current employees in the Council were former apprentices. Over a third of Council employees are currently over 50 and Human Resources has started considering how it will manage succession issues.

The Council has been very successful at leveraging external resources and expertise. This was exemplified in the coastal defence scheme, the Community Safety Hub, the Into University Scheme. Its successful bid for the LGA Housing Advisers programme brought in free consultancy expertise to address the issue of a lack of private landlords. TDC has also successfully bid for a share of a £120m Sport England fund to increase physical activity within the district. It has been at the forefront of the Teach First Scheme in the East of England and ran the first summer school for Teach First in Essex. The council's strong partnerships also add capacity and help achieve priorities. Examples include the local Health and Wellbeing board and the Education Improvement Group.

Plans to transform ways of working should provide additional capacity to deliver corporate priorities. The Customer Service Strategy and rationalisation of buildings will deliver a single customer contact centre instead of a number of different receptions at present. The intention is that the first point of contact will deal with 80% of queries. Information Technology (IT) projects and Channel Shift strategies should also free up more capacity. For example services like Licensing which still take cash will be available online. Print and post will be dealt with electronically. Mobile and remote working will be better enabled by improved links to office systems and files for services like Revenues and Benefits.

Programme and project management as well as project reporting, all need to be improved with greater focus on priorities, risks and outcomes. TDC should consider how it can develop its own consistent approach to project governance – this might cover business cases and project initiation, mapping and managing risk and interdependencies, setting out the budgets and tolerances within which managers are empowered to act and periodic milestone and outcome-focused performance management reporting. The quarterly performance reporting dashboard should pick up all the key Cabinet priorities. The arrangement for reporting performance to Members is also fairly loose. The role of Members in performance management could be strengthened. Given the scale of the projects there should be a formal quarterly report to Cabinet to pick up progress on the key projects. Portfolio holders will want to see progress on key projects and hear from officers. Overview and Scrutiny should be encouraged to include the performance management of these key Cabinet projects into their programme. This will strengthen the role of Overview and Scrutiny in programme governance.

4.6 How well is the council managing its Transformation Programme?

The Transformation programme is addressing all the right issues. There is a strong focus on the key elements of: Office rationalization; Customer Services/Channel Shift and Information Technology (IT). Budgets are already in place to deliver each part of the programme. Over the past two years £1.5m has already been invested in new technology which replaced the aging call manager system with Skype for Business so that users can use instant messaging, conference and video calls.

Much of the groundwork for Transformation has been done. There is broad agreement on the different elements and plans are in place including detailed project timelines.

Currently there is a plan for a Steering Board to be established at a strategic level to provide better co-ordination of the Transformation Programme with a delivery board underneath. However, because these structures are not yet in place formally, each strand of the programme is still headed up by a head of service, with existing corporate management structures and informal networking being used to ensure co-ordination.

Communication with staff and members is already underway and staff are on board with the planned changes. Sources of communication include the all staff briefings, the online newsletter “The Memo” and questions and answers on the staff intranet. The Staff understand the Council’s ambitions for Transformation and there is an eagerness now to get on and deliver. Many feel that it needs to be done more quickly. There has been a delay of 12 months around Channel Shift and Customer Access which may have led to frustration and some loss of the staff goodwill. There may now be a need to strengthen internal communication around the timescales and reasons for delays. The HR team are drafting a communication piece on the 21st Century public servant to re-start the corporate communications on Transformation.

TDC’s plans for a Steering Board make it timely to consider a single transformation programme with four strands: Office accommodation, Digitalisation; Customer Services and People aspects. It will be increasingly important to recognize the people element of Transformation as a fundamental part of the project. Office plans are intended to be Equality Act 2010 compliant for disabled access but they have not yet been tested with users or user groups. Equality Impact Assessments should be carried out for all the Transformation Plans.

The Council is very likely to need to commit more resources to programme and project management of the Transformation programme. This could be bought in or developed in - house. At the moment the office rationalization project is due to take 2 years. TDC would like to reduce this by 6 months but currently there is a lack of capacity to achieve this. Consequently some aspects of the programme will happen sequentially rather than concurrently as staff balance transformation work and their day to day roles. Once the office moves and the Customer Service Strategy are delivered the council should continue with service transformation to ensure that service delivery is aligned fully with the new ways of working.

4.7 Approach to Growth – particularly Jaywick Sands

The council’s Economic Development Strategy is well evidenced by a comprehensive economic baseline document. The Strategy has five clear and appropriate objectives:

- 1: Supporting Tendring’s Growth Locations – Harwich, Clacton, West Tendring.
- 2: Targeting Growth Sectors – Offshore Wind Energy, and Care & Assisted Living.
- 3: Skills and Information
- 4: Supporting Modernisation, Diversification & Growth within the Business Base –.
- 5: Facilitating Population Growth where this Supports the Economy

The Council has in place good partnerships to deliver on issues linked to the Growth agenda such as health, education and skills. These include the local HWB, the Mental

Health Hub and a range of education partnerships and initiatives previously outlined in the report.

There are well developed and ambitious plans for the Garden Communities and Jaywick Sands. The Garden Communities project aims to deliver housing and economic growth in North Essex based on Garden City principles. TDC is working in partnership with ECC, Colchester Borough Council and Braintree District Council to promote three new garden communities. The delivery vehicle for this programme may be, subject to national government decisions, one of the first locally accountable New Town Development corporations.

The Council clearly has an ambition for Jaywick Sands but that plan now needs to be written down. A more formal approach is needed. A strategic development plan produced with partners and the community would be able to set out the ambitious outcomes for the area. This would help to continue to enthuse residents and other stakeholders in the emerging plans. The area is one of significant deprivation. The Council's approach to regenerating the area is now very much about working proactively with the community and partners. ECC has spent £6m on improving the roads in the area and TDC is planning to deliver ten new houses, half of which will be reserved for key workers. The intention is to use this development to generate confidence and private sector investment in the area. The Council has also bought 30 hectares of land for new houses and potentially other facilities. There is already significant private sector interest in Jaywick.

There is an effective approach to tourism and the visitor economy. The portfolio Member for Tourism and the Tourism Team are very enthusiastic, committed and focused. There are increasing visitor numbers at the main tourist attractions in the district and increased expenditure and jobs in tourist related businesses. 2020 marks the 400th anniversary of the sailing of the Mayflower Ship to America. The Mayflower was strongly associated with Harwich and a series of events are scheduled to respond to the high numbers of visitors expected from the UK, the USA and beyond.

The Council has achieved good leverage of private investment in Tendring, for example in Harwich, Clacton Pier and Jaywick Sands. The success of the coastal defence scheme has also encouraged private investment. Since the completion of the coastal works, a £4m investment in the pier at Clacton has begun

TDC has shown strong leadership on delivering the Local Plan. The Plan has been completed in two stages with Section 1 being a joint plan with Colchester and Braintree Councils. This deals with the strategic issues including proposals for the garden communities. Section 2 relates specifically to Tendring. There is good consensus amongst the Members.

The Council is in the process of developing its Housing Strategy. This development phase needs to be accelerated. The strategy should include a district development programme and timetable for growing your own stock and enabling private sector housebuilding as well as a plan for engagement with private landlords; enforcement of housing regulations against rogue landlords and extending the scope of mandatory licensing of HMO properties. The Council should then develop a partnership to deliver the housing strategy. This could include registered providers, private sector landlords as well as developers.

TDC should consider the future direction of its SME growth fund and its links to delivering economic strategy. The current growth fund comes to an end in March 2018 but it generated only modest spend and jobs during its three years. It may be possible to relaunch the fund or to consider a different approach.

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. Gary Hughes Principal Adviser is the main contact between your authority and the Local Government Association (LGA). His contact details are: Email gary.hughes@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 2023.