



Report to: Cabinet Meeting: 18 February 2025

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Paul Peacock - Strategy, Performance & Finance

Director Lead: John Robinson – Chief Executive

Lead Officer: Deborah Johnson, Director - Customer Services & Organisational Development, Ext. 5800

<b>Report Summary</b>	
<b>Type of Report</b>	Open Report, Non-Key Decision
<b>Report Title</b>	Local Government Association (LGA) Peer Challenge
<b>Purpose of Report</b>	To update Cabinet on the results from the Council’s Peer Challenge and the next steps towards the development of an action plan to tackle the report’s findings.
<b>Recommendations</b>	That Cabinet note: a) the report at Appendix A and its recommendations; and b) the formation of a working group tasked with forming an action plan to address those findings.
<b>Alternative Options Considered</b>	The review could be delegated to the Policy & Performance Improvement Committee, but it is considered appropriate for the Leader to chair the group and for senior Members of Cabinet, PPIC and Audit & Governance Committee all to be involved. Work streams can be delegated to PPPIC, Audit & Governance Committee and other Council bodies as appropriate.
<b>Reason for Recommendations</b>	The LGA team provided a presentation of key findings on the last day of the Peer Challenge and have now followed this up with a full report. It is now important for the Council to examine those findings and produce an action plan on how we will use the recommendations to improve our performance.

## **1.0 Background**

1.1 The LGA operate a peer challenge programme which supports continuous improvement by providing effective insight, guidance and challenge to enable continuous improvement, as well as assurance to local leaders and residents.

1.2 Newark & Sherwood District took part in a Peer Challenge in October 2024 which involved a team of local authority peers visiting our Council headquarters to look at our approach across five core elements detailed below.

1. Local priorities and outcomes
2. Organisational and place leadership
3. Governance and culture
4. Financial planning and management
5. Capacity for improvement.

1.3 The LGA team hold up a mirror to the organisation, acting as critical friends and to provide an external, independent perspective on how a Council is performing. A Peer Challenge provides opportunity to celebrate what is working well as well as making recommendations for improvement. The team considered a wide range of experience of what 'good' looks like in other local authorities as they assessed our performance and provided a presentation on the last day which was followed by the final report which is attached at **Appendix A**.

## **2.0 The Findings of the LGA Peer Challenge**

2.1 The report acknowledges that NSDC makes a 'real and tangible difference on citizens lives' through the delivery of its core functions and praises the "great positive, supportive and welcoming culture, with staff going the extra mile to support each other and the communities they serve". The Council's relatively strong financial position is recognised along with what are described as "well and effectively run services" that are performing consistently above national benchmarks. The Council was found to be highly regarded by its external partners with the organisational leadership of the Council being strong, respected and approachable.

2.2 While the ambitious, energetic nature of the Council was something to be valued, the Peers raised reservations about a "lack of clear prioritisation from Councillors" and the tendency to take on responsibilities that properly fell to other organisations. It was acknowledged that this was in part the result of a lack of understanding given the large number of new Councillors but carried the risk of over-stretching officers and placing a strain on the Council's capacity to deliver its core services.

### **LGA Recommendations**

2.3 The report comments throughout on the performance of NSDC and as such offers recommendations on how the Council can develop. These include officer practices such as a review of the appraisal mechanism and enhanced updates around the recruitment & retention project in addition to a number of suggested improvements to the Council's governance arrangements. These areas are in addition to the formal recommendations and will be an area for discussion at the action plan development meetings.

2.4 Highlighted below are the recommendations made by the Peer Challenge team with the full detail being available at section 3 of the report at **Appendix A**.

1. Review and prioritise the 2023-2027 Community Plan.
2. Review Audit, Governance, Overview and Scrutiny functions of the council to maximise councillor engagement and council productivity.
3. Ensure councillors understand the longer-term budget pressures.

4. Establish an ongoing councillor development programme.
5. Continue to foster the positive culture of the organisation.
6. Consider agreeing a Team Charter amongst the Joint Administration.

### **3.0 Proposal/Details of Options Considered**

In response to the LGA's findings the following is proposed:

#### **3.1 The Formation of a Working Group**

The recommendations cover several areas from across the Council, so it is proposed to draw together senior members as set out in 3.2 below. The aim is to hold the first meeting of the working group as soon as possible with a meeting in February 2025 being explored. The remit of the working group will be to discuss the report's findings and agree on an action plan that can respond to any areas that require development. A report will then be brought back to Cabinet, PPIC and Audit and Governance to deliver the action plan and discuss next steps.

#### **3.2 The working group will consist of the following:**

- a. Leader of the Council
- b. Deputy Leader of the Council
- c. Chair of Audit & Governance
- d. Vice Chair of Audit & Governance
- e. Chair of Policy & Performance Improvement Committee
- f. Vice Chair of Policy & Performance Improvement Committee
- g. Leader of Conservative Group
- h. Leader of Green Group
- i. Leader of Liberal Democrat Group
- j. Leader of the Newark & Sherwood Independents Group

#### **Officer Support:**

Director - Customer Services & Organisational Development  
Transformation & Service Improvement Manager

### **4.0 Implications**

In writing this report and in putting forward recommendations, officers have considered the following implications: Data Protection; Digital & Cyber Security; Equality & Diversity; Financial; Human Resources; Human Rights; Legal; Safeguarding & Sustainability and where appropriate they have made reference to these implications and added suitable expert comment where appropriate.

#### **4.1 Legal Implications (LEG2425/8007)**

Cabinet is the appropriate body to consider the content of this report. The informal working group will need to submit proposals for formal consideration by Cabinet, Audit & Governance Committee and Policy & Performance Improvement Committee as appropriate, as set out in the report.

### **Background Papers and Published Documents**

Except for previously published documents, which will be available elsewhere, the documents listed here will be available for inspection in accordance with Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972.

Local Government Association (LGA) Peer Challenge – [Agenda for Cabinet on Tuesday, 5th March, 2024, 6.00 pm - Newark and Sherwood District Council](#)