

LGA Peer Challenge - Progress Update

Date: 02 December 2025

Introduction

This document provides the Peer Team with an update on our response to the Peer Challenge Final Recommendations. Shortly after the team concluded its Final Report, Cabinet approved the formation of a cross-party working group which was tasked with developing an action plan to deliver improvements in the areas recommended by the LGA team. This action plan can be found in the link below and is also attached as Appendix A.

[Cabinet report - Local Government Association \(LGA\) Peer Challenge](#)

As a Council, we recognise the importance of learning from others and seeking out new and different perspectives. We fully committed therefore to assessing every one of the Final Recommendations and have carefully considered how best to respond.

Alongside the Action Plan, the sections below cover our response to the Peer Team's Final Recommendations. We have added a section on Local Government Re-organisation which has emerged since the Peer Team's visit and has become for us and many other parts of the Country, a significant additional focus.

Recommendation 1: Review and prioritise the 2023-2027 Community Plan

During the autumn of 2024, a comprehensive review of the 2023-2027 Community Plan was undertaken, marking two years since its launch and providing an opportunity to assess progress to date.

Commissioned in response to the LGA's feedback, which described the initial plan as 'overambitious' and at times 'overlapping with the roles of other organisations,' the council completed a full evaluation, documenting all actions delivered. Key stakeholders, including elected members and the Senior Leadership Team, participated in dedicated workshop sessions to inform the review, which was followed by delivery of a revised Community Plan including updates to the associated Key Performance Indicators and the council's overarching performance framework.

The updated report and framework were presented to the Policy & Performance Improvement Committee (PPIC) in March 2025 for scrutiny and assurance, and subsequently to Cabinet in April 2025 for endorsement. A much slimmed down and updated Community Plan was approved by Full Council on 20 May 2025, reflecting a robust process of review and improvement.

In addition to this review, a working group was established to address cross-cutting issues that fall outside the formal scope of a typical district council. Assessing the sustainability and impact of these activities on Council resources, the group focused on key areas such as flood response and public health. The group noted that the Council's flood response under the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 and associated community

resilience initiatives remained critical, while the ongoing delivery of public health services was highlighted as an ongoing priority.

The working group is nearing the final stages of its work and progress to date includes the development of an initial set of recommendations aimed at improving inter-agency coordination and clarifying lines of accountability, which will be presented to the Policy and Performance Improvement Committee (PPIC) in December 2025.

[Cabinet Report - Community plan refresh - April 2025](#)

[Full Council - Community plan 2023-2027 - May 2025](#)

Focus and prioritisation has become even more important with Local Government Re-organisation absorbing significant amounts of member and officer capacity. While that is understood and appreciated, there is now the additional challenge to meet the ambitions to leave the very best legacy possible of Newark and Sherwood District Council.

Recommendation 2: Review Audit, Governance, Overview and Scrutiny functions of the council to maximise councillor engagement and council productivity

In line with the LGA's recommendation, the Audit & Governance (A&G) Committee established a dedicated working party to conduct a comprehensive review of the Terms of Reference for both the A&G Committee and the Policy and Performance Improvement Committee (PPIC). The working party also examined the composition of the A&G Committee, specifically reviewing governance arrangements and code of conduct. This thorough review process culminated in the presentation of a series of reports outlining the working party's findings in May 2025.

[Audit & Governance - Local Government Peer Review – Corporate Peer Challenge - May 2025](#)

[Audit & Governance - Review of the Council's Constitution - May 2025](#)

[GGPLGR - Code of Conduct Annual Report for the Period 1 May 2024 – 30 April 2025](#)

As a result of the review, revisions were proposed to Full Council who resolved to split the single Audit & Governance Committee into two new committees, one focused on audit, the other on wider governance matters and LGR. These two committees have been established and are the Audit & Accounts Committee, and Governance, General Purposes & Local Government Reorganisation Committee (GGPLGR).

The changes also provided an opportunity to reflect on the Peer Team's encouragement to revisit the leadership of committees, which is now provided by members who are not part of the ruling administration.

The new GGPLGR committee has been established with a clear remit and its responsibilities include reviewing and recommending amendments to the council's constitution, ensuring compliance with statutory and regulatory requirements, oversight of the Code of Conduct and Local Government Re-organisation.

These changes are a good indication of the value of the Peer Challenge and our willingness to listen and respond to external feedback. It is also worth noting that the chairs and vice chairs of all NSDC committees

now convene on a regular basis to coordinate their respective work programmes. This collaborative approach is designed to ensure that reports are directed to the most appropriate committee, thereby maximising the effectiveness of scrutiny and oversight. This includes the annual review of the governance statement which was completed in July 2025.

[Audit & Governance - Review of the Council's Constitution - Replacing the Audit & Governance Committee - July 2025](#)

[Full Council - Changes to the Council's Constitution - Replacing the Audit & Governance Committee - July 2025](#)

Recommendations 3 and 4: Ensure councillors understand the longer-term budget pressures and establish an ongoing councillor development programme

NSDC remains committed to supporting the ongoing development of its elected members, recognising that effective councillor training is essential to maintaining high standards of governance and community leadership. The council's approach reflects best practice recommendations from the LGA and is designed to equip councillors with the knowledge and skills required to navigate an ever-evolving local government landscape.

In the past year, officers have delivered a series of targeted training initiatives. Notably, an all member training day was held in June, providing a refresher for new and more experienced councillors. This was complemented by finance training delivered by the Section 151 Officer, which focused on statutory responsibilities, financial governance, and budgetary control. More recently, a budget planning workshop took place in October 2025, enabling councillors to engage with the medium-term financial plan and enhance their understanding of the budget-setting process. Further arrangements are in hand to involve the full cross section of members in this latest budget round. Given the nature of our political composition which involves six different political groups and a number of independent, unaligned members, this is a resource intensive task but one we are committed to.

Looking ahead, the newly established Governance, General Purposes and Local Government Reorganisation (GGPLGR) Committee is set to assume responsibility and oversight for councillor development, ensuring a strategic and coordinated approach to future training. This committee will oversee the identification of development needs, the planning of training programmes and the evaluation of its impact, thereby embedding councillor development as a core element of NSDC's governance framework.

Through these and other initiatives, we hope we have demonstrated our commitment to encouraging and supporting members to not only discharge their duties effectively and in accordance with best practice but to support their own ambitions to progress.

Recommendation 5: Continue to foster the positive culture of the organisation

The positive culture of the Council is something we treasure and put a huge amount of energy into. Since the Peer Challenge in October 2024, we have continued to champion initiatives that celebrate

achievement, boost personal and professional growth, encourage open dialogue and take a genuine interest in the health and well-being of colleagues. We do this because we genuinely care but also because we appreciate that high employee satisfaction drives high customer satisfaction.

At the time of preparing this position statement, we are a week away from our annual 'Serving People, Improving Lives' awards which is a highlight in our calendar and held to recognise outstanding contributions of individuals and teams. Colleagues are invited to nominate others having regard to our values and year on year, the number of nominations has increased.

The Chief Executive continues to host a short, online welcome for groups of new employees to make clear our expectations and the importance of our culture. Time after time, new recruits speak positively of their first impressions, the welcoming environment, strong sense of team and can-do attitude.

In addition to formal recognition, NSDC places a strong emphasis on employee development and engagement. The introduction of the Ambition Academy provides tailored learning and development pathways, supporting staff at all stages of their careers. Additionally, the development of the Perform module is aimed at enhancing performance management processes, enabling regular feedback and supporting personal growth. This is now in a pilot period with selected service areas and is due for a full launch early in the new year.

Staff engagement is key to all of this, and we actively promote engagement through a series of well-attended staff roadshows that provide opportunity for direct communication with senior leaders and foster a sense of shared purpose. The annual staff survey continues to provide valuable insights into employee experience, informing ongoing improvements and ensuring that staff voices are heard and acted upon whilst regular staff recognition events, both formal and informal, also contribute to a culture where achievements are acknowledged and valued.

Through these initiatives, NSDC demonstrates a clear commitment to nurturing a supportive and high-performing organisational culture. By investing in its people and continually seeking to enhance the working environment, we aim to ensure that staff are empowered to deliver on our mission of serving people and improving lives, underpinning our reputation as an employer of choice within the sector.

Recommendation 6: Consider agreeing a Team Charter amongst the Joint Administration

This is the only recommendation that the Council has chosen not to take forward. That is not to say that is has been ignored but rather it is not felt appropriate for our circumstances. It was considered shortly after the May 2023 local elections and best practice protocols/charters were obtained from other parts of the country that had also experienced significant political change that had resulted in no overall majority. While political relationships can on occasions become strained, in general they are respectful and constructive and a form of charter at this point in time is not felt to be something that would add value.

Local Government Reorganisation (LGR)

Along with twenty other parts of the Country, our Council submitted its Final Proposal for Local Government Re-organisation on 28 November 2025.

Three proposals are being submitted for Nottingham and Nottinghamshire, each of them proposing to replace the current nine Councils with two new unitary councils.

The preferred north-south option of Newark and Sherwood District Council is supported by three other Councils. Two Councils have chosen not to support any option. Nottingham City has submitted its own option. Nottinghamshire County Council and Rushcliffe Borough Council has submitted the third option.

Newark and Sherwood has been actively involved throughout the LGR process, at a political and officer level and has contributed significant resource to the development of the Final Proposal.

While we await the Government's decision, transition work will continue and LGR commitments will undoubtedly have an impact of our capacity to deliver. Budget provision has been set aside to provide additional resource and early in the New Year, the nine Councils will develop transitional plans and programme and project support.

Every effort is being made to keep elected members and officers fully informed and to maintain a 'business as usual' mindset for the majority of colleagues, whilst being open about the scale of the change that is to come.

Our three objectives are to:-

- Leave a legacy of a high performing, financially resilient Council
- Contribute fully and influentially to the shaping and establishment of the new Councils
- Support our colleagues to take advantage of opportunities presented by LGR

A selection of information relevant to the Peer Team's recommendations

- The number of ambitions within our Community Plan has been reduced from 8 to 7 and the number of actions reduced from 140 to 61 which accounts for a 56% decrease.
- The Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) measuring our progress against the Community Plan were also reduced. This has seen a 21% reduction from 117 in 2024/25 to 92 in 2025/26.
- The revised Community Plan was reviewed by the Out of Remit Activities Working Group. As a result, all service areas were mapped to identify activities which are out of remit and allowed scrutiny to be applied to these service areas to understand whether any reductions in the work undertaken were necessary. Key recommendations were highlighted within flood response and resilience, as well as public health.
- At the time of writing this update, 36 of a total 39 Councillors participate in one or more Council committees. Of the remaining three, two were recently elected following a by-election and have not yet joined a committee, while the third serves as a substitute committee member but is not currently an active committee member.
- The Staff Comments & Feedback portal launched in January 2025 as part of our broader commitment to fostering open and transparent communication among colleagues. We continue to

communicate with colleagues regarding feedback submission. These efforts include maintaining a dedicated page on our Staff Intranet, issuing periodic communications, and incorporating reminders into staff email signatures to promote participation in the survey.

- 340 colleagues were welcomed to the Palace Theatre in February to take part in the Staff Roadshows. The 2025 Staff Roadshows saw a number of changes from previous years based on colleague feedback, including:
 - Attendance by our Environmental Services, who historically attended a separate 'drop in' style session due to operational constraints.
 - Slido allowed colleagues to vote in live polls and take part in a Q&A with SLT and over 160 questions were received.
 - The session encouraged networking between colleagues who may work in separate parts of the organisation.
- Workforce turnover has improved by 1% year-on-year between 2024/25 and 2025/26. This is assessed by the number of leavers as a percentage of the total workforce. In Q1 2024/25, the workforce comprised 730 employees, compared to 748 in Q1 2025/26. Several factors influence staff turnover, such as the average age profile, resulting in retirements and our commitment to supporting colleagues' professional development, which facilitates career progression both within and outside the organisation and encourages new talent to join. Overall, staff turnover rates remain within target parameters and reflect positively on the workforce's satisfaction with the organisation as an employer.