

Newark and Sherwood District Council

CORPORATE PEER CHALLENGE ACTION PLAN 2025



SERVING PEOPLE, IMPROVING LIVES

Introduction

At Newark and Sherwood District Council, our goal is to continuously improve and serve our residents by providing a service that helps ensure Newark and Sherwood is an excellent place to live and work. To further this aim, we invited the Local Government Association (LGA) to conduct a Corporate Peer Challenge in October 2024.

The visit consisted of a team of senior local government councillors and officers who performed an extensive review of key financial, performance, and governance information before they then spent three days at Castle House providing rigorous, strategic, and credible evaluations. Utilising their onsite presence and access to the council's key strategies and documents, the Peer team provided feedback on the Council's performance, which is detailed in their report.

Overall, the review determined that NSDC is a high-performing council with a positive organisational culture and a solid track record of successful delivery across essential service areas. The council was recognised for effectively providing core services to its communities and contributing to meaningful improvements to residents' lives. While performing well in most areas, there remains room for improvement; consequently, we have used the team's feedback and recommendations to formulate 12 actions, which are outlined in this document.

We take pride in the positive feedback received during this review process and are fully committed to pursuing further improvement through this action plan. We are confident that the LGA's feedback will foster our growth as an organisation, and we look forward to welcoming the team back to NSDC for a progress review before the end of 2025.



Delivery of the Plan

The timeframes for the Corporate Peer Challenge (CPC) actions are as follows:

Short Term (aim to complete within 3 months)

Medium Term (within 6 months)

Long Term (A year or over)

In February 2025 the Cabinet approved the formation of a cross party working group that were tasked with developing this action plan. The working group reviewed in full the peer team's recommendations and through several meetings worked with officers to produce the plan below.

Throughout this process, opportunities to implement the changes recommended in the report were taken so we are well underway in delivering change, an example of this can be seen in the review of the Community Plan which is complete with the results of which being presented to Full Council in May 2025. The delivery of this action plan is a collective responsibility of all council officers and preparing it collaboratively with members has enhanced efforts to align existing programmes and initiatives. Lead officers have been assigned accordingly, and progress will be driven and monitored through established governance structures. These officers are tasked with ensuring the advancement of actions, facilitating wider staff involvement, and reporting on milestone achievements through established corporate performance monitoring frameworks. Regular updates on the action plan will be received by the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) with a full progress update expected in September 2025. In the longer term, the LGA will return to NSDC for their progress review, offering council officers and elected members the opportunity to share successes and challenges with peers and to thoroughly evaluate progress against the CPC recommendations.

2025 Corporate Peer Challenge Action Plan

Key recommendations by Peer Challenge Team	NSDC Actions
<p>Recommendation 1: Review and prioritise the 2023-2027 Community Plan</p> <p>Peer Team's Feedback - Work on this has already begun with the Cabinet. This may involve reducing the number of priorities and setting timescales for delivery. The process should be inclusive, for example holding a workshop between Cabinet and SLT to agree priorities and timescales. This should include examining areas that are beyond NSDC's remit and refocus on what a district council can and needs to deliver, before looking at wider areas of work.</p>	<p>NSDC Actions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Completed a full review of the Community Plan noting all actions that have been completed Hosted workshop sessions with key stakeholders (elected Members and Senior Leadership Team and Business Managers) Implemented changes to the Community Plan ensuring to update the associated Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and the Council's performance framework Presented the updated report and performance framework to the Policy, Performance Improvement Committee (PPIC) in March 2025 for further scrutiny and assurance Presented the report to Cabinet in April 2025 for endorsement Presented the final version of the Community Plan to Full Council on 20 May 2025 for approval. <p>PPIC Meeting 10 March 2025 Cabinet meeting 01 April 2025</p> <p>Lead Officer(s): Director of Customer Services & Organisational Development Business Manager Transformation & Service Improvement</p> <p>Timeframe: Short Term</p> <p>Status: Complete</p>
<p>Recommendation 2: Review Audit, Governance, Overview and Scrutiny functions of the council to maximise councillor engagement and council productivity</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Audit & Governance (A&G) Committee formed a working party to undertake a full review of the Terms of Reference (ToRs) for both the A&G committee and PPIC, number of committee members on A&G and the number of meetings held per annum

<p>Peer Team feedback - Review terms of reference for Policy and Performance Improvement Committee (PPIC) and Audit and Governance Committee (AGC) to ensure the adequacy and robustness of the Council's governance, risk and control arrangements. Using a wide range of scrutiny tools available, could encourage more councillors to be better engaged in scrutiny and overview activity. This could include identifying long term challenges, and conducting deep dive commissions, or task and finish groups for shorter investigations. Deep dives could be into subject areas that councillors need more information on before deciding whether to invest staff time and resources in a particular area of work. Consider use of scoring matrix to inform this programme. Ensure the roles of PPIC and AGC are clear and consider how the forward plan for each committee covers the full range of scrutiny, governance, risk management and performance responsibilities. Consider whether opposition councillors could be chairs or vice-chairs of committees.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A series of reports were presented to committee outlining the working party's findings in May 2025 <p>Audit & Governance - Local Government Peer Review – Corporate Peer Challenge - May 2025</p> <p>Audit & Governance - Review of the Council's Constitution - May 2025</p> <p>GGPLGR - Code of Conduct Annual Report for the Period 1 May 2024 – 30 April 2025</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As a result of the Peer Team's feedback and following the review referred to above, the previous Audit and Governance Committee has been split in two, with one committee focused on Audit, the other on Standards, Constitutional matters and LGR. <p>Lead Officer(s): Monitoring Officer and Section 151 Officer</p> <p>Timeframe: Short Term</p> <p>Status: Complete</p>
<p>Recommendation 3: Ensure councillors understand the longer-term budget pressures. Ensure regular financial reports include long-term forecasts to all councillors are understood.</p> <p>Peer Team feedback - The regular reports to PPIC and Cabinet include forward forecasts, and NSDC revises the MTFP annually and identifies the financial gap that will need addressing at the end of the three-year term of the plan. However, it became clear during discussions with councillors that not all appreciated the real financial pressures and risks the council is under, nor the balances that need to be made. The Autumn budget provides an ideal opportunity to update councillors on NSDC's financial pressures. This will help councillors when revising the Community Plan (recommendation 1). Consider holding an audit on the robustness and</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finance training was delivered to all available members in June 2025 with a further budget workshop conducted in October 2025. • The Council's 151 and Deputy 151 Officers provide dedicated budget briefings to political groups during the budgetary process as well as to Cabinet and PPIC • The meeting of the quarterly Shareholder Committee has been brought forward and now takes place before Cabinet considers the Council's quarterly performance reports. This gives Cabinet members more time and focus on scrutinising the performance of the two companies. • The s151 Officer is a Board member of Arkwood and the Chief Executive attends all Board meetings. This provides the Shareholders with the assurance that business plans and on-going decisions are subject to appropriate scrutiny.

<p>sustainability of the Arkwood and Active4Today business plans, introducing an annual report to scrutinise those accounts.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Board of Directors of Active 4 Today include 3 elected members, the Deputy s151 Officer and the Director of Customer Services and Organisational Development. This provides the Shareholders with the assurance that business plans and decisions are subject to appropriate scrutiny. <p>Lead Officer(s): Monitoring Officer Section 151 officer Business Manager Financial Services</p> <p>Timeframe: Short Term/Long Term</p> <p>Status: Complete/Ongoing (Members receive quarterly updates on the budget and further training will be provided through the councillor development group)</p>
<p>Recommendation 4: Establish an ongoing councillor development programme</p> <p>Peer Team feedback - This would ensure that long-standing, as well as new councillors are kept up to date with the many changes that are happening in local government. Consider setting up a councillor development steering group to feed into this process, recognising that officers have a role in recommending development opportunities. Encourage councillors who are new to areas of responsibility to attend Leadership Academy courses. This will build up networks of expertise from around the country and improve resilience of councillors.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Councillor development group will be overseen by the GGP&LGR Committee Elected Member training day conducted on 17 June 2025 The GGP&LGR Committee have recently directed a working group to further develop the members training programme. This will be established in December 2025 <p>Lead Officer(s): Monitoring Officer</p> <p>Timeframe: Medium Term</p> <p>Status: Complete/Ongoing</p>

<p>Peer Team feedback - Recommendation 5: Continue to foster the positive culture of the organisation</p> <p>Officers are deeply committed to delivering the best for local communities. However, many of the officers the team met (formally and informally) are very stretched. Although the recent staff survey indicates that this is 'some' rather than 'many' staff, the peer team recommends that the council explore this further. This is affected by the demands of the Community Plan and work that is outside NSDC's remit. It is underpinned by staff having a strong commitment to deliver high quality, appropriate, supportive services.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A full review of the Community Plan (Recommendation 1) and the Council's 'out of remit activities' (Recommendation 9) to ensure that capacity is released wherever possible - completed and was presented to Full Council on 20 May 25 • CEO regular briefings – face to face, virtually and in writing are in place with a specific objective to maintain morale and culture during the uncertainty of LGR • Feedback from regular induction sessions continues to emphasise and report a welcoming, positive and performance focused culture • Staff commitment to 'go the extra mile' continues to be strongly in evidence • Commitment to staff welfare and development programmes have been enhanced • Long service awards have been strengthened and nominations for our annual Serving People & Improving lives (SPIL) awards have once again increased <p>Lead Officer(s): Director of Customer Services & Organisational Development Business Manager – Human Resources & Training</p> <p>Timeframe: Short Term/Long Term</p> <p>Status: Complete/Ongoing</p>
<p>Recommendation 6: Consider agreeing a Team Charter amongst the Joint Administration</p> <p>Peer Team feedback - This should include a Communication Protocol and be linked with the review of Councillor Code of Conduct.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NSDC Peer Challenge working party discussed the requirement for a team charter • Reviewed the existing code of conduct (linked to Recommendation 8) • A&G reviewed the communication protocol • This has been reviewed by the current administration who felt that a team charter would not be beneficial at this time due to the group being together for over two years. The standards of behaviour are clear and understood by all elected members.

	<p>Lead Officer(s): Monitoring Officer</p> <p>Timeframe: Short Term</p> <p>Status: Complete</p>
<p>Recommendation 7: Strengthen and enhance the Annual Governance Statement</p> <p>Peer Team feedback - The Annual Governance Statement (AGS) could be strengthened and enhanced to ensure that NSDC is assuring itself that governance and scrutiny arrangements are clear and strong. The AGS is an opportunity for the council to set out what it wants to achieve and how, along with clear indications of how plans will be scrutinised, overseen and taken forward by councillors.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensured an annual review of the Annual Governance Statement (AGS) is present on the work programme Undertook a review of the AGS in July 2025 Explored opportunities to benchmark against other Local Authorities AGS where appropriate. <p>Lead Officer(s): Monitoring Officer and Section 151 Officer</p> <p>Timeframe: Medium Term</p> <p>Status: Complete</p>
<p>Recommendation 8: Strengthen the application of the national code of conduct</p> <p>Per Team feedback - The Audit and Governance Committee had already agreed to explore how to strengthen the application of the national Code of Conduct, something which the Peer Team supports to mitigate the risk of the reputation, effectiveness and positive culture of the Council being undermined. The significant increase in formal and informal complaints against councillor conduct risks bringing the council into disrepute.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Responded to the upcoming changes to the national code of conduct Reviewed the existing code of conduct to ensure it is clear and understood by all stakeholders Presented a code of conduct item at the Monitoring Officers network meeting for discussion and feedback. A&G/Monitoring Officer reviewed the use of social media guidance Monitoring Officer to fully apply the national code of conduct in events of any future breach. Invested in additional resources to assist with Code of Conduct complaints <p>Lead Officer(s): Monitoring Officer</p>

<p>Recommendation 9: Explore further options for scrutiny of Arkwood & Active 4 Today</p> <p>Peer Team feedback - Arkwood Development Ltd and Active4Today report to Cabinet for scrutiny as a result of external legal advice. The peer team recommend that the council improves this scrutiny to ensure that more councillors have a clear understanding of their business planning and delivery. This could be through deep dives or other scrutiny mechanisms used by PPIC.</p>	<p>Timeframe: Medium Term</p> <p>Status: Complete</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reviewed governance agreements of Active 4 Today and Arkwood Confirmed existing arrangement is fit for purpose. i.e. Cabinet via Executive Shareholder committee applies scrutiny to both entities Executive Shareholder Committee to consider future opportunity to delegate focussed scrutiny of Active 4 Today and Arkwood Development Ltd to the Policy and Performance Improvement Committee <p>Lead Officer(s): Business Manager Transformation & Service Improvement</p> <p>Timeframe: Long Term</p> <p>Status: Complete</p>
<p>Recommendation 9: Review NSDCs 'out of remit' activities within the Community Plan and day to day business.</p> <p>Peer Team feedback - There is currently a very ambitious 2023-27 Community Plan, which includes about 140 projects, and some of these projects fall within the remit of other organisations. Whilst this was done with the best of intentions at the time, it is putting a strain on capacity. The council needs to carry out a review of the Community Plan, with a view to ensure that sufficient capacity would be able to deliver the Council's core services.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Policy & Performance Improvement Committee (PPIC) established a working group to review and map any activities that may fall 'out of the remit' of a typical District Council. A cross-party working group was formed and held their first meeting in April 2025. The group have recently completed their review and their final report will be presented to PPIC in December 2025 <p>Lead Officer(s): Business Manager Transformation & Service Improvement</p> <p>Timeframe: Medium Term</p> <p>Status: Complete</p>

<p>Recommendation 10: Review the communication plan of projects linking to 'diversity and addressing inequalities in the district'.</p> <p>Peer Team feedback - Little direct reference was made in conversations during the CPC to diversity or addressing inequalities, despite the work that the council is doing in this area. For example, work to support gypsies and travellers and relations with settled communities, and positive work on the resettlement of refugees. The peer team recommend that more is made of this work, particularly when demonstrating achievement of the council's equality objectives and fulfilling its Equality Duty obligations.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Equality, Equity, Diversity & Inclusion (EEDI) lead has conducted a full review of the Council's EEDI strategic internal & external approach. This has included a review of the communication plan with a focus on maximising awareness of the work the Council is delivering to address inequalities in the district. An updated EEDI Strategy will be presented to Cabinet in January 2026 <p>Lead Officer(s): Business Manager Transformation & Service Improvement Business Manager Communication & Marketing</p> <p>Timeframe: Long Term</p> <p>Status: Ongoing</p>
<p>Recommendation 11: Review the performance of the housing allocation service area</p> <p>Peer Team feedback - The total households on the housing waiting list as of 31st March 2023 was 89 households per 1,000. This compares reasonably with the England average of 82, but less favourably when compared to 39.4 amongst CIPFA near neighbours and 38.8 within East Midlands district councils.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Carried out a full review of the housing allocation service with the aim of bringing the total number of households on the housing allocation list to a level that compares more favourably to our CIPFA neighbours A full-scale review of our housing register has been carried out and applications dropped to 2513 as at 31 March 2024. This now places us at 40.1 per 1000 households an improvement from 89.0 <p>Lead Officer(s): Business Manager Housing Services</p> <p>Timeframe: Short Term</p> <p>Status: Complete</p>

Recommendation 12: Review of the staff appraisal mechanisms

Peer Team feedback - There is a clear performance management structure in the council including Business Managers reporting performance to SLT, Cabinet and PPIC quarterly. There is an individual staff appraisal system in place, but this is not consistently carried out across the council. The peer team suggests that NSDC should consider a review of the appraisal mechanisms to build a stronger performance management culture.

- Reviewed current mechanism for staff appraisals
- Explored opportunity to bring appraisal processes online to enable better assurance of appraisal completion and frequency
- A pilot of this system is now underway with the aim of rolling out the new system out fully in early 2026

Lead Officer(s):

Business Manager Human Resources & Training

Timeframe: Short Term

Status: Complete