

# **Gloucester City Council Corporate Peer Challenge**

**Feedback from the peer challenge team  
14-17 November 2017**

# The peer challenge team

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  - Councillor Linda Robinson, Leader of Wychavon District Council
  - Lucie Breadman, Assistant Director Community Services, Colchester Borough Council
  - Shirlene Adam, Strategic Director – Operations, Taunton Deane Borough Council and West Somerset Council
  - Denise Edghill, Head of Economic Development and Skills, Southampton City Council
  - Chris Bally, Assistant Chief Executive and Chief Information Officer, Suffolk County Council
  - Amy Haldane, Local Government Association
  - Andrew Winfield - Peer Challenge Manager, LGA.
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# The purpose of peer challenge

Peer challenges are improvement-focused and tailored to meet individual councils' needs. They are designed to complement and add value to a council's own performance and improvement focus. The peers 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 team provide feedback as critical friends, not as assessors, consultants or inspectors.

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# The process of peer challenge

- 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 Gloucester during which time we:
    - Spoke to around 150 people including a range of council staff together with councillors and external stakeholders
    - Gathered information and views from around 40 meetings along with additional research and reading
  - Feedback session at end of onsite visit, followed by a report and follow up activity
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# Your scope for the peer challenge

- Progress since 2013 peer challenge
  - Partnership arrangements
  - Social benefits from physical regeneration
  - Capacity to deliver projects and transformation
  - Business continuity resilience and emergency planning capacity
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# Scope for the peer challenge

The scope is contained in the core components considered by all corporate peer challenges:

1. Understanding of the local place and priority setting
2. Leadership of Place
3. Financial planning and viability
4. Organisational leadership and governance
5. Capacity to deliver

# Our feedback

What you are going to hear is what we have gathered, read, heard and understood during our work at Gloucester

The value of the process is to look forward and consider future opportunities

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## At the peer challenge in 2013

- Council not regarded as a dependable partner
- Finances were “precarious”
- Silo working
- Decision-making arrangements were ineffective and, at times, dysfunctional
- Members stepping into space vacated by officers
- Member and officer relations were strained
- Culture of the council was not healthy
- Dated IT

**Now all the above has been turned around**

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# 2013-2017 'chalk and cheese'

## Some positive comments

- Staff
    - I'm really proud of how my team have responded to the challenge
    - We recognise that Together Gloucester is not perfect and will need to shift
    - Bear with us, we're going in the right direction
  - Members
    - The leadership is able, committed and broadly doing a good job
    - It is now a much better place
  - Partners
    - Good and effective partner – great to work with
    - Members at Gloucester City are really strong and capable – amazing
    - Culture of trust now in place
    - Brilliant at delivery
    - No concerns about business continuity
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# Understanding of local place and priority setting - strengths

- Council Plan and Vision developed through consultation, partnership working, political priorities and customer insight
  - Evidence of other plans and strategies (Regen. & Economic Dev. and Cultural vision) underpinned by data and knowledge of local place
  - Leadership Vision 2050 – Gloucestershire leaders and partners coming together to consider a future shared vision for the Place
  - The council has strong and supportive partnerships to collaborate with in shaping place
  - Joint Core Strategy – Place based approach for economic, housing and transport needs for the area providing some real opportunities for the future
  - The concept of Asset Based Community Development is supported universally by staff and partners
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# Understanding of local place and priority setting – areas for consideration

- Build on vision and key strategies to provide a consistent narrative so all audiences understand what council is working to achieve
  - The strategies and plans do have measures and actions which will enable progress and outcomes to be monitored. Important to give this prominence and share with partners and the public
  - Data – especially customer insight data - will be important to target future activity and resources. This will require capacity that could be developed with principal partners where interests overlap
  - ABCD would benefit from interpretation and understanding for all service areas and partners
  - Future work to consider how the regeneration aims can benefit the council's desired social outcomes would be beneficial, especially for those more deprived neighbourhoods. This could be a key feature for the next phase of regeneration building on the successful platform now created.
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## Leadership of place - strengths

- Regeneration has been a clear priority and has delivered an impressive body of work and achieved critical mass. The city is becoming a destination in its own right with an increased sense of pride.
  - Strong track record of delivery with a proven ability to secure funding and bring forward developments. The council is now seen as an effective partner.
  - Efforts to bring forward city centre sites through private sector partners had stalled for a range of reasons. However, the council has demonstrated leadership by finding a way to unlock private sector funding through an innovative approach. This was only made possible through council leadership and intervention. This model provides confidence for development partners.
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## Leadership of place - strengths

- Housing (regeneration and new developments) outside the immediate city centre have both a good record of delivery (bringing a sizeable urban extension with social and community infrastructure) and with £1.5m targeted funding for continued estate regeneration
  - The council has demonstrated strong partnerships and collaboration in pursuance of its core strategy and has a maturing relationship with Cheltenham and Tewkesbury
  - The new culture portfolio recognises the increasing importance of adding depth to the city's overall offer - the emerging partnership working with culture and heritage sectors is positive.
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# Leadership of place – areas for consideration

- The ability to deliver physical regeneration is manifest and the Council recognises the need to go further to realise wider social outcomes for residents, businesses and visitors to the city
  - Driving up GVA, growth and income levels is a priority within a context of severe risks of labour and loss of young people from the area. We have not seen sufficient evidence of the local employment being well enough aligned to current and future workforce requirements. The council will need to decide whether to fill the void in skills and labour market interventions which is not being driven by others.
  - Relationships between Marketing Gloucester and the Culture Trust could be strengthened to improve the alignment of outcomes
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## Leadership of place – areas for consideration

- The County Council spends £85m on social care in Gloucester – this frames the potential for developing joint work on social impact
  - Opportunities include:
    - Future work on ABCD could be better aligned with the work of partners, e.g. the Gloucestershire Council Enabling Active Communities Strategy
    - There is scope for a Gloucester-specific approach; e.g. piloting projects for wider rollout across County; convening partners from VCS. Partners have expressed a willingness to open that dialogue.
    - The proposed office relocation presents an opportunity to improve outcomes for residents and customers.
    - Leadership Vision 2050 underlines the importance of the city ambitions within the emerging context of a wider place shaping and the fundamental economic role that Gloucester can play.
    - There is an opportunity to further optimise additional income and social gains through planning and procurement, e.g. s106; employment & skills plans, social value act etc.
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## Financial planning and viability - strengths

- Council has moved from financially “precarious” in 2012 to now providing a strong and stable foundation
    - Reserves built up from very low to healthy levels
    - Council has addressed financial funding gaps over many years by successfully delivering savings
    - Members now receiving regular monitoring reports and have confidence in council finances
    - Additional provision in 2018/19 is proposed for transformation work
    - Significant investment made to ensure business continuity and resilience against future data breaches
    - ASPIRE Trust has delivered significant financial benefit
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## Financial planning and viability- strengths

- Public consultation on proposed budget demonstrates will to engage and discuss spending plans
  - Five year Money Plan promotes longer-term thinking
  - Property investment strategy is a bold move to develop new income streams
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# Financial planning and viability- areas for consideration

- Service responsibility for budgets and budget monitoring needs to be clearer. Opportunity following service planning process to strengthen this.
  - With longer-term prospects of New Homes Bonus looking increasingly uncertain it may be worth considering reducing budget reliance
  - Plans to set aside resources for transformation are a good start but are they sufficient?
  - Business rates are a volatile area and there is a need to consider level of contingency
  - Develop the 'commercial' design principle further as part of the Together Gloucester work
  - There is an opportunity to be more explicit and visible in capital and revenue plans to connect to corporate plans, priorities and programmes.
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# Organisational leadership and governance - strengths

- Strong working relationships between officers and Cabinet members. Significant improvements since 2012.
  - Fortnightly 'Leadership' meeting provides opportunity for political and managerial leaders to share and develop forward programme and anticipate issues
  - Group Leader meetings have been reinstated and are valued
  - Updated Constitution contributing towards greater confidence in governance arrangements. This means members can now step back from space they occupied in 2014.
  - Important work begun on behaviours and values to guide council activity and interaction
  - Communication products seen are of high standard and professional communications support offers future opportunities
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# Organisational leadership and governance – areas for consideration

- Lack of clarity on longer-term Together Gloucester transformation programme and implications for staff, members and council
  - New managers require support and training to develop organisational governance skills
  - Staff uncertainty and apprehension identified. Confirmed in staff survey.
  - Communications felt to be more reactive than proactive. Some direction and fine tuning with provider would be beneficial.
  - Contacts between officers and all Members have been affected by implementation of Together Gloucester – expectations need to be recalibrated in light of the restructure
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## Capacity to deliver - strengths

- Passionate and dedicated staff with good ideas, optimism and commitment to Gloucester – accepted the need for change
  - “Good and effective partner” across the board– County Council; Districts & Boroughs; Aspire; Marketing Gloucester; Environmental Groups; VCS...
  - Vision for Change – ambitious and “brave”
  - ‘Together Gloucester’ programme articulated and recognised by staff and acknowledged by partners
  - Clear financial and milestone targets for structural change
    - Delivered at pace
    - Innovative design approach
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# Capacity to deliver - strengths

- Plans in place around key processes
    - Performance management
    - Talent Management
    - Behaviour Framework
    - Service Plans
    - Organisational Development
  - Positive, open and honest relationship with County Council
    - Local partners recognise the value of the partnership
    - County Council recognise value
    - Opportunity in future; property and co-location; IT – revisit at contract end?
  - Shared MD post – builds relationships; informal influence; Gloucester voice on Commissioning Board; ‘oils the wheels’ – only 2 years in!
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# Capacity to deliver – areas for consideration

- Wider components of transformation and inter-dependencies less understood and requires leadership, planning and investment (temporary)
    - Technology, Channel Shift and Digital, Accommodation, Organisational Development & People – “started the journey of cultural change, but lots to do”
  - Reception of Together Gloucester is mixed and is affecting morale
    - Crucial period – transitioning from old to new – the end of the beginning!
    - Some staff embracing the opportunity
    - Others struggling and need support
      - Need clarity of roles
      - Support to change systems and processes
      - How to ‘stop’ doing things
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# Capacity to deliver – areas for consideration

- Need to manage expectations – reduction in capacity means that there is less resource to respond as quickly as before. Need to communicate to:
    - Customers
    - Councillors
    - Staff
  - Partnerships and contracts
    - Build on the partnership reputation – discussion about strategic intent – what do we want to achieve from our partnerships...collectively
    - Contract management and monitoring needs to be clarified and strengthened
  - Specific areas of risk in terms of capacity and skills now
    - Planning & Land Charges
    - Customer Services
    - Opportunity to generate income
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# Next big things?

- Together Gloucester – complete the journey
  - Communication and engagement important
  - Collaboration– strong grounding
    - Next step around relationship with the County Council
    - Opportunity to work with Districts and Boroughs on areas of common interest / themes
  - Gloucester's role in the region
  - Define USP for future growth and social benefit
  - Vision 2050 – a strong Gloucester is important
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# Next steps

- Opportunity for questions and discussion now
  - Feedback report to follow
  - LGA support
  - Productivity programme
  - Follow up visit to be scheduled
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