

Overview Local Authority Peer review September 2022

In September 2022 the council welcomed back a LGA peer team, made up of peers who were involved in the CPC, the finance peer challenge and the planning challenge.

The purpose was to provide an overview of progress three years on from the council forming from peers who have provided support and challenge to Dorset Council in respect of its improvement journey.

This is a summary of the report findings and follow-on actions identified.

The 'Progress Review' provides Dorset Council with very positive feedback with respect to the Council's approach to the peer reviews, and to what has been achieved so far against the original review carried out in November 2019. Key highlights and messages:

- Dorset Council is actively focused on improvement – 'this forms part of the Council's DNA' and can be seen from its staff group right up to its senior officers and members.
- The Council has clearly used the opportunities from its various sector led engagements and has embraced the recommendations from peer reviews.
- The Council made a great start in achieving its 'safe and legal' mantra from day one.
- The Council has evolved a clear 'can do' culture.
- The Council regularly reviews shared understanding and commitment to agreed structures and frameworks.
- The 'One Council' approach is well embedded, and staff are engaged with this.
- There is clear ownership of budgets and cabinet members are proactive and positive.
- Dorset Council has made considerable progress towards achieving as strong a financial position as possible over the last three years.
- Performance in Children's services has made significant improvement.

Summary of actions

[Council/Corporate plan](#)

At the time of the peer review process, the Council Plan had not been refreshed and the review highlighted a need for this refresh. This refresh has now taken place and consequently some recommended actions have already been satisfied in this respect. Other related items include:

- Review the Council plan metrics and monitoring against the new plan.
- Ensure that a 'Golden Thread' reflects the council's top priorities through to team and individual objectives.

Place leadership

- Enhance 'co-production' in relation to town and parish councils, so that everyone can work together on a common purpose to collectively make progress.

Learning and development

- Review effectiveness of the staff induction process at the Council, identify areas of best practice currently undertaken and utilise these as a corporate wide approach to induction.

One Council

- Look at the way Essex County Council is working to evolve a one council approach.
- Undertake an 'appreciative enquiry' approach to explore how and why the 'one council' approach appeared to the Peer Review to be more apparent and embedded in some areas of the council, such as Children's Service, than others.

Financial control

- Continue to maintain a granular focus on linking priorities to financial commitments as a key priority.

Governance/Scrutiny

- Continue to look for ways to enhance the role of the ward and community member, and to look afresh at 'the member role' in the light of the refresh of the corporate plan, in terms of their convenor role and concept of co-production with parishes and towns, and as part of reviewing the council's scrutiny arrangements.

Local Plan

- Continue to focus on developing the progress of the Local plan and look to achieve its ambition of a revised Local Plan in accordance with the schedule agreed by Cabinet in October 2022.
- Seek to ensure that a balanced portfolio of sites for housing, both in scale and location, is developed to ensure needs across the Dorset Council area are fully met and to better safeguard annual supply across the whole plan period.

Action Plan

Recommendation	Proposed action/comment	Lead	Date to be completed	Comments/progress or suggested update data
Review the 'Council Plan' metrics and the monitoring of Council Plan	Quarterly reporting with first report due in April.	Chief Executive / Service Manager Change, Transformation, Innovation and Digital	On-going	Revised plan agreed (as Peer Review visit was happening) and performance monitored by Cabinet in the first instance.
Review how the Council plan objectives are embedded into team and individual plans	Quarterly reporting with first report due in April.	Service Manager Change, Transformation, Innovation and Digital	Complete	New council plan training launched in autumn 2022. Impact will be monitored.
Review and refresh our relationship with Town and Parish Councils		Business Partner – Communities and Partnerships	On-going	DC working with DAPTC on building the appropriate relationships for the responsibilities held.
Review the staff induction process looking at best practise across the organisation to adopt a 'one council' approach to Induction		Head of Human Resources / Head of Organisational Development	April 2023	<p>Streamlining the approach to induction was already a piece of work identified by the project to review recruitment and retention within Dorset Council. Work is being completed to understand the 'best practice' within Dorset, recognising the nuances that our diverse organisation and roles bring, with an aim to streamline and provide an updated induction process that is consistently used across the organisation. This aims not just to provide the necessary checklist of induction requirements, but supports the manager and ensuring a positive onboarding and embedding experience is had by the new starter.</p> <p>Alongside this, a review of the way the Dorset Welcome (our induction event) has been</p>

				completed, with amendments being implemented in the February 2023 event.
Review Essex approach to 'One Council' and embed any good practice		Executive Director for Corporate Development	October 2023	Make contact with Essex County Council and establish any good practice – report into SLT in the first instance.
Ensure granular focus is given to managing financial commitments against priorities		Executive Director for Corporate Development / Corporate Director for Finance and Commercial	On-going	
Review the member role in governance processes and any actions arising from the Scrutiny Peer Review		Director of Legal and Democratic Services / Service Manager for Democratic and Electoral Services	October 2023	Review report and agree action plan with Overview Committees and Scrutiny Committees as appropriate.
Maintain focus on the Local Development Plan	A revised Local Development Scheme has been approved by the Council and work is progressing on the local plan in accordance with the agreed milestones	Corporate Director for Economic Growth and Infrastructure	On-going	Further to recent policy announcements this work is in hand and Cabinet and council members will be updated as appropriate.