

To the Chair and Members of the Audit Committee
The Local Government Association Peer Review and Statutory
Intervention in Doncaster Council

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. The Council has been subject to corporate governance Government intervention since 2010. After the Intervention Commissioners Annual report for 2013, it was felt that strong progress had been made and that the Council was in a position to request an external review of governance arrangements.
2. The Local Government Association (LGA) was commissioned to undertake a “Peer Review” to assess the Council’s progress and provide a written report based on their review. The recommendations provided by the LGA are included in paragraph 8 below.
3. The Council’s Corporate plan includes a key objective to become intervention free during the next 3 years. This report also sets out the progress made towards that objective since the completion of the Peer Review (see paragraph 8).

RECOMMENDATIONS

4. Audit Committee are asked to
 - I. Note and comment on the Local Government Association Peer Review and progress towards becoming “intervention free”

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR THE CITIZENS OF DONCASTER?

5. The Peer Review recommendations will be used to enhance the progress that is being made in the Council and to the services provided to the people of Doncaster. The focus will be on Doncaster’s communities, preparing them for the future and in being flexible to adapt to their needs.

EXEMPT REPORT

6. Not applicable

BACKGROUND

7. After a Corporate Governance Inspection by the Audit Commission in early 2010 the Secretary of State for Local Government gave “direction” that Doncaster Council would be subject to statutory intervention until July 2013. In 2013 the direction was extended until July 2015

In June 2014, the Local Government Association provided a team of independent external elected member and officer experts to conduct a Peer Review. This was to assess the Council’s progress since the Corporate Governance Inspection

(CGI) in 2010. The CGI found that the Council was not serving residents as well as it should be, leading to the Department of Communities and Local Government placing it into corporate intervention.

The Peer Review team spent more than 400 hours determining their findings and spoke to over 150 people about how the Council is operating. In particular they considered how the Council is shaping Doncaster, the management of finances, political and managerial leadership and governance and decision making.

This is a landmark moment in the Council's improvement journey. Changes for the better have been made due to the drive and determination of staff, Members and partners.

PEER REVIEW RECOMMENDATIONS & PROGRESS

8. Peer Review recommendations

- Develop a long term vision for both the borough and the council
- Consider extending the overall horizon for budgeting to a longer time frame such as 5 years
- Develop thinking on value for money and how you know it will be achieved
- Revise those major plans and strategies whose current lifespan ends in 2014
- Develop a detailed transformation delivery plan to articulate when and how the major savings will be delivered, and so that progress can be made on time and be monitored
- Ensure adequate capacity at the corporate centre to ensure that change programmes are delivered on time and consistently across services
- Pay close attention to attitudes and behaviours and challenging anything inappropriate
- Continue to pay close attention to governance and be willing to change approaches and processes to ensure that current strengths are maintained and continue to be enhanced
- Make safe children's services a priority for the whole council
- Keep up to date with local research on how Doncaster is evolving, including opinion and perception surveys

Progress and developments

- The final report gave very positive feedback and endorses the Council's improved position. The Peers said that the Council is now functioning well in a manner consistent with that to be expected in other local authorities.
- The positive outcome of the review produced a wave of professional support from the public sector.
- The Secretary of State for Local Government produced a written statement announcing that he proposed to "bring statutory corporate intervention to an early close....as soon as the (Children's) Trust is up and running". He stated that that further intervention would be of little, if any, value 'given the level of improvement that Doncaster has now achieved, their firm plans for the future, and their readiness to engage with the wider local government sector on improvement'.
- The operation of the Recovery Board and the Intervention Commissioners has been suspended subject to the Secretary of State providing official confirmation of his written statement.
- An action plan to deal with the Peer review recommendations has been produced. The action plan includes actions developed working with the Mayor

and Cabinet, Directors, Assistant Directors and Heads of Service. The plan will be presented to Directors on 25th November and then at future meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee and the Audit Committee. It will then form a key part of future service plans.

- 11th November 2014 – a new Direction is received from the Secretary of State for Education and the Secretary of State for Local Government revoking the “directions made to Doncaster Metropolitan Borough Council on 17th April 2013 and 16th August 2013” with immediate effect.
- The Council is now “intervention free”.

OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REASON FOR RECOMMENDED OPTION

9. Not applicable

IMPACT ON THE COUNCIL’S KEY PRIORITIES

10.

	Priority	Implications
	<p>We will support a strong economy where businesses can locate, grow and employ local people.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Mayoral Priority: Creating Jobs and Housing</i> • <i>Mayoral Priority: Be a strong voice for our veterans</i> • <i>Mayoral Priority: Protecting Doncaster’s vital services</i> 	
	<p>We will help people to live safe, healthy, active and independent lives.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Mayoral Priority: Safeguarding our Communities</i> • <i>Mayoral Priority: Bringing down the cost of living</i> 	
	<p>We will make Doncaster a better place to live, with cleaner, more sustainable communities.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Mayoral Priority: Creating Jobs and Housing</i> • <i>Mayoral Priority: Safeguarding our Communities</i> • <i>Mayoral Priority: Bringing down the cost of living</i> 	
	<p>We will support all families to thrive.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Mayoral Priority: Protecting Doncaster’s vital services</i> 	

	We will deliver modern value for money services.	
	We will provide strong leadership and governance, working in partnership.	Although monitored via “We will provide strong leadership and governance, working in partnership.” The Peer Review Implementation Plan will have an impact on all of the council’s priorities.

RISKS & ASSUMPTIONS

11. There is a risk that the Peer Review recommendations will not be used to enhance the progress of the Council. In order to avoid this, they will be embedded into daily work, with the support of senior officers, the Executive and Members, and into the Corporate Plan.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

12. There are no legal implications associated with the Peer Review report; however particular projects and activities arising as a result of the implementation of the recommendations will need to be the subject of separate legal advice.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

13. There are no specific financial implications arising from this report. The LGA undertook the Peer Review at no cost to the Council. Any costs incurred in the implementation of the recommendations must be contained within approved revenue and capital budgets. Where specific initiatives arise which necessitate the incurring of costs these will be reported separately.

HUMAN RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

14. Not applicable

EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

15. Decision makers must consider the Council’s duties under the Public Sector Equality Duty at s149 of the Equality Act 2010. The duty requires the Council, when exercising its functions, to have ‘due regard’ to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited under the act, and to advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between those who share a ‘protected characteristic’ and those who do not share that protected characteristic. There are no specific equality implications arising from this report. However, particular projects and activities arising as a result of the implementation of the Peer Review recommendations will need to be the subject of separate ‘due regard’ assessments.

CONSULTATION

16. The Peer Review team spoke to over 150 people about how the Council is operating. This included Members, officers and partners.

Cabinet held informal discussions with Directors at an 'away day' in June 2014, followed by further discussion at the Directors' meeting on 5th August 2014.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

17. Local Government Association: Corporate Peer Challenge Doncaster Metropolitan Borough Council 16th – 20th June 2014 Report

Corporate Plan 2014-17

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