

## **To the Chair and Members of Council**

### **Local Government Association Peer Review Report**

#### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

1. The Local Government Association has carried out a Peer Review to assess the Council's progress since the Corporate Governance Inspection (CGI) in 2010. The Peer Review report gives positive feedback and endorses the Council's 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 Council is looking up and speaking with greater confidence and optimism for the future.

It is recognised that the Council's needs to do more to improve further. The Peer Review recommendations will be put into action by senior officers, the Executive and Members, forming part of corporate planning.

Following the Peer Review findings, the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) has announced that it intends to bring corporate intervention to an early close.

#### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

2. Council is asked to acknowledge the findings of the attached Peer Review report and to support the work to continue to improve.

#### **WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR THE CITIZENS OF DONCASTER?**

3. 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**

4. Not applicable

#### **BACKGROUND**

5. In June 2014, the Local Government Association provided a team of 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 DCLG placing it into 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.

The final report gave positive feedback and endorses the Council's position. The peers said that the Council is now functioning well in a manner consistent with that to be expected in other local authorities.

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.

Highlights from the report include

- The culture of the organisation is changing for the better, senior managers are more accessible and open and change is well handled.
- There is renewed stability, with a Mayor and Cabinet and senior officers who are all working well together with clear plans in place.

Suggested areas of improvement included

- Developing a longer term vision for both the borough and the council, and to consider extending the timeframe of budgets.
- Improving how value for money is delivered.
- Keeping up to date with local research on how Doncaster is evolving and ensuring provision is made for this in planning services.
- Children's Services should be seen as a priority for the whole council.

The feedback from the Peer Review will be used to inform future plans so that the Council can improve further and have a real positive impact on the people of Doncaster. Senior officers, the Executive and Members will work together to embed this into daily work and the Corporate Plan to make sure that progress is made.

Following the feedback from the Peer Review, the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government has announced that he intends to bring the corporate intervention to an early close. He has stated 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'.

Intervention will now end when the Children's Services Trust is established in Septmeber, rather than in July 2015 as originally planned.

Significant improvements must be made for children and families, along with the other public service reform in the new financial climate. The strong governance and leadership now in place will enable the Council to make improvements for the people who live, learn and work in Doncaster.

#### **OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REASON FOR RECOMMENDED OPTION**

6. Not applicable

#### **IMPACT ON THE COUNCIL'S KEY PRIORITIES**

7.

	<b>Priority</b>	<b>Implications</b>
	<p>We will support a strong economy where businesses can locate, grow and employ local people.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Mayoral Priority: Creating Jobs and Housing</i></li> <li>• <i>Mayoral Priority: Be a strong voice for our veterans</i></li> <li>• <i>Mayoral Priority: Protecting Doncaster's vital services</i></li> </ul>	

		The Peer Review recommendations will be used to enhance the progress that is being made in the Council and to services. This will support the delivery of key priorities including becoming an “intervention free” authority.
	<p>We will help people to live safe, healthy, active and independent lives.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Mayoral Priority: Safeguarding our Communities</i></li> <li>• <i>Mayoral Priority: Bringing down the cost of living</i></li> </ul>	
	<p>We will make Doncaster a better place to live, with cleaner, more sustainable communities.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Mayoral Priority: Creating Jobs and Housing</i></li> <li>• <i>Mayoral Priority: Safeguarding our Communities</i></li> <li>• <i>Mayoral Priority: Bringing down the cost of living</i></li> </ul>	
	<p>We will support all families to thrive.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Mayoral Priority: Protecting Doncaster’s vital services</i></li> </ul>	
	<p>We will deliver modern value for money services.</p>	
	<p>We will provide strong leadership and governance, working in partnership.</p>	

### **RISKS & ASSUMPTIONS**

8. 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 the Corporate Plan.

### **LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

9. 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**

10. There are no specific financial implications arising from this report; however 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**

11. Not applicable

## **EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS**

12. 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**

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

## **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

14. Not applicable

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