



Doncaster Council

Report: Doncaster Council Peer Review 2022

Date: 14th July 2022

To the Chair and Members of Full Council

Relevant Cabinet Member(s)	Wards Affected	Key Decision
Mayor Ros Jones	All	No

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. The Council invited the Local Government Association (LGA) to support our journey of improvement via a peer review. This report outlines the process, feedback and our response to date. Overall we welcome the recommendations suggested to us by the peer review and the positive feedback, which recognises our **'journey to an exemplar council'** and we fully acknowledge the hard work of officers and elected members over a considerable period of time to bring the positive elements of the report into a reality for Doncaster.

EXEMPT REPORT

2. This report is not exempt

RECOMMENDATIONS

3. It is recommended that Council notes and comments on the Peer Review report and our initial response to the recommendations.

BACKGROUND & PROCESS

4. The Local Government Association (LGA) provides a range of practical support, on a free of charge and/or subsidised basis, to enable local authorities to exploit the opportunities that this approach to improvement provides. This includes support of a corporate nature such as leadership programmes, peer challenge and programmes tailored to specific service areas such as children's, adults', health, care, financial, culture, tourism, sport and planning services.
5. Doncaster last had a peer challenge in 2014 - one was scheduled for 2020 but postponed due to Covid. The Mayor and Chief Executive felt that now was the right time as we continue to manage the legacy of the pandemic, deal with the cost of living crisis and have recently agreed a new Borough Strategy to invite the LGA into Doncaster to provide independent feedback that will guide our next steps as an organisation.

6. The Peer review process is conducted in two parts, an initial recovery and renewal panel followed by a full peer review visit. The LGA Recovery and Renewal (R&R) Panel was a small and brief review acting as a sounding board for the council embarking on post pandemic recovery and to help to understand the area prior to the full peer review onsite visit.
7. The peer team provide feedback as critical friends, not as assessors, consultants or inspectors.
8. The Peer Review Team all conducted the full peer review and the ones marked with an * were also on the initial Recovery and Renewal Panel:

*Steve Broomhead	Lead Peer & CEO Warrington Council
*Shabir Pandoor	Member Peer & Leader Kirklees Council
*Steven Young	Economic Peer & Chief Executive Halton Council
Christina Thompson	(S151) – Senior Officer Peer & Director of Finance & Property - London Borough of Lambeth)
*Satvinder Rana	LGA Project Manager
Helen Reeves	LGA Project Manager

Recovery & Renewal Panel

9. On 7th and 8th December 2021 Doncaster Council undertook an LGA Recovery & Renewal Panel. The Panel focussed on the robustness of the Council's post pandemic recovery and renewal plans and how well prepared it is in delivering its new Borough strategy. The council provided a position statement prior to the R&R panel based on the five broad areas of focus;
 - How robust and deliverable are the Council's regeneration and economic growth plans post Covid?
 - How will the Council balance the needs of economic recovery and potential financial challenges with its climate change objectives? What are the opportunities around, for example, green recovery?
 - How will the Council work with strategic partners and develop community capacity to deliver priority outcomes? e.g. collaboration, empowerment, co-production. What is the learning from the Council's response phase?
 - Does the Council's financial plan look at the medium and longer-term challenges as well as the immediate? What are the capacity gaps and requirements in light of changing priorities?
 - What are the short and medium terms actions the Council needs to take to deliver against its recovery and renewal ambitions and priorities?
10. A short brief was composed by the LGA which would act as an initial view from the sessions but more importantly set the scene and inform the wider peer review visit and final report

Corporate Peer Review Visit

11. The LGA use a general assessment framework, but the approach is flexible and tailored to the needs of the participating council. Doncaster had several sessions with partners, elected members and staff to set out a position statement and

identified local areas in which we would like the Peers to focus on their visit. These two sets of questions are set out below;

General Assessment Focus (LGA Framework)

- **Local priorities and outcomes:** Are the council's priorities clear and informed by the local context? Is the council delivering effectively on its priorities and achieving improved outcomes for all of its communities?
- **Organisational and place leadership:** Does the council provide effective local leadership? Are there good relationships with partner organisations and local communities?
- **Governance and culture:** Are there clear and robust governance arrangements? Is there a culture of respect, challenge and scrutiny?
- **Financial planning and management:** Does the council have a good understanding of its current financial position? Does the council have a strategy and a clear plan to address its financial challenges?
- **Capacity for improvement:** Is the organisation able to support delivery of local priorities? Does the council have the capacity to improve?

Additional Local Focus

- What more needs to be done to build leadership, management and workforce capacity to deliver Doncaster Delivering Together (DDT)?
- What more needs to be done to communicate and embed the DDT priorities – in the Council, across Team Doncaster and in communities?
- What more can be done to strengthen the Council's approach to securing additional investment, developing delivery plans and implementing them?
- What further critical success factors, risks and opportunities need to be considered in rolling out localities working?
- How the Council's risk management culture and arrangements need to evolve to deliver the DDT priorities?

12. The Peers reviewed the Position Statement and document profile before coming on site from 16th – 19th May 2022. They attended 35 meetings and spoke to around 120 people including a range of council staff together with Members, residents and external stakeholders

FEEDBACK AND RECOMMENDATIONS

13. The Peer team provided a set of initial slides on the final day of their visit (appendix a) and they have also written up a final report of their findings (appendix b).
14. Firstly the Council would like to welcome the report and recommendations which recognises that Doncaster Council is on a journey to being an exemplar council.
15. However we know that significant challenges and opportunities remain and that this a journey of improvement and the Council must continue to learn and adapt to ensure we are effectively meeting the demand now as well being ready for the opportunities of the future.

16. The appendices give the main detail and context to the wider findings but the main recommendations arising from the peer review are set out below;
 1. Pause and reflect on the Council's strategies to address organisational overload and fatigue; and address capacity issues
 2. Condense the key priorities for the Council for the next three years and set annual delivery targets
 3. Simplify and communicate key messages in a more tailored manner, particularly internally
 4. Reassess the Council's corporate risk appetite
 5. Continue to plan for the impact of the cost of living crisis on local communities and the delivery of council services
 6. Celebrate the Council's achievements and consider sharing learning and good practice with the wider local government sector

DONCASTER COUNCIL RESPONSE

17. Doncaster Council will commit to reflect on these recommendations and **implement them in full with an agreed and public action plan** linked to the recommendations to be published in September 2022.
18. Doncaster Council will ensure that we **build our actions and response into our annual improvement cycle** and delivery through our quarterly performance monitoring and our emerging Regenerative council programme (our internal improvement programme). This will ensure that our effective performance routines help to drive accountability and delivery of our peer review action plan.
19. Doncaster Council will **deliver a staff engagement programme** in autumn 2022 to communicate and share the Action plan but also use this engagement to set out a new set of values for the organisation that are owned and recognised by staff
20. Doncaster Council, along with partners, will be bringing forward a **Doncaster Delivering Together Investment plan** which will set out our investment priorities for the year and we plan to align this to our annual budgetary and policy delivery cycles.
21. Doncaster Council will be **reviewing our risk appetite** through active examples and taking a 'learning by doing' approach to support greater investment and the role the Council can have in achieving that investment.
22. Doncaster Council will look to **celebrate success more often and on a wider scale**, sharing good practice both internally and across the local government community. This can be achieved via specific networks and national publications, for example the Municipal Journal, as well as via local media – the peer review process shows some of the excellent things we are doing but we need to tell more people about it.

23. However all of this is set against a backdrop of a ‘**Cost of living Crisis**’ that is impacting on residents, families, businesses and the cost of delivering Council services. Doncaster Council has identified and provided an additional £4 million into our support for people and will need to do even more over time to ensure our people have those essentials to live a good life. A partnership group is co-ordinating our approach to ensure we can prevent people from falling into poverty, provide relief for those in poverty and how we can support more people to exit poverty. This work is particularly crucial over the next 12-18 months.

OPTIONS CONSIDERED

24. Not applicable

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDED OPTION

25. Not applicable

IMPACT ON THE COUNCIL’S KEY OUTCOMES

Outcomes	Implications
<p>Connected Council:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A modern, efficient and flexible workforce • Modern, accessible customer interactions • Operating within our resources and delivering value for money • A co-ordinated, whole person, whole life focus on the needs and aspirations of residents • Building community resilience and self-reliance by connecting community assets and strengths • Working with our partners and residents to provide effective leadership and governance 	<p>Corporate Peer Review so impacts on all outcomes</p>

RISKS & ASSUMPTIONS

26. The peer review process was intense but triangulated several pieces of evidence to arrive at the recommendations presented to the Council. These recommendations should have a clear action plan to ensure we respond effectively to those areas where currently improvements have been identified.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

27. No legal Implication sought.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

28. No Financial implications sought

HUMAN RESOURCES IMPLICATIONS

29. No Human Resources implications sought

TECHNOLOGY IMPLICATIONS

30. No Technology implications sought

HEALTH IMPLICATIONS

31. No Health implications sought

EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS [Officer Initial: SWr Date: 17/06/22]

32. In line with the corporate approach for compliance against the Equality Act 2011 due regard must be shown across all activity within the Council. As the Peer Review was an internal process with no impact on staff or residents a due regard statement was not required.

CONSULTATION

33. In preparation of the Peer Review visit the Council produced a position statement which was sent to the Peers prior to their arrival in Doncaster. To produce the Position Statement and conduct the onsite elements of the Peer Review consultation has taken place with;

- Elected Members (two workshops)
- Directors and Senior Managers
- Team Doncaster Partners
- Parish and Town Councils

BACKGROUND PAPERS

34. Appendix A – Peer Review Slides presented on Final Day of Inspection

35. Appendix B – Peer Review Final Report

GLOSSARY OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

36. LGA – Local Government Association

37. R&R Panel – Recovery and Renewal Panel

38. DDT – Doncaster Delivering Together

39. CEO – Chief Executive Officer

REPORT AUTHORS AND CONTRIBUTIORS

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