

Corporate Peer Challenge Richmondshire District Council

2nd – 4th November 2016

Feedback Report

1. Executive Summary

Richmondshire District Council (RDC) is a rural district with a sparse population. Two-thirds of the area is within the Yorkshire Dales National Park, and Catterick Garrison, the largest MOD presence in Europe, is also within its boundaries. RDC is a small organisation, with highly committed staff and a culture that is very positive. People like working for the council and there is an enthusiastic buzz amongst the workforce which made it a pleasure to visit.

The election in 2015 brought in a majority Conservative administration, which represents a new phase after many years of being under no overall control, run by the group of Independent Members. The new administration took some time to adjust to its role, but is now becoming more confident.

A significant number of staff have worked for the council for many years. This brings a wealth of experience and a degree of continuity for service users and stakeholders alike. However, the relatively recent experience of shared services has meant that politicians and officers are wary of repeating the same mistakes. Whilst this should not preclude the Council from revisiting the wider collaborative agenda in future, it would need to be aware of the past and to draw from the experiences, good and bad. It has already made steps in this regard.

The council has a new focus on development and growth as part of its approach to mitigate the forthcoming financial challenges. This includes economic and housing development. However, evidence suggests that currently it is focused more on aspirations than action. Clearer priorities and plans for action will be needed to realise the council's potential and to encourage wider stakeholders to engage in the process

Previous efficiency drives and other measures have led to capacity being stretched and this will impact on the council's ability to reach its ambitions. It already appears difficult for officers to deliver the current level of services due to increased demand, and RDC is an ambitious council wanting to increase what it can to support local residents (for example housing support and benefits). The CA£H programme is currently focusing on making savings, but it could also be used to help generate wider ideas of efficiencies and income generation.

The council has stated that it wishes to be an 'enabling' council especially in relation to its new area of focus: growth. However, we heard several different views of what that means. There is little evidence of proactive work enabling others to deliver services on RDC's behalf, with the exception of extra care housing, where the Council has been very proactive. Without good, clear communications, it could appear that RDC is not taking a lead in the service areas where it could act. For example, RDC could be a more strategic and proactive facilitator between partners in order to take on that enabling role.

2. Key recommendations

1. Develop and strengthen two way communications to ensure staff, councillors and partners have a consistent understanding what the Council is trying to achieve and feel able to contribute.
2. Clearly articulate and specify the Council's role, ambitions and expectations when engaging with strategic partners and key stakeholders.
3. Maximise the influence the Council has with partners and potential partners by strategically working together.
4. Bring forward the taking and timing of difficult decisions and thereby strengthen the Council's financial position in order to ensure sustainability of services.
5. Encourage and act on creative thinking on commercialisation in order to maximise income generation through thinking "outside the box" and taking managed risks.
6. Clarify what the Council is looking for as "Growth" and ensure there is a balance of development in the deeply rural areas with the more urban locations
7. Prioritise the use of funds, capital and revenue, to meet the Council's key objectives
8. Continue to develop the scrutiny role and function to involve as wide a number of members as possible
9. Be aware of and actively consider shared services opportunities that could benefit the Council and its residents.
10. Further develop the 'Digital' offer in light of recent Government announcements. Include this as part of a broader set of demand management techniques, such as channel shifting and early intervention.

3. Summary of the Peer Challenge approach

The peer team

Peer challenges are delivered by experienced elected member and officer peers. The make-up of the peer team reflected your requirements and the focus of the peer challenge. Peers were selected on the basis of their relevant experience and expertise and agreed with you. The peers who delivered the peer challenge at Richmondshire District Council were:

- Dr Anthony Goodwin, Chief Executive, Tamworth Borough Council
- Cllr Andrew Proctor, Leader, Broadland District Council
- Terry Collier, Deputy Chief Executive, Spelthorne Borough Council
- Chris Parkhouse, LGA Economic Growth Adviser
- Becca Singh, Local Government Association

Scope and focus

The peer team considered the following five questions which form the core components looked at by all Corporate Peer Challenges. These are the areas we believe are critical to councils' performance and improvement:

1. Understanding of the local place and priority setting: Does the council understand its local context and place and use that to inform a clear vision and set of priorities?
2. Leadership of Place: Does the council provide effective leadership of place through its elected members, officers and constructive relationships and partnerships with external stakeholders?
3. Organisational leadership and governance: Is there effective political and managerial leadership supported by good governance and decision-making arrangements that respond to key challenges and enable change and transformation to be implemented?
4. Financial planning and viability: Does the council have a financial plan in place to ensure long term viability and is there evidence that it is being implemented successfully?
5. Capacity to deliver: Is organisational capacity aligned with priorities and does the council influence, enable and leverage external capacity to focus on agreed outcomes?

In addition to these questions, you asked the peer team to consider the Council's ability to deliver against its growth aspirations for the district in terms of housing and employment.

The peer challenge process

It is important to stress that this was not an inspection. Peer challenges are improvement-focussed and tailored to meet an individual council's needs. They are designed to complement and add value to a council's own performance and improvement focus. The peer team 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 peer team prepared for the peer challenge by reviewing a range of documents and information in order to ensure they were familiar with the Council and the challenges it is facing. The team then spent three days onsite in Richmondshire, during which they:

- Spoke to more than 70 people including a range of council staff together with councillors and external partners and stakeholders.
- Gathered information and views from more than 30 meetings, visits to key sites in the area and additional research and reading.
- Collectively spent more than 250 hours to determine their findings – the equivalent of one person spending more than seven weeks in Richmondshire District Council.

This allowed us to triangulate our evidence and therefore nothing has come from just one source or "gut feel". This is information which was given in a non-attributable manner.

This report provides a summary of the peer team's findings. It builds on the feedback presentation provided by the peer team at the end of their on-site visit (2ndth – 4th November 2016). In presenting feedback to you, we have done so as fellow local government officers and members, not professional consultants or inspectors. By its nature, the peer challenge is a snapshot in time. We appreciate that some of the feedback may be about things you are already addressing and progressing.

4. Feedback

4.1 Understanding of the local place and priority setting

Richmondshire District Council (RDC) is supportive of the devolution agenda and is actively involved in discussions to make it work. It is realistic about how difficult it could be to get agreement for the wider area, but is determined to play its part and make it work. It is important to maintain the seat at the table and ensure that whatever agreement is reached, it works for RDC.

RDC has an adopted Local Plan supported by a five year land supply. Sites are clearly allocated for development and are moving forward in the major growth areas, such as Colburn and Catterick. Neighbourhood Plans flow from the Local Plan with work focusing on local priorities, involving communities in how growth can be managed successfully and how communities will benefit from it (for example, in Colburn). Housing partners see RDC as responsive and willing to facilitate new housing projects. This is particularly important in the provision of affordable housing in the deeply rural areas where building just a few new homes can give communities more sustainability. Housing growth will bring more people into the area but it needs to be accompanied by jobs and supporting infrastructure, not just roads but improved community facilities.

RDC recognises that working well with parish and town councils is essential to how they operate. Councillors regularly attend parish and town council meetings to ensure there is two-way dialogue. Despite this, there is a perception among parish and town councils that they are being 'done to' by RDC, rather than 'working with' RDC, for example the charging for public conveniences. The team were told by some that this was a charge that had been introduced, whereas RDC are actually testing it as a pilot to see if it is viable or worthwhile.

Connectivity, particularly the provision of faster broadband, is a key issue for the whole area. This creates an opportunity for RDC to have a role in influencing its provision either directly through financial investment, or lobbying and working with government and other organisations. The council has been working with North Yorkshire County Council (NYCC), NYNET (the municipally owned company which has been leading the roll out of superfast broadband coverage in North Yorkshire) and British Telecom (BT). In addition, RDC may need to communicate better how it is influencing and working with existing providers as stakeholders were not aware of this and felt that RDC could do more. If the current provider model is not delivering, are there alternative providers, or models of provision that could be explored? RDC could learn from how councils in other deeply rural parts of the country have tackled the same problems, for example seeking alternative providers.

There are well-known attractions of the local area, with the beautiful countryside, industrial heritage, and historic towns and villages. However, destination marketing and management could be better influenced to show the real benefits to the area from tourism. For example, it would be worth considering what RDC is getting from its work with and investment in Welcome to Yorkshire and what are the deliverables it wants to achieve? Richmondshire has large untapped markets which are particular to the local area, such as the equine industry. Are these adequately managed and marketed through a Yorkshire-

wide tourism board?

Many local businesses are in the tourism sector, and there may be opportunities to explore more district-specific marketing. RDC support of LEP-organised business breakfasts, and participation at local business fora could prove fertile ground for this work. There may be opportunities like this where RDC could be more proactive, or could communicate better with partners about what it is doing.

4.2 Leadership of Place

There are good working relationships with a variety of partners which are generally positive and productive. Richmondshire is generally a very safe area demonstrated by the low incidences of crime although there is still the natural underlying fear of crime. The council, particularly through its housing and community safety teams, has very good working relations with the police and there is mutual trust and respect as well as strong data sharing protocols.

Voluntary sector partners suggested that although RDC works very well with individual local organisations, they did not feel that the council was working strategically enough with umbrella and national voluntary sector organisations present in the district. Where this work is happening (for example, gifting the use of the buildings adjacent to Mercury House for a Voluntary Sector Hub), this is not being recognised locally as a strategic way of engaging with the sector. One suggestion from the sector was for community organisations to be involved in identifying local needs around the district in order to help set RDC priorities. RDC will need to communicate better with this sector to ensure that it is recognised for the contribution it does make. For example, although RDC members recently provided small grants (and seed funding to help support further funding opportunities) to local community organisations, the partners we discussed this with thought that this was on a council-wide basis, rather than being more strategic and focused on specific areas where need had been identified (the six areas identified for Growth). We encourage further strategic discussions with voluntary and community sector partners to explore together what their concerns are and how they can be addressed.

There is good prevention and early intervention work with partners. With the police, there is work to identify and address spikes and surges in activity (such as repeat offenders and domestic abuse on return from traumatic deployment overseas). RDC is in regular dialogue with the Ministry of Defence (MoD) through the Commander of the garrison and the Defence Infrastructure Organisation. This enables a co-ordinated approach to potential growth, development and disposal of assets and troops. The ageing population of the district means that more focus needs to be given as to how the future needs of the district can be best provided. RDC's work with NYCC on extra care and independent living is moving this forward, for example supporting telecare services which are available to private individuals as well as in care homes. The step up/ step down work with the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) – the Dales Project – has been identified as particularly notable practice. Few councils have a productive relationship with CCGs who have experienced significant changes recently. This is a particular example where a "half way house" for non-acute care provision has been created which frees up hospital beds.

Some relationships with partners have been damaged by historic relationships or recent

changes and need further improvement. Work with other councils has improved, for example shared disaster recovery arrangements with NYCC, and occupational health provision with Darlington Borough Council. RDC could explore how this could develop into further constructive working relationships, for example with the national park. Where others are responsible for service delivery, RDC could use its strategic leadership role more to influence those that do, or those who may have a greater opportunity to influence other sectors (for example, the LEP to influence mobile phone providers in the National Park). Partners are keen to make this work within RDC.

Although Area Partnerships work well for councillors as a form of community engagement, partners felt that they were of little value, largely due to the timing, number and location of meetings. The council could consider how to better engage with community organisations and involve them in discussions into how to maximise the value of area partnerships. This could involve thinking about how technology could be used, such as Skype or Facetime, to enable greater partnership attendance without the considerable journeys, and continuing to publicise the agenda in advance and seek to invite relevant partners to specific meetings.

The garrison and its future in RDC will have a major impact on how the district and wider surrounding area grows. This is why the MoD is a key partner in the sustainable growth of RDC. The council, DIO and the MoD all have an important role to play to maximise the benefits and are working together to realise these.

4.3 Organisational leadership and governance

A new political administration was elected in 2015, with a majority Conservative controlled council. There are some really strong political assets with the enthusiasm of new members, a desire to learn, and good member/officer relationships. There is a good blend of political experience and raw community activism, and RDC councillors see their role as both community advocates and activists. Many are actively involved in the local business communities and help RDC to work well with this sector.

There is visible and accessible leadership from the Senior Management Team (SMT), but they need to be able to act more strategically and cohesively as a team, ensuring corporate systems and processes are consistent. Managers need to be able to take more responsibility for the day to day running of the organisation to enable SMT to drive the future direction of the council with the members. This is particularly important as RDC has fewer levels of management than in some other councils.

There is a strong working relationship between Member spokespeople and SMT but not to the point of dependency. There is an experienced and active opposition which will help to improve Scrutiny in particular.

There has been a steep learning curve for councillors after a significant time of the Council being under no overall control. The differences this makes, from political group decisions and votes, to fully appreciate the role of opposition members, has not yet been widely embedded by members or officers, but understanding is gradually improving.

Scrutiny and wider governance processes are on a trajectory of improvement. Chairs of committees are seeking to encourage inclusiveness on scrutiny and other committees. A

clear work programme is benefitting one of the Scrutiny committees, but there is some lack of recognition and respect for the function and process. As a result, there have been times where attendance has been poor and the committee has not been quorate. This is beginning to improve.

The Audit and Governance Committee has also shown evidence of recent improvement, whilst recognising that they are still learning. The Chair and Vice Chair understand the need for Members to own and monitor the key strategic and corporate risks facing the organisation. The Monitoring Officer and Section 151 Officer is supporting members to improve this. There is a good working relationship with both internal and external auditors.

There is evidence to suggest that councillors who sit on more than one tier of government (for example, Parish and District, or District and County) can have slow the pace of decision-making as members' capacity is shared across more than one organisation. There are advantages with a greater awareness of how decisions affect different levels of government, but further understanding of the impacts and risks may be necessary.

There is potential for a greater use of analysed evidence and data to better inform decision making. Members of all parties need to recognise the roles and capacity of officers whose professional role it is to know, adhere to and advise on legislation and statute, and understand the potential costs and consequences of uninformed decision making. This can include legitimate grounds for appeals against council and committee decisions, ultimately costing RDC money in legal fees which could be avoided. This is particularly true on emotive and/or controversial matters. There is much that could be learned from other councils, including benchmarking comparable district councils.

The clear consequences and implications of reduced capacity are not fully understood by councillors. Members may have to reduce their expectations of officer capacity and officers may need to work in a more flexible manner. Clear, joint communication from the Leader and Chief Executive will help to explain how things need to change. This means that the council will have to work in a different way, with less time to spend on member enquiries, and more time on delivering frontline services.

4.4 Financial planning and viability

RDC currently has a healthy financial position. External Audit has given reassurance to this effect. There is no over-reliance on New Homes Bonus, and there are healthy balances. However, there are challenges ahead. All district councils are facing a significant funding shortfall, and there is limited capacity to deliver the savings and additional income required. There needs to be a recognition, particularly by Members, that there may be a business case for investing more resources upfront in the CA£H programme on an invest-to-save basis. Strategic decisions need to be made in order to ensure that the council can continue to both deliver services and implement transformation programmes designed to ensure continuing viability. There is evidence to suggest that capital funds may not be sufficient in future without prioritisation now.

The Garrison provides a large proportion of business rates tax base at over 20% of the business rates tax base. This is both positive, and a risk, with significant reliance on a single source for business rates income. A couple of years ago a valuation appeal resulted

in its valuation reducing from £6m to £5m. With the latest draft revaluation figures a further 9% reduction in rateable value is shown. Whilst at present the Garrison is growing as a super garrison, it is always possible that future MoD decisions could reverse that status, even if this does not currently seem likely. Indeed, the week after the peer challenge took place, there was a formal MoD announcement about a significant increase in deployments to the Garrison.

The Council is hoping to realise a significant capital asset but if this is not achieved, there could be insufficient capital funds to support the planned level of capital programme. There will therefore need to be more robust prioritisation of capital expenditure in future.

Members and officers are working together to ensure a healthy financial position. The Audit Chairman and Deputy are improving the effectiveness of Audit Committee and there has been a Scrutiny review of the Medium Term Financial Strategy. There is a good breadth of technical financial experience and service management experience in the finance team which works well with senior politicians. This is a sound base to build on to further develop the effectiveness of scrutiny of finance.

Improvements are being made to processes, such as procurement and risk management with an officer from North Yorkshire County Council having been brought in to support the introduction of a new risk management approach. The approach to procuring website development demonstrated good practice. Consideration should be given to thresholds for procurement and contract sizes in order to continue to nurture local businesses. The current tendering process was cited by staff as too cumbersome for local sole traders to bid and there is a trend towards large national providers as a result. We were told that there was one standard approach to procurement, irrespective of the size of contract, and could result in a requirement for paperwork and policies disproportionate to the contract value, and be off-putting for local sole traders. Staff felt that there had been a corresponding increase in national companies winning contracts as a result.

We recognise that there has been a difficult history of shared services for RDC, but this should not hamper the council from looking at further shared services possibilities with different organisations. The key is to ensure that there are real benefits from them that appropriate exit strategies in place, with clear contractual lines of responsibility. There are a variety of ways to achieve efficiencies and RDC should consider them all in order to continue to be financially sustainable. We recognise some steps have been taken, for example with Disaster Recovery and Occupational Health.

The council will need to keep its financial position continuously under review and be prepared to make key strategic decisions if its circumstances become more challenging. This may require it to more actively pursue income generation and revisit potential to make savings through shared services. Consider the timing of making decisions, and act boldly to prioritise savings early and take the benefit as quickly as possible. Don't avoid decisions that will end up costing the council more in the long-term. It could also be beneficial to take key decisions (for example about the future of the leisure centre) sooner rather than later to mitigate the risk of draining reserves.

RDC gave indications that it wanted to adopt a more commercial approach. The current plan appears to focus on beginning to charge for some services. A more commercial

approach could mean driving development opportunities in joint ventures. There may be opportunities to use RDC's assets to deliver new or additional income generating services or bring processes in-house. Finance has been working with services to improve budget monitoring. Whilst the team recognise that there may be limited demand for office accommodation in the area, other opportunities may be available, for example hotel accommodation. The skills and capacity of the workforce could be used to generate new income streams. For example, considering re-entering the market for trade waste services using existing skills and resources (as some other district councils are now doing). Alternatively, some processes could be brought in-house to achieve cost-savings or improved quality (for example, housing repairs).

We recognise that the Council did update its Asset Management Strategy in April 2016 and has in place a strategic approach to ensuring that its assets support the Council's objectives including being a value for money council. With this respect we note the Strategy will measure rate of return on assets. We recognise that there is a supporting implementation plan and we would encourage the Council to ensure that it appropriately resources the delivery of the Strategy and Plan. RDC could explore options regionally and locally through the One Public Estate programme to maximise savings and income from public sector assets. There is a need to address issues of subsidising assets such as the leisure centre to avoid it becoming a liability. We heard that there is a view that some assets been disposed of which could have generated income streams; consider how remaining assets could best benefit the council which we note is considered as part of the Strategy. Some work is being done to identify small scale pieces of land etc. which could be disposed of, or could be used to generate long-term income. Additionally there may be opportunities to acquire assets which will generate additional income streams for the Council.

External audit welcome the transparent approach of the Council and commented positively on the way finance are getting to grips with challenges of faster close of accounts. External Audit are happy with the quality of working papers and did not require adjustments to Statement of Accounts. The team noted the challenge of delivering the savings built into the plans for the next few years.

There have been significant under spends against budget in recent years, in part affected by the split from Hambleton when it appeared that Members did not fully appreciate the cost of services. The Finance team have been doing some good work analysing the extent to which there are underlying trends behind the savings.

4.5 Capacity to deliver

Staff enjoy working for RDC and are committed to delivering good services for communities. There is considerable benefit from a stable workforce, with long organisational history and professional relationships and partnerships are well-established. However, there can be risks, particularly when trying to change the culture of an organisation. Staff need to be on board with cultural changes; good communications (including, but not limited to, timely information) are essential at a time of change.

The CA&H programme is largely seen by staff to be only about cuts and savings, not income generation or commercialisation. At the time of the peer challenge, it was too early

to have delivered cashable efficiencies. Officers in particular have ideas of income generation or commercialisation but these are not always explored as part of the CA£H programme. Clear communications are necessary about the possibilities that this could deliver. There is some recognition that there is currently not sufficient capacity to deliver the CA£H savings required. A more creative and widespread approach may be needed, including investing on spend to save in the future. This kind of change may be harder, and involve stopping delivering some services, and changing the way others are delivered.

There is a variety of two-way internal engagement mechanisms but these are not always utilised. Consider how these can be publicised and improved to ensure that staff feel heard and involved in decision-making. Some staff feel that there is no feedback on suggestions that they have made, but other staff were quick to refute this. This could be a legacy of the past.

In general, managers feel empowered to act using their professional knowledge. However, there was a considerable sense that officers were worried that risks and impacts around service and policy changes were not thoroughly understood by the senior leadership and not always taken into consideration by politicians (or senior managers to a lesser degree) when making policy decisions. For example, changes to refuse collections, or when officers feel that their professional judgement has not been listened to. However, there are also examples where staff have been offered opportunities to learn from others about forthcoming changes (such as how similar changes have taken effect in other councils) and have not taken up these offers.

Good communication is key to managing community expectations at a time of diminishing resources. RDC may need to look elsewhere for support to help improve how the variety of communications channels are used to maximum effect. This could include exploring how professional communications expertise could be shared across different councils, or taking up LGA Communications support.

We encourage the Council to learn from how other councils operate work together with councils of similar challenges, such as the National Park context, rurality and connectivity, within the context of becoming more commercial and generating income. The 'Innovative Councils' website has a number of case studies that could be useful:

<http://www.local.gov.uk/innovation> .

The deliverability of the council's ambitions is predicated on good decision-making and adequate officer capacity. Capacity is currently severely limited, and decisions will be needed to reduce what the council provides and change how it operates.

4.6 Growth Aspirations

The current vision for "Growth" is aspirational and ambitious but not yet clearly defined. Consequently there are many different views on how that can be developed. The Council has set out an action plan identifying how it will deliver its aspirations and the resources it will apply however, it needs to develop how it will measure the success of the plan and be more specific about the outcomes that it is expecting to see as a result of implementing the plan. Whilst the Council did undertake research into the plans being delivered by other District Councils in the region, more work could be done in exploring how other rural

District Councils had developed their vision for growth. The authority could learn from their evaluations of what works and potentially explore options together with similar District Councils.

RDC has aspirations of delivering significant housing growth. As has been highlighted in section 4.1, there are sites allocated, and housing partners see RDC as responsive and willing to facilitate new housing projects.

Political leadership on economic development issues is well intentioned but does not appear to be well enough informed at a time when clear, decisive action and direction is needed. The councils could further leverage economic development opportunities to harness the new political landscape of collaborative working and the LEP. We note that since the team was on site, the Secretary of State has formally granted planning permission for the designer retail village at Scotch Corner. RDC should celebrate this significant achievement and ensure that its stakeholders are aware of the work it put in to realising this permission. RDC may wish to establish a programme for elected members to broaden their knowledge, skill and experience of economic development so that they can promote its benefits to their residents and communities. The LEP relationship is strong but lacks evidence of business stimulus. Plans need to be developed for the management of significant local issues such as skills and infrastructure. These may be more important than nationally or regionally driven issues.

'Growth' means different things to the vastly different areas around Catterick and Colburn compared to the deeply rural areas of the Yorkshire Dales National Park (YDNP). The overall strategy for growth should recognise that substantial growth in the former needs to be tempered by what can be achieved on a small scale in the YDNP. The growth planned can only be achieved by using the skills, assets and attributes of all stakeholders, including developers, local residents, the local business community, further education providers, politicians, officers in different council departments, and the County Council. Capture and ensure the creation of locally available skills before they are lost in order to meet any skills gap that may exist. Membership of the LEP could provide opportunities to identify skills gaps and make formal links with local universities and colleges in nearby towns and cities (for example Darlington or York), potentially involving them in developments in identified growth areas. There is an opportunity for the creation of a business base to service local needs, particularly around the Garrison, and to develop emerging opportunities and hone skills. There does not seem to be universal political buy-in across RDC from all those who will feel the impacts of economic development. This will be critical to implementing an inclusive strategy.

The council states that it wants to be an "enabling" council but whilst we were on site, there was little clarity on what that actually means. People in many meetings we held (with partners, elected members and council staff) repeated the view that RDC tend to blame other organisations, or national providers, for inaction, and was not using its power and influence over others for the good of the District (for example the MoD, YDNP or Highways Agency). However, the team understands that this is not the case, and that there are significant levels of lobbying, negotiating and influencing at local, regional and national level. This message is clearly not getting through locally. RDC is not getting the credit for the influencing it feels it is doing. Consideration should be given as to how it communicates this to ensure that its partners, councillors, staff, residents and businesses

are aware of how hard RDC is using its influence on their behalf.

We saw little evidence on how RDC can create the right environment for developers and companies to move to the area. RDC could learn from how other small district councils have worked with their LEP in order to bring in investment and economic benefits. Where RDC is successful in this area, it is not widely known.

The contribution to 'Welcome to Yorkshire' to provide destination marketing is intuitively justified but there has been no evaluation on whether this is value for money. There are specific locations and industries that do not appear to have been targeted, perhaps because they are specific to Richmondshire, and not Yorkshire as a whole. This includes the development of an equestrian proposition with the significant numbers of racing stables and the racecourse within the district. Consider how to exploit future developments that may not immediately appear to benefit the area, for example the high-speed rail link currently plans to terminate at Leeds, and although this feels some distance away, RDC could still use this as an opportunity to promote Richmondshire as a destination of choice for business and pleasure.

There are critical partnerships that require bespoke management. Different relationships are needed which have to be two-way in order for them to be productive. This includes the YDNP Authority, the MoD, the LEP and NYCC, as well as neighbouring district councils. Partners are looking to RDC to drive the connectivity between them. The council has leverage that other organisations do not have locally and should use this leverage to maximise the benefits for its residents and communities. Where it is doing this, it should ensure that this is widely and appropriately communicated so that it is accorded the recognition it deserves for the work it is doing on behalf of its communities.

5. Next steps

5.1 Immediate next steps

We appreciate that the senior managerial and political leadership will want to reflect on these findings and suggestions in order to determine how the organisation wishes to take things forward.

As part of the peer challenge process, there is an offer of further activity to support this. The LGA is well placed to provide additional support, advice and guidance on a number of the areas for development and improvement and we would be happy to discuss this. Mark Edgell, Principal Adviser is the main contact between your authority and the Local Government Association (LGA). His contact details are: **Mark.Edgell@local.gov.uk or 07747 636910**

In the meantime we are keen to continue the relationship we have formed with the Council throughout the peer challenge. We will endeavour to provide signposting to examples of practice and further information and guidance about the issues we have raised in this report to help inform ongoing consideration.

5.2 Follow up visit

The LGA Corporate Peer Challenge process includes a follow up visit. The purpose of the visit is to help the Council assess the impact of the peer challenge and demonstrate the progress it has made against the areas of improvement and development identified by the peer team. It is a lighter-touch version of the original visit and does not necessarily involve all members of the original peer team. The timing of the visit is determined by the Council. Our expectation is that it will occur within the next 2 years.

5.3 Next Corporate Peer Challenge

The current LGA sector-led improvement support offer includes an expectation that all councils will have a Corporate Peer Challenge or Finance Peer Review every 4 to 5 years. It is therefore anticipated that the Council will commission their next Peer Challenge before 2021