

# **Chorley Borough Council – Corporate Peer Challenge**

**Feedback from the peer challenge team  
January 2014**

# The Team

- **Lead Peer** – Ian Fytche, Chief Executive, North Kesteven District Council
  - **Member Peer** – Cllr Simon Greaves, Leader of Bassetlaw District Council
  - **Senior Officer Peer** – Jackie Smith, Director of Environmental and Customer Services, South Staffordshire District Council
  - **Senior Officer Peer** – Steve Capes, Head of Regeneration and Organisational Development, Derbyshire Dales District Council
  - **Peer Challenge Manager:** Darienne Law, LGA
  - **Shadowing role:** Jonathan Yeates, NGDP Graduate Trainee, LGA
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# Challenge - Principles and Thoughts

- This is not an inspection – the team has been invited into Chorley as ‘critical friends’
  - Peer challenge is part of LGA offer to support local government self-regulation and improvement.
  - The confidentiality of information shared with the team is fully respected
  - What we share here is what we have read, heard and seen
  - We are grateful to Rebecca Huddleston for the efforts she and her team have put in to preparing for and supporting our visits.
  - People here have been welcoming and willing to use this as an opportunity for learning and they have made themselves readily available to members of the team
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# The Peer Challenge Process

- Pre on-site documents submitted and reviewed
  - Case study literature
  - Observations, interviews and focus groups
  - Feedback presentation
  - More detailed letter to follow
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# Scope and purpose of the peer challenge

The core components that all corporate peer challenges cover:

1. Understanding of local context and priority setting:
2. Financial planning and viability:
3. Political and managerial leadership:
4. Governance and decision-making:
5. Organisational capacity:

With an additional focus on

6. Economic Regeneration

# Headlines – Current Reality (1)

- **Chorley understands its context** – local challenges and community aspirations well known
  - Chorley has a **strong track record of delivery**
  - Chorley is a **well led, ambitious** council
  - **The Chorley Council brand is trusted** – it is a ‘can-do’ council, it gets things done and delivers good services
  - Economic development – ambitions are clear, clear evidence of delivery
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## Headlines – Current Reality (2)

- Chorley is a **high performing organisation** with good levels of customer satisfaction, well regarded as a partner
  - Chorley has **good member/officer relationships** with an open transparent culture
  - Chorley has some **excellent people** passionate about making a difference
  - **Chorley has shielded the community from service cuts** through sound financial management, investment in priorities, and the benefits of growth (New Homes Bonus)
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# Headlines – Looking Ahead (1)

- The financial challenge is a **game changer** for local government, Chorley is no exception
  - Excellent progress in delivery – neighbourhood working and economic development – now needs to be translated into **long term sustainable plans**
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# Headlines – Looking Ahead (2)

- **Key factors for success are in place**, creating a brief window of opportunity to meet the financial challenge – the time to make the big decisions is now
  - Robust governance, ‘joined up’ **leadership with the capacity** to focus priorities and make the big decisions is essential
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# Local Context and Priorities

## Headline Findings

- Context and local challenges are understood, supported by data and analysis
  - The annual planning process creates a 'golden thread' from priorities through to delivery plans, performance frameworks and individual objectives
  - There is a strong track record of delivery
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# Local Context and Priorities

## Challenges

- The need to translate recent achievements into **long term sustainable change** – neighbourhood working and economic development
  - The need to **ensure priority setting is focused**, and takes account of financial challenges
  - The need to test priorities with the community through **consultation** on an ongoing basis
  - The need to ensure the new **vision and priorities are clearly articulated and communicated**
  - The need to work with others – **partnership building is challenging**
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# Local Context and Priorities

## Opportunities

- Through the annual planning process, **refine and communicate vision and priorities** with a long term sustainable focus, building on track record
  - **Establish a clear USP** for Chorley in the wider regional context – build on location and connectivity
  - **Prioritise...and prioritise again** – the financial outlook demands focus and difficult choices
  - **Define the role of Chorley Council** in service delivery and meeting community aspirations
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# Local Context and Priorities

## Opportunities

- Start a conversation with the **community about the shape of things to come**
  - Partnerships take time – **add value through partnership working** with LCC, LEP and Central Lancashire authorities – through leadership, influence and track record
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# Financial Planning and Viability

## Headline Findings

- There is strong financial management at the council
  - Budget pressures and risks are identified and accounted for in MTFP and updates
  - The Council has done well from New Homes Bonus and on the back of that its settlement compares favourably with some of its neighbours
  - You have been successful at maintaining investment in projects by making efficiency and transformational savings
  - Your opportunities to generate income and savings are considerable and you are prepared to innovate
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## Future financial challenges and opportunities

- Seek early consensus on how you will meet the longer term financial challenges – e.g. NHB
  - Be realistic about how long it takes to deliver change and the lead times
  - Revisit your savings and income options, further develop them, test and risk assess them.
  - Consider how and when you will communicate and seek engagement with your community and stakeholders on future priorities and service changes,
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# Leadership and Management

- Leadership is seen as visible and approachable and strengthens the loyalty and motivation of the workforce
  - There is a making things happen approach which is valued by your partners and you are viewed as innovative and exemplars
  - Politically ambitious
  - Focus and drive on delivery – huge momentum
  - Can do Council – positive culture
  - High level of member engagement (all parties)
  - Structured information sharing at Executive and non executive level
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# Future leadership opportunities and challenges

- Member and Officer time invested in delivery
    - Moving on - invest time on scoping the future
  - Develop a consensus about the future and how to get there
  - Can you keep adding more to your agenda?
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# Governance and Decision Making

- There is a **strong governance** structure in place at Chorley.
  - There is a **good working relationship between members and officers** which exhibit characteristics of trust and openness, with a member driven agenda.
  - **Scrutiny is effective** in both keeping a check and balance on decisions, and its role in policy development through task groups.
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# Governance Challenges & Opportunities

- The heavy agenda ahead may require a more robust structure and frequent cycle of member meetings.
  - Need to focus on long term planning.
  - Consider a frequent meeting of statutory officers and strategy group to add rigour to decision making.
  - More corporate ownership of decision making to ensure transformation is fully embedded.
  - The volume of performance indicators could be made more concise to increase focus.
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# Organisational capacity

- ‘**Can do**’ organisational culture - open, innovative and very positive
  - **Staff morale** is generally good .
  - You have the huge **asset** of the massive **commitment** of members and staff
  - Authority has recently developed a new **management framework** “Leading Edge” to prepare the authority for the future
  - Internal **communication** channels are generally good
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## Organisational capacity (2)

- Change has already been delivered and you have invested in IT as a **key enabler**
  - Good examples of transformation, targeted through rough cut activity.
  - Shared services developed for some support services which are embedded into the organisation and working effectively.
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# Future organisational challenges

- Chorley is going through significant change; it is now timely to review before embarking on the next part of the journey **has the organisation got the capacity**, support, and skills consistently across the organisation and ICT infrastructure to deliver and realise it's ambitions.
  - To support the ambitions of the authority **review and define the purpose of the authority**, distinguish the transactional/operational priorities and strategic objectives.
  - Develop a framework to consider **options for future service delivery**: including a range of options e.g. in-house, shared services, stopping, voluntary sector or joint ventures.
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# Organisation Capacity - Challenges

- **Continue the positive momentum of ICT strategy** ensuring the benefits are tested and embedded into the organisation meeting your needs.
  - Recognise the well regarded and **positive branding of Chorley** as an employer, ensuring part of the organisational development, career paths are identified and supported through training opportunities, succession planning is recognised and appropriately funded.
  - **Pace of change and level of ambition** could potentially impacting on capacity and goodwill and .
  - During times of change it is difficult to maintain **customer satisfaction levels** and this should be a key focus
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# Economic Development

- **Thorough, balanced Economic Development strategy** that is backed by resources
  - Considerable momentum built up over 18 months, with **tangible outcomes** delivered
  - Widespread recognition that ED is **top council priority**: well led with determination to deliver
  - Borough council now **highly regarded** by County Council and LEP – ahead of the game
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## Economic Development (2)

- Growth opportunities linked to **location and accessibility** – Chorley's USP?
  - **'Pipeline' of investment sites** being prepared with potential for 3,000-19,000 jobs
  - **Scope for collaboration** with County Council and LEP – success follows success
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# Economic Development Challenges

- Current strong investment in economic development – **how can it be sustained?**
  - Future investment sites at early planning stage – **do they have support?**
  - LEP strategy bound to focus on ‘big’, but there is some **synergy with Chorley’s aspirations**
  - **Legacy** of difficult relationships and lack of direct representation needs to be left behind
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# Economic Development Opportunities

- Keep up momentum on economy: **resources** to stay with it if it remains top priority
  - Speed up investment site pipeline and **Town Centre masterplan** to take advantage of forthcoming funding opportunities
  - Engage pragmatically with **LEP**
  - Create opportunities for joint work with **County Council** (and other boroughs)
  - Relationship Management for **Key businesses**
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**QUESTIONS?**

