

North Tyneside Council

LGA Remote Peer Support and
Recovery & Renewal Panel

Feedback and Key Reflections

29th - 30th June 2021



Introduction

When the Covid-19 pandemic emerged and lockdown began in March 2020, the LGA suspended the physical delivery of all peer challenge work including the core offer of a corporate peer challenge.

To continue to support councils during this unprecedented period, the LGA rapidly refocused their support and adopted a new remote approach, focusing on supporting the recovery and renewal of local government and its communities. This new approach does not replace the LGA Corporate Peer Challenge offer.

On 29th and 30th June 2021 North Tyneside Council undertook an LGA Remote Peer Support and Recovery & Renewal Panel. The Peer Team focussed on:

1. The progress the Council made against the recommendations of the Corporate Peer Challenge delivered by the LGA in June 2019
2. The Council's recovery and renewal ambitions going forward against its changed context post Covid-19, its role in supporting local economic recovery, and its capacity to deliver

The Peer Team included the following participants:

- **Jim Taylor** (Former Chief Executive - Salford City Council)
- **Mayor Ros Jones** (Elected Mayor & Leader - Doncaster Metropolitan Borough Council)
- **Amy Harhoff** (Corporate Director of Regeneration, Economy & Growth – Durham County Council)
- **Satvinder Rana** (Programme Manager - LGA)

Background

North Tyneside Council received an LGA Corporate Peer Challenge during 18th – 21st June 2019. Feedback from the Peer Challenge concluded that:

North Tyneside Council has intervened strategically and tactically to make the most of the natural assets of the local area. The Council's leadership role in place-shaping is based on a deep understanding of the local context and Members, staff, partners and residents are all passionate about North Tyneside. People could see both the physical transformation of the area and the benefits of the impact the Council's interventions are having on their quality of life. However, there is now an opportunity for step-change in tackling the impact of pockets of deprivation across the Borough through an inclusive economic strategy.

This report provides a written summary of the key observations made by the peer team during their follow up remote peer support to North Tyneside Council, addresses the key issues of the recommendations made in June 2019, and provides some key reflections on the Council's renewal and recovery ambitions going forward post Covid-19.

Feedback and Key Reflections

Progress against the Corporate Peer Challenge of 2019 – Feedback

The Peer Team's headline message for the Council is "Well Done North Tyneside! You have done a great job in the last couple of years". The Peer Team was very impressed with the progress the Council has made during some unprecedented and very challenging times. The amount of 'business as usual' as well as coping with a pandemic, including temporary national attention for a surge in COVID-19, is commendable. Achieving an 'Outstanding' OFSTED inspection for Children Services and the expected positive Youth Justice results during this time was no small achievement.

The Council has continued to provide impressive political and managerial leadership that balances passion and compassion. The passion for the area is finely balanced with compassion for residents, particularly those that need support the most. The complementary leadership styles of the Mayor and the Chief Executive is strong and inspirational and the two continue to be highly regarded. They are supported by a strong Cabinet and a committed and effective senior management team; both should be commended for their excellent joint working to deliver for the people of North Tyneside during these challenging times.

The Peer Team was heartened to see how the Council addressed the Corporate Peer Challenge recommendations through formalised and coordinated processes. The Peer Team has noted the following progress against the six recommendations of the Corporate Peer Challenge of 2019.

1. Organisational values and behaviours of *'we listen'*, *'we care'*, *'we are ambitious'*, and *'we are good value for money'* are now much clearer and are beginning to filter down from the Mayor and the Chief Executive. They are clearly articulated and reflected in the Council's plans and programmes; and are being modelled by both the political and managerial leadership teams. The Council's focus on *'our people'*, *'our place'*, *'our economy'*, and *'our organisation'* is equally clear and reflected in all the work of the Council.
2. The Covid-19 pandemic threw up unprecedented challenges for everybody and the Council dealt with these in a thoughtful, coordinated, and supportive way. Group managers and frontline staff welcomed the visibility, support and communication from senior leadership during this time. They found the Chief Executive's Updates, dedicated social media pages, social chats by team leaders, online exercise classes, more freedom and trust to do what was needed, and general management flexibility and sense of care in responding to and dealing with personal and family issues, particularly helpful. This all helped them to feel more connected to the organisation and is something that should be built upon going forward.
3. The Council has moved immensely on strengthening its client function and giving it a strategic context. It has had detailed discussions with its service provider to agree an approach to strengthen these functions through three different, but interlinking, workstreams around the *'Team'*, *'Resources'* and *'Technology'*.

The Council has developed its digital strategy with a focus on using, storing and sharing *'Data'* responsibly; designing easy to use interactions for *'Customers'*; having stable and fit for purpose technical tools for the *'Team'*; and supporting residents, businesses and visitors across the *'Borough'* with accessibility to digital connectivity.

Strengthening of the Workforce/Human Resources/Organisational Development client function is work in progress and once completed it should enable the Council to move to next level. The Peer Team was pleased to note that a strategic approach to Human Resources is being developed through a workforce and organisation development plan that will be directly linked to the Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP), and that the Senior Team has agreed an overall approach to leadership and the outcomes required for this corporate function.

4. The Council has also now put in place a robust MTFP which wraps around its strategic plans. This has enabled Members and officers to have a clear view of how the delivery of the Council's priorities and operational plans will be financed and where the pressure points are likely to be. This will be even more important as the Council delivers against its post pandemic recovery and renewal ambitions for the local area and its residents.
5. The framework for an Inclusive Economy is sound. Its emphasis on employment, safety, social equity, housing, digital connections, and sustainable environment is aligned with the Council's values and strategic priorities. The challenge now is to consider the extent to which a commercially guided approach to unlock and accelerate development is needed; and move it onto the delivery phase so that it starts having an impact on people's lives and livelihoods, as well as addressing the inequalities exacerbated by the pandemic. This will mean bringing the Council's workforce and the local community on board to deliver inclusive economic benefits to all.
6. Positive progress has been made by the Council on creating space for itself on the North Tyneside Combined Authority (NTCA) and it continues to have positive relationships with its strategic partners. In addition to providing senior leadership to the NTCA at political and managerial levels, the Council now has some emerging programmes funded by the NTCA. Going forward, the Council should increase the focus on the impact of the NTCA on its residents and the delivery of the Mayor's new Manifesto priorities. In addition, the Council must grasp any opportunities that may present themselves from the emerging North East Devolution Deal. The value of engagement on these forums should be demonstrably felt by North Tyneside and its residents.

Recovery and Renewal – Key Reflections

The Council has a very good understanding and analysis of the impact of the pandemic on the local area and residents. The Peer Team was impressed with the analysis and understanding the Council is developing around the 'direct' and 'indirect' impacts of the pandemic on local communities so that it can inform a refreshed Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA). The increased focus on people and customers, as well as the need to reduce inequalities, is clear and is at the heart of all the positive things underway. There are some positive examples of how this work is being taken forward, for example, the Education plan that will be run over the next four years to assist catch up and assist in closing the widening gap of schools is impressive.

The Council has ambitious plans for North Tyneside. Its phased Covid-19 recovery framework for North Tyneside focusing on '*People, Place, Economy and Organisation*' provides a well thought through and coordinated approach to building the 'new normal'. This is being performance managed to ensure that outcomes are on track.

To accelerate recovery, renewal, growth and to secure buy-in and any future inward investment the Peer Team would encourage the Council to consider defining an overarching economic strategy for the Borough. This could support the Local Plan by identifying sector

development, where housing development sites will be, the location of the strategic growth areas, and where potential council investment interventions might be made. Such a strategy would enable the Council to share its ambition for the areas with its strategic partners, its workforce, and its residents to help drive the growth. It would also act as a useful reference to compete for regional and national resources, lobby government when necessary, attract inward investment, and deliver on its regeneration projects.

North Tyneside has a buoyant local economy, albeit via Small and Medium Enterprises, but the opportunities this might offer for more localised commercial activity could be explored. This might provide income to the Council and in turn provide help to residents. However, this will mean identifying the levers that will help to attract investment and enable the Council to exercise control to mitigate against risk.

The Council should continue to influence and develop integrated approaches with health colleagues in health and Social Care, paying particular attention to really integrating pathways to health services for residents. It should use the new JSNA to give teeth to the Health and Wellbeing Board (HWB) and support the HWB to maintain its leadership role across the health and wellbeing system and deliver integrated health care for the residents of North Tyneside.

Despite the Covid-19 pandemic the Peer Team heard positive examples of increased collaborative problem-solving, closer partnership working, new and innovative ways of working bring agility and pace in decision-making, a heightened sense of community and an increase in volunteering activity (being recognised through the *'Spirit of North Tyneside'* initiative), reduction in crime and anti-social behaviour, and a cleaner environment. All these positives should to be considered as the Council moves into the post-pandemic 'new normal'. It is time to continue to shift the organisational culture in a positive direction to build for the future.

The Council has outlined an impressive and challenging agenda for post pandemic recovery and renewal which will make a call on all its capacity. The Council has a very impressive Cabinet and a very capable officer cadre to drive and deliver this agenda for the benefit of North Tyneside and its residents. By building on the good work undertaken to align the Council behind some strong values and behaviours, tightening up its strategic functions, articulating clearly the Council's plans for the future, actively playing into the regional space, and putting in place the MTFP to align emerging plans with funding availability, the Council is in a strong position to deliver impressive results for the people of North Tyneside.

Recommendations

North Tyneside is on a successful transformation journey and it is now beginning to reap rewards for the organisation and the Borough's residents. To keep this journey on track and accelerate it further the Peer Team would recommend that the Council:

1. Completes the work to strengthen the Workforce/Human Resources/Organisational Development client function; and build on the good practice developed during the pandemic to connect, empower, and support the workforce, making creative use of technologies to engage with staff and residents, and support agility and pace in decision making.
2. Finalises its strategic plans, secures buy-in from all stakeholders, and start demonstrating the impact its ambitions and customer promises are making across the Borough.

3. Identify and consider the opportunities that may be available to:
 - a. attract inward investment and government funding through a shared and compelling local economic and growth narrative
 - b. support local investment interventions through commercial activity, where appropriate
 - c. work closely with Health partners to develop more integrated pathways to health and care services for residents
4. Continues to play in the regional and sub-regional space to bring in tangible benefits to the residents of North Tyneside.

Next Steps

Under the umbrella of LGA sector-led improvement, there is an on-going offer of support to councils. The LGA is well placed to provide additional support, advice, and guidance on a number of the areas identified for development and improvement and we would be happy to discuss this. Mark Edgell (Principal Adviser) is the main point of contact between the authority and the Local Government Association (LGA). His contact details are: Email: mark.edgell@local.gov.uk and Tel: 07747 636 910.



Satvinder Rana
Programme Manager

(On behalf of the peer team)

Key recommendations from the LGA Corporate Peer Challenge (18th – 21st June 2019).

1. ***Crystalise the ‘We Listen, We Care’ principle and narrative into a coherent strategy and implementation plan and develop Council-wide strategic capacity to support this objective.*** This will help to translate this commitment into tangible plans for Members, staff and external partners which describe ‘what’ the message looks like in practice and ‘how’ they can embed it in their work and through their behaviours and actions.
2. ***From the existing positive culture, articulate and communicate clear key values for the organisation.*** This means teasing out the different key words and phrases and consolidating this into one clear set of values that articulate and define what North Tyneside Council is all about, what it is trying to achieve.
3. ***Realign the corporate enablers to better develop and deliver service reform with a particular focus on digital enablement.*** This means strengthening the strategic functions by having a stronger centralised intelligent client function, working with service area teams to get the best out of outsourced contracts. This will help to ensure that the outputs are aligned to the Council’s ambitions and will support service reform, particularly in the progressive use of modern technologies.
4. ***Develop an inclusive economic strategy for North Tyneside having regard for commercial opportunity, sectorial strengths, skills provision and social inclusion.*** An inclusive economic strategy co-developed with communities and businesses would help in targeting growth opportunities to specific sectors, both locally and as part of the North of Tyne Combined Authority strategy. It would enable the development of skills around those sectors so that local people can benefit from the investment that may flow into the area.
5. ***Through a whole council approach, deliver a four-year medium-term financial plan to meet the challenge which will enable the Council to deliver its priorities.*** This will enable the Council to take a long-term view of its financial capacity by breaking the budget down and aligning expenditure against priorities to help the Council in delivering its ambition for people, place and the economy.
6. ***Maximise North Tyneside’s influence and participation in the new North of Tyne Combined Authority with particular emphasis on joint development of priorities.*** This will enable the Council to jointly work on key agendas such as skills development, inward investment, tourism and in addressing deprivation through inclusive economic development.