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Chief Executive  
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August 2013

Dear Dawn

**Southampton City Council Corporate Peer Challenge**  
**22<sup>nd</sup> – 25<sup>th</sup> July 2013**

On behalf of the peer team I would like to say what a pleasure and privilege it was to be invited into Southampton City Council to deliver the recent corporate peer challenge as part of the LGA offer to support sector led improvement.

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 Southampton were:

- Joanne Roney OBE – Chief Executive, Wakefield Metropolitan District Council
- Cllr Mike Connolly (Labour) – Leader of Bury Metropolitan Borough Council
- John Harrison – Executive Director, Strategic Resources at Peterborough City Council
- Rob Walsh – Strategic Director, Governance and Transformation at North East Lincolnshire Council
- Ian Hickman – Audit Commission
- Paul Clarke – Programme Manager, Local Government Association

**Scope and focus of the peer challenge**

You asked us to provide an external 'health-check' of the organisation in the context of your plans for further improvement and development. We have done this by considering the following core components looked at by all corporate peer challenges:

1. Understanding of the local context and priority setting: Does the council understand its local context and has it established a clear set of priorities?
2. 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?
3. Political and managerial leadership: Does the council have effective political and managerial leadership and is it a constructive partnership?
4. Governance and decision-making: Are effective governance and decision-making arrangements in place to respond to key challenges and manage change, transformation and disinvestment?
5. Organisational capacity: Are organisational capacity and resources focused in the right areas in order to deliver the agreed priorities?

### **The peer challenge process**

It is important to stress that this was not an inspection. Peer challenges are improvement-focussed and tailored to meet individual councils' 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 4 days onsite at Southampton, 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 7 weeks in Southampton.

This letter 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 (22<sup>nd</sup> -25<sup>th</sup> July 2013). In presenting feedback to you, they 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.

## **Summary of feedback: overall observations and messages**

There is a consensus across the organisation about what is preventing Southampton City Council from maximising its' potential to be an effective, modern and productive local authority. There is a good awareness of the key challenges facing the Council, including size of the budget savings required over the next couple of years. The Council recognises organisational performance and morale is not in a good place and knows it needs to up its game. This awareness, together with the appetite from elected members and staff to make things better, will be vital as the council seeks to make the substantial and significant improvement required during a period of continued financial challenge.

We think the council has the potential to radically turnaround performance. This will, though, require a pace of change far quicker than the current transformation programme is delivering, and an approach to performance management that is more enabling and supporting. At present there is limited clarity about how to change things. There also seems to be a lack of urgency to do so. In essence you quickly need to evolve the organisation's mindset from 'want to change' to 'how to change'.

In terms of future direction and aspirations, you have a new Council Plan and have an exciting physical regeneration agenda that builds on a successful programme to date. But we suggest there needs to be a clearer articulation of the priority outcomes the authority is striving to achieve for both city and council. Once agreed the organisation needs to become fit to achieve them through a refocused and co-ordinated council wide transformation programme. This needs to be clear on the size, ways of working and the mindset of the organisation required to deliver them.

During this period of transition and transformation you will need to be confident and assured your frontline services and practices are maintained. A strengthened performance management system and culture will help assess service delivery, ensure clarity about service standards, and measure outcomes and impact. More empowerment and confidence throughout the organisation will enable quicker and more effective decision-making.

Southampton City Council clearly faces some tough challenges. The authority was described by many we saw as an organisation in a 'perpetual crisis'. There is no doubt the local context and recent events exaggerate some of these perceptions. But the reality is that the context and challenges are not unique to Southampton. Many authorities successfully function and achieve radical and effective transformation when facing similar challenges. Now is the time to focus on the future, not the past.

Our time at the Council left us with a firm impression that a lot of what is accepted as normal practice at Southampton is currently out of kilter with the rest of the sector. There looks to be too much focus on process compliance and risk aversion that now needs to shift to enabling and action. Process is of course important in providing

safeguards and transparency. But at Southampton it seems to be driving the way the organisation does business, rather than supporting and enabling it. A culture of process compliance is seen by many to be stifling the productivity of the organisation and creating a default position of demonstrating why something cannot be done.

However, all of this is fixable. It will, though, require strong, decisive leadership, political consensus on key improvement priorities, a clearer articulation of the desired strategic direction of travel, and an accelerated pace of change. In doing this, there will need to be an acceptance that given the speed and scale of change required not everything will go smoothly. You will need to stick to decisions, hold your nerve and ensure momentum is sustained.

We think there are a set of current circumstances which provide a basis for this. We see an organisation aware of the issues it faces, and one that has a new Leader and Chief Executive who have made an impact already. There is an appetite from partners and public to be involved. You have shown a willingness to invite external challenge and support through this peer challenge process. All of these combine to provide the conditions to move forward. We strongly encourage you to seize on this moment in time to transform the Council into the well performing, high achieving and modern local authority you and a range of stakeholders want and need it to be.

### **Summary of feedback: current performance, ability and capacity to deliver future ambitions**

#### *Understanding of local context and priority setting*

You have recently developed and agreed a new Council Plan 2013-2016. This succinctly and clearly sets out the priorities, challenges and opportunities, and includes key actions and measures of success. The Plan is a good start in setting out the future direction of travel for the city and council. The priorities appear relevant given the local context and the challenges facing the local area and wider sector. You will no doubt wish to demonstrate how they relate to consultation and engagement with residents. But in terms of format and style we think the Plan is excellent.

We suggest the content can be developed further, particularly in terms of providing a clearer articulation of the priority outcomes and ensuring that the measures of success are focused on the most critical aspects of those. Currently some of the measures don't appear ambitious and aspirational and relate more to service delivery outputs rather than impact on quality of life. For example, many appear to be about simply maintaining performance or incrementally improving current levels of service, such as levels of homelessness and waste recycling. Others appear to be simply an activity or action. In developing the Plan further we suggest a clearer thread of outcome-action-impact. As one person put it 'measure what matters'.

We appreciate the Plan is new. That provides a timely opportunity to engage staff, partners and public about what the Council is aspiring to deliver in the medium term. If necessary you should be prepared to refresh it, ensuring it sets out clear, and maybe less, priority outcomes that all stakeholders understand. The Plan should become your key strategic document, driving the allocation of resources and capacity to ensure delivery of the priority outcomes. Notwithstanding the freshness of the Plan, we saw little connectivity between the priorities, medium term financial strategy and transformation programme. There is an opportunity to improve the alignment of priorities and resources to support the delivery of your agreed key outcomes and monitor them.

We suggest there is also a need to ensure your transformation programme is focused more on developing the organisation's expertise, skills and culture to deliver the (revised) Council Plan. We are not necessarily saying the current strands of the programme are wrong, and we understand and appreciate the initial focus on achieving significant change to form the People's Directorate. But it is difficult to see explicitly how some of the current programme, e.g. community asset transfer, will contribute significantly to delivery of the Council Plan. The need to reduce operating and business support costs is a common thread across many council transformation programmes, i.e. - maximising internal cost reduction and efficiency in order to minimise impact on front line services. This didn't come across clearly to us at Southampton. As you develop the Transformation Programme to support the delivery of the Council Plan, there will be a need for it to become more council-wide, be more effectively programme managed, and include culture change activity – i.e. more of a focus on the way you do things as well as what you deliver.

Beyond the priority outcomes you are striving for, there are of course a range of services and activity that remain non-negotiable in terms of statutory responsibilities for instance. There will undoubtedly be a very intensive improvement agenda, and some immediate challenges to overcome and major changes to manage. During this period the council must also stay focused on delivering services to local people. This will need a continued stringent focus on the basics. Being clear on service standards and being able to manage performance against those will obviously help.

#### *Financial planning and viability*

The Council currently appears to be in a relatively sound financial situation. Strong accountancy and tight control has helped put you there, albeit the strategy to date has included use of reserves and one off monies as means by which to achieve a balanced budget. We urge you not to underestimate the challenges you will face on the journey ahead. Public sector spending reductions beyond 2014/15 are likely to be much tougher than what has been experienced to date and we encourage you not to underestimate the severity of the challenges and the tough decisions and radical

options that will inevitably be required. Whilst we might say this to most other authorities, the scale of the financial savings required at Southampton – essentially £60 million over the next two years - are sizable compared to many other places. You have rightly identified the capacity to deliver savings as a key strategic risk for the Council. This risk should not be underplayed.

We suggest you need a more robust and sustainable medium term plan to identify and deliver all the savings required. We encourage you to consider introducing a 3-5-year budget and longer term planning horizon, including appropriate scenario planning and thorough testing of assumptions and forecasts. We think CMT and Cabinet should work collectively to prepare this, ensuring corporate and executive ownership. We understand and appreciate how the election cycle and political imperatives may make a shorter term planning horizon and annual budget setting more palatable. But the use of reserves and one off monies are of course only short term solutions and longer term planning is absolutely critical to the future financial viability and sustainability of the Council. In short, strategic decision-making driven by medium to long term priorities is needed. As one person described it, without this you will 'sleep walk into bankruptcy'.

You will need to make sure your planning is informed by accurate data and intelligence that you have confidence in. The organisation seems to be rife with myths and suspicion about what gets spent where. This seems to be due to a lack of high-quality data about expenditure which in turn diminishes the confidence to challenge assumptions and allocations. We heard anecdotal examples of missing or incomplete data and information affecting the ability to plan robustly, such as the number of people receiving a home care service not being known. Not only does this make financial planning difficult, it also means that value for money is hard to judge. The 'blue prints' recently produced for all services are a useful start in establishing some baseline information, and identifying the cost of services. But there is more to be done here we suggest.

Some of your savings are predicated on efficiencies and more productive ways of working to be achieved through the Transformation Programme. We think you quickly need further clarity of how much the programme is anticipated to contribute to the overall savings target, and when those savings will be delivered. Currently there is merely an acceptance that the Programme will make a contribution. This is risky. Whilst you may not be able to accurately predict the savings to be delivered, some estimates are required to enable effective financial planning and to determine if other options need to be pursued, or indeed whether the current options are the right ones. Whilst not all transformation projects may have an objective of saving money, for those that do a clear indication of savings and the timescale over which they will be achieved is required. More council wide communication of the budget challenge and options being considered is also required we suggest.

Economic activity in the city presents an opportunity for income and should be a more prominent feature of the medium term financial planning we think. This is about maximising the connectivity between the priority of attracting investment and the Council's budget strategy, for example economic growth enabling increased income from business rates and knowing when major income streams can come on line. But there are also more general observations such as long term physical regeneration being hard to achieve within a short term financial plan.

### *Political and Managerial Leadership*

The City and Council wants and needs strong and visible leadership. People are desperate for a clear medium to long term vision, and a coherent plan of how that will be achieved. You need to create a feeling in the organisation that, this time, changes will be for real and plans sustainable. Staff and partners need to know what the direction of travel is and be confident they can commit and invest their trust to this. The recent appointment of a new chief executive and new leader provides a chance for this to happen. This is critical opportunity for the organisation to achieve the change, improvement and transformation required.

The Cabinet and Corporate Management Team (CMT), as a new 'top team', will need to demonstrate a collective strategic view and grip of the challenges, and exhibit a focus on the future not the past. The new Director of People and Head of Strategic HR and the fresh perspectives and experience from elsewhere they bring will be critical to the next phase of the Council's transformation. We encourage you to continue the frequent dialogue established between Cabinet and CMT and ensure it is used to create ambition, drive culture change, and provide internal challenge to proposals. Ultimately you know what is wrong with the organisation and it is your job to sort it. Staff, partners, residents, and other external stakeholders need to see and hear this is happening.

In doing this you will need to be prepared to take tough decisions and stick to them. There have been recent high profile decisions reversing previous budget saving actions and proposals, for example staff terms and conditions, the refurbishment of Oaklands Swimming Pool and night time car parking charges. We appreciate these were driven by various factors including changing political priorities, opportunities afforded by an improved financial situation, and responding to adverse public feedback. But there is a risk the authority will be seen as not being able to stick to tough decisions made. Not all decisions moving forward will be palatable or in line with public opinion, particularly as the financial challenge becomes more acute. Clear communication about decisions and the reasons for them being taken will be critical.

We suggest you also need to consider how you further develop the communication and engagement with partners and public. Residents want to be involved and help find solutions. You are clearly committed to consultation and already have some

good mechanisms in place – such as the ‘Your City, Your Say’. You regularly consult on a vast array of proposals and plans. We suggest there is scope to consider how you can develop your current approaches so they become more about engagement. There is also scope we think to build cross-public sector relationships and engagement on an area or neighbourhood basis, something that many other authorities are doing.

You have clearly strengthened communication within the organisation, for example through the weekly ‘Friday Note’ email from the Chief Executive. We urge you to keep building on your improving internal communications and engagement. Communication will be as important as ever as you move forward. Some staff suggested the rumour mill remains very active. So there is, and will continue to be, more to do. In doing so, you need to reflect on how senior management can be more visible to all parts of the organisation.

### Governance and decision-making

The basic foundations and core elements for good governance look to be in place at Southampton. Whilst we did not examine your Constitution or Scheme of Delegation in detail, they seem in line with what is expected and required. The Constitution is reviewed annually, and the Governance Committee benefits from having independent members on it. You are clearly committed to ensuring there is robust governance and transparent decision-making at Southampton, and keen that the authority avoids unnecessary risks.

However, this seems to have created a way of doing business with a heavy emphasis on governance processes, and a culture of compliance, as opposed to a culture that enables and supports the decisions and action required to deliver the priority outcomes. As a consequence the pace of decision-making is perceived to be slow and bureaucratic. This was an almost universal view presented to us by officers and members we engaged with. Managers are frustrated at the levels of empowerment to take decisions. They want to be empowered and accountable, but decision-making was described as ‘hierarchical’ with high levels of upward delegation and repetition, demonstrated for example by frequent revisiting the detail of budget packages already approved and the internal processes for recruitment. This, coupled with a lack of systematic performance management across the organisation, is reducing individual accountability.

It may also be diminishing the productivity and stifling the creativity of the organisation. As the challenges facing the Council become more acute, and the need increases for more radical solutions to be found we suggest, there will be a need for more frank conversations and less process and analysis of why something cannot be done. We questioned whether you are too risk averse – ‘gold plated safe’ as one person described it - at a time when rapid change and major transformation is



needed. There may be a need to accept you will not get everything right first time, will make mistakes and that you can learn from them.

Professional advice (such as legal, finance, HR, procurement) will need to focus more on proactively enabling solutions to be developed, rather than the current emphasis on safeguarding the authority from risk. Professional advice does though also need to be respected and valued. There were many instances cited to us where elected members had made a decision contrary to officer advice and recommendations, for example, budget and planning decisions. Whilst this is not an issue in itself, it does suggest that the organisation's attitude to risk might be out of kilter with elected members aspirations and ambitions. Strategic risk management may be something worth considering further at a CMT and Cabinet meeting. Likewise a CMT discussion on levels of empowerment is required.

The practice at Southampton seems to have evolved and developed to produce a minuted record for every conversation and debate that occurs between officers and members. We question whether this is always necessary. We appreciate the need for audit trails and records, but empowerment, trust, and effective relationships are all equally important parts of good governance in a modern local authority. These elements seem to have been overlooked somewhat. The current emphasis looks to be on compliance with processes rather than accountability for decision-making and delivery. We think you should consider the current processes with a view to rationalising, streamlining and speeding up decision-making. This includes the number of officers present at member meetings which from our (albeit limited) observations appear to be heavy.

Overview and Scrutiny is working well. It appears to be undertaken in a collaborative manner and felt by members and officers to be making a useful contribution to decision-making, such as through its' work on Adult Social Care charges, welfare reform, and apprenticeships. We think the scrutiny work programme could strike a better balance in terms of its focus, so that there is even more emphasis on making a proactive and timely contribution to policy development as well as the important role of holding decision-makers to account. In both of these modes there is potential for scrutiny to be more externally focused we suggest, including having a useful role in engaging with citizens on key issues facing the city, particularly in the absence of any area or neighbourhood forums/committees.

The governance and project management of your Transformation Programme are not currently clear or robust. You know this and are putting arrangements in place. For example, you have established a Change Programme Board and are recruiting a Head of Transformation whose role will be to manage the Programme. The Programme is at a formative stage. In developing it into a fully matured programme you will need to ensure the arrangements you are putting into place enable the linkages, sequencing, and inter-dependencies between the various projects and

activity to be clear. Robust monitoring and accountability will need to be key feature of your programme governance. We have already mentioned the importance of knowing the contribution to the budget strategy.

### Organisational Capacity

You have allocated dedicated resources for the Transformation Programme, having set aside a budget of £2million and contributed another £1million for 2013/14. It will be important that as various projects and parts of the organisation draw down on this funding the return on investment is clear, and that it is funding transformational activity not business as usual. In terms of other resources, including people, you will need to consider how you use of what you have got and consider the competency and skills gaps. During a period of transformation you are likely to need different skills and expertise at different times.

We suggest you will need to give more consideration to securing temporary capacity, skills and knowledge through flexible and agile arrangements including for example internal and external secondments. Part of this we suggest may be better utilising your existing relationship with your existing contractors/partners to build capacity and support transformation. They undoubtedly have much to offer in terms of transformation expertise and it was not clear whether this had been explored as part of the recent contract re-negotiations, or whether the dialogue had focused purely on savings.

Given the recent performance issues and concerns, there has understandably been a big focus on the People's Directorate to transform. In moving forward, we encourage you not to forget about the rest of the organisation. As you move to develop the Transformation Programme to support delivery of the Council Plan, there is a risk that transformation in silos could damage credibility and overall progress, and have a detrimental effect on other parts of the organisation or transformation projects. There are already some small examples of this starting to happen such as recent changes to housing payments having a knock on effect with the customer contact centre.

A council wide programme led delivery with robust project management will result in faster progress. As mentioned already, the linkages, sequencing, and inter-dependencies between the various projects and activity are not currently understood consistently across the organisation. 'We don't know how everything knits together' was a view frequently expressed to us. We were unclear as to how some of the projects under the 'working environment' strand might help deliver other elements of the Programme, and how the organisational design elements of the People Services transformation linked to this.

There is a need we think to further develop the functions that maximise organisational capacity and productivity such as performance management, strategic human resources (HR) and ICT, both to support transformation and serve the needs of the council of the future. Performance management in particular is an area for immediate improvement we suggest. We know there are proposals in place, albeit these appear to be taking a significant amount of time to progress given your acceptance that something needs to be done. In implementing the new arrangements remember it is about culture and behaviours as well as systems and process. In short it is you knowing that what you are delivering is making a difference and having the intended impact and effect.

You have recognised the further development of strategic HR needs to be a priority and, again, there are proposals in place to address this. As you do this we think that sorting Equal Pay, building on the improved relationships with trade unions, will be a critical element. Workforce development to support the transformation of the council is another important area for further consideration and progress we suggest. As is the role of ICT where a clearer strategy is required, not only for how it supports and enables the organisation now, but how it supports further efficiencies, transformation and the future business needs.

You have recently agreed to develop a new strategy for councillor development which will comprise induction, personal development planning and a range of learning and development opportunities to support corporate objectives and initiatives, and specific member roles. You have significantly increased the budget, albeit from a low base, and will enable Group Leaders to have a budget as part of this. Building on this commitment and additional investment, we encourage you to ensure that the learning and development programme supports the evolving roles of councillors as the council changes such as community leader and strategic commissioner. We think this is a very important part of the Council's transformation.

The recent re-location and amalgamation of the communications function to create a new corporate team provides an opportunity for a significant impact and change. It is a chance for an early and 'quick win' as regards demonstrating the new 'One Council' ethos. Similarly the integration of public health into the Council also provides a great opportunity for learning. Public health staff will bring a great deal of expertise and knowledge, especially performance management, to the council and we encourage you to use these opportunities to spread and embed learning across the organisation.

We also encourage you to maximise the potential to leverage further capacity and expertise through existing partners, voluntary sector, neighbouring authorities, and the community. All appear poised and ready to make a contribution. You will need to articulate your vision for the future, including the priority outcomes you are seeking to achieve, and get into a dialogue with others about what you need from them. More

collaboration will almost certainly be a feature of your future approach to delivering the priority outcomes for the City we suggest.

The staff we engaged with during our visit were proud and loyal. They are passionate about working for the Council and keen to be part of its improvement journey. We encourage you to harness this through more and better engagement and empowerment, particularly at the frontline enabling them to be responsive to customer need. Ensure that you celebrate success through a council-wide approach. Again, this will help progress the 'One Council' priority.

### Creating a 'new normal' at Southampton City Council

We suggested there were several characteristics of the current organisation that need to evolve to help create a 'new normal' at Southampton, and help you make progress towards becoming a better, more productive, responsive and sustainable local authority:

#### The current Southampton Way

A focus on delivering council **services**, with the emphasis on outputs

A focus on the collating and analysing of **data and information**, including formal consultation to inform decisions

A **paternal** mind-set, with an emphasis on the council being a provider of services to people

Officers have **responsibility** for implementing decisions and delivering services

A focus on **compliance** with processes and prescribed standards and delivery of a rigid delivery plan

Ways of working focus on avoiding **risk** (risk aversion)

Public sector '**victim**' – using the challenges facing the sector and locality as a reason for not being able to do things

#### The new Southampton Way

A focus on the **outcomes** required, with the best means by which to achieve them then being decided

More use made of **intelligence** including dialogue and engagement to inform decision-making and policy development

A recognition that **co-production** with service users will enable better outcomes, and an active exploration of opportunities to do this

Officers are **accountable** for their decisions and judged on delivering outcomes

An emphasis on officers being **empowered** to enable outcomes within an agreed budget and overall plan

An appetite to embrace the **opportunity** to innovate within agreed risk parameters (opportunity risk)

Public sector '**leader of place**' – embracing the challenges facing the sector and locality as an opportunity to lead the council and city



## **Our recommendations: suggestions and ideas for your consideration**

The peer team developed some key recommendations for you to consider. These are based on what we saw, heard and read. Drawing on our experience of the sector and knowledge of local government improvement, the following are things we think will help enable the above transformation and make best use of your skills and experience, deliver some quick wins, and develop the strengths you will need to progress your improvement agenda:

1. Further develop your new Council Plan so it includes the agreed priority outcomes for City and Council. This should be the key document to drive and determine resource allocation and transformation. All processes should support the delivery of the Plan.
2. Consider refocusing your Transformation Programme so it becomes more council-wide, robustly programme managed and monitored, and enables the organisation to deliver the Council Plan and medium term financial plan. In developing the programme further consider:
  - Whether the programme and the projects and activity are ambitious enough and relative to the scale of change required
  - The linkages, sequencing, and inter-dependencies between the various projects and activity, ensuring they are clear
  - The capacity to deliver the programme and project activity
  - Ownership from the whole organisation, in terms of awareness and understanding, but also opportunity to contribute
3. Introduce a three year priority-led financial and service planning horizon, including appropriate scenario planning and thorough testing of assumptions and forecasts.
4. Establish a council wide performance management approach which includes a focus on measuring outcomes, enabling accountability and management competency.
5. Streamline your decision-making processes – including looking at the levels of delegation, empowerment and the servicing of member meetings.
6. Collective Cabinet and CMT agreement and development time to establish a shared commitment to the one council approach to delivering changes and culture to create the 'new normal'
7. Be bold, be brave, and be confident. Do something quickly to demonstrate and communicate what will be different here.

8. Get out more and learn from others. The sector is willing to help. Consider an external peer sounding board, or voluntary improvement board, as means by which to ensure continued external peer support and challenge.

We have attached a set of slides that summarise the above feedback. The slides are the ones used by the peer team to present its feedback at the end of the onsite visit.

### **Next steps**

You will undoubtedly wish to reflect on these findings and suggestions made with your senior managerial and political leadership before determining how the council wishes to take things forward. As part of the peer challenge process, there is an offer of continued activity to support this. In the meantime we are keen to continue the relationship we have formed with you and colleagues through the peer challenge to date. We will endeavour to signpost you to other sources of information and examples of practice and thinking.

I thought it helpful to provide contact details for Heather Wills who, as you know, is our Principal Adviser (South East). Heather can be contacted via email at [heather.wills@local.gov.uk](mailto:heather.wills@local.gov.uk) (or tel. 07770 701188). She is the main contact between your authority and the Local Government Association. Hopefully this provides you with a convenient route of access to the Local Government Association, its resources and any further support.

All of us connected with the peer challenge would like to wish you every success going forward. Once again, many thanks to you and your colleagues for inviting the peer challenge and to everyone involved for their participation.

Paul Clarke - Programme Manager (Peer Support)  
Local Government Association

On behalf of the peer challenge team