LGA Corporate Peer Challenge

East Riding of Yorkshire Council

Dates: 29th November – 2nd December 2021

Feedback report

1. Executive summary

East Riding of Yorkshire is a great place with lots of potential and opportunities to develop and promote the area further. It has some unique characteristics and assets such as the coastline, beautiful countryside, busy high streets with quality shops such as in the market town of Beverley, its proximity and connections to two large cities, and the Humber estuary providing an opportunity to drive further economic growth in the area.

The Council itself is a stable organisation that has consistently delivered good quality place-based services. It now faces challenges in people focused services - particularly children's services following an 'Inadequate' OFSTED judgement of 2019-20; and rising demand for services coupled with recruitment and retention pressures in Adult Social Care. There is recognition of these challenges, and the Council has plans in place to deal with them - including for Children with Special Needs and Disabilities (SEND). The Council has talented, committed and long-serving loyal staff who have a strong affinity to the place. The majority of staff are also residents of the area, and they want to provide the best services they can.

These positives provide solid foundations for the Council to demonstrate strong organisational and strategic leadership and do some exciting and great things in the future. However, the critical ingredient that is currently missing is the broader ambition of the Council around place-shaping and the priority outcomes that are desired. The Peer Team was not able, either from documentation or onsite conversations, to gain clarity on exactly what the Council's strategic ambitions for the local area and its residents and businesses are going forward. A strong place narrative that galvanises staff and delivery partners, and which is understood by residents and businesses, would help to set out a clear strategic intent for the Council and promote East Riding as a good place to live, learn, visit and work.

The Council's elected Members are committed, engaged and embedded within their communities and they are strong advocates for their constituents. However, their leadership role within the Council and across the region and sub-region needs strengthening. They should be playing a far greater role in policy development, decision-making and performance management, as well as providing leadership of

place from the front. Members need to be at the core of decision making in the Council and they need to be adequately supported by senior officers to enable them to exercise their democratic responsibilities. Timely information, intelligence, policy options and regular updates will help them to make informed decisions based on evidence and insights.

There are some able and willing partners who are open to working much more collaboratively with the Council, but this opportunity is not being maximised. Partners played a critical role during the COVID-19 pandemic and provided extra capacity to enable the Council to provide the necessary support to residents. However, the Council has yet to develop and leverage this capacity to help deliver its wider ambitions.

Senior officers maintain a tight grip on the Council's resources, capacity and delivery mechanisms. However, there is a risk to the Council of power and decision-making resting in a small number of people outside of the democratic process. The Peer Team found things opaque in some areas of decision making and delivery, which makes it difficult to determine where leadership and accountabilities lay. The Council needs to put in place processes that make the organisation much more transparent so that everyone, especially Members, understand where the organisation is heading, how it is going to get there, and what resources it has at its disposal.

Greater understanding is particularly needed of the budget setting process by Members through collective engagement among Members and senior officers and collective ownership of the decisions required to address the Council's future financial challenges - especially in view of, rising demand for services, increasing costs, and investments needed in the future workforce. These challenges will require the Council to make some difficult choices in the future and work on addressing these needs to begin now.

Work on improving staff capacity is underway, and more needs to be done. This needs to be complemented with further work on improving staff capability through a refreshed staff training and development programme. The Council grasped the opportunity presented by the COVID-19 working arrangements to advance its plans to develop a more agile workforce. However, this major corporate project needs

effective implementation and proactive senior level leadership and accountability if it is to deliver long-term transformational benefits to the organisation. Investments in Agile working must lead to a more responsive and efficient organisation with a refreshed set of organisational values to help deliver better customer interactions and service delivery that meets the changing needs and expectations of residents. All this can be addressed through the planned fundamental review of the organisation to ensure resources are in the right place and at the right level.

The Council is putting efforts into improving its internal and external communications. The Council has recently brought together separate Communications functions into a single corporate resource to bring forward a more consistent and structured approach to communication which is seen as a positive move.

2. Key recommendations

There are several observations and suggestions within the main section of the report for the Council to consider. The following are the Peer Team's key recommendations to the Council:

2.1.   Recommendation 1

Develop a compelling shared vision and narrative for place with clear local priorities and desired outcomes, that are widely communicated and tracked.

This will help set the strategic agenda and enable staff, partners and residents to align themselves behind it. It will also assist in influencing the alignment of internal resources and external investment decisions to the Council's key priorities.

2.2.   Recommendation 2

Strengthen the roles, responsibilities and leadership positions of Cabinet Members.

This will enable Cabinet Members to provide effective leadership, exercise good decision making, have a clear line of sight across their portfolios, and deliver on their democratic responsibilities.

2.3. Recommendation 3

Put in place robust performance management reporting mechanisms with key performance measures to track progress against priorities; make the Cabinet central to the management of performance; and develop a culture of challenge and scrutiny.

This will give Members and especially the Cabinet an improved focus on delivery, clarity on achievement against priority outcomes and information on any corrective action that may need to be taken. It will also enable scrutiny to challenge performance and Cabinet to share the achievements of the Council with key external stakeholders.

2.4. Recommendation 4

Increase transparency and shared ownership by developing a 'one team' ethos across the Council through an organisation-wide transformation plan that is Member-led and officer-managed.

This will enable the top team to inject confidence in the organisation and make it more effective. It will also create a more open and transparent organisation with a clear strategic agenda.

2.5. Recommendation 5

Implement the planned fundamental review of organisational structures and pay and reward to ensure resources are in the right place and at the right level. Learn and make use of good practice from other Councils.

This will help to maximise the expertise and capacity of the whole organisation to create a sustainable, stable, 'fit for the future' organisation.

2.6. Recommendation 6

Put in place a more Member-led financial planning process which enhances understanding and ownership of the Council's future financial challenges.

This will put elected Members in the driving seat, enabling the Council to fully understand and reflect financial pressures and ensuring a robust strategy going forward.

2.7. Recommendation 7

Strengthen relationships with strategic partners and key stakeholders to co-design and co-produce approaches to shared challenges to create capacity and community resilience.

This will enable the Council to increase its capacity and facilitate cooperation and joint working with partners as a leader of place in the interests of local people.

3. Summary of the peer challenge approach

3.1. The Peer Team

Peer challenges are delivered by experienced elected Member and officer peers. The make-up of the Peer Team reflected the focus of the peer challenge and peers were selected on the basis of their relevant expertise. The peers were:

- **Marcel Coiffait** - (Chief Executive at Central Bedfordshire Council).
- **Councillor Abi Brown** - (Leader at Stoke-on-Trent City Council)
- **Jackie Yates** - (Deputy Chief Executive at Reading Borough Council)
- **David McIntosh** - (Corporate Director of Human Resources and Organisational Development at Dorset Council)
- **Gabrielle Mancini** - (Service Lead for Customer Engagement and Transformation at West Berkshire Council)
- **Satvinder Rana** - (Programme Manager, LGA)

3.2. Scope and focus

Peer challenges are improvement-focussed and tailored to meet a council's needs. They are designed to complement and add value to a council's own performance and improvement focus.

The peers 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 team provide feedback as critical friends, not as assessors, consultants or inspectors.

The Peer Team considered the following five themes which form the core components of all Corporate Peer Challenges. These areas are critical to councils' performance and improvement.

1. **Local priorities and outcomes** - Are the council's priorities clear and informed by the local context? Is the council delivering effectively on its priorities?

2. **Organisational and place leadership** - Does the council provide effective local leadership? Are there good relationships with partner organisations and local communities?

3. **Governance and culture** - Are there clear and robust governance arrangements? Is there a culture of challenge and scrutiny?

4. **Financial planning and management** - Does the council have a grip on its current financial position? Does the council have a strategy and a plan to address its financial challenges?

5. **Capacity for improvement** - Is the organisation able to support delivery of local priorities? Does the council have the capacity to improve?

In addition to these questions, the Council asked the Peer Team to provide feedback on "*the Council's internal and external communication strategy and processes; and on agile and changed ways of working that the Council is pursuing going forward.*"

The Peer Team has covered this within the main body of the report and has offered some concluding remarks in section 4.6.

3.3. The peer challenge process

Peer challenges are improvement focused; it is important to stress that this was not an inspection. The process is not designed to provide an in-depth or technical assessment of plans and proposals. 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 by reviewing a range of documents and information to ensure they were familiar with the Council and the challenges it is facing. The Peer Team then spent four days onsite at East Riding of Yorkshire Council, during which they:

- Gathered information and views from around 38 meetings, in addition to further research and reading.

- Spoke to around 90 people including a range of Council staff together with Members and external stakeholders.

This report provides a summary of the Peer Team's findings. In presenting feedback, they have done so as fellow local government officers and Members.

4. Feedback

4.1.   Local priorities and outcomes

The Council has a corporate business plan which outlines its mission to create a place "where everyone matters" and aims to achieve this through its five corporate priorities around growing the economy, valuing the environment, promoting healthy lifestyles, protecting the vulnerable and helping children and young people achieve. However, what is unclear is how this mission and associated high level priorities will be delivered, how they translate to the local area and local communities, and what measurable outcomes people can expect.

Whilst the Council has a range of strategy documents covering several areas identified in its Corporate Business Plan, it was difficult to determine delivery metrics and achievements against them. Therefore, a clearer articulation and organisational understanding of these priorities, in which local places and their communities are central, is needed to give direction to staff and secure buy-in and alignment from stakeholders.

Transformational success requires collaboration, a clear long-term vision, big investment, and bold decisions with accompanying transparent governance and

accountability arrangements. These are areas where East Riding of Yorkshire needs to do further work.

Elected Members, particularly Portfolio Holders, need to agree and own their individual priorities and they need clarity on how officers are going to deliver against them. This requires officers to share better quality information with Members so they can assess how services are performing against priorities and whether the performance trajectory is moving in the right direction. This is particularly important in Children's Services and Adult Social Care, where improvements need to be made and action plans tracked to ensure they are working. More transparent and better-quality information will also allow members of the public to acknowledge and scrutinise Council performance in an informed way.

The Council has an extensive suite of performance indicators, and it collects a range of data through consultation, but what is not clear is how the indicators relate to the Council's priorities and how data and insights are used to drive improvements in services. Also, there are gaps in the data collected - particularly around customer and resident satisfaction. The Council needs quality information on how its residents and customers are feeling and how they view the services they receive so that it can act to make the necessary improvements. It needs to make better use of data, analytics and customer voice and experience when designing services and responses to local challenges; and should be able to demonstrate where customer voices have influenced decision making and relay this back to them.

There are opportunities and aspirations for the Council to work more collaboratively with its partners. Capacity and expertise of strategic partners; organisations and individuals; that span the public, private, voluntary and community sectors needs to be recognised and leveraged at all levels through greater collaboration and co-design to help meet local needs and ambitions.

The Council is fortunate to have a wide range of partners, including parish councils, the voluntary sector and other government agencies, who are keen to engage and work with the Council to improve outcomes. There is a sense that this opportunity is not being maximised and that the Council could facilitate more cooperation, goodwill and joint working as a leader of place in the interests of local people. However, to

realise this capacity the Council needs to foster a more collaborative and inclusive culture which recognises partners' respective strengths and expertise. Some of the partners the Peer Team met felt there was a belief in the Council that it knows best and behaviour towards partners has on occasions been dismissive, particularly at scrutiny meetings. This needs to change.

4.2. Organisational and place leadership

Generally, the Council is delivering good quality services, particularly place-based services. The work around economic regeneration and the street-scene is good. The work it did with local businesses and communities during the COVID-19 pandemic, the relaunch of the 'Love Your High Street' fund last year, and the recent success in being shortlisted to be a possible site for the new energy fusion pilot plant are all things the Council should be proud of. Some of these successes and achievements can be attributed to the predominantly locally sourced long-serving workforce that is resourceful, loyal and committed with a strong affinity to the place. However, as the leader of place the Council needs to communicate its story better and communicate better the work undertaken with partners, such as Hull City Council, to maximise benefit for the wider area.

There are challenges and pressures in the Council in delivering good quality people-based services – particularly Children's Services and Adult Social Care. The 'Inadequate' OFSTED judgement of 2019-20 in elements of Children's Services and the pressures of rising demand due to an ageing population coupled with difficulties in recruitment and retention of staff in Adult Social Care Services require the Council to utilise its resources and capacity more creatively; and continue building on the 'Your Life, Your Way' approach.

Whilst the Council is working with Hull City Council to pursue a devolution deal for the Hull and East Riding area and has expressed interest in a 'County Deal', it does not come across as a key player within regional and sub-regional structures or a leader of place. Place leadership requires clear and consistent messaging, engagement and communication to residents, businesses, and strategic partners about the future of the place. Getting it right helps consolidate a council's place leadership role, provides direction to the workforce, and secures buy-in to its

ambitions and priorities.

At present East Riding of Yorkshire Council's place leadership role is not as strong as it could be. There is a gap in the broader ambitions of the Council around place-shaping and the outcomes being pursued. It is difficult to determine exactly what the Council's shared strategic ambitions for the local area and its residents and businesses going forward are. Therefore, the top team needs to develop, with key stakeholders, a shared narrative around the story of place, a compelling vision for the area, desired outcomes, clear deliverable priorities, and resources aligned to these priorities if it is to successfully move forward as an effective organisation. A strong place narrative that galvanises staff and delivery partners, and which is understood by residents and businesses, can help to set out the strategic intent of the Council and make it much more outward looking and customer focused.

The Council also needs to demonstrate stronger and better aligned political and managerial leadership at the senior level. This means Cabinet and the Corporate Management Team (CMT) acting as one united 'top team' with an agreed balance of power and transparency in decision making. At present the balance of power among Members and officers is tilted towards officers. This limits Members' ability to provide effective leadership and deliver against their democratic responsibilities. In the current arrangements there are decisions potentially being made in the wrong place. To mitigate against this, elected Members need to be placed at the core of decision making. This requires officers to present facts and policy options to Members; Cabinet to take decisions based on those facts and policy options and then to monitor delivery; and Scrutiny to constructively challenge and scrutinise those decisions and the impact on delivery on behalf of residents.

The Covid-19 pandemic threw up unprecedented challenges for everybody and the Council dealt with these by working more closely with its partners and enabling them to play a role. This will have fostered closer working, collaborative problem-solving, and a heightened sense of community – but this is not being developed and maximised. The Council should now harness and leverage the capability and capacity of partners and the wider community through greater collaboration, respecting breadth of experience and knowledge they can bring to the co-design of solutions to help meet local needs and ambitions.

There is evidence that the Council corporately gathers a lot of information by use of surveys, and individual service directorates also carry out a plethora of customer/user surveys, but there is little evidence that services are driven by customer needs or how this data is used to inform policy or service developments generally. The Council therefore needs to move into a place where it is using that knowledge, understanding, insights and data corporately to inform Council priorities and departmentally to drive service improvements.

4.3.   Governance and culture

Key governance and decision-making structures are in place within East Riding of Yorkshire Council and there is a structured learning and development programme for Members in place. The Council is administered under a Leader and Cabinet model of governance with the Administration having elected a new Leader in May 2021. The new leadership is getting to grips with their political priorities and seeking to make improvements.

Going forward, the leadership and decision-making roles and responsibilities of Cabinet Members need to be strengthened so that they can exercise their democratic responsibilities and have a clear line of sight across their portfolios. Cabinet Members need to be involved in decision making a lot sooner than they are at present. They need to be provided with policy options for the corporate governance of the organisation in advance so that they can decide the ones they want to follow with confidence and insightfulness. They also need timely information on service developments and performance related to their portfolios so that they can own and drive forward the Council's ambition and priorities with clarity, authority and more strategic focus.

There is effective Overview and Scrutiny which is supported by Review Panels to look in depth at specific issues. There is potential to strengthen the policy development role of Overview and Scrutiny by it making more use of its powers to scrutinise pre-decisions. Also, to ensure more rigour; regular performance reports should be presented to Overview and Scrutiny so that it is able to challenge and scrutinise the Council's services and performance on behalf of residents. For this Members need to receive quarterly monitoring reports of progress against key

outcome indicators and delivery programmes as part of the Council's performance management framework in easy to read and digest formats.

Generally, there are good Member and officer relationships and in most situations Members and officers feel supported in their respective roles. However, the Peer Team did come across examples of officers demonstrating undue control over Members' decision-making role through a lack of transparency in the information provided to them. The Peer Team was also made aware of frustrations among ward Members about the lack of a proper system in the Council to receive and respond to Member queries. These are easily rectifiable and should be dealt with as a matter of urgency.

The culture of the organisation is inward-looking with power invested in a small number of long-serving officers. The Peer Team witnessed, and were told about, some unusually controlling senior officer behaviour which needs to be addressed through a cultural shift in the organisation. The Peer Team was also told about important decisions being made outside of the democratic process because of generous officer delegated powers. This poses a potential risk to the organisation. Officer delegation thresholds should be reviewed and, if appropriate, brought in line with other councils and Cabinet Members placed at the core of strategic decision making in the Council.

A strong and collaborative top team with a good balance of power and clarity about its ambitions can inject confidence in the organisation and get people behind it. It can also position the organisation on the front foot by identifying the issues and challenges the Council is going to face in the future and, together, working up solutions on how to tackle them. If the Council can get this balance right, then it will create a successful organisation that is good across the board and not just in some places.

To facilitate this way of working, CMT should demonstrate a more collegiate and collaborative work ethos to foster and promote the Council as 'one organisation'. CMT members can also take ownership and provide proactive managerial leadership by championing corporate and cross-council initiatives and projects such as Agile Working, Commercialism, Digitalisation, etc. and performance managing their

delivery. Council directorates and services should be able to demonstrate more collaborative working in delivering priority outcomes.

The Council has an Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) action plan in place and progress against this is reported annually to Cabinet. The 'Annual Progress towards meeting the Equality Duty and the Corporate Equality Objectives 2020-2021' highlights some impressive actions the Council has taken in the recent past to meet the needs of residents. It needs to continue with these and ensure that visible equality outcomes are delivered both in service delivery and employment. This means ensuring that a culture of equality and diversity is developed and embedded across the whole organisation. This will call for equality objectives to be built into service plans; equality initiatives championed by senior management; and progress against targets monitored through the corporate performance management framework.

4.4.   Financial planning and management

The Council has enjoyed a strong financial position in the past and has managed its finances well. It currently has a healthy level of reserves where its General Fund earmarked reserves grew from £65.5m as of 31 March 2010 to £161.5m as of 31 March 2019. Since then, however, they have reduced to £152m as of 31 March 2021 and are projected to fall to £103m as of 31 March 2022 – a reduction of £49m in the 12 months, with further reductions envisaged in subsequent years. This trajectory needs to be kept under review.

The Council's financial strategy aims to focus on:

- <u>Resilience</u> - remaining viable, stable and effective

- <u>Digital</u> - investing in new technologies with residents and workforce at the forefront of decision making

- <u>Commercialism</u> - embracing commercial opportunities which will strengthen the Council's financial sustainability and support the local economy

- <u>Value for Money</u> - ensuring that the services provided are effective and sustainable whilst minimising the cost to taxpayers and the public purse

The accompanying financial plan forecasts that the Council needs to deliver £27.3m of budget savings to meet projected budget pressures by 2024-25. Savings proposals identified for the next four years, and the planned use of reserves total £17.7m, resulting in a projected budget gap of £9.6m in the General Fund revenue budget by 2024-25. This represents a worsening of the funding position from the budget gap of £3.8m by 2023-24 projected in the previous financial plan. This increase to the budget gap primarily relates to lower projections of council tax and retained business rates income due to the impact of the pandemic and further unmet pressures forecast within Adult and Children's Social Care budgets.

These assumptions will need to be revisited when the Local Government Finance Settlement is announced, and the Council Tax Base figures are calculated. At present there is no guarantee of future government support to local authorities, so the Council may have to think of other ways to manage its finances. There are some things that it may have to do which it has avoided doing as a local authority because of its strong financial position.

In presenting options to Members officers should model alternative scenarios to reflect the impact of not only the above service pressures but also to ensure its Medium-Term Financial Strategy is robust and reflects value for money. This could include for example, exploring more rigorously the scope for efficiency savings, asset rationalisation and organisational transformation, including better workforce planning.

In terms of governance of the Council's finances, Cabinet Members, CMT and individual budget holders need to own the budget and have a much better collective understanding of the budget position. They need to have insight into planning assumptions and options so that they can make effective decisions. This calls for Cabinet Members to be engaged earlier in the detailed formulation of the budget so that they can consider options and determine which option(s) they want to pursue. They can then stand behind the budget as they will know what the financial envelope is to deliver their ambitions and achieve the outcomes they want.

Financial reporting in the Council needs to be more transparent, particularly in terms of the use of reserves and delivery of savings. The Peer Team has tried to understand what is happening with the Council's reserves and efficiencies and how it

tracks and manages them – and it's been difficult to build a clear picture. For example, the use of earmarked reserves is assumed within individual service budget lines creating a lack of clarity about the total appropriation from reserves in any one year: the Council's General Fund budget for 2021-22 required £10.6m of savings to be delivered to help meet budget pressures. The latest projections indicate that the Council is on track to deliver over 98% of the required savings. However, there is no information on how this is split across individual service areas or progress on delivery against individually agreed savings targets.

Finance should be an enabler to deliver those services and outcomes that Members have prioritised, but unless they understand the full financial picture, they will not be able to make informed decisions about the objectives they want to achieve or any corrective action that may be required.

4.5.   Capacity for improvement

East Riding of Yorkshire Council has potential to become a high performing council delivering excellent services to its residents. To do this, it must clarify and strengthen its strategic intent and ambition, bring more transparency into its decision-making processes, and recognise the benefits of collaboration with key partners. Understanding where the Council can make a difference and putting its efforts into pursuing its goals will require focused and distributive leadership delivered through a more collegiate, collaborative, and transparent 'one team' approach that maximises the capability and capacity of its staff and strategic partners.

In the immediate term, dealing with and fixing the big issues around Children's Services and Adult Social Care should be prioritised and owned by the whole Council. Improvements in these areas should be managed by the top team and progress against milestone and performance indicators tracked on a regular basis. Where corrective action needs to be taken this should be agreed by Members and CMT and, where appropriate, implemented in consultation and collaboration with all stakeholders.

To optimise capacity and to help bring about improvements the Council should review its organisational structure and operating model. It should also ensure that its

corporate initiatives such as Agile Working, Commercialisation, and Digital Strategy are able to deliver the planned efficiencies. Furthermore, these projects need to be coordinated and other aspects of transformation all brought together into a single plan where each workstream has a clear business case, clear leadership from CMT, and a delivery plan attached to it.

4.6. Specific area of focus

The Peer Team looked closely at the Council's internal and external communication strategy and processes and its work on its Agile and changed ways of working and offer the following observations.

Agile Working

The Council is making good use of the opportunity presented by the Covid-19 working arrangements to advance its plans around agile working. This should enable the Council to make the most of the benefits which can be realised for the organisation (e.g. its staff and Members) and its customers (e.g. residents, business and communities the Council serves).

Where there are reservations, the Council should counteract these with evidence so that concerns around, for example, the potential detrimental impact of agile working on town centres are addressed and that potential benefits for the Council as an employer and deliverer of services are better understood. Agile working is the strategic direction of travel for many other organisations where they are now offering their employees such flexibility and realising the savings opportunities and efficiencies presented by becoming more agile.

However, the Council's Agile Working project is still in the early stages of implementation and lacks strategic direction. It needs more championing at CMT level to drive the programme forward at speed and deliver the long-term transformational improvements the Council needs to thrive in the future.

The Council has committed to Agile, Digital and Commercial transformational programmes and this needs to be consistently and continually advocated at the most senior levels.

Investments in Agile working must lead to a more responsive and efficient organisation with a refreshed set of organisational values to help deliver better customer interactions and service delivery that meets the changing needs and expectations of residents. This means an increasingly flexible customer-focused workforce, the integration of customer services 'front-desk' and improved processes that embraces the use of digital technology to deliver more services and information online.

Whilst the Agile principles are wide ranging and encompass enhancement to service delivery as well as allowing employees to adopt "blended" working, there is a mixed understanding of the Agile principles and blended working amongst senior managers. There needs to be a reinforcement of the message that Agile is about more than "blended" working.

The team protocols approach to implementation gives each manager and their team a high level of autonomy to develop the approach which best works for them. Whilst in theory this is commendable, the lack of clear parameters and guidelines on how teams will work introduces the risk that savings achieved will be substantially less than they could have been and that there is potential for unequal and discriminatory practices leading to grievances across the organisation.

It is imperative therefore, that managers are fair, reasonable and consistent in their implementation of Agile Working and that there is ownership at every level of the agreed Agile Principles. This is a key message which needs reinforcing by directors.

Agile Working (along with Digital and Commercial) is central to the Council's transformation savings but with a very modest target of £1m. Delivered properly, the Agile Working project provides opportunity to create flexible working practices using digital technologies as well as the collaborative usage of buildings combined with sensible asset rationalisation decisions which can deliver greater savings. However, at present there is a disconnect between the Agile Working project and asset management in the Council and no clear business plan outlining the full potential of Agile working or even how the modest savings currently identified will be achieved.

We would encourage a business plan being developed, through a stronger link with

asset management. This should provide a clear explanation of the asset release aims and how more ambitious savings can be achieved, along with clear, central oversight of those savings.

Communication

The Council has recently brought together separate Communications functions into a single corporate resource to bring forward a more consistent and structured approach to communication which is seen as a positive move. However, this has yet to deliver a consistent approach to communicating corporate priorities and engaging with residents and partners. The Council's investment in its Communications Team is significant and provides a far larger establishment than comparable organisations. This poses a question as to whether the investment represents good value for money as there are no measures of success or clear aspirations in respect of engagement levels.

The Council needs a continuous and much broader conversation with residents to enable them to articulate their needs and wants. This calls for new and creative ways of engaging with them. At present, there is no clear communications plan and no alignment of activity with stated corporate priorities. Furthermore, access to the resource within the team is subject to internal recharging arrangements which can mean that directorates with greater budgetary constraints (e.g. Children's Services and Adult Social Care) may not get the support they need. There is an emerging understanding of these challenges and management is working to put an improvement plan in place to address them. It should be monitored to ensure it delivers what is required.

The maturity level of the Council's social media channels is at an early stage and engagement rates are relatively low. It appears that they are used to broadcast timely information about service delivery rather than to engage with residents about priority areas or seek their views.

Some individuals the Peer Team spoke to said that it felt that the Council has a tendency towards 'over communication' and that the wide range of channels used lead to confusion or a lack of focus on key messages. Questions were also raised as to whether printed publications (such as 'Your East Riding') were necessary, or even

appropriate, for environmental and cost reasons. The Council should therefore review its channels and methods of communication to ensure that necessary messages are received by the relevant people in the most appropriate and cost-effective way.

5. Next steps

It is recognised that senior political and managerial leadership will want to consider, discuss, and reflect on these findings.

Both the Peer Team and the LGA are keen to build on the relationships formed through the peer challenge. The CPC process includes a six-month check-in meeting. This will be a short, facilitated session which creates space for the Council's senior leadership to update Peers on its progress against the action plan and discuss next steps.

In the meantime, Mark Edgell, Principal Adviser for East Midlands, Yorkshire & Humber and North-East, is the main contact between East Riding of Yorkshire Council and the Local Government Association. Mark is available to discuss any further support the Council requires. His contact details are: Email: mark.edgell@local.gov.uk Tel: 07747 636 910.

Satvinder Rana
Programme Manager

(On behalf of the peer challenge team)