

# **Corporate Peer Challenge Ryedale District Council**

19<sup>th</sup> – 21<sup>st</sup> October 2016

Feedback Report

## 1. Executive Summary

Ryedale District Council (RDC) is a small but ambitious council with committed staff who are focused on delivering the best possible service to meet local needs, in partnership with others where possible in order to improve capacity. Staff are proud to work for the council, and have an excellent understanding of the local context. There is a commitment to seek housing and economic growth and an understanding that this needs to be done sensitively, and in partnership with others.

The council is recognised regionally as an exemplar for its planning services. Partners highlighted the pre-planning advice and the relationships they are able to build with the Planning Team, but were concerned about the capacity of the team to continue to provide such a good service. The Planning Committee was also cited as acting with care and due diligence.

RDC is keen to work in partnership where possible. It benefits from the work of the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP), making sure it has a seat at the negotiating table and influencing partners. It has seconded two officers, part-time, to the LEP which has led to RDC being at the forefront of potential funding and support opportunities. Partners highlighted Ryedale's positive contribution and suggested that their engagement was more productive than that of other local councils.

There are excellent ideas from officers on using assets for income generation, but in order to realise this income this work needs to be translated into a delivery plan with clear lines of accountability and robust performance management.

The peer challenge took place towards the end of a transformation programme (T2020), which is intended to change the way the organisation operates and involved almost every post and team being reviewed. The new structure proposes a flexible operating model and generic job descriptions based on behavioural competencies. Staff are able to apply for a number of jobs at different levels, an approach which brings both opportunities and risks, with a high degree of uncertainty and anxiety for staff during the process.

The T2020 programme also offers the chance to set a firm strategic direction with clear lines of accountability and responsibility across the officer corps, together with the opportunity to develop strategic plans and introduce a robust performance framework. Reference was made to the 'One Ryedale' vision (although it had not yet been clearly articulated or shared across the organisation), which will aim for Members and staff to model the same behaviours and values, working together for the good of the district. However, if this is to work those values and behaviours will need to be agreed by and demonstrated across all members and officers. With the exception of Council and committees there is little member/ officer interaction except at a senior level but where there is (for example the Ward Buddy system) it is generally positive and valuable.

Senior officers and Members, particularly the Chief Executive and the Leader, have taken on additional responsibilities over and above their substantive roles, and this is placing

limitations on their capacity. A fully functioning senior management team could help the chief executive delegate some responsibilities. Distributing councillor responsibility (for example representation on external bodies) more widely than at present would enable the

Chief Executive:

Leader to delegate. Both should ensure that there are clear succession planning options. Involving members of the administration in strategic planning will help to share the responsibilities and ensure that the challenges (particularly financial challenges) faced by the council can help the Members make more informed decisions.

Internal communication needs to be significantly improved for staff and Members. There is a lack of professional communications expertise at RDC, and this has manifested itself in different ways, including a perceived lack of communications about the T2020 programme by staff, and members feeling excluded from information prior to decisions at full council. Sometimes the methods used may not be the most appropriate or effective, and monitoring and guidance from communications professionals should help this to improve.

There is a clear priority for both economic and housing growth, but this is not consistently understood by councillors, with some openly opposed to growth. In addition, there is not necessarily a corresponding commitment to resources to support these priorities, such as increasing capacity in the planning and economic development teams.

Full Council meetings are acknowledged to be challenging, with some member behaviour extremely disruptive. This behaviour dominated discussions in almost all of the meetings held by the peer team, and council meetings were described as a 'circus' by a number of internal and external stakeholders. This is damaging RDC's reputation. Although decisions are usually reached at Council, the length and standard of debate, and the methods of reaching decisions are demoralising Members and officers alike. This is not sustainable. Good, firm and consistent chairing, together with individual Members adopting the agreed values and behaviours, will be essential to tackle this.

Ryedale District Council is considered to be a good partner that, although recognising the limitations due to its size and location, is maximising its influence and building productive relationships with others. Tackling the problems with how decisions are reached would enable the council continue to be effective in future.

## **2. Key recommendations**

1. Use the T2020 programme to establish a strong and effective strategic officer leadership team with a collective vision and shared strategic responsibilities, such as financial management.
2. Review the expertise and capacity of the organisation in the following key areas: Communications, Governance and Planning.
3. Review governance arrangements in order to prepare future political Leaders and ensure that you are succession planning. Consider investing in external support to develop

Member capacity through learning and development and consider how politicians are involved in priority setting. .

4. Establish and demonstrate a collective commitment to shared values and behaviours, developed, agreed and demonstrated by all members and officers.
5. Develop and deliver strategic plans jointly with members and staff.
6. Improve communication across the organisation.
7. Seek formal feedback regularly from staff and customers. This will help ensure your priorities and service plans are evidence-based.

8. Consider opportunities for using financial reserves to support the delivery of your priorities after conducting an appropriate financial risk analysis.
9. Develop a strategic commercial income generation plan, including use of assets.
10. Develop and embed a robust performance management culture as part of the One Ryedale approach.

### **3. Summary of the Peer Challenge approach**

#### **The peer team**

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

- Jane Toman, Chief Executive, Blaby District Council
- Cllr Paul James, Leader, Gloucester City Council
- Kirsty Cole, Deputy Chief Executive, Newark and Sherwood District Council
- Andrew Seekings, Corporate Director, Allerdale Borough Council
- Louise Sboui, Policy, Performance and Transformation Manager, Huntingdonshire District Council
- Helen Rankin, Adviser, Leadership and Localism, Local Government Association
- Becca Singh, Peer Challenge Manager, Local Government Association

#### **Scope and focus**

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

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

5. Capacity to deliver: Is organisational capacity aligned with priorities and does the council influence, enable and leverage external capacity to focus on agreed outcomes?

In addition to these questions, you asked the peer team to look at how well the Council is achieving, and whether it has appropriate plans in place to achieve its stated vision of a place where all residents can enjoy a good quality of life with strong, prosperous and welcoming communities.

### **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 three days onsite at Ryedale House, 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, and additional research and reading.
- Collectively spent more than 250 hours to determine their findings – the equivalent of one person spending more than seven weeks in Ryedale District Council.

This allowed us to triangulate our evidence and therefore nothing has come from just one source or without any evidence. This is information which was given in a nonattributable manner.

This report provides a summary of the peer team's findings. It builds on the feedback presentation provided by the peer team at the end of their on-site visit (19<sup>th</sup> – 21<sup>st</sup> October 2016). In presenting feedback to you, we have done so as fellow local government officers and members, not professional consultants or inspectors. By its nature, the peer challenge is a snapshot in time. We appreciate that some of the feedback may be about things you are already addressing and progressing.

## **4. Feedback**

## 4.1 Understanding of the local place and priority setting

*“RDC understands the local population and the area, they engage well” (partner)*

Ryedale District Council has a small population in a large geographic area, a significant proportion of which is within the North York Moors National Park. There are challenges in delivering services in such a rural area with reducing resources. However, RDC works hard and creatively to understand these challenges, gathering intelligence from partners as well as using its own data. RDC sets its priorities for the local area using this information with a focus on economic and housing growth.

Councillors provide good local information, and work with Town and Parish Councillors has helped enhance RDC’s understanding of local needs. The Parish Liaison meetings are welcomed, and provide an opportunity for all public sector partners (for example, police and county council delivering services in the area to share updates and hear concerns from residents). It may be worth considering holding them more than twice a year.

The ‘Town Team’ approach currently being piloted in Helmsley is a positive demonstration of RDC redesigning services with the customer at its heart. Officers from different disciplines work together around the needs of the town, and have a regular local presence in the community, often with the ward member. Other towns have ‘virtual’ town teams where officers work together but are not yet co-located in the town, but with the success of the Helmsley pilot this is likely to be rolled out in the near future. This has helped to enhance RDC’s ongoing understanding of local issues.

Although priorities for growth are set, it is not clear how well these are owned under a ‘One Ryedale’ vision by both members and officers. We heard mixed views on the member appetite for growth in the District, and although there is a strategic commitment to growth, resources do not always follow. For example, income generated by Planning is used to further develop the housing offer, rather than increasing capacity in the Planning Department.

## 4.2 Leadership of Place

There is widespread pride in the Ryedale District by staff and Members. There is clear understanding of Ryedale as a place where people live and work, and evidence that RDC takes responsibility for its leadership role in the local area. For example, the council held a public meeting to discuss the potential and perceived impacts of fracking within the district, despite having no specific responsibility for decisions relating to this.

There is evidence that Members have tried to adopt a sustainable development approach, and ensured infrastructure improvements are secured before approving larger scale developments. This shows that they have tried to address community concerns when taking difficult decisions about developments, explaining to communities the reasons for the growth.

The Chief Executive is recognised as a regional player, working on the devolution debate and bringing organisations together, particularly around health and housing. Although there are challenges with the Combined Authority in the region, partner authorities consider RDC to be “even-handed and working well to broker deals”.

RDC is seen by partners (including councils and developers) as engaged and approachable and there are well established and effective relationships. The formal and informal partnerships between RDC and other public sector partners (such as police, health and the National Park), local businesses and voluntary and community sector has ensured that local needs are identified together. For example, the Housing Options team are planning to hold surgeries in market towns, and benefits assessors are co-located in the Job Centre in Malton, and conduct home visits if necessary. Everyone Active, the sport and leisure management contractor providing leisure services, has ensured that leisure services are designed to include a focus on health and community engagement and reports a good working relationship with the council.

There are major opportunities in the region, with a strong LEP and effective partnerships, to influence at a regional level. The secondment of two economic development officers on a part-time basis to the LEP is increasing the council’s profile and supporting inward investment to Ryedale. There is a sense from partners that these secondments illustrate RDC’s forward thinking, enabling it to act quickly on funding and other support opportunities. The partnership work on economic development with the County Council, neighbouring districts and the LEP is welcomed by the business community, which works across administrative boundaries.

RDC has recognised that the local skills gap is a barrier to growth, and is addressing this by working with local businesses and training providers, and funding a post to work with young people in schools and higher education, for example the highly valued ‘Opportunity Knocks’ events which raises aspirations and awareness of career opportunities within the district. Through the work with the LEP, residents have access to learning opportunities at the training college and Coventry University campus at Scarborough.

RDC is recognised locally as an exemplar on Planning with both the department and the committee held in high regard regionally, particularly for its pre-planning advice. There is a high degree of trust between Members and officers. The Planning and Economic Development teams work together when needed, and there is work with developers early in the process to identify needs and address community concerns, such as the inclusion of infrastructure improvements. Officers work with Members and communities to understand the benefits of developments, so that when the application comes to Planning Committee, Members already understand the different implications of an application. Planning in the National Park is the responsibility of the North York Moors National Park Authority (NYMNPA). The relationship is constructive and RDC works with the NYMNPA to explain and talk to communities about decisions. This was evidenced by the production of the Helmsley Plan which was jointly prepared by 2 planning authorities and adopted in July 2015. RDC is driving the successful delivery of housing numbers, although further clarity is needed on economic and infrastructure targets.



There is positive action around culture and tourism, with RDC seeking to maximise its natural environment through working in particular with the Forestry Commission and the National Park Authority. The Food Enterprise Zone is a partnership initiative and offers potential for further development.

There is a perception amongst staff and partners that some Members are unwilling to embrace change and are unrealistic about the amount of change that may be needed in order to continue to fund and deliver council priorities. This suggests a possible lack of understanding of the local government finance landscape within which the council is operating. It appears that not all Members understand that they may not be able to continue to deliver all the services that they have in the past. 'Doing things differently' may mean stopping doing some things, however the retention of business rates and the ability to increase the Council Tax base means that driving growth can deliver funds to maintain essential services. Therefore there are some tensions between growth (economic and residential) and preserving the current environment.

*“Ryedale is a challenging district, rural isolation, poor travel options, and particularly difficult road conditions in the winter – but all of these are outweighed by its strengths – a strong community spirit” (partner quote)*

### **4.3 Organisational leadership and governance**

There is a transformation programme underway at RDC known as T2020. It is designed to give RDC a flexible operating model, with staff able to work in different locations and in different ways to continue to deliver services with reduced resources. Staff, managers and Members generally understood the need for change and mostly felt that the changes would bring improvements to the way the council operates. RDC has been working with an external provider to develop the transformation process and the new organisational structure. The approach is mature and provides opportunity for talented staff to progress within the organisation, for example, through allowing staff to apply for 3 posts within the new structure which may be at grades above their current role. There is a need to be sensitive to the fact that this may be destabilising to some staff, for example to staff currently in role which colleagues may now apply and compete for.

Relationships between operational officers and ward Members is generally good, although engagement is limited. The 'Ward Buddy' system ensures that service managers spend time with ward members and go out within the ward to meet local people and understand local needs. Members and officers both noted that this was working particularly well and fosters good relations and better understanding between staff and Members both of their respective roles and the challenges associated with delivering services with fewer resources and/ or greater demand than in the past. Managers feel that this has enhanced knowledge and understanding of issues in local areas for both officers and Members. Outside this system, interaction is limited and many staff feel disconnected from councillors and feel that Members have little understanding of the services provided.

There is little opportunity for Members to be involved in strategic planning of services, which could help increase their understanding of the current constraints in the local government sector. If members better understood the wider national constraints and how they affect RDC, they may find it easier to set achievable priorities. Planning is an example of where officers and member have together established a positive approach and successful service with clear lines of responsibility and delegation.

The conduct of some Members at full council meetings is damaging the Council's reputation. Meetings were described to the peer team as "unpleasant" and "a circus" by officers, Members and partners. Meetings are always held in the evenings and are known to go beyond midnight. Recordings of meetings provide examples of Members' aggressive questioning and personal verbal attacks on officers and other Members. This has a considerable negative impact on the organisation and it featured in almost every meeting the peer team held with staff, members and partners. Everyone we spoke to talked about it 'grinding down' and demoralising staff and members, and diverting the council away from delivering its priorities. This has led to a cycle of behaviour where staff are reluctant to share information with members and dread attending council meetings. Members in turn feel uninformed about key issues, such as the T2020 programme or how individual services work.

The ruling group have a clear majority and mandate, which councillors need to respect. Clear, firm and consistent chairing is essential to ensure that meetings are not excessively long. Constructive debate is healthy, and ensures a robust decision-making process. However, the council chamber is not the place for personal attacks or aggressive public rows, which are not conducive to a healthy effective organisation. The 'One Ryedale' vision and approach offers an opportunity for all Members to agree and commit to an agreed set of values, behaviours and ways of working. Individual Members are responsible for their own conduct, but this needs to be in the context of agreed behaviours, with sanctions if needed for failure to adhere to them.

If the current constitution is not supporting good decision-making processes, the council should consider revising it. A constitution needs to enable a council to work effectively. We suggest that you explore how responsibilities could be shared more widely (for example identifying which members could take the lead on certain issues, and appointing a deputy leader), and consider whether decisions are being made at the appropriate tier of decision making (for example, do all decisions that go to Full Council need to be taken there?). Finally, the council should consider whether it is appropriate for Members to ask officers questions at Full Council – this is highly unusual. Providing more comprehensive information at an early stage may cut down on the number of questions at Full Council. It is not for the peer team to recommend one governance structure over another, but the council needs to decide how best to make its decision-making system work and the behaviours needed in order for it to be effective.

The way that the current committee system works puts too much responsibility on the Leader. There is no deputy leader, and limited scope for other members to develop specialist knowledge and share responsibility for key policy areas or partnership work. Members have mixed views on the effectiveness of the 'Champion' system and the

champion positions do not correspond with Council priorities. Formal leadership training or mentoring should be considered for elected Members in order to improve decision-making and strategic leadership. A succession plan needs to be put in place to nurture the leaders of the future and further the skills of those in leadership positions.

The Chief Executive spends a significant amount of time dealing with Member issues including complaints about Member behaviour, but this should be more the role of the Monitoring Officer. The Chief Executive and Deputy Chief Executive need to be able to share corporate responsibilities with senior managers, and collectively to set the tone and direction for the organisation, in particular financial management of the council. Consider establishing a senior management team, including the Monitoring Officer and the Section 151 Officer as well as other senior managers. This team would benefit from having a collective vision and shared strategic responsibilities to enable equitable delegation. The Council's policies and priorities need to be more widely developed, shared and owned within the organisation with clear accountability for delivery.

The interim shared Chief Executive arrangement with Selby is generally felt to be working well. However, there is no clear strategic direction for future models of working. It may in future have an impact on the effective delivery of key projects without effective delegation. The arrangement has been expanded to explore the opportunity to share other officer resources, but there seems to be no overall strategy or plan for how this will work in future. There are opportunities to build the capacity at Ryedale, but at the moment there is a risk that RDC is not fully understanding the benefits which could be realised or assessing whether the arrangement is delivering as expected. The council would benefit from evaluating how the arrangement is working and take decisions on how it will continue to benefit both Selby and Ryedale. Selby DC is a very different council from RDC, and there is much to learn from each other.

Performance management is patchy. Although appraisals and one-to-one supervision meetings take place, this is not consistent and not universally felt to be useful. RDC should build a robust approach to performance management as part of the new structure.

External, professional, expertise may be needed in some areas, for example to improve internal and external communications. The council should make efforts to tap into existing networks to learn from best practice, and the peer team would recommend assessing whether the council has sufficient capacity in your priority areas of Planning and Growth.

#### **4.4 Financial planning and viability**

RDC has successfully spent on or around budget over last few years and its approach is prudent with no major over- or underspends that would cause concern. However, there is scope to ensure staff at all levels are more involved. For example, Heads of Service, managers and other staff do not appear to be currently involved in corporate budget planning or management. The Head of Economic Development needs a good understanding of the level of business rates and how their service drives growth for the district and the council in order to maximise delivery. Members do not always feel fully

informed of key financial issues, such as how the financial benefits of local economic growth will enable the council to deliver better services.

RDC has healthy reserves and could consider how best to invest reserves to generate income to support service delivery. Using a sensitivity analysis (as done in other councils) would put a financial value to each risk allowing RDC to set a minimum reserves level. In employing this approach, the council could be confident that if risks materialise it would have enough in reserves to cover them, and it would also give confidence that any reserves over and above that can be invested into priorities. Reserves could be used to drive commercial activity, growth and jobs, which in turn would bring in income (through business rates, New Homes Bonus, Council Tax and commercial property income). Instead of focusing only on savings, RDC could use that energy to drive growth and commercial activity.

The council has recently completed an asset management review and there are a number of opportunities to use assets to drive growth and increase income. There is a £100,000 target within the Medium Term Financial Plan from better use of assets. A clear strategy and delivery plan is needed in order to realise the benefits identified in the review. People shared individual ideas with the peer team, but there was no clear strategic plan setting out which ideas are to be taken forward.

Working differently and collectively is clearly a major strength and has seen the delivery of shared services through innovative approaches (Veritau Internal Audit partner) and commissioned services (Everyone Active for leisure services). There remains an opportunity to undertake strategic reviews for a number of internally managed services, (such as waste management and street scene) that could drive up income, reduce costs and build in resilience that does not always exist in small councils. This could include the formal extension of shared services, commissioning a range of services, informal agreements and the formation of income generation targets for business units.

The Council needs to ensure that resources are allocated in order to support strategic priorities, that they link to future financial planning and management, and to communicate this well. Resources are required to support and drive growth in houses through both planning and economic development teams. The current economic plan sets out growth targets for new jobs and investment, yet doesn't make provision for an increase in business rate income. The investment in ICT is a good example of where resources have been allocated in order to support the transformation programme.

#### **4.5 Capacity to deliver**

We repeatedly heard that staff are committed, proud to work for and in Ryedale District Council, and go above and beyond their role. The goodwill of staff was spoken about in many of our conversations and we heard from members and managers that “the staff are brilliant”.

*“The vast majority of people like working here but the uncertainty is damaging morale”*

*(officer comment)*

There are some examples of excellent service delivery, with Planning and Housing particularly cited by partners. There are risks for the future if too much expertise is concentrated in a small number of individuals, but it is clear that services are currently delivering good outcomes for residents. The Town Team approach is also beginning to deliver outcomes and efficiencies and staff involved have identified good opportunities for further development.

There was a general acceptance of the need to change as a result of reduced resources and the changing local government landscape, but staff and partners expressed concern about the ongoing capacity to deliver services and meet the corporate priorities if resources were cut too far during the transformation process. The priorities of the council were seen as well-communicated, but some felt that the council was less clear on *how* priorities were going to be achieved. Individual staff do not necessarily understand how their work fits in with the council plan objectives, and the inconsistent performance management process means the 'golden thread' is not clear.

We heard from a number of stakeholders that Ryedale was excellent at partnership working, and there was a feeling that more could be done to share services. For example, working with other councils to build resilience in services by sharing skills, particularly in areas such as legal, planning and communications. RDC has worked opportunistically to boost capacity but this would benefit from a more strategic approach.

Communication and engagement difficulties were a continuing theme throughout the peer challenge. This included communication with Members, between political groups, and within staff groups. There was a Council decision to have a period without a communications specialist. We could not find anyone who could say which officer was individually responsible for either internal or external communications. For example, there is a communications plan for the T2020 programme, but there was no involvement or advice from communications specialists. Improved information sharing at an early stage in decision-making, with clear boundaries and transparency, could help to avoid lengthy questions at full council. Good Communications expertise is able to help decision-making (through improved communication with Members), maintain staff morale at a time of considerable change, and ensure that the public and partners are clearly aware of what is happening and how they can be involved or influence that change. We understand that there is provision for professional communications support in the new operating model.

Communication about T2020 was generally considered by staff to be poor. A perceived lack of anonymity regarding online questions, the format of information giving, and no clear timeline has led to staff morale being damaged, and little confidence about how meaningful staff consultation has been despite good intentions and processes. Many staff and Members felt that the new structure is not clear, and they do not understand how it will work in practice. There is a widely held view that the plan has not been wellcommunicated. Throughout a period of major change, information is key. It is important to have consistency of message, set clear deadlines and milestones for when something will be announced or known, and stick to them.



The behaviour-based approach for competency-based selection has resulted in some officers feeling under constant assessment and anxious. There is a high level of union membership and the union is keen to offer support for its members going through the transformation process. RDC could encourage and communicate these practical offers of help and support. The peer team, and staff, were not clear how Human Resources (HR) expertise has been involved in T2020, and this has meant that many staff feel that it is being done 'to' them not 'with' them. There was recognition that the Chief Executive took on all the oversight of the T2020 programme because all other officer posts were affected, and in order that normal HR service delivery was maintained, but this has meant that the Chief Executive shouldered a good deal of pressure at a time when increased support from Human Resources and Communications expertise (potentially with additionally allocated temporary resource) could have helped both the Chief Executive and staff during the change process.

Some short-term communications specialist help could improve work around the T2020 programme, and in the longer term the way information is disseminated across the whole organisation, including members and officers. We suggest that RDC explores the use of external communications expertise, tapping into regional and national networks where good practice is shared and support is offered.

#### **4.6 Conclusions**

RDC has a committed staff team who are keen to develop new ways of working and to provide the best possible service to local residents and communities. There are examples of excellent services in Planning and Housing, but the learning is not being shared across the whole organisation.

There is a good community spirit, and a sense of resilience under difficult circumstances. RDC is not afraid to act on behalf of its communities in areas outside its immediate control in order to support its residents to the best of its abilities, for example, around the planning permission for fracking.

The need for clear strategic leadership is being overshadowed by poor Member behaviour at Full Council meetings. All Members need to concentrate on doing what is best for the district and driving the change they want to see, rather than becoming engaged in political game-playing. The governance system needs to ensure a greater balance of responsibilities with clear lines of accountability.

Responsibilities need to be better shared and a collective ownership of values, behaviours and strategic priorities at senior political and managerial level will help to drive improvements in unifying Members and officers under the One Ryedale banner. There are some areas which need intense specialist support in the short term (for example communications and Monitoring Officer role). A strategic management team should be sharing strategic leadership for the organisation, including sharing responsibility for budget and financial issues more.

The council has the willingness and commitment to achieve its stated aims and objectives, working in partnership with key stakeholders. By maximising the establishment of the new organisation from early December, it can clearly set out the values and behaviours it wants to work with, and continue to demonstrate leadership of the local place by acting as One Ryedale, a unified district council.

## **5. Next steps**

### **5.1 Immediate next steps**

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

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

In the meantime we are keen to continue the relationship we have formed with you and colleagues through the peer challenge. We will endeavour to provide additional information and signposting about the issues we have raised in this report to help inform your ongoing consideration.

### **Follow up visit**

The LGA peer challenge process includes a follow up visit. The purpose of the visit is to help the Council assess the impact of the peer challenge and the progress it has made against the areas of improvement and development identified by the peer team. It is a lighter-touch version of the original visit and does not necessarily involve all members of the original peer team. The timing of the visit is determined by the Council. Our expectation is that it will occur within the next 12-24 months.