



North Kesteven
DISTRICT COUNCIL



A great Council...

a 'strong financially secure,
stable council'

A great place to work...

'a positive, collegiate and
supportive working environment'

A great partner...

'has effective, recognised, positive
relationships with partners'

An influential place-shaper...

providing 'good place leadership
across the District, county and region'

Focused on the future...

with 'excellent ambitions for
tackling climate change'

These are the
headline findings of
the **Local Government
Association Corporate
Peer Challenge of
November 2021.**

See the full report at:
www.n-kesteven.gov.uk/CPC2021



Over four days, six external peers met 111 people working within and with North Kesteven as Members, partners colleagues and customers to challenge what we do.

They determined North Kesteven District Council to be: well-run by a 'strong, competent' team'; committed to 'delivering services how residents want them'; with a 'positive, collective, inclusive approach to decision-making'; 'robust and well-established' governance arrangements; and a 'genuine commitment' to build on its award-winning colleague wellbeing provision and Gold Investors in People status.

**In short...we're a high performing Council,
an excellent partner and a great place to work.**

Having reviewed a substantial library of strategies, policies, projects, performance and financial data – the most comprehensive ever they said – and our own assessment of where we're at, in advance of their visit, the Peer Team arrived with a clear impression of what North Kesteven District Council is all about.

This was reinforced through 48 meetings, involving 111 colleagues, councillors, partners and customers – including the Leader, Executive Board, more than half of our 43 Members, senior officers from within NKDC and beyond, tenants and businesses.

They found a Council with big ambition, clear strategic direction, excellent plans, focused place leadership, a track record of delivery and a strong financial position.



The Executive Summary outlines:

'A strong, financially secure and stable Council!'

'Good place leadership across the District, county and region!'

'Excellent ambitions for tackling climate change!'

'Robust and well-established governance arrangements', with 'strong audit function!'

Balanced budgets up to 2025 and 'positive' financial management and planning.

'A positive, collegiate and supportive working environment!'

A controlling political group that works 'positively and collegiately together via an inclusive approach to decision-making!'

All work being 'informed by a strong suite of corporate plans and strategies!'

'A supportive, responsive' Corporate Management Team, 'accessible, flexible, willing to listen and help!'

A 'key priority' on colleague wellbeing.

'A strong, competent Senior Management Team, which understands the strategic direction the Council needs to and is taking!'

'Effective, recognised, positive relationships with partners' who universally 'regard the Council as a strong and positive partner to work with .. constructive, respectful, productive and collaborative!'

'Good intentions' in respect of engagement and understanding of resident needs.

The Peer Challenge Team's full Feedback Report and associated documents can be found at:

WWW.N-KESTEVEN.GOV.UK/CPC2021

Across the five areas of particular interest, forming the core components of all Corporate Peer Challenges, the Peer Team found:

Local priorities and outcomes

All work is informed by a strong suite of corporate plans and strategies 'like a complete jigsaw, with all the required pieces in place' to achieve aims and aspirations.

A well-developed performance management framework subject to regular review targeted on the NK Plan's five core priorities.

Commitment to deliver services how residents want them.

Clear commitment to build homes for local people, at a pace and to a sustainable standard.

High levels of council tax and non-domestic rate collection, quick processing of housing benefit claims and high rates of processing planning applications.

Clear Member and officer commitment to tackling the climate emergency locally.

A strong economic development team which knows the District's businesses well, and is delivering strongly on current projects.

Place leadership

NKDC is a strong and positive partner to work with; successfully representing the best interests of the District and representing, advocating and leading wider Lincolnshire interests through its leadership on county and wider regional partnerships.

Well positioned to provide place leadership on tackling climate change.

NKDC sets the required direction of travel strategically.

Positive collaboration in planning and delivering health and wellbeing provision and a joint waste management approach.

Positive relationships with parish and town councils.

Financial planning and management

NKDC is in a relatively strong, mature financial position, with a financial plan that strikes the right balance between optimism and pessimism.

The Council is exemplar in producing a 10-year financial plan coupled with a range of potential scenarios.

Strategies and plans are aligned with costed and funded deliverables, and moving forward with momentum.

Organisational leadership, governance and culture

The controlling group works well, with a positive, collective, inclusive approach.

Relationships between Members and officers are positive and respectful. Members are very supportive of staff and their work.

Operations are run by a strong, competent SMT, which understands the Council's strategic direction.

Chief officers are highly respected by Members and colleagues alike.

The Constitution is solid and the Code of Conduct operates effectively.

Governance documentation is sound and audit performs strongly.

Capacity for improvement

The Council recruits excellent, experienced and productive staff and has high retention rates.

Colleagues like working at NKDC and say the Council and CMT are supportive, responsive, accessible, and willing to listen.

Staff wellbeing is a key priority.

Significant support enabling colleagues to work flexibly in advance of the pandemic facilitated quick and easy adaptation to working remotely.

Commitment to build on an Investors in People Gold status to achieve Platinum.

Strong appetite to build on and support Member and staff development.



Development opportunities

Being improvement-focused, the Peer Challenge naturally made a number of positive suggestions for further action and development.

These were focused on constitutional innovation, delivery of our climate ambition, engaging young people, use of survey data, connections with local businesses, and broadening gender and equality.

While identifying 'the relative strength' of our finances overall, the Peer Team advocated a 'bolder approach' in our spending plans investments and commercialisation over and above the £220m capital programme laid out for the coming decade – in order to 'make the most of NK's momentum' in taking forward strategies, policies, delivery and ambitions.

Enthusied by the extent of the Council's climate action agenda, the Peer Team encouraged us to build further on our challenging ambition to achieve net zero by 2030. They recommended the development of costed pathways for delivery, building on the progress and investments made to date.

They also encouraged us to explore 'what next' in our engagement of young people, building on the work of the Student Council and exploring ways to engage more young people under-30 more fully and more broadly across demographic groups; and how to make better use of all insight to drive our priorities.

Whilst very positive about Member/officer relationships, and what they observed as 'robust and well-established governance arrangements', the Peer Team identified opportunities to further strengthen this in a number of ways through the next constitutional review. These include further development of the scrutiny function, constitutional innovation and governance and opportunity to build a renewed focus on equality, diversity and inclusion.

An action plan has been drawn up with Members for moving forward such opportunities for growth and enhancement.

Considered formally by the Full Council on January 27, alongside the Feedback Report, the action plan can be accessed at: www.N-Kesteven.gov.uk/CPC2021



Thank you

The Corporate Peer Challenge has been a positive exercise: an opportunity to reflect on the achievements of the organisation, and explore opportunities for learning, development and continuous improvement.

As Council Leader and Chief Executive, we have and will continue to reflect on the feedback given, which is of great value. Founded in the observations of six critical friends from other councils and in the lived experience of our own peers, colleagues and associates, it is very instructive.

The Peer Challenge Team read everything we threw at them...and we threw a lot at them; our Community Strategy, the NK Plan, our finance strategy and every policy, strategy, delivery plan or piece of performance data we could think of.

They met with a lot of people, probed, challenged and asked searching questions. They learned a lot about us and we are enormously grateful to them for the time, commitment and challenge they brought to us.

It is clear that everyone was open, honest and constructive; and the outcome is full of insight, ideas and appropriate challenge as a result.

We thank everyone who took part – it is greatly appreciated – and hope they found it positive, enjoyable and useful in helping the organisation to shape the future of our priorities, our services and our plans for investment.



Cllr Richard Wright
Leader of the Council



Ian Fytche
Chief Executive
of the Council