

# Corporate Peer Challenge II Chiltern and South Bucks District Councils

*27<sup>th</sup> – 30<sup>th</sup> November 2017*

Feedback Report

## **1. Executive Summary**

Chiltern and South Bucks district councils provide good quality, valued services to their communities delivered largely through their shared services partnership. The councils are well regarded by partners and politically very stable benefitting from all out elections once every four years. Both councils have had large Conservative majorities since their inception.

In 2011 the councils came together to share a chief executive and management team and since then have worked quickly and methodically to review and develop shared services where they provide a benefit. The pursuit of shared services has been a pragmatic one and has been introduced where it makes sense but has not been dogmatically pursued. The councils have maintained a sense of individual identity and in 2015 took a clear political decision not to consider merger within the current political cycle (to 2019). In October 2017 there was a change of leader at South Bucks with Cllr Nick Naylor becoming leader, while Cllr Isobel Darby remains leader of Chiltern. The decision to continue with the corporate peer challenge is a testament to the depth of the partnership and its stability.

Working together the councils have realised £1.9m in shared service savings per annum, reformed service provision, and developed a draft Joint Local Plan. In this second peer challenge the peer team found two councils with highly committed staff and members who are well-placed to guide the organisations into the future. Our overriding impression is that building on this, the councils need to invest greater thought leadership and appropriate capacity into defining the shape of the councils of the future. Given their experiences and stability it is for Chiltern and South Bucks to define their future rather than wait for announcements on potential local government reorganisation.

## **2. Overall messages**

South Bucks and Chiltern have demonstrated stable leadership despite changes in leadership at both officer and member level. Both leaders and the Chief Executive are valued by peers and partners for their open and supportive approaches. This is matched by a committed and friendly workforce. Members and officers generally work well together. The partnership has both strength and depth and has been cemented by a strong focus on delivering cultural change through a robust and refreshing approach to organisational development.

South Bucks and Chiltern are universally regarded as a welcoming partner. Partners like working with you, your inputs and your co-operation. There is however a sense of inertia with an overwhelming impression of 'wait and see' regarding potential local government reorganisation. This is permeating across many parts of the two councils and risks you not being able to deliver on your ambitions for your communities and partners. Our recommendations below identify how we suggest you may want to address this.

### **3. Key recommendations**

There are a range of suggestions and observations within the main section of the report that will inform some 'quick wins' and practical actions, in addition to the conversations onsite. The following are the peer team's key recommendations to the Council:

#### **Be masters of your own destiny**

- Further strengthen the partnership identity and reduce duplication
- Be absolutely clear about leadership on transformation and resource appropriately
- Explore wider options for shared services

Further recommendations can be found in section 12.

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

It is important to stress that this was not an inspection. Peer challenges are improvement-focused and tailored to meet individual councils' needs. They are designed to complement and add value to a council's own performance and improvement plans. 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.

This report provides a summary of the peer team's findings. In presenting this report the peer challenge team has done so as fellow local government officers and members, not professional consultants or inspectors. It builds on the feedback presentation provided by the peer team at the end of their on-site visit 27<sup>th</sup>-30<sup>th</sup> November 2017. By its nature, the peer challenge is a snapshot in time.

Peers reviewed a range of information to ensure we were familiar with the council, the challenges it is facing and its plans for the future. We have spent 4 days onsite at Chiltern and South Bucks councils during which we:

- Spoke to more than 60 people including a range of council staff together with councillors and external stakeholders
- Gathered information and views from more than 40 meetings, visits to key sites and additional research and reading
- Collectively spent more than 280 hours to determine our findings – the equivalent of one person spending around 8 weeks in Chiltern and South Bucks

Feedback was provided to an invited audience of staff and councillors on the final day of our visit and this report will be accompanied with the offer of bespoke follow up. We appreciate that some of the feedback may be about things you are already addressing and progressing.

#### **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 were:

- Stephen Baker, Shared Chief Executive Suffolk Coastal and Waveney councils
- Cllr Linda Robinson, Leader Wychavon DC (in shared partnership with Malvern Hills)
- Dave Barnes, Strategic Director Christchurch and East Dorset councils
- Matthew Hamilton, Director District Councils Network
- Kevin Kewin, LGA Programme Manager
- Clare Hudson, LGA Peer Challenge Manager

## **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. 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. Capacity to deliver: Is organisational capacity aligned with priorities and does the council influence, enable and leverage external capacity to focus on agreed outcomes?
4. Political and managerial leadership: Does the council provide effective political and managerial leadership through its elected members, officers and constructive relationships and partnerships with external stakeholders?
5. Governance and decision-making: Is political and managerial leadership supported by good governance and decision-making arrangements that respond to key challenges and enable change to be implemented?

In addition to these questions the councils asked the peer team to:

1. Reflect back on progress since 2014: the progress made including the key recommendations from the last report (clear path forward 'post phase 2'/Stronger in Partnership programme, Planning shared service, Joint Local Plan, Economic Development Strategy).
2. Provide input on the council's future directions, both councils agree that 'No further change' not an option: there is a need to keep on with transformation, efficiencies, customer focus/improvements and maintaining relevance to a sense of place.
3. Feedback on identifying the way forward: The Partnership's ability to meet future challenges.

4. Consider possible future models for the partnership: including differentials such as depth or geography – what is currently politically acceptable, and can any suggestions be made on strengthening joint governance or wider sharing with other organisations?
5. Advise on strategic prioritisation: how do we make decisions about what is key to the Councils, and how do we allocate our resources to those priorities?

It is important to note that the peer team did not provide a view on the proposals for local government reorganisation that have been proposed to the Secretary of State in Buckinghamshire.

## **5. Feedback**

### **5.1 Reflections on progress since the first Corporate Peer Challenge in 2014**

The first Corporate Peer Challenge in 2014 was commissioned by the then Chief Executive who had been in a shared role for three years was preparing for retirement. At that time the peer team found that the two councils were progressing their shared service reviews well and focusing on delivering good services to their communities. The team recommended investing more time in deepening the partnership through more opportunities for informal working between members and clarifying the next phases for partnership working. The team also made clear recommendations on streamlining governance and decision-making, particularly at Chiltern, and urged the councils to consider developing a Joint Local Plan.

The peer team found that the councils could demonstrate progress on almost every aspect of the previous challenge's recommendations and it was clear to us that the degree of follow up and commitment to implementing the peer team's recommendations was impressive. We were particularly interested by the councils' approach to organisational development. A new Organisational Development strategy has been developed and is clearly having an impact throughout the partnership. Staff were able to articulate how this has refreshed the culture of the partnership and could point towards the positive impact this has had on them as staff and we believe is one of the reasons that staff on the whole remain very committed, despite the scale of change they have faced.

Governance appears streamlined and clearer. Members are clear on their roles and how to acquit them, and are supported in developing their skills. Scrutiny appears to be used more effectively and is able to contribute to the future direction of the partnership. The Partnership has a clearer identity and the council has invested in developing a brand around the partnership 'stronger in partnership' which was well understood internally.

The council's decision to develop a Joint Local Plan is a measure of their pragmatism and a recognition that by doing so they may be able to better leverage influence and attract highly skilled staff, particularly in planning where there are regional skills shortages. The peer team also suggested developing a joint economic development

strategy, which has been developed by the councils, through working with a local business organisation.

There are a number of areas where progress was less evident to the team, which is not to suggest it has not taken place, but was not as clear as other evidence presented to us. In the first peer challenge the team suggested that time should be spent on succession planning for political and managerial leadership and 'space' should be created for members and senior officers to discuss the future of the partnership. Whilst this has happened to some extent we hope that this second peer challenge will solidify plans for this.

The councils have progressed a joint economic development strategy, utilising the skills of Buckinghamshire Business First. South Bucks have set up a property company 'Consilio' to invest in assets within the district and help the council to address its future funding gap. South Bucks faces a funding gap by 2019 whilst Chiltern's financial planning suggests they should be able to achieve a balanced Medium Term Financial Strategy. Both councils have plans for income generation, for Chiltern this is largely through capital project investment providing revenue streams and for South Bucks there is a more overt focus on asset management.

Housing affordability is a major issue for both councils, and there is considerable and rising pressure on homelessness. In the first challenge the team suggested developing a joint Housing Strategy, which is understood to be in development. We would encourage the councils to urgently progress and implement this, in close partnership with neighbouring councils as well as those in the recently announced growth corridor in North Bucks.

## **5.2 Reflections on the progress of The Partnership**

***'We now feel more like one delivery organisation'***

The 'partnership' has clearly deepened having been driven by capable members and officers now has its own sense of identity. Senior officers and leaders have had a steadying effect managing to mitigate instability and concerns when they emerge. Crucially change has not impacted negatively on the perception of the councils externally. Partners only saw positives in the partnership suggesting that they still maintained relationships with the individual councils and respective leaders but suggested the modus operandi was 'tell one, both hear it'.

Through implementing the various shared service reviews and phases of transformation the partnership has implemented complex change at pace. The harmonisation of terms and conditions was undertaken faster than many other councils in shared partnerships have managed to achieve. We have already highlighted the robustness of the new OD strategy and its impact. This has been extended to the introduction of the 'Unwritten Ground Rules' that define behaviours and values. These are highly valued by staff and feel like a solid basis for any future changes.

The partnership is stronger than in 2014 and opportunities for further consolidation and transformation remain. We will reflect on these in section 12 - Recommendations.

## 6. Understanding of the local context and priority setting

There is a broad awareness within the councils of the need to invest more time in considering future options. For some this has been prompted by the debate around local government structure, whilst some of the more senior leaders and officers have clearly felt this more keenly for some time. We heard that there had been a plan to have a joint political discussion which had been delayed due to the change in leadership at South Bucks.

As part of your new customer strategy you have a clear ambition to reach 80% of digital enablement of customer service transactions by April 2019, which should be applauded. There is a consistent focus on service reform and continuous improvement, for instance Chiltern have a long established waste partnership with Wycombe DC that provides household collection and recycling services across the two districts. The partnership is now being extended to include South Bucks, which provides a further opportunity for efficiencies, partnership working and to strengthen some of the work undertaken in developing proposals on potential local government reorganisation.

The Economic Development Strategy has been developed with key business partners and provides an opportunity to play a more guiding role in the local economy. Through securing seats on both the Bucks LEP and the National Infrastructure Committee Central Growth corridor you are securing the opportunity for your councils to 'punch above your weight' and be genuine leaders in future economic development. To further support this you have played a welcome role in facilitating the merger of local colleges through the area based skills review, allowing colleges to focus on a range of skills in different locations.

### 6.1 Understanding of the local context and priority setting – opportunities

***'They are good at communicating what is happening but there is a need to engage partners in design and development, not just tell us what is planned'***

The councils' ability to influence future economic development now has the opportunity to be realised and you have 'seats at the right tables'. We would encourage you to seek to maximise every opportunity for enhancing communities and the local economy, however small scale. This might take the form of improved broadband access, infrastructure improvement or opportunities to promote wellbeing – all are key elements in a successful community as well as actual business growth.

Housing affordability and rising budget pressure on homelessness as well as the forthcoming Homelessness Reduction Act requirements are the principal issues facing the councils, both in terms of residents but also for your own workforce. A joint Housing Strategy is in development but we heard little to suggest that this would focus on a joint approach to affordable housing delivery. Both councils suggested to us that they would be seeking to develop their own approaches, including in some instances the delivery of new social housing stock. We would urge you to consider what 'strength and depth' there could be in delivering affordable housing together. The team felt that there was scope to do this with registered providers, and building on your strong understanding of partnership working.

The theme of 'no change is not an option' was consistently relayed to us by staff and there are several major capital projects set to come on-stream for Chiltern in particular, but also in South Bucks. The plans for the new Chiltern pools appear to be a welcome addition to the community and the council has rightly commissioned in skills to help develop this. These capital projects are seeking to meet the needs of the current community but we did not see widespread evidence of future projects to meet the needs of the community of the future, including the predicted rise of the older population. The councils should build on the existing experiences and design a longer term pipeline for capital projects. This will help to engage residents and partners (including registered providers) in designing and shaping their future communities and enhance the skills within the partnership. There are already groups seeking to develop this vision, such as the Chesham Masterplan.

Now is the time to move from partner and collaborator to Leader of place.

Signpost – 21<sup>st</sup> Century councillor and public servant – developed by the Institute for Local Government at the University of Birmingham this seeks to identify the skills and approaches needed for the changing roles expected of leaders.

<https://21stcenturypublicservant.wordpress.com/>

## **7. Financial planning and viability**

The councils are on a relatively solid financial footing. At the time of the previous peer challenge the team pointed to healthy levels of reserves for both councils. Both councils still retain appropriate levels of reserves. The major projects coming onstream such as the extension to Amersham car park in Chiltern and investment in assets in South Bucks shows that the councils are seeking to generate stable income streams into the future. It will also move the councils away from their previous approach of being debt free and towards prudential borrowing, which is apposite in the current climate. Members understand the financial information provided to them and act accordingly.

The partnership has a record of delivering savings in what is an increasingly challenging financial climate, the shared services reviews for instances have generated £6.04m over the last six years. The councils have sought to channel investment in areas where they have identified there is greatest need including physical infrastructure such as car parking.

Both councils participated in business rates pooling, which is largely perceived as a positive experience. Given the current tensions created by the debates on local government reorganisation the councils in Buckinghamshire did not submit a bid for a business rates pool, which is understandable but perhaps a missed opportunity. The Economic Development Strategy and the opportunities to lever investment for the districts from being engaged in the appropriate partnerships such as the LEP may provide further prospects for business rate growth.

## 7.1 Financial planning and viability – opportunities

### *'The cliff is only just over the horizon'*

The councils have identified a range of further savings that will be required, alongside predicted income streams. For Chiltern a further £1.3m of savings are expected to be delivered by 2021/22 and for South Bucks this figure is £1.45m by 2021/22. Even with these savings and the planned additional income South Bucks have an identified budget gap of between £300-400K each year for the medium term financial strategy. The majority of savings are expected to be delivered through Phase 3 of the Stronger in Partnership work, including the delivery of the customer strategy and the move to a fully shared planning service.

A key factor in the delivery of the savings will be the realisation of capital projects and associated revenue income, notably from leisure and car parking. This will be a significant change to the approach to funding local services that has been the norm and will require tight project and programme management as well as proficient client side management of contractors and procurement. The number of major projects and their importance to the future financial strategy of the two councils means these projects will need to be vigorously monitored at the most senior level.

There is some continued reliance on New Homes Bonus to contribute to revenue streams which presents a risk that should be carefully managed. In leading the councils' finances members will be required to provide appropriate levels of scrutiny and challenge and guide project and programme development and design by working closely with residents and partners. We believe members are well placed to do this but would be better placed to do so with a more up to date and dynamic financial narrative.

To aid this we would suggest that the councils update their financial reporting and planning. Some of the financial information provided to the peer team was over 12 months old with more recent information provided onsite during the challenge. As the councils move towards more challenging financial decisions and greater borrowing we would suggest that financial reporting should be rigorous, regular and explicit. We would question whether the current approach could fully meet these tests and urge you to ensure that there is a depth of understanding and rigour applied to financial decision-making and monitoring that is shared across the political and managerial leadership.

Whilst the comments above can be applied to both councils it is also clear that a financial imbalance remains between the two councils with South Bucks facing a greater budget gap than Chiltern. As the partnership progresses it will be important to acknowledge this at key points and ensure that members understand the imbalance and do not perceive one council to be 'a drain on the partnership'.

## 8. Capacity to deliver

Despite the significant changes that have taken place we found a positive and committed workforce that are universally valued by councillors and partners alike. Most staff now undertake their roles in shared teams and have come to enjoy the challenge of working in the partnership. In delivering the various phases of the partnership project

staff have been tenacious in developing new skills and adapting to new ways of working, and the middle manager programme is helping them to do this.

Staff now accept that change is a constant and feel supported in delivering this through the middle manager programme, which is highly regarded. The OD Strategy's implementation of 'Unwritten Ground Rules' is also welcome and provides a neutral way to negotiate new ways of working and communicate change and challenge constructively.

Members and officers have worked together to embrace new ways of working and did not exhibit the concerns you will often see in shared management partnerships around sovereignty. Members bring a wide range of skills and experience to their roles but are also open to further opportunities for learning and exchanging ideas. Their openness and pragmatism is evident in how much resource and thought has been put into culture design and change, with members expressing that they seek to embody those values themselves.

## 8.1 Capacity to deliver – opportunities

***“We get there in the end and take the goodwill of the officers and members with us”***

Building on the supportive environment you have created we feel the Partnership should invest more time in defining its ambitions for the future and working collaboratively with partners to develop a vision of place and community. Senior leaders are starting to consider what project and programme management skills and capacity will be needed in the future and we would suggest progressing this quickly to ensure that the councils can establish themselves as more of a 'place-shaper'. Enhancing project management capacity may also help to accelerate some of the planned changes through the existing transformation phases. The steady pace of change has been right in some areas but in other areas, such as ICT, the peer team felt that progress could be accelerated to make implementation swifter and more efficient.

The staff survey is well embedded and return rates are solid, and we understand improving. That said, staff reflected that they do not feel that confidentiality is guaranteed in the current format used. We suggest you consider utilising an external, independent provider to give the survey a greater standing in the organisation and increase completion rates. The middle managers programme is respected but we would urge the partnership to consider how they can identify pathways, and design them with staff, for career progression and succession planning through the workforce not just in the middle manager cohort.

The tendency towards incremental change means that there are still multiple communications channels, for instance both councils operate their own twitter and other communications channels. The reality is that messages are often repeated resulting in duplication and absorbing unnecessary resource, we provide recommendations specifically on this in section 12.

Internally you are clear on the kind of organisation that you aim to be, rooting this in the values you have adopted: '5 Cs' – Courteous, Committed, Customer-Focused,

Challenging and Collaborative’. These have landed well with staff and members and the councils should now extend these to all of your relationships and interactions with your external partners.

## **9. Governance and decision-making**

In the first Corporate Peer Challenge there were a number of recommendations to streamline decision making, particularly at Chiltern DC. Reflecting on this now it is clear that complexity had been reduced and scrutiny considered more effective. The use of Policy Advisory Groups is viewed as effective. We were impressed at the efforts that have gone into ensuring that opportunities are provided for councillors to engage regularly and informally through joint informal cabinet as well as sessions for all councillors. Portfolio holders are working increasingly closer together exchanging ideas and practice – and they are enjoying the benefits of this. Joint working at Cabinet level is solid, and a model than many councils in shared partnerships would envy.

The peer challenge team in 2014 referred to concerns over ‘Chilternisation’ which we tested during our time onsite, and whilst there were a few references to it the efforts that have gone into the ‘stronger in partnership’ identity have done much to mitigate this.

The methodical approach to reviewing services and realising efficiencies and harmonisation where appropriate has also been applied to governance with protocols and key constitutional documents being revised to ensure they support the ‘stronger in partnership’ ethos.

Members routinely cited the opportunity for delivering good outcomes for residents as their inspiration and clearly feel very rooted in their communities. Illustrating this we came across some examples of sound engagement with community representatives through town and parish councils, often at a senior level.

### **9.1 Governance and decision-making – opportunities**

***“Members need a long run up – there is a lot of politics going on”***

Senior councillors at Chiltern and South Bucks have shown their openness to joint working and see the benefits in regular interaction with each other. We would encourage you to identify further opportunities for this between all members, centred on a particular theme or purpose so that members can see the potential value in it.

The focus of the councils’ responses to the potential for local government reorganisation has been on rebutting the option of a single county unitary. The devolution debate has focused on the county and district levels, but we would question whether Chiltern and South Bucks could, and should, also have been considering the prospects for double devolution. Engagement with parish and town councils varies across the two districts – we are not suggesting that it must be uniform but that both Chiltern and South Bucks should consider how as ‘leaders of place’ you can collaborate and lead with the different layers of local democracy.

In discussing the key elements of corporate peer challenge we were struck by the focus on the shared services ‘journey’ and delivering the agreed phases. Some people that we spoke to felt that the councils have reached the end of the shared services ‘story’, for others the councils are moving through the chapters of the ‘story’. Throughout our time onsite we could not get a clear understanding of who is writing the ‘story’.

## **10. Political and managerial leadership**

Councillors and officers have demonstrated their openness to feedback and external perspectives. In being so open it is clear that the senior leadership is well respected internally and externally. Political leaders ensure that there is regular and frequent contact between themselves and neighbouring councils.

This openness is extended to partners who described the councils as having the ‘partnership perspective’ – which is much wider than their own shared partnership and a demonstration of the effort placed on co-operating well with others. In working with partners the councils have helped to grow community capacity to understand and campaign on key strategic issues such as the impact of planned HS2 infrastructure.

Informal political discussions are well established and provide a positive basis for difficult discussions. Council leaders recognise that these discussions need to be used to help define future ambition and vision. Our overriding impression is of two councils who are positive and pragmatic, but in today’s changing world we urge the councils to consider if these characteristics are enough to meet and successfully address the challenges of the future.

### **10.1 Political and managerial leadership – opportunities**

***“Having got involved in the debate about structures we now need to learn how to play with the big boys”***

The councils are undoubtedly stronger for being in partnership together. It has given added resilience, ability to invest in their workforce, and greater influence with partners amongst other benefits. This has been achieved through incremental change building up the skills within the workforce to design and implement change. The political and financial landscape for public services and particularly local government has changed dramatically since the partnership was formed. The existing modus operandi may no longer be the most appropriate fit to allow the councils to be financially sustainable into the future and able to maximise the opportunities for growth and community development.

We are suggesting you need to be more willing to design and deliver bigger scale change – with your partners. This will require a shift in your approach to strategic risk management. The councils have a sound approach to risk management but we would question whether this is genuinely strategic and whether you are willing to accept risk in the longer term where it might be appropriate? Developing the pipeline of major projects described earlier in the report will be critical to achieving this.

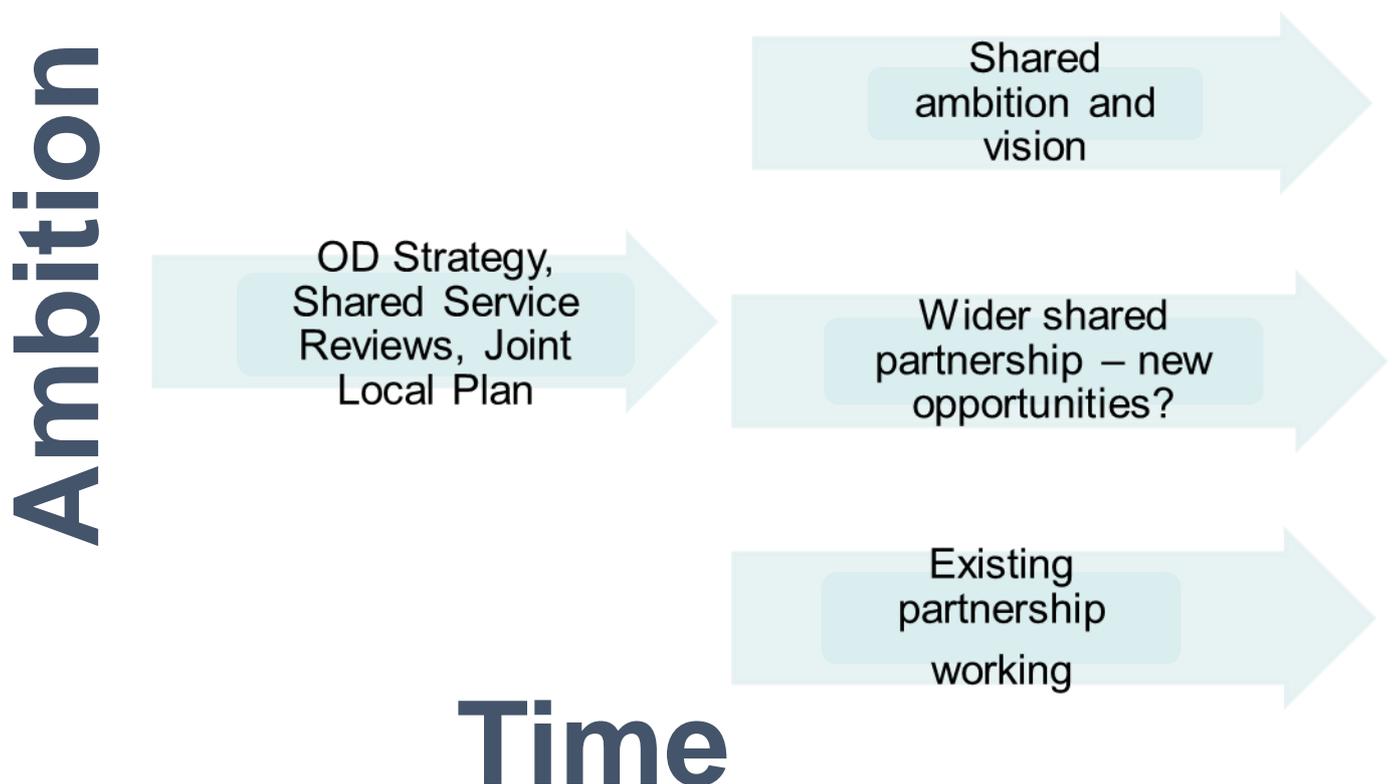
Your ability to be pragmatic, to deliver change, and to co-operate with partners is well established. Now is the time to be the valued collaborator and leader.

## Be masters of your own destiny

### 11. Identifying strategic options

Throughout our consideration of the corporate elements of peer challenge we have thought about what we consider to be the future strategic options you face. We would suggest you have three broad strategic options, which are not mutually exclusive:

1. Develop a shared ambition and vision for place – as a leader and collaborator
2. Explore a wider shared services partnership – where are opportunities for further and deeper sharing with existing and perhaps new partners?
3. Maximise the existing partnerships you have – explore what options there are for extending these, e.g. double devolution, growth corridor



## 12. Recommendations

We have set out below a series of recommendations that reflect the narrative of our report. Some of these are short term, whilst others may take longer to explore. We suggest that taken together implementing these recommendations would leave you better placed to face the future:

Explore the three strategic options – together, and in so doing:

1. Further strengthen partnership identity and reduce duplication, for instance:
  - a. chiefexec@chiltern&southbucks.gov.uk
  - b. @chiltern\_southbucks
  - c. Explore co-location options
2. Celebrate success consistently
3. Invest in programme and project management capacity
4. Be clear about leadership roles and responsibilities on transformation
5. Explore wider options for shared services
6. Maximise your leverage within the growth corridor
7. Invest in engaging systematically with residents, staff and members. Undertake a Resident's Survey in 2018, and repeat on a regular basis.
8. Ensure equity of support to our partners, particularly towns and parish councils, and all members
9. Ensure the Joint Local Plan is enabling – and allows you to maximise benefits of development, e.g. infill, greenbelt, are all opportunities for place shaping and income generation
10. Maximise and bid for funding opportunities that fit with your wider vision e.g. LEP
11. Having spent time understanding what residents want and need, feed this into your vision
12. Develop a pipeline for capital and place shaping projects with communities and partners front and centre – that deliver your wider ambition

## 13. Next steps

### Immediate next steps

We appreciate the senior managerial and political leadership will want to reflect on these findings and suggestions in order to determine how the organisation 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. Kate Herbert, Principal Adviser is the main contact between your authority and the Local Government Association. Her contact details are, email: [Kate.Herbert@local.gov.uk](mailto:Kate.Herbert@local.gov.uk), Telephone: 07867 632404.

In the meantime we are keen to continue the relationship we have formed with the Council throughout the peer challenge. We will endeavour to provide signposting to examples of practice and further information and guidance about the issues we have raised in this report to help inform ongoing consideration.

### **Follow up visit**

The LGA Corporate 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 demonstrate 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 2 years.

### **Next Corporate Peer Challenge**

The current LGA sector-led improvement support offer includes an expectation that all councils will have a Corporate Peer Challenge or Finance Peer Review every 4 to 5 years. It is therefore anticipated that the Council will commission their next Peer Challenge before 2021.

On behalf of the peer team:

Stephen Baker, Shared Chief Executive Suffolk Coastal and Waveney councils

Cllr Linda Robinson, Leader Wychavon DC (in shared partnership with Malvern Hills)

Dave Barnes, Strategic Director Christchurch and East Dorset councils

Matthew Hamilton, Director District Councils Network

Kevin Kewin, LGA Programme Manager

Clare Hudson, LGA Peer Challenge Manager

**December 2017**