

# LGA Corporate Peer Challenge

Mansfield District Council

3-5 October 2023

Feedback report





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## 1. Executive summary

Mansfield District Council (MDC) is engaged with and well respected by external partners, which positions it well for future devolution possibilities. MDC has a clear corporate plan and priorities with projects linked to the achievement of both. MDC's contribution to wider place leadership is strong, valued, respected and demonstrates cohesion between private and public partners.

Partners across Mansfield and the wider region are positive about MDC and its leaders, reflecting that partnerships are strong and that MDC has shifted to "look beyond its borders".

There are ambitious, well-articulated plans for regeneration, linked to funding and positive outcomes for residents and businesses. MDC has invested in its internal economic development capacity and capability, with the recent development of a small in-house resource. This team is supported by external consultancy expertise on a project by project basis. This means it is better placed than many other districts to offer high quality service and contribution in its partnership working.

The vision for place within Mansfield is strong and clearly supported by a focused and collaborative Place Leadership Board of key stakeholders. Furthermore the energy and commitment to Mansfield as well as the ambition for the place is abundantly clear. The peer challenge team heard repeatedly and from various partners how much MDC has done to make new partners welcome due to the council's openness and willingness to collaborate.

There is a clear understanding and grasp at MDC of the financial challenges ahead and there are emerging plans to address these challenges. The peer team was provided with the council's own assurance that the position is being managed and that there are robust plans in place. This is a very challenging position for the council that needs ongoing intensive focus and resources. The peer team would strongly encourage MDC to continue monitoring this and assuring itself through whatever mechanisms it feels are necessary to ensure these risks do not become greater nor the worst eventualities become a reality.

Additional funding comes with expectations about delivery which needs to be coupled with the risks that MDC is already actively managing. Much of these risks and expectations require input from the same resources and skill sets. Maintaining a

strong oversight of this will be particularly important at a time when the positive opportunities afforded by additional resource is inevitably putting a stretch on internal capacity to either deliver directly or commission.

The relationship between the Executive Mayor and the Chief Executive is seen as strong. The opportunity now exists for the Chief Executive to use this strong relationship as the foundation for further strengthening team working at wider Corporate Leadership Team (CLT) level to harness and enable the energy and knowledge of senior leaders. There appears a significant opportunity for MDC to take a role of local system leadership. However, for this to be successful and sustainable there will be a need for a wider, more inclusive approach to bringing other senior leaders of the organisation along on the journey of transformation and continuous improvement.

The peer challenge team sees a real opportunity to enhance distributive leadership which utilises contributions within and outside the council even more effectively. On a practical and pragmatic front, this will provide the much-needed capacity required if MDC is to maximise the possibilities of success in delivering on its clear ambition and aspiration for Mansfield. Now is the time to truly harness and enable the energy and knowledge of other senior leaders at MDC. This would be a powerful means of more widely role-modelling and truly bringing to life the behaviours identified in the Chief Executive's future direction-setting document 'After 60 days – Mansfield District Together'.

## 2. Key recommendations

There are a number of observations and suggestions within the main section of the report. The following are the peer team's key recommendations to the council:

### **Recommendation 1: Swiftly agree the financial plans to assist in addressing the current and future challenges MDC faces.**

In light of the inherent risks in the Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP) and the wider economic climate, having financial plans that are robust and sustainable is essential to ensure the future delivery of services for residents, businesses and to ensure that the district can fully utilise the funding awards that it has been given.

### **Recommendation 2: Maximise Collective Leadership Opportunities**

There is an opportunity to create more capacity within the officer and member leadership spaces for MDC. Embracing this opportunity will enable additional capacity for MDC to play an even more active system leadership role within Nottinghamshire, and the Devolution Deal, with the creation of the East Midlands Combined Authority.

### **Recommendation 3: Prioritise key projects and create stronger visibility.**

Ensure agreed priorities are aligned to resources and the capacity of the organisation. Provide more clarity on the link between strategic priorities and delivery while ensuring organisational visibility for internal and external stakeholders.

### **Recommendation 4: Consider wider opportunities for Mansfield, and its partners, within the East Midlands region.**

It will be important for the council to ensure it continues to exercise sufficient voice and influence on devolution agenda for Mansfield and the wider East Midlands Region.

### **Recommendation 5: Maximise the opportunity of the Overview and Scrutiny function.**

The Council should continue its work to strengthen the Scrutiny function by applying the learning from recent workshops so that it adds value to the decision-making process, genuinely drives improvement and continues to support effective governance.

### **Recommendation 6: Build and sustain capacity to deliver MDC's ambition**

MDC has great foundations within its team and stakeholders to deliver on its challenges. Enabling and developing these even more will be essential for MDC to maximise the opportunities from new funding opportunities, against the backdrop of the financial situation. Ongoing workforce planning should ensure that skills and staff resources are in the best possible place despite any need to make savings on the staffing budget. Effective employee engagement will be crucial to staff continuing to feel they are a valued part of future solutions.

## 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 peer team onsite were:

- **Lead Peer:** Jonathan Stephenson (Joint Chief Executive of Brentwood Borough Council and Rochford District Council)
- **Member Peer:** Cllr. Martin Gannon (Leader, Gateshead Council)
- **Senior Officer Peer:** Suzanne Jones (Strategic Director - Customer, Business and Corporate Support - St Albans City & District Council)
- **Senior Officer Peer:** Kirsten Burnett (Head of Policy and Organisational Development - Hyndburn Borough Council)
- **Shadow Officer Peer:** Caleb Ellis (Graduate Trainee, Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough Council)
- **LGA Peer Challenge Manager:** Ernest Opuni (Senior Regional Advisor)

### 3.2 Scope and focus

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. For this peer challenge areas of particular focus requested by Mansfield District Council were included as extensions of the core questions under each theme heading:

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 and achieving improved outcomes for all its communities? How effective is the council's approach to partnership working, especially across Levelling up/ Levelling up Partnerships and maximising opportunities?
2. **Organisational and place leadership:** Does the council provide effective local leadership? Are there good relationships with partner organisations and local communities? How effective is Mansfield's approach to regeneration and growth?

3. **Governance and culture:** Are there clear and robust governance arrangements? Is there a culture of respect, challenge and scrutiny? How clear about their purpose and focus are the council's Overview & Scrutiny Committees?
4. **Financial planning and management:** Does the council have a clear understanding and grip of its current financial position? Does the council sweat its investment assets as well as it could? Does the council have a strategy and a clear plan to address its financial challenges? What is the council doing to close its future budget gaps, improving its reserves position and strengthening its approach to financial planning? How wide an engagement is there in ensuring the council is effective in its financial planning and development of the Council Medium Term Financial Plan?
5. **Capacity for improvement:** Is the organisation able to support delivery of local priorities? Does the council have the capacity to improve? Does the council have the organisational and corporate capacity (Human, Transformation, finance, legal and communications) to deliver?

### 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 in order to ensure they were familiar with the council and the challenges it is facing. The team then spent three days onsite at Mansfield District Council, during which they:

- Gathered information and views from more than 20 meetings, in addition to further research and reading.
- Spoke to more than 60 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

MDC has a clear corporate plan and priorities with projects linked to the achievement of both. Underpinning this is the strong in-house team who all subscribe to a culture of a supportive, single team ethos. The overarching shared value of a 'One Mansfield/One Team' approach puts the council in a strong position to respond corporately to the delivery challenges of Levelling Up resources.

MDC has invested in its internal economic development capacity and capability. This means it is better placed than many other districts to offer high quality service and contribution in its partnership working. This impacts positively on MDC's ability to lead on delivery of the regeneration ambitions for the district. The council has managed to retain a significant level of internal regeneration expertise, experience and skills at a time when other councils have struggled on this front.

The energy and commitment to Mansfield as well as the ambition for the place is abundantly clear. The peer challenge team heard repeatedly and from various partners how much MDC has done to make new partners welcome due to the council's openness and willingness to collaborate. Partners with experience of working with other councils commented that MDC is, in their experience, more open and willing to listen to its partners than is often the case elsewhere. MDC is really starting to think about its engagement beyond Mansfield which is resulting in the council being better able to strengthen its impact up to the level of Nottinghamshire and more widely into the East Midlands region. Various partners described MDC as engaging across all agendas to positive effect. There is a clear view from partners that the renewed appetite for change demonstrated by MDC over the last two years has had a very positive impact.

MDC's contribution to wider place leadership is strong, valued, respected and demonstrates cohesion between private and public partners. The council was described as doing well to find common ground between itself and commercial partners because it engages well and is viewed as being accessible. Partners from the Voluntary and Community sectors attest to having a very good relationship with MDC in which they feel valued by the council and listened to.



The vision for place within Mansfield is strong and clearly supported by a focused and collaborative Place Leadership Board of key stakeholders. The council is responding positively to the opportunity of the additional £12.5m of funding awarded from the Towns fund, which is in addition to the £20m received from the Levelling Up Fund and Levelling Up Partnerships. This resource will be allocated over a ten-year period and is designed to help councils deliver interventions based on evolving local needs and priorities. Mansfield has project ideas which can be ‘taken off the shelf’ to complement existing projects which have already commenced.

Additional funding comes with expectations about delivery which needs to be coupled with risks that the MDC is already actively managing. Much of these risks and expectations require input from the same resources and skill sets.

There seems to be a real opportunity for MDC to deliver further nationally recognised schemes for its residents and businesses. The council’s Executive Mayor and Chief Executive seem aligned in seeking to strike a balance between looking to the future whilst also celebrating, protecting and acknowledging the past history of Mansfield. This combination of looking forward whilst recognising the contribution of the past is important for taking the community along with the council in its ambitions for a re-defined future.

The peer challenge team would encourage both the Mayor and the Chief Executive to continue ensuring that the views of residents and employees are sought and used to inform decisions following the adoption of the Internal Communications Strategy. Future success will depend to a large extent on ensuring the wider views of the district’s various citizens and communities across all generations can feed into future plans for Mansfield.

There appears a significant opportunity for MDC to take a role of local system leadership. However, for this to be successful and sustainable there will be a need for a wider, more inclusive approach to bringing other senior leaders of the organisation along on the journey of transformation and continuous improvement. Senior leaders are clearly keen to have greater opportunity to contribute their skills and experience.

This will be particularly important at a time when the positive opportunities afforded by additional resource is inevitably putting a stretch on internal capacity to either

deliver directly or commission. The conditions attached to the latest 'Long Term Plan for Towns' Funding are still to be fully clarified which could make it difficult to manage and fully understand any risks associated with not meeting Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) expectations. The peer challenge team would encourage MDC to assure itself that that it is clear on how to manage any risks associated with taking on the extra workload.

#### **4.2 Organisational and place leadership**

Partners across Mansfield and the wider region are positive about MDC and its leaders, reflecting that partnerships are strong, and that MDC has shifted to “look beyond its borders”. The district’s input when working at a Nottinghamshire level is strengthening with indications from various partners that MDC is contributing positively to more effective two-tier working. This will enable MDC to add value in working collectively on difficult issues such as Health and Education for example. There is an appetite from partners to bring Place Boards together across different areas to deepen the impact of collaboration on a larger county-wide scale.

Partners value the council’s approach to local leadership and would welcome even more of this in future to maintain and further build upon these effective and positive relationships with partners. Building on these positive relationships can help to deliver more collectively than individual partners can do on their own. The clear message to MDC is to ‘keep doing what you are doing’ as the council compares favourably with other Local Authorities. There is a genuine enthusiasm from MDC’s private and public partners to join the council on what is viewed as the start of a journey. Many describe the MDC approach as being refreshing and inclusive of partners from all sectors.

Relationships between MDC and its various partners across the county seem very positive and this is exemplified by the appetite for looking at how all projects fit in strategically at a county level. This is viewed as evidence that MDC is actively recognising the need to consider its role in wider, collective leadership.

The strategic intent within ‘Making Mansfield (Towards 2030)’ is seen as relevant, with progress being made and key projects being delivered which align with the overarching vision. It remains a foundation on which further building blocks for future development can be laid.

There is a strong stated and demonstrable commitment to regeneration activity using the opportunities from recent funding allocations such as the Levelling Up Fund. The vision for the town centre is clear and regeneration aspirations are ambitious and there is already demonstrable progress being made. This work is involving the full gamut of partners for example the public realm and flood defence initiatives supported by Severn Trent.

The relationship between the Executive Mayor and the Chief Executive is seen as strong. The opportunity now exists for the Chief Executive to use this strong relationship as the foundation for further strengthening team working at wider Corporate Leadership Team (CLT) level. The peer challenge team sees a real opportunity to enhance distributive leadership which utilises contributions within and outside the council even more effectively. On a practical and pragmatic front, this will provide the much-needed capacity required if MDC is to maximise the possibilities of success in delivering on its clear ambition and aspiration for Mansfield. Now is the time to truly harness and enable the energy and knowledge of other senior leaders at MDC. This would be a powerful means of more widely role-modelling and truly bringing to life the behaviours identified in the Chief Executive's future direction-setting document 'After 60 days – Mansfield District Together'.

The peer team were informed that the recent Corporate Leadership Team (CLT) session on 'Making Mansfield' was a truly positive and collaborative event in which it was clear that the Chief Executive was genuinely listening. There seems much within the approach this session utilised that would be beneficial to reflect on. The point of this would be to better understand and replicate the elements of this engagement which meant it was so positively received; it is evidence that some of the valuable learning about other ways of working into the future can already be found within MDC's own practice.

The council has a clear transformation master plan which is aligned to the vision for the place. This plan is underpinned by a pipeline of projects to support delivery of these aspirations for the future. The peer challenge team would encourage MDC to balance this ambition with a clear, concurrent consideration of the capacity the council possesses in order to deliver its regeneration plans in responding for example to unexpected, and often last-minute funding initiatives and opportunities.

### 4.3 Governance and culture

The council operates the Elected Mayor and Cabinet system of Executive Governance. Under this system Executive authority is vested with the Elected Mayor who determines who will make executive decisions and how they are made through the scheme of delegation.

There are 5 Portfolio Holders at MDC covering (i) Corporate and Finance (ii) Regeneration and Growth (iii) Environment and Leisure (iv) Housing and (v) Wellbeing, Health and Safer Communities. The current Elected Mayor has authorised the Portfolio Holders to make individual executive decisions on matters that are in accordance with the council's approved corporate plan, priorities and budget. The majority of executive decisions are taken by individual Members but the Elected Mayor has the ability to take a collective executive decision through the Cabinet.

The council's principal overarching strategic documents are the Budget and Policy Framework documents which are drafted and consulted on with elected members in accordance with the provisions as set out in the council's Constitution.

These draft documents are prepared by the appropriate Executive Member and then scrutinised by non-executive members through the appropriate Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Any recommendations from the scrutiny process are considered by the Executive Members which may result in the draft document being amended, before it is recommended to council for approval. MDC operates three Overview and Scrutiny Committees for (i) Communities and Services (ii) Place) and (iii) Corporate Resources

There is an identified need to further develop Overview and Scrutiny to get better outcomes. Work has already begun on this building on examples of where it has worked well. The council has re-established a working group to review the effectiveness and the structure of the overview and scrutiny function and its recommendations will be submitted to the Governance and Standards Committee at the end of 2023. The council also recently delivered Overview and Scrutiny training to both officers and members with the Local Government Association to support this review and ensure both Officers and Members have the knowledge and skill set to support effective scrutiny at the council.

There are well-established systems for officer governance in place. Regular meetings

of the Corporate Leadership Team comprising of the Chief Executive Officer, Strategic Directors and Heads of Service take place for disseminating information, strategic planning and decision making. Each Head of Service in turn holds regular meetings with their Departmental Leadership Team which includes service managers. There are also planned Extended Leadership Team meetings that take place throughout the year for all supervisors/managers where organisational priorities and development opportunities are discussed and explored.

There may be value in these processes being reviewed from time to time to ensure they remain fit for future purpose. This might include seeking internal assurance that the existing arrangements contribute as well as they might to effective working at the various leadership levels in the council. Might there be value in shortening the duration of some meetings and increasing the frequency of others? There were observations shared with the team that some of the interface feels transactional and that a more engaging and reflective dialogue approach might refresh the current feel of some of these meetings and interactions.

Whilst these processes are well-established there may be some value in those relating to officer-delegated decisions being reviewed to ensure they are proportionate, timely and reflect future need. There may be a need to look once again at systems relating to arrangements for signing off reports which the council hopes ModernGov will help with once brought in more widely. There has been some inconsistency in the quality of reports in areas such as relevance of information, formatting and spelling but work to address and improve this is ongoing with key departments where this is an issue.

There are generally good member–officer relationships across the council. There is a recognition that it is important to respect and understand each other’s roles to maintain and improve effective and efficient working arrangements. A particular comment made to the team was that councillors treated staff with respect and that they displayed appropriate behaviour in meetings.

There have been occasions of member standards complaints particularly relating to use of social media. However, the council can evidence that it is seeking to deal effectively with this issue as there were one-to- one discussions and other training provided. Additionally further guidance will soon be sent out to continue the

promotion of learning and understanding best practice.

The message from staff to the Peer Challenge team is that they clearly want to work at MDC and that they feel they have strong reasons to stay. Some of the descriptions shared were of staff at MDC 'feeling like a family' with everyone 'working towards a common goal'. There is a collective sense of people wanting to deliver and they display a willingness to work in a joined up fashion underpinned by a collective commitment and passion to both the place and the council. Notwithstanding the possibility for some of being able to earn more if they were at different councils, the overriding driver is their clear desire to work at MDC.

This culture of commitment and loyalty is an invaluable resource for the council. The peer challenge team would encourage the council to ensure that it recognises this. A message which came through to the team was that many staff are unsure if this passion and drive to work for MDC and the people of Mansfield was fully recognised and appreciated at the most senior levels in the council. Staff did not always feel heard however this provides a basis on which MDC can continue to build on its aspiration to be an organisation which is confident to challenge itself and encourages a culture in which it is possible to 'speak truth to power'.

In the first three months following his appointment the Chief Executive undertook an exercise of observing all functions of the council in order to understand the culture of MDC and identify strengths and prioritise areas for improvement. In the resulting 'After 60 Days – Mansfield District Together' document the rationale for this approach was outlined. While much of the content of the document reflects messages and findings which staff can recognise and agree with, the robust challenge and process did leave some staff with a feeling of discomfort which is not dissimilar to feelings associated with being inspected.

Whilst approaches taken had the best intentions at their core, it is important to reflect on the process for future change and transformation programmes and understand how these can ensure wider buy-in to a shared and common purpose. It was clear that steps have been taken since the introduction of the plan to improve co-production and collaboration and this should continue to be developed.

The 'Internal Communications Strategy' provides a platform and opportunity for clear, consistent, regular, robust - and critically- two-way communication at MDC going

forward. There is also the opportunity as part of this work for clear messages to be shared with staff that they are truly trusted to deliver by the council's senior leadership without measures which feel like being inspected being deployed.

#### **4.4 Financial planning and management**

It is to be noted that Mansfield as a district ranks as 117th in the country for its levels of deprivation, with 10 of its Lower Layer Super Output Areas (LSOAs) featuring on the most-deprived ranking. Based on these socio-economic challenges the district receives and manages high levels of demand for service.

The 2023/24 budget for both General Fund and Housing Revenue Account (HRA) was approved in February 2023 as the UK was starting to see the effects of the Cost-of-Living Crisis, with rising costs experienced by both the Council and Mansfield's residents.

The Consumer Price Index (CPI), which provides the measure for inflation, was at 9.9% at August 2022, when the 2023/24 budget-setting process began, which was close to the all-time high of 11.1% seen in October 2022, due to sharp increases in goods such as utilities. However, CPI was 6.8% in July 2023, showing that inflation is starting to come down.

The pending pay award is greater than what was assumed in the 2023/24 budget. When the 2023/24 budget was set, a 4% pay award was assumed year-on-year. However, the offer from employers, which the trade unions have rejected, includes a £1,925 pay rise for each employee, an average increase of 6.79% across all pay bandings. Given that this offer has yet to be agreed, it has still been used to estimate the potential salary increase, as this is the most prudent estimate available at this time. Estimates have been included in the forecast for this pay award, with £450k additional cost to the General Fund and £209k for the HRA.

This has been included within the base for 2024/25, as it is likely to be the minimum position, with an additional estimated 5% increase for 2024/25 included on top of this. The impact of the 2023/24 pay award, plus an estimated 5% pay award for 2024/25, is an increased basic pay budget of £509k for the Council's General Fund, compared to the original estimate for 2024/25.

Alongside the increased pay award, Mansfield District Council is also, in common

with many councils, facing staffing pressures due to recruitment difficulties. There are a number of vacant posts throughout the authority. However, in order to ensure that key services continue as expected, some roles have been covered through agency staff, which is more expensive than employing staff directly.

Prices for gas and electricity have greatly increased since the conflict in Ukraine began due to the instability in the utilities market created by this. However, prices for both commodities have begun to fall in recent months. For 2024/25, Mansfield District Council's General Fund, this means that the electricity budget has decreased by £52k compared to previous estimates, and the gas budget has decreased by £93k.

The council generates a high proportion of its income from commercial and industrial rents. Given that business are experiencing the same pressures as Mansfield District Council, such as increased energy and staffing costs, the council needs to monitor this income stream closely. These items have been factored into the 2023/24 quarter 1 forecast and will also impact upon the Medium-Term Financial Plan.

Prior to changes in interest rates and restrictions on access to Public Works Loan Board loans, the Council had pursued a property investment strategy to generate income. This was seen as part of the means to close the predicted spending gap. On Page 8 of the 2017 Mansfield LGA Corporate Peer Challenge report, the members of that team suggested that not everything accompanying such investment was widely understood and that it would be prudent for additional risk-management measures to be developed and implemented:

*'It is also not clear whether the current vision of concentrating investment in property has been fully understood by all in the council. Therefore, this need to enable council-wide ownership and shared understanding of the budget and finance is imperative. We would also encourage the council to spread the risk in dealing with financial challenges between efficiency savings, shared service arrangements, property investment, commercialisation of services and service transformation'.*

As with most councils the need for MDC to create additional income streams from commercial income has been essential to balance the budget. This income is vital, and very much relied on, in supporting the council in sustaining service provision. MDC is experiencing some challenges with its investment property portfolio. MDC is



currently managing a complex remediation project. If not managed this could have serious consequences on the council's financial position. The peer team was provided with the council's own assurance that the position is being managed and that there are robust plans in place. The peer team would strongly encourage MDC to continue monitoring this.

There is at the present time a shared understanding of financial challenges and collective will to bring solutions at Mansfield District Council. Officer and member leadership on financial management is currently clearly aligned and effective. Strong financial governance is also in place and validated. As in most organisations, there are frustrations with some operational processes relating to authorisations however it is important and financial governance is not compromised but processes do need to allow for orders to be put in place in a timely manner. Plans exist to balance the MTFP– (subject to some difficult decisions) - but have inherent risks so MDC will need to ensure that its MTFP is sustainable.

There is nervousness both internally and externally over MDC's capacity to deliver against an extremely difficult financial backdrop. This nervousness and caution is healthy in the view of the 2023 Corporate Peer Challenge team as it is important for the council to continue to question itself as to whether the savings targeted are both deliverable and sustainable. It is a valid question that the council is posing itself in order to seek assurance that its savings and recovery plans are achievable. This is especially important when some of the uncertainty relates to investments which are external to the council and are therefore impacted by conditions which may not remain within the council's full control.

MDC has good financial monitoring systems in place with quarterly reporting to elected members which are part of publicly available papers. This could be improved further by the inclusion of additional information on the use of reserves both planned and actual, alongside the existing balances level. More information on cost increases and savings would also aid understanding of budget pressures.

The authority has missed financial targets for transformation savings for several years and in the past has relied on commercial investment income to make up the difference. As the most recent quarterly monitoring report acknowledges, that income source is now under strain, with additional bad debt provision having to be made as

well as investment being required for remediation works to property within the council's portfolio. One-off business rates income has been used to cushion the impact. The authority has ambitious plans with the assistance of Levelling-up and Council funding to redevelop the Town Centre whilst also moving its own headquarters. This will require careful management.

For all of these reasons a key recommendation from the team to MDC is for the council to swiftly agree the detail within the financial plans that will be needed to assist in addressing the current and future challenges the organisation faces.

#### **4.5 Capacity for improvement**

There is an opportunity for collective leadership to be improved. The Extended Leadership Team (ELT) all really want to work together better; this commitment and expertise needs to be valued and embraced.

Ultimately one of the most valuable resources the council possesses is that its Leadership Teams at various levels are committed to the council and all they do is driven by the right values. There is a huge amount of passion and desire to help the council to build for the future. This needs to be embraced.

There is a significant amount of staff engagement taking place and a wider communications strategy has been drafted. These provide a good foundation on which to establish more effective and proactive two-way engagement and wider sharing of pertinent information across the council. Staff in some areas report that communication should be improved. An example shared with the team is that some staff found out via social media that Mansfield's public were being consulted on cutting some (but not all) non-statutory services. The Internal Communications Strategy feels like a conduit for addressing and correcting this.

There is a significant amount of energy and an understanding from CLT that transformation needs to happen and this is echoed across the organisation. The challenge is widely understood. Nonetheless there remains more for MDC to do in tackling its transformation ambitions. Is there enough capacity in the organisation and is it in the right place to deliver transformation and the corporate priorities? There has been some reduction to the Transformation team which has led to some concerns about MDC's capacity to progress its transformation ambitions. This has also raised

questions as to whether, in the absence of sufficient and dedicated Transformation capacity, Service areas will have the time and capacity to do this transformation work for themselves.

MDC would find value in assuring itself that the amount of work happening to both transform the organisation and drive the wider regeneration ambition for the district at the same time is sustainable. Mansfield is not alone among councils in attempting to deliver on significant ambition whilst not always having enough capacity to achieve this. Ensuring transformation can happen whilst delivering on the opportunities emanating from new central government funds being from within the same capacity envelope is a key consideration for MDC.

In this regard there is an opportunity for MDC to streamline its priorities through the review of 'Making Mansfield Towards 2030' underpinned by the content and thinking of 'Mansfield District Together'. This would allow for these priorities to be brought to the forefront of both the organisation and Mansfield as a place.

As with other Councils, there are recruitment and retention difficulties. MDC are ready and prepared to embrace innovative ways of addressing this. The added benefit is that staff uncertainty and anxiety will be reduced by greater clarity on budget and organisational planning.

## 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 LGA are keen to build on the relationships formed through the peer challenge. The CPC process includes a six-month check-in session, which provides 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 (LGA Principal Adviser for the East Midlands, Yorkshire and the Humber and North East Regions) is the main contact between your authority and the Local Government Association. Mark is available to discuss any further support the council requires and can be reached by email:

[mark.edgell@local.gov.uk](mailto:mark.edgell@local.gov.uk)