

LGA Corporate Peer Challenge

East Devon District Council

6 – 8 February 2024

Feedback report



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1. Executive summary

East Devon District Council (EDDC) is an ambitious council that is keen to make a positive difference to residents' lives and the environment in East Devon. Officers working at the council describe that they are working in a progressive and forward thinking environment. Officers have shown great resilience during the challenges of recent years which have been the subject of public reporting. The council's political leadership changed in 2019 after 45 years of Conservative administrations and the chief executive retired in October 2023 after 21 years in the role. This significant level of change impacted the council both politically and operationally and for some time the council suffered a lack of direction.

The council is working hard to address the challenges and has made clear progress on its journey of improvement. After a period of transition at senior officer level there is now a sense of stability, in no small part arising from how well the three interim chief executives, appointed in September 2023, have worked together. However, capacity at that senior level is limited at the moment and a permanent chief executive is needed to provide vision and direction to the staff and to support the leader and members with a strategic perspective.

The council's Cabinet work collaboratively and strive to improve themselves and the council. They may benefit from reviewing their working arrangements, for example by establishing regular workshop style sessions with senior management to inform early strategy and policy development; the senior management team will benefit from this too. Other suggestions include having informal Cabinet meetings to review draft reports and ensure all the necessary information is available to inform decisions that will be made in public; enhancing the forward plan of future decisions; empowering portfolio holders to present reports at Cabinet and ensuring that they are held to account at scrutiny. Measures and actions such as these will enable the Cabinet to work even more effectively as a cohesive team and with senior management.

The council has recently undertaken a great deal of work around improving governance and this needs to be both continued but also seen through, so the benefits are fully realised. Importantly, the peer team observed that councillor/officer relationships were positive, which was not always the case.

The council should invest in further councillor and officer development, for example, a review of the councillor induction programme that addresses learning and development needs throughout the term of the council, and political awareness training for officers would ensure newly elected councillors and officers understand their different roles and responsibilities.

A refresh of scrutiny training would help to ensure that discussions at those meetings are focused and both Overview and Scrutiny Committees and the Housing Review Board are adding value.

EDDC shows some strong performance in certain key areas which are referenced later in this report. Therefore, now is a great opportunity for the councillors and management team to move above and beyond the internal matters that have occupied the council's time and enhance its reputation further. The council is now at a point where it needs to raise its profile externally at a county and regional level and be part of wider debates around devolution and regional place shaping. The leader is currently the chair of the Devon Districts Forum, and this provides a platform to build on, particularly with the recent announcement of the Devon and Torbay Devolution Deal.

It will be important for the new chief executive, once in post, to develop a programme of external engagement to build on partnership working which will help to enhance the council's external reputation.

EDDC is currently consulting on a new council plan. The peer team has seen a draft of the council plan and would recommend that the number of actions supporting the themes is streamlined to ensure that delivery of the priorities are achievable within the resources available.

Developing the council's narrative once that new council plan is approved will broadcast the aims and priorities of the council across the district, county and sub region. Considering the use of councillor and officer ambassadors as part of telling the story will help to address any legacy reputation issues.

The council has 4,300 tenanted properties. There are challenges with the Housing Service and whilst a great deal of work has been undertaken to address the issues arising from staff capacity, stock condition, complaints and repair requests, more needs to be done to improve tenant engagement, contract management and performance in dealing with repairs.

Building on the work that is already ongoing by further engaging with tenants to clearly establish what they would find valuable, should help improve the service that is received and relationship between tenants and the council.

Whilst the council has a robust approach to financial planning and an excellent track record of financial management, there are some areas that could present a financial risk. The financial viability of the Housing Revenue Account and ability to address the stock condition issues of properties is a risk.

A further risk is the provision of leisure and culture. The council should identify specific principles for the provision of these services that include timescale and budget parameters so that decisions can be made to ensure future service delivery is financially sustainable.

EDDC has undertaken a comprehensive programme of external reviews prior to this corporate peer challenge taking place. This demonstrates a clear desire for continuous improvement and the council has clearly taken on board the various feedback that has resulted in a number of recommendations for EDDC to take account of. The peer team recommendation is that an action plan is produced and included as part of the next Annual Governance Statement that consolidates the actions arising and has councillor oversight for monitoring of delivery.

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:

2.1 Recruitment of a Chief Executive

Progress the plans to recruit a Chief Executive and ensure sufficient capacity at director level to support the leader and councillors with strategic vision and provide vision and direction to staff.

2.2 Consideration of Cabinet working arrangements

Consider and explore options to enhance Cabinet working arrangements, for example: making space for strategic workshop sessions with senior management, so that the Cabinet can work even more effectively.

2.3 Invest in councillor and officer development

Invest in an ongoing programme of councillor development and training and political awareness training for staff to ensure wider understanding of the roles and responsibilities of councillors and officers respectively.

2.4 Streamline the actions in your new Council Plan

As the council's new Council Plan is developing, further prioritise the number of actions that sit under the four themes in the new Council Plan to and delegate to and empower staff within the organisation to deliver those actions across the life of the plan.

2.5 Resist the temptation to undertake further external reviews

Consolidate the learning and recommendations from the reviews the council has undertaken and focus on addressing the actions arising from the various reports. Continue to build on governance improvements systematically reviewing all elements of the council's governance and implementing improvements where necessary.

2.6 Develop a programme of external engagement and make outwardly focused work a priority for the new Chief Executive

Develop external engagement with partners and stakeholders for example, undertake work with town and parish councils to include planning matters and host a regular Developer and Agents Forum that includes officers and the portfolio lead for planning. The new Chief Executive should prioritise work on an external focus and profile for the council; external partners are waiting to work with you at a district, county and regional level.

2.7 Consider using councillor and officer ambassadors

Consider using councillor and officer ambassadors to address reputation management and assist with 'myth busting'. Sense check where the council is now and where it wants to be.

2.8 Review visibility with housing tenants

Whilst ensuring greater visibility with housing tenants is underway, ensure that engagement with them is effective and meaningful to sense check what they would find valuable to support the relationship between housing tenants and the council, and simultaneously address performance.

2.9 Provide direction for leisure and culture provision

Identify specific principles for leisure and culture provision that include timescale and budget parameters to ensure a financially sustainable model of service delivery.

3. Summary of the peer challenge approach

3.1 The peer team

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

- Councillor Mike Every – Liberal Democrat Member Peer, Deputy Leader Cotswold District Council
- Councillor Colin Noble – Conservative Member Peer, Suffolk County Council
- Kath Marriott – Lead Peer, Chief Executive Rushcliffe Borough Council
- Stephen Capes – Director of Regeneration and Policy, Derbyshire Dales District Council
- Heather Wills – Principal Advisor (Finance and Governance), Local Government Association
- Kathryn Trant – Peer Challenge Manager, Local Government Association

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.

1. **Local priorities and outcomes** - Are the council's priorities clear and informed by the local context? Is the council delivering effectively on its priorities?
2. **Organisational and place leadership** - Does the council provide effective local leadership? Are there good relationships with partner organisations and local communities?
3. **Governance and culture** - Are there clear and robust governance arrangements? Is there a culture of challenge and scrutiny?
4. **Financial planning and management** - Does the council have a grip on its current financial position? Does the council have a strategy and a plan to address its financial challenges?
5. **Capacity for improvement** - Is the organisation able to support delivery of local priorities? Does the council have the capacity to improve?

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 East Devon District Council, during which they:

- Gathered information and views from more than 30 meetings, in addition to further research and reading.
- Spoke to almost 150 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

EDDC adopted a council plan in 2021 with a vision for the following three years to make a positive difference to residents' lives and the environment in East Devon.

A new council plan is now in development following consultation with councillors, officers, stakeholders and residents. The priorities are clear and work well. They continue the three themes from the previous plan, in short, 'Better Homes and Communities for all', 'A Greener East Devon' and 'A Resilient Economy bringing Prosperity to the district'. There is an additional theme included in the new council plan around the 'Delivery of Quality Services'. Traditionally EDDC has been one of the better performing and more outwardly-looking councils in Devon and the addition of this theme confirms the council's ambition to overcome the more recent challenges and return to being a top performing council.

A draft of the plan was shared with the peer team. It currently includes 52 actions and 100 measures. This number will be difficult to manage effectively, and the peer team recommend that the actions and measures should be streamlined based on deliverability and priority, or at least profiled over the four years of the plan.

EDDC has a strong economic development strategy and a team of officers delivering that strategy who are highly respected. A quote from one stakeholder was *"I feel very listened to – the business support offer is right up there compared to other local authorities I've worked with. No hesitation"*. The council has good levels of engagement with local businesses and has supported excellent regional level growth sites within the Exeter and East Devon Enterprise Zone (EEDEZ). The council has worked in collaboration with partners to enable growth ambitions and to drive clean growth and create jobs and a skilled workforce for the future. A brand strategy for EEDEZ has been developed and agreed that sets the purpose of the EEDEZ "To provide a world class, low carbon environment for business successes". This makes clear the ambition for the zone and has attracted businesses with a similar ethos.

EDDC is establishing a corporate green team which will include senior representatives from each of the council's services. This is a good approach to embedding climate change work across the council and ensuring that climate change priorities are included as specific areas of development in all service plans.

The peer team saw practical examples of the council tackling climate change in the district, for example the drive for clean growth at EEDEZ, the visit to the depot to see the treatment of recycling material, and the district generally appeared extremely clean and tidy which is a credit to frontline operatives.

EDDC has excellent recycling rates and low levels of residual waste as evidenced by the [LG Inform](#) report. The LG Inform data and performance information system is hosted by the Local Government Association on behalf of the sector and, using the most recently available data, shows that EDDC, when compared to other councils in its Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) 'family' grouping of other similar authorities, has the lowest levels of residual waste at 255.7kg per household against a mean of 428.8kg and best recycling rates at 59.5% of waste collected against a mean of 43.07%. These figures represent one of the core strengths of EDDC that has been embedded over a number of years.

Cranbrook is a new community being developed in East Devon. 3,200 homes have so far been delivered and there are further phases of the development to be constructed. EDDC has reviewed its approach to the delivery of Cranbrook and taken the lessons learnt, for example infrastructure needing to be in place and more community engagement and will apply them into the planning and delivery of a second new community in the district.

Despite a great deal of work taking place over the last few months, there are challenges within the Housing service in terms of staffing levels and capacity, repairs performance, the complaints procedure and poor stock condition of the properties. EDDC has 4,300 tenanted properties. A stock condition survey of all properties is almost complete and whilst the survey is part of a project to support making the properties more energy efficient, it will also identify stock condition issues and in time should reduce repeated repair requests. Feedback from some tenants suggests that a higher profile from members and officers would be welcome. The peer team recognise that significant engagement work has been undertaken but would recommend

engaging with residents who are keen to help to sense check what support they would welcome in strengthening the relationship between tenants and the council. Ensuring effective engagement, listening and responding to tenants as well as involving them in solutions. The sentiment expressed was that “*they are the council’s houses, but our homes*”.

Once the stock condition survey is complete, a realistic and costed programme of housing improvements will be required and will need to be built into the Housing Revenue Account once the information is available.

Council Plan priorities and actions feed into service plan objectives and then flow into team and individual objectives known as the Performance Excellence Reviews (PER). This ensures a ‘golden thread’ from council priorities through service plans to individual staff through their objectives.

Performance management is currently managed within teams and reviewed quarterly by the Corporate Performance and Project Management Team and reported to the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) and Scrutiny Committee. The council may wish to consider an overarching corporate approach at senior level to performance management with a clear formalised process so that SLT and Cabinet can quickly see and manage corporate performance and therefore respond to emerging issues that may be impacting service delivery, for example monthly performance clinics with a dashboard of indicators. Corporate oversight on a regular basis of delivery of significant programmes and projects (defined in terms of risk as well as scale) should be included to enable corporate management of projects and identification of risks that could impact on delivery.

The council’s approach to equality, diversity and inclusion is a work in progress and whilst it is too early to judge its effectiveness, the impact of work so far is positive. Examples of work include the equality impact assessment template has been updated, the policy will be reviewed in 2024 with councillor and officer training planned, and work is taking place to identify and build relationships with groups to support and inform community engagement work. A corporate lead for the work has been identified.

4.2 Organisational and place leadership

The Anti-Poverty work is a great example of EDDC leading a partnership – the council is rightly proud of this work and should consider showcasing it more widely on the national stage. It involves the council working in collaboration with partners to support residents in helping to address root causes of poverty. Through collaborative working the council can help residents access all the services available to them whilst also supporting them to learn how they can access the support themselves. This has only become possible through building strong working relationships with partners across the business and voluntary sector.

EDDC also works in partnership with service providers such as SUEZ who provide recycling and waste services, LED Community Leisure Ltd who provide leisure centre services and Strata Service Solutions who provide ICT to EDDC and two neighbouring councils.

Partners are impressed by the openness and willingness to collaborate that was demonstrated by EDDC. This is a clear example of partnership working that could put EDDC back on the regional stage. The council's partners would like to see EDDC step forward and show regional leadership on priorities that are important to it.

One of the stakeholders commented “*Stuffed full of environmental gems is East Devon like a string of pearls – the only thing holding us back is working together*”.

There have been some challenges with partnership working too, for example with Devon County Council (DCC) and Exmouth on the masterplan work. It appeared the previous masterplan was not sufficiently consulted on to secure full public and partner support and funding. However, the council has undertaken significant regeneration work linked to its land holdings along the Exmouth seafront. It will be a positive step to see this work continue with an overarching vision in place.

EDDC should continue to develop the relationships with town and parish councils, of which there are 69 in total. The council recognises this need and already has plans in place to address this such as holding workshops in the summer of 2024, particularly around planning and s106 spend. There is a clear opportunity to strengthen the relationships through proactive and consistent engagement mechanisms and by consulting on sensitive issues such as the Local Plan as a matter of course.

The Leader of EDDC should have the confidence to undertake his role given the trust placed in him by his fellow cabinet colleagues. He is perceived by neighbouring councils as becoming more 'statesmanlike', both as Leader of council and as the current chair of the Devon Districts Forum. Once the new chief executive is in place, they will need to represent the district strategically alongside the Leader to raise the profile and reputation of the council. This will address the more recent perception that EDDC has become more inward facing and will help to rebuild the external reputation of the council and further develop a network of partners.

The new senior management team at EDDC includes a number of Assistant Directors. This team works well together and shows great commitment to the council and the district. The talent at this level could be harnessed to lead on corporate project work and managing cross cutting themes of work, for example on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, on Performance Management, on the Green Team, on adopting a customer centric approach. This would ensure corporate oversight and perhaps offer the opportunity for other officers to become involved in work themes of particular interest to them.

There have been media reports about bullying at EDDC but the peer team did not find this to be the culture and staff said positively that they didn't recognise this portrayal of EDDC. Internally the council is seen as 'progressive' and 'forward thinking'. There is a sense from officers and councillors of a desire to move forwards and stop focusing on the recent challenges, the council has turned a corner and a positive direction of travel is now set. EDDC should consider developing staff ambassadors to counteract some of the negative press about EDDC as a workplace. An example could be to build on the recruitment video that is already on the EDDC website where officers speak so positively about the benefits of working for the council.

EDDC has a good external communications strategy. The council uses extensive external communication methods including e-newsletters, residents' newsletters which are delivered three times a year, an App and engagement through social media which is monitored and responded to allowing for real time communication. The council recently consulted on the new council plan and is aiming to provide an evaluation of the responses received, if and how the council plan is altered in line with feedback. This will demonstrate the council's intention to engage rather than communicate so that residents can be confident that the council is listening and proactively seeking views.

In terms of internal communications, staff are well informed and comfortable that they have the opportunity to have their voices heard at staff awareness sessions and briefings. A councillors' newsletter has recently been developed and joins the impressive range of internal communications that the council has adopted.

4.3 Governance and culture

The council has invited a number of reviews to take place which clearly demonstrates a desire for continuous improvement following a period of transition. The Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS), the Planning Advisory Service (PAS), Investors in People (IiP) and Grant Thornton in their Value for Money Auditors Report have all recently provided recommendations to EDDC prior to the LGA corporate peer challenge taking place.

There is now an opportunity for senior officers and councillors to take key outstanding points from the reviews listed above and include them in the annual review of the council's controls and governance. This review ensures wider understanding of areas where ongoing improvement is required and so that the council's Annual Governance Statement fully reflects both areas for improvement and actions the council will take to address them. The peer team recommends that the Audit and Governance committee monitors delivery of the Annual Governance Statement action plan in addition to reviewing the draft statement prior to its approval.

EDDC has already undertaken, and has a number of actions underway, to improve governance arrangements at the council, including:

- A refreshed Senior Leadership Team allowing a full cascade of information to all staff and full engagement of all senior officers in decision making.
- A weekly meeting between the interim chief executives and the Leader and Deputy Leader providing a two way communication channel which is constructive and supportive.
- Action to revise the template for decision-making reports to support officers to ensure that councillors receive all appropriate information and advice.
- The setting up of a 'Constitution Member Working Group' to work on the wholesale review of the constitution.

- The updating and approval of a new risk policy and consideration of the council's risk appetite.

The council should continue to build on its work to update its risk management approach and ensure that Cabinet are sighted on the council's strategic risks. Further areas for consideration include ensuring that service and strategic risks are reviewed in a timely way to respond to changing circumstances.

Councillor/officer relationships are largely positive and productive. A councillor/officer protocol is in place and will be reviewed after the corporate peer challenge has taken place. It will be important that this protocol is a constant reference once the new chief executive is in place to ensure the head of paid service role is clearly and widely understood, as well as roles of senior councillors.

The peer team recommend investment in an ongoing programme of councillor development and officer training to ensure understanding of the different roles and responsibilities in addition to ensuring that councillors are equipped to perform all of their roles and are kept updated on new developments. Officers may benefit from political awareness training to ensure wider understanding of the different roles for councillors and officers. Councillors will benefit from a refresh of scrutiny training to ensure discussions at their respective committees are focused and adding value, coordinated with implementation of actions arising from the Scrutiny Improvement Review. The council should continue to use the resources available such as the South West Audit Committee Chairs Forum and the LGA Leadership offer.

Outcomes from motions to council are not reported back to councillors. Similarly, recommendations from the scrutiny committees are not tracked to show their impact. The council should develop a tracking reporting mechanism so that the loop is closed on outstanding actions and motions. This will allow councillors to see the impact of actions recommended and motions debated and passed. A summary of this could be included in an annual report to full council.

The Cabinet works collaboratively. However, the peer team recommend that the Cabinet consider their working arrangements as there are opportunities available to them that could make them work even more effectively together. Examples include informal workshops with ELT to sense check areas of work, empower portfolio holders to present their reports to Cabinet and developing a clear forward plan. All of these

options will support the Cabinet in working together in a cohesive way to lead EDDC. EDDC is not unusual in reporting challenges with timetabling of formal council meetings, and a number of councillors reported issues with the timing of meetings. It will be important to understand if there is a related impact on meeting attendance. This is a topic that could perhaps be explored by a councillor working group, if the council felt it would be helpful to do so.

4.4 Financial planning and management

EDDC has an excellent financial track record and has successfully managed the General Fund budget in recent years without recourse to use of reserves. The council has developed a Financial Sustainability Model (FSM) which is a process that undertakes reviews to ensure value for money, drives efficiencies to see what savings can be achieved and forms an evidence base that the council has done what it can. The FSM and savings plans to balance future budgets should be part of the budget and budget monitoring reports to decision making bodies and to scrutiny, to provide clarity and detail to aid early decision making and should include 'big ticket' items as well as service efficiencies.

The council has a robust approach to financial planning. Its Medium Term Financial Plan covers a period of 10 years, updated each autumn, and it provides a sound basis for setting the following year's budget. The council ensures that the council plan objectives are aligned to the budget so that resources are linked.

The MTFP includes a significant challenge in 2026/27 if there is a rebasing of business rates as the council has benefitted greatly from retained business rates. The challenge for the council will be the extent to which the FSM by itself will be sufficient to bridge any budget gap that arises as a result of rebasing of business rates. The revenue budget should be modelled for 2026/27 onwards, using a variety of scenarios regarding the potential impact of business rates revaluation and other risks, and this modelling will help to inform decisions as planning activity during the next year will be key.

The council's overall financial monitoring is reported quarterly to Cabinet, but performance monitoring is not being reported to Cabinet. EDDC should ensure that both budget monitoring and performance monitoring is done regularly at the right level.

The council may wish to review how the budget is scrutinised as it was reflected to the peer team that service plans were more of a focus than the budget itself as part of the preparation for budget setting for 2024/25. Cross party budget workshops are a mechanism used by many councils to ensure the focus of budget discussions remains high level and strategic.

The council could benefit from taking the opportunity to review the work programme and effectiveness of the Audit and Governance Committee, informed by CIPFA guidance, indeed it is recommended good practice to do so. By reviewing its work programme against its terms of reference (and by ensuring that its terms of reference match CIPFA guidance as part of the constitution review) it can ensure its annual work programme covers the right bases.

Notwithstanding the robust approach to financial planning, there are a number of areas that represent a financial risk to the council. These include:

- The waste and recycling contract – a large overspend is forecast
- Housing stock – the financial impact of the stock condition survey
- Leisure

In respect of leisure, the council needs a clear strategy that sets out a plan of delivery with key principles. Questions for the council to ask include: What leisure and culture provision does EDDC need/can afford? What is the timescale for decision making to ensure a financially sustainable solution?

The council should consider better developing and defining its portfolio of leisure and culture as not every site needs all services. Conduct benchmarking and visit other authorities to inform the exploration for sustainable delivery models. These will need to balance opportunities (such as health and decarbonisation agendas) with threats (such as the costs of maintaining ageing leisure facilities).

The risks arising from the financial impact of the stock condition survey will be known once the survey is complete and can then be built into the ongoing budget. Until then, the council is exposed so needs to expedite this work. Building into the existing budget may not be easy and looking outwards for examples of good practice may help to address the challenge.

The waste and recycling contract risks relate to the large overspend forecast for 2023/24 and the significant additional funding in the draft budget for 2024/25. It is unclear whether the additional funding will be sufficient given the level of overspend and this will need to be closely monitored.

4.5 Capacity for improvement

The three interim chief executives were appointed in September 2023 after the retirement of the previous chief executive. Under their guidance and direction there is a sense of stability across the council, and they should be applauded for the way they have worked together. They have used staff awareness sessions to make sure the workforce feel engaged and valued.

However, a permanent chief executive is needed and the plans for recruitment into this role should be progressed to ensure sufficient capacity at director level to support the leader and Cabinet to provide strategic vision and direction and provide direction to staff and oversight of delivery. Officers are looking forward to feeling more settled once the new chief executive is in post and there is a sense of anticipation that the new chief executive will provide more direction to staff.

Currently, the split of services is across the three interim chief executives. Whilst it will be a decision for the new chief executive once in post, it will be helpful to get staff and resources into the right place and take the opportunity to ensure an appropriate distribution of services and responsibilities across the roles.

Some services had workforce capacity issues that were impacting on service delivery, for example the peer team heard of capacity issues in finance, housing and planning. The workforce problems in finance and housing are being addressed, but capacity in planning is a national issue and harder to solve. The measures set out below as part of the wider measures to address recruitment challenges will help.

The council is working closely with Strata, its ICT partner on Transformation, ensuring there is a customer focus as the programme progresses. There is a clear direction of travel for the digital by default project. Resources are not limitless, but the Council now has a prioritisation process so that urgent ICT and transformation projects are progressed first.

The council has introduced a workforce plan, and this is currently being revised. The plan will be used to inform the council's future people strategy and priorities and will be an effective tool in allowing managers to identify workforce needs and gaps and how to address them.

EDDC has employed a number of effective measures to address recruitment challenges. During 2021 and 2022 the council undertook a Reward Review to address recruitment challenges. Alongside a wider pay review the council has implemented the Real Living Wage as part of the proposals which aligns to the Poverty Reduction Strategy. Further actions to address recruitment challenges include the 'Grow our Own' plans and to support this the council has become a member of the South West Apprenticeship Ambassador network which promotes apprenticeships to other employers. EDDC currently has 17 apprenticeships which is impressive.

The council introduced a Personnel Committee to oversee workforce matters and monitor vacancies to give councillors oversight of capacity and resource issues. The peer team would question whether this committee will be necessary once the new chief executive is in post as workforce matters will be their responsibility.

EDDC has an impressive range of internal engagement. Officers report good levels of engagement and communication including welcome meetings, staff awareness sessions, an apprentice lunch and star awards. There is a wellbeing offer that is positive and welcomed by staff, 'Happy, Healthy, Here', which offers a wide range of support and initiatives to staff.

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 progress review within twelve months of the CPC, which provides space for the council's senior leadership to update peers on its progress against the recommendations from this report.

In the meantime, Paul Clarke, Principal Adviser for South West, is the main contact between your authority and the Local Government Association. Paul is available to discuss any further support the council requires. paul.clarke@local.gov.uk.