

Darlington Borough Council Corporate Peer Challenge

Feedback presentation

Introduction

- Corporate Peer Challenge is based on five key questions
 - Not an inspection – invited in as ‘critical friends’
 - Discussions are non attributable
 - People have been open and honest
 - Visit has been very well organised – thanks to Janet Walke
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The Peer Challenge Team

- **Barbara Spicer**, Chief Executive, Salford City Council
 - **Councillor Tudor Evans**, Leader of Plymouth City Council
 - **Councillor Sir Merrick Cockell**, Chairman, LGA
 - **Lucy Robinson**, Deputy Chief Executive, Suffolk County Council
 - **Michael Laing**, Director, Community Based Services, Gateshead Council
 - **Marcus Coulson**, Challenge Manager, LGA
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The Programme

- Pre-onsite meetings and conversations
 - Document and data review
 - Interviews
 - Focus groups
 - Conversations
 - This feedback
 - Report to follow
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Your areas of focus

You asked us to look at:

- Look at the actions already taken to deliver change and drive down costs
 - Test and constructively challenge current plans and proposals
 - Identify any other potential measures to manage down demand, reduce or deliver services in more cost-effective ways including through whatever delivery mechanisms
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The story so far - your context

- Darlington's reputation is as a good Council, well run
 - Strong local identity, well expressed, well placed
 - Success based on careful, thoughtful development
 - Strong record of achievement since 1997
 - Evidence of numerous successful activities
 - You punch above your weight using a particular style
 - Your approach has been successful being pragmatic seeking to exploit opportunities as they arise
 - You see things through to a successful conclusion
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Your achievements 1/4

- Sound financial management
 - You have made savings of £19m
 - Low cost, low tax authority
 - Darlington seen as a great place to live and people want to move here
 - High degree of trust in partnership relationships with: business, VCS, statutory (Police, Fire, Health)
 - Positive hard working staff delivering good services
 - Council wide plan for developing leadership skills and investing in staff capabilities
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Your achievements 2/4

- Savings delivered in the 'People' budget £7 million in Children's and £0.75 million in Adults
 - Narrowing gaps in academic achievement 2011 best GCSE pass rates in England and highest rates of improvement
 - Good commissioning support and documents in People
 - Schools@OneDarlington felt to be excellent by education partners "A Special Thing"
 - Strong approach to child poverty
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Your achievements 3/4

- Strong Local Strategic Partnership
 - Track record of delivery on major regeneration projects, e.g. West Park, Lingfield Point
 - Retention of DfE Staff in new building to be hub for public sector
 - Successful integration of DPH
 - CCG co-terminus with council and good initial relationships established
 - Positive engagement and mature political debate across parties in Scrutiny
 - Opposition parties working constructively with majority party
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Your achievements 4/4

- Community capacity has mitigated Council budget cuts e.g. Darlington for culture
 - New Teesside University campus
 - Ambitious future development plans e.g. Feethams Leisure
 - Xentrall exceeding targets for five years
 - Tees Valley Unlimited and ambitious City Deal proposals
 - Good focus on Town Centre regeneration
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The challenge

- The Peer Challenge Team recognise the level of financial difficulty you are in and that consequently you feel stuck
 - The future budget challenges, the June spending review, 'fiscal cliff' of March 2016
 - Don't let the language of cuts fetter your ambition for Darlington
 - Not following through on your big ideas from 2010
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Issues

- What will the Council look like in five or more years?
 - What will local public services look like in Darlington in five or more years?
 - How will services be provided and by whom?
 - The “Well Managed, Well Run Council” approach needs to change
 - This time it is a different set of challenges
 - Get way from pragmatic and opportunistic
 - Grasp this leadership opportunity
 - Focus on action
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Actions

- Deliver your ambitions and priorities for Darlington in the medium to long term
 - Conclude mature conversations with partners to work out what the Council will look like in five years
 - Community Budgeting approach with public sector partners
 - Create a space for joint vision and priority setting for senior members and officers
 - Get pace and accountability into delivery
 - Revisit who delivers on Place services and consider a corporate commissioning team
 - Conclude the tri-borough arrangements one way or another
 - Refocus your budget consultation to also set the platform for public sector
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Actions

- Joint waste disposal contract asap
 - Set ambitious targets to reduce demand in Social Care
 - Build on Xentrall, rolling programme
 - Different ways to deliver Arts, Culture and Leisure
 - Exploit the desire from VCS to work with you
 - Get out to look and learn
 - Use the LGA to support your political and managerial leadership
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You Can Do It

- You have a track record of success having delivered some outstanding examples of best practice in all kinds of places
 - But now you need to build this into a new model that generates creative solutions
 - You have ability and great pride
 - You have most of the capacity and capability, you may need to consider what else?
 - Focus on what you can control rather than what you cannot control to expand your levers of control
 - Work with your partners
 - Move on and let go
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Finally

Stop trying to survive and decide to thrive

Reflections and questions



Next steps

- Reflect on our comments and recommendations
 - Consider what you do differently
 - Draft summary letter to Darlington BC
 - Consider communication key messages
 - Publish the final report
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Contact details

Marcus Coulson

Programme Manager

Local Government Association

Tel: 07766 252 853

Email: marcus.coulson@local.gov.uk

www.local.gov.uk/peer-challenges
