

## Strategic Alliance of High Peak Borough Council and Staffordshire Moorlands District Council

High Peak Borough Council and Staffordshire Moorlands District Council welcomed seven peers from other local authorities and the LGA during the last week of January 2022. Over five days the peer team met virtually with 117 people across 50 meetings, to gain insights into each Council, its workings, its relationships with Members, colleagues, partners, residents and businesses.

The peer review team reviewed a significant number of strategies, policies, performance and financial documents and spoke to people including colleagues, councillors, partners and customers.

The critical overview concluded that both Councils have been well managed for many years with particular strengths in financial management, governance, and risk; and that the Alliance is at the 'forefront of creative thinking' in terms of the shape of the organisation with a clear focus on efficiency and resilience.

**In short.... we deliver high-quality, low cost services that are value for money and invest in developing our staff and members.**

### Great Councils

Performance focused delivering high-quality, low-cost services

### Great places to work

Track record of growing and developing people and enabling career progression

### Great partners

Enhanced links between the Councils, communities and partners as a result of the pandemic

### Influential place shapers

High-level understanding of the places we serve

### Focused on the future

Ambitious plans to be carbon neutral areas by 2030

These are the key findings of the [Local Government Association Corporate Peer Challenge](#) of January 2022

# Executive Summary headline findings:

- Performance focused delivering high performing, low cost services
- Sound financial management and good attention to governance and managing risk
- Good progress made in delivering the ambitious Efficiency and Rationalisation Strategies
- Track record of growing and developing people and enabling career progression
- Good community capacity – particularly in relation to maintaining and enhancing the environment
- Enhanced links between the Councils, communities and partners as a result of the pandemic
- Impressive achievements which reflect the changing role of Councils delivered within a complex environment
- Much activity and engagement since both Councils declared a climate emergency in 2019 including jointly developed strategies and action plans
- Good relationships between Members and Officers founded on mutual trust and respect



# Five areas form the core components of any Peer Challenge and the review team found:

## 1 Local priorities and outcomes

- Clear priorities set out in Corporate Plans which reflect the differentiation and priorities of each area
- Good community capacity and involvement – the pandemic enhanced links between the Councils, their communities and partner organisations
- Performance-focused and delivery high performing, low cost services that are value for money
- High collection rates for Council Tax and non-domestic rates and percentage of household waste sent for reuse, recycling and composting
- Good digital progress – the creation of a customer self-service portal and a related communications campaign saw a 500% increase in website visits and a 45% reduction in phone calls

## 2 Organisational and place leadership

- Impressive range of achievements which reflect the changing role of local authorities operating in a complex environment
- Good track record of accessing external funding
- Political leaders engaged in a number of local and regional key bodies and forums
- Focused on ensuring strong leadership and management; skilled, flexible and motivated workforces; innovation; and equality and diversity
- Investment in leadership and management development programme - a very positive development which increases the sense of inclusivity

## 3 Governance and culture

- Well managed councils with good financial, governance and risk management
- Good relationships, mutual trust and respect between elected members and officers
- Scrutiny and member-engagement makes a meaningful difference
- Valued elected member training and development

## 4 Financial planning and management

- Value for money ethos – in the 20% of Councils nationally with the lowest per capita costs
- At the forefront of creative thinking – the Alliance has generated savings of over £15m
- Establishment of AES has led to savings of over £800,000 over the last four years
- Efficient, resilient services – eg maintenance of driver capacity during HGV shortage
- AES going beyond efficiency and resilience to embrace Councils' ambitions around climate change; a culture of continuous improvement; and horizon-scanning to adapt to emerging opportunities and threats

## 5 Capacity for improvement

- Track record of growing and developing people and enabling progression through apprenticeships and secondments
- Capacity needs identified which now need to translate into a deliverable action plan
- Staff have good access to training and investment in training exceeds national averages across local government
- Opportunities and enthusiasm for enhancing external communications
- Pandemic demonstrated ability of both Councils to work at pace with an increased focus on tangibles and deliverables to achieve greatest impact within capacity and resources



## Development opportunities

One of the key purposes of a Peer Challenge is to encourage improvement and the review team made a number of helpful suggestions for further action.

These were focused on strengthening visions and outcomes for both places and our capacity to deliver them; delivering our climate ambitions; increased engagement with our residents; and improved scrutiny and implementation of the findings from the Centre for Governance.

Whilst recognising the uniqueness of each place, the review team encouraged partnership development of aspirational visions with a clearer focus on outcomes to 'enable effort and resource from across partner organisations to coalesce around shared priorities.'

Work has taken place to map capacity and identify needs. The Councils now need to translate this into a deliverable action plan to meet their ambitions.

Whilst investment is being made in the climate change agenda, the team felt 'ownership right through both organisations of the climate change ambitions and related delivery' is required.

The team saw value in the Councils undertaking more engagement on generic issues and suggested regular resident and staff surveys as a good way of helping to achieve this.

A Centre for Governance and Scrutiny review for both Councils highlighted areas for action. The findings are 'at the outset of being responded to now' and 'there are examples of good engagement by scrutiny members and a difference being made.'

## Thank you

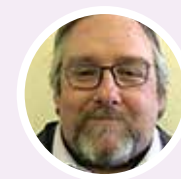
The Corporate Peer Challenge programme is an excellent way for Councils to see themselves through the eyes of their colleagues, partners and stakeholders – and fellow local government professionals.

We were very pleased to welcome the Peer Team who reviewed High Peak and Staffordshire Moorlands and we truly appreciate the invaluable insights the process has provided us with.

The team read a lot of documents, spoke to a lot of people and spent a lot of time understanding what they found to provide us with insightful observations and suggestions which we can use to further strengthen our plans for developments and improvements which deliver our ambitions.

We'd like to say a big thank you to everyone who took part in this review. We now look forward to continuing our improvement journey and turning our aspirations into reality to the very real benefit of everyone who lives in, works in and visits the High Peak and the Staffordshire Moorlands.

An [action plan](#) has been drawn up to move these recommendations forward



**Councillor Anthony Mckeown**  
Leader of High Peak Borough Council



**Councillor Paul Roberts**  
Leader of Staffordshire Moorlands  
District Council



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