

Corporate Peer Challenge

**Cheshire West & Chester Council**

14-17 March 2017

Feedback Report

## Executive Summary

Cheshire West and Chester is a council which provides and commissions high performing services which serve its local population well. As a borough it has high educational attainment, a relatively low crime rate, a high proportion of high quality housing in many parts of the borough and higher than average employment. This is underpinned by a strong and growing local economy. Though areas of the borough experience significant inequalities, many local authorities would be envious of a social and economic base as strong as Cheshire West and Chester.

The council has a good reputation both regionally and nationally and a very good track record of achieving national awards, piloting national programmes and pioneering innovation. The council has strong ambitions for its communities expressed by a relatively new set of priority outcomes for residents. The political balance of the council means that ensuring strong political consensus on large strategic issues will be critical if the council is to make good progress at the appropriate pace. This challenge should not be underestimated as the councils' work on agendas like closer sub-regional working and the increasing integration of the social care and health system are long-term strategic challenges which require stable and consistent political support.

The funding of future health and social care proposals for the area are ambitious. Although some integration has already taken place the council is relatively early in this larger more ambitious move towards greater integrated working (both in terms of commissioning and provision). The county of Cheshire has a complex local government and health organisational 'footprint'. There are current demand pressures on care services and a fragile care market. However, there is a growing consensus from the organisations on future models of integrating commissioning and provision. Clarity is needed on the end destination of the integration and this can then be achieved if the process is planned well, stakeholders are engaged throughout, the financial implications are clearly understood (and funded) and the process is led by politicians.

There is now a need to develop greater clarity and consensus on the vision on commissioning and provision for health and care. The council and its health partners should seek to move quickly to an integrated commissioning model, supported by putting in place an overarching governance arrangement across the whole health/care system and agreeing a road map for key decisions. Capacity to deliver the change will be important and there is therefore a need to identify the specific capacity, programme management and funding necessary to 'double-run' the system through the change.

On sub-regional working, the council and neighbouring councils at Cheshire East and Warrington have developed a strong devolution proposal which they are currently refreshing. The council has played a leading role in securing this, with the Leader in particular working across organisational and political party boundaries to bring partners together. The proposed deal is pragmatic and of appropriate scope, with the scope to deliver more radical devolution over time. Having secured the necessary local commitment, a clear response from Government is now needed to allow the deal to proceed with confidence.

To progress further the three councils will need to establish a constitutional framework. Building on the existing Strategic Economic Plan, they need to continue to integrate and

prioritise their economic strategy, and develop credible investable proposals to move quickly. The councils are taking on a transport function and the capacity and governance to manage this function should not be underestimated. Again, overall capacity is an issue and there is now a need for the councils to establish an appropriate 'core' team for the Combined Authority.

## **Recommendations**

The key aspects of the team's findings that we suggest would deliver the greatest benefit if the council were to focus on them are:

1. To strengthen stability of decision-making, ensure there is strong political consensus across the political parties on the council's large strategic issues.
2. Create clarity on the 'end destination' of the council and health agencies integration work, including greater clarity and consensus on the vision of commissioning and provision for health and care and a clear business case.
3. Create sufficient capacity across the health and care system to manage the transformation.
4. Move to an integrated health and care commissioning model, supported by putting in place an overarching governance arrangement across the whole health/care system and agreeing a road map for key decisions to be made.
5. Map the data flow and cash flow through the health and care system, including identifying the funding necessary to 'double-run' the system through the change.
6. Continue to engage strongly with Government to press for agreement of the 'devolution deal'.
7. To progress further the three councils will need to establish a constitutional framework to support the establishment of the Combined Authority.
8. Building on the existing Strategic Economic Plan, continue to refine, integrate and prioritise an economic strategy across the devolution area and develop credible investable proposals.
9. Establish the capacity and governance necessary to deliver transport functions, as part the Combined Authority.
10. Establish a core officer team to support the delivery and operation of the new Combined Authority.

## Summary of the peer challenge approach

### The peer team

On behalf of the team, I would like to say how much we enjoyed spending time in Cheshire West and Chester to work with you on the recent corporate peer challenge. The team very much appreciated the welcome we received and the positive way with which people engaged in the process and the support provided in the lead up to, and during the course of, the challenge.

It is testimony to the council's desire for constructive external insight that Cheshire West and Chester commissioned the peer challenge. Peer challenges are managed and delivered by experienced elected member and officer peers. The council is an enthusiastic adopter of the peer challenge approach, having recently had two other peer-driven review processes focusing on service specific issues. The peers who delivered this peer challenge were:

- Steven Pleasant, Chief Executive, Tameside MBC
- Cllr Keith Wakefield (Labour), Leeds City Council
- Andrew Lewis, Managing Director, Tees Valley Combined Authority
- Chris Badger, Operations Director, Older People's Services, Hertfordshire County Council
- Neil Shaw, Principal Adviser, Local Government Association

### Scope and focus

You asked the peer team to explore the following three issues:

- A council fit for the future
- Making the most of sub-regional working and devolution
- Transforming health and care

The peers used their experience and knowledge to reflect on the evidence presented to them by people they met, things they saw and material that they read. There are a series of guiding questions for all corporate peer challenges which the process usually explores. These issues are central to the 'council fit for the future' area of focus and so were explored as part of that theme:

- Understanding of the local place and priority setting: Does the council understand its local context and place and use that to inform a clear vision and set of priorities?
- Leadership of place: Does the council provide effective leadership of place through its elected members, officers and constructive relationships and partnerships with external stakeholders?

- Organisational leadership and governance: Is there effective political and managerial leadership supported by good governance and decision-making arrangements that respond to key challenges and enable change and transformation to be implemented?
- Financial planning and viability: Does the council have a financial plan in place to ensure long term viability and is there evidence that it is being implemented successfully?
- Capacity to deliver: Is organisational capacity aligned with priorities and does the council influence, enable and leverage external capacity to focus on agreed outcomes?

### **The peer challenge process**

It is important to stress that this was not an inspection. Peer challenges are improvement-focussed and tailored to meet individual councils' needs. They are designed to complement and add value to a council's own performance and improvement focus. 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 for the peer challenge by reviewing documents and information in order to ensure they were familiar with the council and the challenges it is facing. The team then spent four days on-site between 14 and 17 March 2017, during which they:

- Spoke to more than 120 people including council staff together with a number of councillors and external partners/agencies and stakeholders (particularly in relation to the local economy and the health agendas).
- Gathered information and views from meetings, visits to Warrington Borough Council and Cheshire East Council and additional research and reading.
- Collectively spent more than 170 hours to determine their findings – the equivalent of one person spending more than 4 weeks at the authority.

This report provides a summary of the peer team's findings. It builds on the feedback presentation provided by the peer team at the end of their on-site visit. In presenting feedback to you, they have done so as fellow local government officers and members, not professional consultants or inspectors. By its nature, the peer challenge is a snapshot in time. We appreciate that some of the feedback may be about things you are already addressing and progressing.

## Detailed feedback

### A council fit for the future

#### Leadership of Place

1. Cheshire West and Chester is a council which provides and commissions high performing services which serve its local population well. As a borough it has a number of social assets: high educational attainment, relatively low crime rate, high proportion of high quality housing in many parts of the borough, higher than average employment underpinned by a strong and growing local economy. Many local authorities would be envious of a social and economic base as strong as Cheshire West and Chester.
2. The council has a very good track record of achieving national awards, piloting national programmes and pioneering innovation. This includes being one of only four national Community Budget pilot authorities, pioneer status on health transformation (along with Cheshire East), winning the Best Achieving Council in the Municipal Journal Awards and being highly commended in the LGC Council of the Year category in 2015. Collectively elected members understand the different towns and villages across the borough and their often very different issues. The council therefore has a good understanding of the differing needs of its localities.
3. The Labour Administration has provided a clear steer on the priorities for the borough focused around ten priority outcomes it wishes to see. The council have translated this vision into a new Council Plan: *Helping the Borough Thrive*. The peer team considered how well the council is achieving outcomes for Cheshire West within the context of the council's major service areas (as the ten priority outcomes in the Council Plan have only been agreed relatively recently).
4. The council provides good core council services. Children's services received a judgement from Ofsted in 2015 that services were 'good' overall (and 'outstanding' in leadership and its work on adoption). Over the last 12-18 months Children's services have come under increasing pressure through more young people entering the care system. The number of looked after children increased to 485 by November 2016. The management team believe that this is in part representative of a national trend which is drawing more children into the system because it feels safer to do so. Staff understandably want to retain their 'good' rating and drive further improvement. There is a structured approach to early help, a joined up 'front door' for services and the council is working hard to address social worker vacancies. The council needs to assure itself it is clear about what it needs to do to address these issues, and track performance to ensure outcomes improve.
5. Adult social care performance is good, with good performance on levels of self-directed support and admission rates to care homes. As with most other authorities, delayed transfer of care have increased significantly this Winter and actions plans

and initiatives are in place to try and address this. NHS colleagues were appreciative of the council's efforts over Winter. The budget overspend in adult care is broadly in line with levels seen across the country and there are plans in place for this to be addressed. Demand pressures, particularly in the frail elderly population, will continue to present significant challenges to the local authority and will require an on-going focus in coming years due to the relatively large numbers of older people in the borough.

6. Performance on 'clean and green' services has been good. Cheshire West and Chester recycles 57% of its waste, which is high compared to other authorities across the country. Value for money (in comparison to spending by other unitary councils) is also good for waste collection as it is slightly below the national average.
7. Cheshire West's economic development and housing objectives sit within a wider spatial catchment area which encompasses other parts of Cheshire, Merseyside and North Wales. The local economy is strong with an increasing number of business start-ups and unemployment levels well below the national average. The council has placed significant emphasis on building new homes. The council has set an ambitious annual target: to deliver 1,100 new homes. The council has agreed its Local Plan and has a five-year housing land supply which will help it better manage its housing building objectives. The performance of the Planning service is good, with the implementation of a new customer-focused way of working. The latest quarterly returns show 87% of major planning applications and 84.9% of minor applications are processed within timescale, in excess of Government targets. There are good examples of an ambitious economic development programme. The council takes an active approach to their investment programme, for example, the Northgate and Baron's Quay developments. Looking forward, this is now a good time to evaluate the approach in light of new challenges. There are opportunities for the council to take a longer-term and more ambitious approach to its interventions to support economic growth, particularly at a sub-regional level. This can be built on successful delivery of higher risk projects, the opportunities arising from devolution and capturing the benefits of growth for reinvestment.
8. The borough has many very good schools. Educational attainment in Cheshire West is above the national average, with 61% of young people attaining 5+ GCSEs A\*-C (including English and Maths). Progress 8 is 0.04 compared to -0.03 nationally, and Attainment 8 is 51.3 compared to 49.9 nationally.
9. The council were early adopters of the Government's One Public Estate national programme as part of its public sector reform work, to transform the use of public sector buildings and land. This is contributing to the redevelopment of Ellesmere Port, the rationalisation of public buildings, the release of land for housing development and the proposed future creation of a public sector hub. It is important to build on these foundations to deliver the ambitions of this programme, leveraging greater influence over national government land and facilities to transform local service delivery.

10. The council has a range of companies and social enterprises delivering some of its key services. These include Vivo - council owned company for adult social care and Brio, providing leisure and culture services. In 2015 they launched a new school traded service jointly with Wirral, called Edsential. The new company has around 1,200 staff and offer such services as catering, cleaning and school development. The landscape has changed since some of these companies were established. Many authorities have begun to review their traded companies and now is a good time for the council to fundamentally review the operating model and added value for each of these companies as the landscape continues to change. In particular, there is an opportunity to ensure that Vivo and Brio are positioned to contribute to the council's ambitions for integrated public service delivery.
11. In summary, Cheshire West and Chester is a borough with significant attributes on which it can build. For example, it has a relatively low overall crime rate. The borough has a number of good schools and educational attainment is higher than the national average. However, there are significant health inequalities within the borough, with relatively high levels of obesity, smoking, alcohol and substance abuse in places like Ellesmere Port and Winsford. Therefore, although the borough overall is doing well, it still faces challenges in ensuring all local people can take advantage of some of the great local opportunities to attain a well-paid job and good quality housing. Having established a strong position delivering high quality local services within the borough, the council's greatest challenges and opportunities, and hence the focus on the council's leadership, now focus on partnership arrangements across a wider geographical footprint.

### **Leadership, governance and decision-making**

12. The council is ambitious and wants to see the borough as a place of choice to live and for investors to set up and grow businesses. This is a council which is performing well overall. It delivers many good services, has coped with the reductions in Government grant funding well and is seen by some of its peer local authorities as innovative and award winning. Since its formation in 2009 the council has performed well overall. These are achievements of which the council and its partner agencies should be rightly proud.
13. In 2015 the council changed political control and elected a new Leader. She is a strong advocate for the borough. The Leader is highly regarded by members and officers. There is a strong and supportive relationship between the senior leadership team and the Cabinet (and senior managers and the political leadership more generally). The Leader has personally played a strong role in working collaboratively with Cheshire East and Warrington councils to seek a joined up approach to the three councils working more closely on common outcomes and progress the development of a draft devolution deal for the area. The controlling political group has a clear set of priorities which are clearly articulated and are being used to shape how funding is allocated. The priority outcomes are owned and have



been shaped by the council's managerial leadership in terms of their operational delivery.

14. The council currently has 37 Labour, 36 Conservative, 1 Independent members (and one vacant seat). Given the finely balanced political make-up of the council and the challenge ahead it is important to ensure a strong cross-party consensus on many of the issues such as sub-regional working and the future of the health and social care system. It will be important to enhance opportunities for dialogue between the two political groups and the LGA is happy to help support both groups independently or collectively to ensure political stability within the council.
15. The council appointed a new Chief Executive in Summer 2016. He is positively regarded by members and staff and has taken a collegiate approach to leadership by establishing a wider senior leadership team. He is regarded by both political parties as even-handed.
16. Scrutiny can play a useful role in ensuring robust accountability and transparency. Although the peer team did not explore the operation of scrutiny in depth it appears that the capacity of scrutiny is being overstretched by the volume of items being scrutinised. The council's scrutiny function has been recognised nationally in 2014 by the Centre for Public Scrutiny for its work, specifically its scrutiny of adoption services. To build on this and ensure scrutiny is adding value there is likely to be benefit in scrutiny undertaking some development work in order to be able to focus on a smaller number of issues in greater depth and having less items for updates on activity (which could be dealt with through Group briefings). The LGA has offered its support to further developing the approach to scrutiny, to build on the existing strengths and seek ways for scrutiny to add further value.

### **Financial planning and viability**

17. The council has recently agreed its net revenue budget for next year of £238.1m. In 2016/17 the council has a revenue budget of £273.3m. The budget over the next three years requires the delivery of £32.0m gross savings, including £12.1m in 2017/18. Since the council was founded in 2009 its budget has reduced by £96m overall.
18. The council has a strong (and growing) tax base and a history of being financially well managed. The level of savings the council had to make this financial year – which was £13.8m – was smaller than other similar authorities as the council have made considerable savings in previous years.
19. For a number of years the council overall has underspent its budget, which has helped it to meet its savings targets. For example in 2016/17 the overall underspend was £1.5m. However, some services areas, especially social care, have experienced financial pressures over the last couple of years. This resulted in a £1.2m overspend in Children's social care in 2015/16 and again of the same

size in 2016/17. Much of this can be attributed to by the growth in the number of looked after children, which is representative of the national upward trend. The council is also experiencing financial pressures in Adult social care (like many local authorities nationally).

20. Over the next three years the council proposes capital expenditure across the borough of £235m. For 2017/18 the recommended level of general reserve should be £23m-£26m and the council's budget plans reflect that. Over recent years the Council has used small (planned) amounts of reserves to fund one off activity, or to achieve specific priority outcomes. This is very modest compared to many other unitary authorities.
21. The council provides good value for money in comparison to spending by other unitary councils across the country. For total spend per head of population the council is in the best (lowest) spending 25% of single tier local authorities nationally. Across a range of services value for money is overall slightly better than average and in some areas, such as waste collection, value for money is notably better than average. This is also supported by the external auditor providing an unqualified opinion of the council last year.

### **Capacity to deliver**

22. The council is a much smaller organisation than it was five years ago, reduced down to around 2,900 full time employees. Staff morale is positive overall from the staff the peer team met. Feedback from a recent staff survey was generally very positive.
23. Like most councils, Cheshire West is seeking to free up capacity by increasing 'digitisation' of services. Many core IT systems seem fit for purpose and the council has a clear programme to roll out a digital approach to a wider range of services. The council has a joint venture with Qwest through which it has developed the council website and is looking to introduce a new customer relationship management system. Work is underway to make the council workforce more agile, making better use of IT to enable services in real-time and more efficiently. This is a work in progress but the work undertaken to date seems to be laying the groundwork for the rollout of this approach effectively. The council has recently commissioned a review of the IT function to explore future operating models and how IT can better meet the needs of the organisation.
24. The council has a very well-established approach to Public Service Reform, intelligence and performance management. The council's Public Service Reform team employs a clear process and rigour in designing, delivering and tracking the performance of major projects and services. This team enables the council to flex and adapt to be at the forefront of new public service reform initiatives. The council also has a well-established approach to managing the governance of large projects.

There is a positive relationship between the corporate Public Service Reform team and the council's main departments.

## **Making the most of sub regional working and devolution**

25. Cheshire West and Chester, Cheshire East and Warrington have been developing a proposal for a devolution deal with Government, to create a Mayoral Combined Authority securing additional funding and powers from central government. Cheshire West and Chester has played a significant role in this development: both in terms of the technical propositions and – most crucially - in providing political engagement and leadership. The other constituent councils – Cheshire East and Warrington – were highly complementary of the role of the council, and in particular the critical role played by the Leader personally in securing agreement with her fellow Leaders, on a true cross-party basis, and working constructively with them to win wider political support. She was described by one partner council as providing “eloquent, persuasive and clear minded leadership”. Officers of the council are also actively engaged and committed to the devolution programme, and have a good understanding of the steps that will be required to deliver it.
26. The three proposed authorities have a strong case for a devolution deal. They have an established partnership with political support, good relationships with the business community and an effective Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP). The proposed deal largely builds on agreements already reached with other potential combined authority areas across the country. It would deliver opportunities for a longer-term ‘single pot’ approach to investment, devolution of adult skills and employability support, transport functions including influence over bus and rail services, housing investment and opportunities to develop proposals for larger scale transformational investments. There is also a proposal for a 30 year commitment to additional funding. This is a strong package which has clearly been debated locally. We agree with the local partners that the current proposals strike the right balance, and represent an accurate and pragmatic reading of the position of central government. There is also a clear view from local partners that the devolution agreement would be only a first step, to lead on to more radical opportunities in future years, as confidence and capacity are further developed; in particular in areas such as public sector reform where the council already has a positive partnership with central government.
27. With the local partners agencies aligned, it now appears to be central government that has placed the process on pause, pending the Mayoral elections in other parts of the country, and with a suggestion that deals in core city areas will be prioritised. The councils have a good relationship and reputation with Government and therefore should in May seek a clear position from Government on its commitment, while affirming the readiness of local partners to make rapid progress. Any further delay in the process of establishing a devolution deal for Cheshire and Warrington will quickly jeopardise the critical path to a Mayoral election in May 2018.

Cheshire and Warrington has all the ingredients for a successful devolution deal, and should in our view press ahead with confidence.

28. Some of the necessary processes, plans and strategies are already in place, but the council is also aware of the scale of further work necessary to meet the requirements of the devolution deal. Among the most critical elements (although by no means an exhaustive list) are:

- Establishment of a constitutional framework – this will provide appropriate checks and balances, decision-making and scrutiny, and partnership with the LEP and wider business community. The partner councils have a strong framework to build on, but the creation of a statutory body with Mayoral leadership represents a significant step-up in local responsibility, which the partners need to be confident can be governed effectively – retaining the confidence of the individual councils as new arrangements are put in place.
- Further work to integrate and prioritise economic strategy - to ensure the new Combined Authority is able to develop a clear position on its priority interventions. The partners are establishing a number of transformational projects and strategic priorities. The challenge will be to bring these together into a clear joint investment programme agreed at a Combined Authority geography to meet agreed objectives, within the scarce resources that will be available.
- A clear understanding of how relationships beyond the Combined Authority's boundary will be developed within the new devolved arrangements - particularly with the Mayors in Merseyside and Greater Manchester, and with North Wales. The economic strategies for Cheshire and Warrington correctly place a strong emphasis on connectivity with neighbouring areas, which means those strategies need to be closely aligned with the proposals being developed by and with neighbouring areas, with mechanisms in place for joint propositions to be supported on a cross-boundary basis.
- A deeper understanding of the implications of becoming, for the first time, a Transport Authority covering Cheshire and Warrington. Unlike Combined Authorities based around metropolitan areas, the Combined Authority will not have operational responsibilities for the delivery of public transport services. But it will nevertheless take on statutory responsibilities for oversight of a transport strategy, and political leadership for securing transport investment and improving local services. This is a great opportunity for the area, but will require the creation of a new function with sufficient expertise, analysis and capacity to deliver, and with effective political governance.
- Determine the appropriate point to establish a shadow Combined Authority staff team - while also maintaining close engagement from within the individual councils, and within this to establish the appropriate model of integration with the

LEP support arrangements. A comparative study of the management arrangements being put in place by other Combined Authorities would be helpful in pitching this capacity at an appropriate level. While a degree of central capacity will be necessary through establishing a core team, during the transition period there will remain a need for officers of the constituent councils to devote considerable time to making this work. As part of this the council needs to review its own organisation in how it responds to this new tier of governance, particularly in areas like economic development.

- A strengthened focus on public engagement - all Combined Authorities have faced a challenge of engaging the public with devolution, explaining what it means for individuals and the difference it will make to their lives. Cheshire and Warrington will need to develop a compelling public narrative, and a range of means for public engagement, if the Combined Authority is to secure public support and understanding in the run-up to a Mayoral election.

29. The Mersey Dee Alliance is a prominent set of relationships for Cheshire West and Chester Council, which the Leader of the Council has been central to developing. Encouragingly, the other two councils within the proposed Combined Authority identified the opportunity to strengthen the alliance with North Wales as a key shared objective, in which Cheshire West and Chester is taking the lead. The creation of the Cheshire and Warrington Combined Authority, alongside a parallel deal for North Wales, strengthens the opportunity for joint projects, and for the Mersey Dee Alliance to be a complementary rather than competing focus for the council. It will be important to identify the key investable priorities emerging from this joint work. The alliance is currently wide in scope but modest in resource, and would benefit from specific development funding (funded through the devolution deal) to establish more detailed business cases for a smaller number of transformational but achievable priorities.

In addition, the council is one of the authorities driving forward the Constellation Partnership, alongside Cheshire East, Stoke and Staffordshire. This partnership has the potential to leverage significant benefits from HS2, which will support growth in areas such as Winsford and Northwich. Good progress is being made and the growth strategy and underpinning programmes are being developed.

30. The LGA has a support offer available specifically to combined authority areas. This can be shaped to best meet the needs of the councils whether this be in leadership development, strategic advice on negotiation with Government or technical advice for example on governance. We have made an open offer to the leaders of the emerging combined authority.

## Transforming health and social care

31. This appears to be a key moment for health and social care in Cheshire, in what is a complex geography, to increase the scale and pace of joint working across providers and commissioners of health and care. The institutional and geographic complexities of this health and social care system are providing a challenge to moving to an integrated, and ultimately sustainable, system. This is recognised both by local authorities, clinical commissioning groups (CCGs) and NHS providers we spoke to. The system currently exhibits significant financial and clinical challenges, which are unlikely to be addressed with the current institutional arrangements.
32. There appears to be a growing consensus around the key features of a strategic commissioning and provider structure based around a Cheshire footprint, and this is something we would endorse. Indeed, consideration could be given to how that could be reconciled against the Combined Authority footprint. Currently the council and health partners are moving towards a consensus for the health and social care system across Cheshire and there is now need for a clarity on a vision for an 'end state' for the health and social care system (beyond Cheshire West and Chester). Having this debate was an instrumental part in areas like Greater Manchester deciding how they were to structure their health and care system.
33. The council should continue to play a leading role in championing an integrated commissioning and provider system based on a local authority and Cheshire-wide footprint. Without such an approach we feel that the financial and clinical challenges faced by the system are unlikely to be addressed, which will impact negatively on outcomes for Cheshire residents. Consideration should be given to agreeing a more strategic and collective approach to commissioning across Cheshire. It is likely to be appropriate to commission different services at different levels and the specific issues around the suitability should be explored service by service. As part of this there will be a need also to understand what needs to be commissioned in a more integrated way on a Cheshire West footprint.
34. We recognise the council has a key role to play in this leadership agenda, and will need to continue work to build consensus and facilitate effective joint decision-making. The council needs to give consideration to the governance model that needs to be in place to deliver an agreed vision and proposal for both joint commissioning and integrated provision that gives the Health and Wellbeing Board a central role in decision-making. This would be accompanied by a clear road-map and timeline for decision-making required to both agree the vision, and implement any new structures.
35. A fuller understanding is needed amongst all partner agencies of the level of the capacity and engagement that will be required to deliver this agenda, including leadership, transformational capacity, funding for 'double-running' the health and care system, and the capital required. There is a need for a dedicated resource as the scale of the task is large. A core team for the system (not just the council) and programme management approach will be important to drive the process. Clarity on the leadership of the project at a senior level is important. There is now a need to identify the specific work streams, for example on developing the operating models, information governance and workforce. The analytics and underpinning

cash flow for the model are important so there is a need to better understand this information and financial flow through the system.

36. Partners recognised and appreciated the personal effort the Leader and Chief Executive has invested in this agenda. This has been cited as a significant reason for the progress made to date. Internally, there is evidently sound political and officer leadership around social care. Now might be an opportune time to continue exploring further joint staffing appointments with partners within Cheshire to accelerate integrated working. Relationships between the council and its health partners are strong. Health partners viewed the council as a good partner, both strategically and operationally. However, there was a theme from partners that the council could engage more proactively with health partners on issues that could have a direct or indirect impact upon them.
37. The council and partner agencies have acknowledged that joint commissioning could be enhanced. There is more urgency for agreement around joint commissioning on a more strategic footprint, and clarity on what would be ceded to such an arrangement in terms of services and sovereignty. This would also help drive forward progress the pace of change towards a single accountable care organisation (ACO) model and more integrated provision within Cheshire. Whatever form integrated commissioning may take, the council will need to ensure that it is able to deliver commissioning strategies that help address the structural fragilities in the social care market. Identifying some discrete areas, such as care at home, or mental health, and accelerating joint commissioning in those areas would help exemplify the potential benefits of integrated approach.
38. There is clearly a fast-moving agenda on the development of the ACO proposal and securing of Pathfinder status for the work. Whatever the form ACOs may take, it will be important for the council to ensure these arrangements can deliver the council's aspirations for the transformation of social care both to ensure the quality of provision remains good, and that demand pressures can be managed in way to ensure financial sustainability. We agree that the council should work with partners to confirm and evidence that the ACO model is the best one to deliver the desired outcomes for residents that the council and partners aspire to. Crucially, partners will need to collectively demonstrate how the ACO will help deliver the system's health and social care financial deficit that exists.
39. Finalising and implementing new arrangements of integrated health and social commissioning and provision will take some time. However, there are significant current demand issues that will undoubtedly require careful management in parallel (and not after) resolution and implementation of any ACO model. There are some excellent examples of integrated working on the ground which are helping manage demand, for example integrated working in localities with the Community Trust, and discharge arrangements with hospital colleagues. We agree with your own view that progress in these areas will need to accelerate, with good practice scaled across the whole of the borough. Similarly, the West Cheshire offer will need to deliver the practice changes necessary to allow the council to meet the challenges of increasing demand through a different approach to assessment of need, eligibility and consequent size of care package. The success of this approach will need to be

monitored carefully given its importance to the financial risks facing adult social care.

40. The fragility of the provider market appears to be the biggest single risk facing adult social care. Accelerating progress on joint commissioning and market management in these areas would be beneficial given the difficulties in the market, and the complex geography of the area. Such an approach will need to address the structural workforce issues which are the root cause of the challenges being faced.
41. The staff the peer team met are committed to the council and were supportive of senior management's willingness to listen. Staff consistently reported said that they liked working for the local authority, and this is corroborated by the results of the recent staff survey. There was a sense that staff could be better connected to commissioning decisions, and felt integration on the ground with NHS colleagues was not matched by strategic decision-making and commissioning structures with NHS partners. As decisions become clearer on joint commissioning and the ACO it will be important to undertake considered engagement with staff on what this might mean for them.
42. Feedback from both independent safeguarding chairs was positive about the council's safeguarding relationships, in particular senior leadership on safeguarding, openness to challenge, and willingness to learn and reflect from independent case reviews and serious case reviews. It will be important to ensure any new integrated health and social care arrangements have robust mechanisms in place for delivering effective safeguarding practice.
43. In summary, within this analysis of how the council can transform health and care in the borough, the priority next steps should be to focus on establishing the governance to agree health and social care model. There are also some 'quick wins' in terms of accelerating joint commissioning and making more joint staffing appointments. Making progress on these issues will enable to the council and health partners to take significant steps forward

Finally, we would like to thank colleagues and members at Cheshire West & Chester, especially Matthew Dodd and Will Pearson, for their support in the lead up to the peer challenge and during the challenge itself.

Further on-going support is available through the Local Government Association's Principal Adviser, Neil Shaw (email: [neil.shaw@local.gov.uk](mailto:neil.shaw@local.gov.uk), tel: 07876 688987). Neil will liaise with the authority in the coming months to explore specific issues the council may wish to be supported on.

## **Report contact**

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