

CORPORATE PEER CHALLENGE –OVERVIEW OF FINDINGS

Leadership

Strengths

- There is clear political and managerial leadership based on a strong partnership between the Leader and Chief Executive, which is endorsed by members, staff, unions and partners
- Senior members and officers understand their respective roles and how these complement each other to move the Council forward
- There has been significant and positive progress in political and managerial leadership over the past 4 years: *“Relationships have never been better”*
- The Leader is seen as accessible and collaborative. He is a key influencer regionally and in the Key Cities movement
- The Chief Executive is well-respected and his meetings with a range of staff are greatly valued
- The Council is seen as fundamentally important to the positive future of Sunderland

Areas for Improvement

- The Administration’s vision and priorities need further development and clearer articulation
- Develop member and community capacity in order to change behaviour, manage expectations and thereby reduce demand
- There is some evidence to suggest that change projects could be more effectively coordinated to avoid unintended consequences for service delivery
- Communication of the transformation message to staff, members, partners and public needs to be relentless and consistent

Community Leadership

Strengths

- Community Leadership Council is a clear brand
- Community Leadership infrastructure in place: Area Committees, (*Place and People Boards*), Three major boards, - HWB, Education and Economy Boards
- Localism being developed through a level of financial autonomy (SIB)
- Partners are engaged
- Effective joint member/officer leadership
- Area Committees are working innovatively on local priorities

Areas for Improvement

- Consider how Areas Committees can help deliver council priorities by:
 - Addressing the communication and understanding at the operational level of both members and officers
 - Ensuring use of available resources
 - Continuing to nurture social capital
 - Deciding how to deliver a more tangible impact for local people and communities and publicise them
 - Considering how to develop public engagement in meetings and spending processes
 - Agreeing which further services can be devolved

Context and Priorities

Strengths

- The Council is leading the City by:
 - Having a clear ambition for regeneration
 - Being a trusted partner
 - Embracing the LEP to raise its regional presence
 - Achieving recognition through national awards
 - Playing a lead role in the national Key Cities initiative
- Major transformations in services have been delivered
- The University and the College are well placed and willing to be used as economic drivers of regeneration
- Your values (Proud, Decent, Together) reflect your communities.

Areas for Improvement

- Recognise the potential of the creative and cultural sector in supporting economic growth
- Clarify and communicate your key priorities to all
- Make clear to staff, partners and potential investors what a future Sunderland will look like and their part in it
- Review how performance management and reporting can help you realise your priorities

Financial planning/implementation

Strengths

- Strong and effective financial management by:
 - Strong political and officer leadership on MTFS
 - Track record of delivering huge savings
 - Good awareness of financial challenges ahead and being well placed to deal with them
 - Brave investments in a time of austerity including an ambitious capital programme
 - The use of innovative financial models: LABV, Leisure Trust, BID

Areas for Improvement

- Communicate the reasons for the uneven distribution of cuts across directorates to create a shared understanding of the reasons.

Capacity & Resources

Strengths

- You are forward thinking and enthusiastic about change, innovation and risk e.g. Intelligence Hub
- Officers are empowered to lead in their own directorates and they demonstrate this
- The Council seeks to play to people's strengths valuing them for their unique contributions as staff are valued for their unique contributions capitalising on talent
- Your approach to Customer Services is well established and professional
- Community Directory sets out a useful list of Community Assets and resources which direct people to organisations other than the Council - publicise this to staff.

Areas for Improvement

- Consider frontline staff's capacity for transformation with dwindling resources
- Some frontline staff do not feel valued

- At a community level partners and officers would like frontline members to be encouraged to be more pro-active
- Seek to develop community capacity to deliver services

Customer insight

Strengths/Areas for Improvement (combined)

- You have a good range of information in the authority and the City. But you still need to bring it together now and make better use of it in order to target diminishing resources more effectively
 - e.g. Care Bill, prevention, early intervention
 - Do not wait for the Intelligence Hub

Addressing the scope

Community Leadership

Consider the depth of understanding that is held, particularly by frontline councillors and how well embedded and integrated the current agenda is around community leadership.

Alternative Service Delivery

Adopting Trusts and Social Enterprises to deliver services effectively is a significant challenge which can require a new skill-set. We recommend you consider prioritising those which will bring the best return on investment in dealing with future cost pressures and which will build the capacity and capability needed to deliver in a period of dwindling resources.

Customer Insight

Develop the role and impact of Area Committees through a more proactive role of frontline members and the more extensive use of the community.

Customer Service

It will be important to keep the offer relevant as customer preferences for contacting the council change.

