

Appendix C

CORPORATE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 5 DECEMBER 2024

25. LGA PEER REVIEW

The Chief Executive presented the report.

A discussion was had about the Council's engagement with local businesses and attention to their needs, with some Members expressing some concern, particularly regarding the logistics industry. The Chief Executive advised that the Peer Review Team recognised the active Economic Development Team who had forged strong links with local businesses. She had personally visited many of the large employers in the district, and was aware of their needs, views and what they offered to the district's employment profile.

The Chair requested a profile of how logistics employment within the district was distributed. The Chief Executive said she would consult with the Economic Development Team and would arrange for relevant data to be shared with the Committee.

An extended discussion was had about the Freeport. Members expressed some concern about engagement with some local stakeholders, governance arrangements and communications with Members. The Chief Executive advised that the Infrastructure Portfolio Holder represented the Council on the Board, whilst she and the Strategic Director of Place had regular briefings with Labour Group leaders and the shadow Portfolio Holder. She had also suggested to the Chief Executive of the Freeport that they broadened their community engagement activities to involve local parishes and local ward Members. Any company wishing to locate within the Freeport had to pass rigorous checks.

In response to a question about communications with Council staff, the Chief Executive explained how the Council Delivery Plan fed into service level plans and then down to personal development reviews. There were regular staff roadshows, workshops for senior officers, as well as knowledge sharing events with front line staff. This was a work in progress but a key area of importance to her. Relatedly, she wanted to know Members preferences regarding Member Development Workshops which could be led by the LGA or senior officers at the Council.

Members asked several procedural questions. The Chief Executive explained who the peer review team membership had been. The Strategic Director of Communities, himself a peer reviewer on occasion, advised that findings always reflected a consensus position agreed between the peer reviewers, and were then moderated for fairness and balance by LGA specialists. He did note nevertheless that there were some inevitable limitations with the three-day snapshot model of peer review.

Several Members commended the positive findings and welcomed the wide basis of consultation. The Chief Executive also clarified that all participants had been thanked with a personal letter from her.

The Chair invited the Portfolio Holder to address the Committee.

The Portfolio Holder addressed the committee. He felt some of the profiling data around employment in the district, requested by the Chair, might be regarded as commercially sensitive, and so businesses would likely be reluctant to provide it.

The Chair thanked Members for their comments which would be presented to the Cabinet on 17 December 2024.